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A Method in the Dragon's Moods: Why China behaves as it does

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Executive Summary

This paper argues that, despite changing global scenarios, there is a consistency in how the People's Republic of China sees and behaves vis-à-vis the outside world. Through its inexorable 'rise' in contemporary times it has been making nuanced adjustments of its tactical postures within the parameters of broad and abiding strategic goals.

The policy framework was initially laid down by Chairman Mao Zedong. He had analysed the globe as being divided into three worlds: the first comprising the two superpowers, the United States and the (then) Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); the second having for its members, Europe, Canada, and Japan; and the rest, including China, belonging to the third world. He identified the 'first world as the source of all instability'. Later, Deng Xiaoping declared that China would always join the 'oppressed' (in its perception) against the 'oppressors' (also in its view). This paper seeks to show that, since then, while the rhetorics have been downplayed and tactics vastly altered, the overall behaviour pattern of China is still derived from the 'original principles'.

Mao had also remarked that China had no troops outside its borders and had no intention of fighting anybody unless its borders were attacked. However, the statements of Chinese leaders can be very subtle and open to interpretation.

Given the facts that the current Chinese defence budget at US\$70 billion is the second largest in the world, that China's navy is the fastest growing arm of its military capable of rapidly deploying forces overseas, and the capability of its missiles to hit any targets anywhere in the globe, it is probably not necessary for China to station troops abroad. Also, it is unclear whether the definition of its 'territory' now includes its burgeoning interests in such places as Africa, Central Asia and now Latin America. There are some obvious red lines, however, Tibet and the declaration of independence by Taiwan being two of them. The protection of China's physical territory is obviously the 'core' interest. War with India and fighting on the Ussuri River borders with the USSR indicate just that.

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Conversely, when the threat to its 'core' interests is not palpable, China is chary of taking a position that can involve a military conflict. The essay includes a detailed case study of China's role during the conflict in South Asia between India and Pakistan over Bangladesh in 1971, in the course of which China did not actually militarise its strong verbal support to its staunchest ally, Pakistan. Indeed, Chinese diplomacy managed to portray its stance against Bangladesh's emergence as a part of its overall opposition to 'Indo-Soviet hegemony' and, when Bangladesh did achieve sovereignty, it managed to raise its relationship with this new state to the level of an 'all-weather friend', the same as Pakistan, thus gaining an additional ally in South Asia. The case study traces the extremely nuanced and calculating position China has taken as the situation has evolved. This can be seen as an example of the success of China's diplomacy in that volatile region.

China's tactics and policies continue to be circumspect and driven by pragmatism. Her close ties with Singapore, for instance, evidenced in the signing of the Free Trade Agreement signals pragmatism unencumbered by ideology. At the United Nations (UN), her principled position has been against any 'interference in internal affairs'. Therefore in the Security Council she bars action against Myanmar, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Iran, but this is largely due to the ramifications of the principle for itself. China, however, is said to be quietly pressing changes on Myanmar.

China's economic clout is growing. Even during the recession, it is registering a growth rate of 7.9 to 8 percent and the World Bank has predicted that it will be the first country to experience a 'rebound' in this period. According to Goldman Sachs, it will overtake the United States as the world's largest economy by 2041. Analysts have begun to talk of 'G-2' referring to the United States-China duo and American policy makers have described the bilateral relations with China as being the most important in the world this century. Chinese caution, however, is also exemplified by the fact that it suggested the replacement of the United States dollar by the Yuan as the global reserve currency, then 'soft-pedalled' the proposal, while, at the same time, taking steps to try and eventually bring it to fruition. Thus, Beijing will formulate and follow policies consciously directed towards its goals, with implementation always tempered by realism. The river of China's external policy slowly meanders but does not suddenly change course. Time is on its side and is not necessarily of the essence.

The Helmsman must guide the boat by using the waves; otherwise the waves will sink it.

Old Chinese Proverb

Introduction

This paper argues that, despite changing global scenarios, there is a consistency in how the People's Republic of China sees and behaves vis-à-vis the outside world. While China no longer regards itself as the 'Middle Kingdom' as in the past, its 'rise' in contemporary times has been inexorable and there is a reflection of this rise in the nuanced adjustments of its tactical postures within the parameters of the broad strategic goals. Indeed there has been an internal debate within the Chinese system in the early 21st century as to whether the concept of 'peaceful rise' or *heping jueqi* should constitute a major policy doctrine. Ultimately, by late 2004, it was settled in favour of the less ambitious 'peaceful development'.²

The question then arises then as to what are these broad strategic goals? One analyst sees these as broadly threefold: first, preservation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime, despite remarkable changes in its governance principles; secondly, prosperity, mainly economic, which helps prop up the regime as with the loss of communist rationale the CCP's legitimacy is domestically tied to performance; and finally, power, generally in the international realm, both in the 'hard' and 'soft' capabilities.³ Another analyst holds that its primary need is ensuring a peaceful environment to sustain its reform and modernisation programmes, which calls for a foreign policy which conforms to, rather than challenges, the existing international order.⁴ A third views China as a champion of multi-polarity, but which would like itself to be the only power in Asia to be able to stand up to the United States.⁵

These varieties of opinions reflect specific observations of a policy for the framework which was laid down early by Chairman Mao Zedong, 'the great helmsman' himself. Mao analysed the globe as being divided into three worlds. He said, "In my view the United States and the Soviet Union belong to the first world. The in-between – Japan, Europe, and Canada – belong to the second world. Except Japan, Asia belongs to the third world. So does Africa and Latin America."⁶ These worlds were both mutually related as well as contradictory, and the two superpowers were the sources of instability. Later, in April 1974, Deng Xiaoping propounded that China, a socialist developing third world country, would join "the oppressed peoples and nations" in their "just struggle" against the oppressors.⁷ Since then, despite stylistic changes, the behaviour pattern of China has been derived from those 'original principles'.

This hypothesis will be tested in this essay through examining China's role in South Asia during the Bangladesh War in 1971 in which China's ally Pakistan was engaged in a severe

² See Thacik, Jr, John J.; 'China's Peaceful Rise at Stake in Power Struggle', *Asian Times*, 8 September 2004.

³ Wang, Fei-Ling, 'Preservation, Prosperity, and Power: What motivates China's Foreign Policy', *Journal Of Contemporary China*, Vol. 14, No. 45, pp. 669-694.

⁴ Bhattacharya, Abanti, 'China's Foreign Policy Challenges and Evolving Strategy', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 30, No.1, Jan-Mar 2006, pp. 182-204.

⁵ Cabestan, Jean-Pierre, 'The China Factor: China between Multipolarity, and Bipolarity', in Bouquerat, Gilles and Grare, Frederic (eds.) *India, China, and Russia: Intricacies of an Asian Triangle* (Singapore, Marshall Cavendish International Private Ltd., 2004) p. 86.

⁶ Chairman Mao Zedong's Theory on the Division of the Three Worlds and the Strategy of forming an Alliance Against an Opponent. [http:// www.fmprc.gov.cn?eng?ziliaoj/ 3602/3604/t18008.htm](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn?eng?ziliaoj/3602/3604/t18008.htm) – accessed on 29 June 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

military conflict with India. China had, as this paper demonstrates, a negative attitude towards the independence of Bangladesh. However, eventually, China fitted this new country in South Asia into its scheme of things, raising the relationship with Bangladesh to an “all-weather friendship and multi-dimensional relationship” that was not much different from the one it enjoys with Pakistan. The overall strategy remaining the same, China was able to acquire another friend on the international scene, replicating the relationship with Pakistan.

Chinese Role during the Bangladesh War

China’s Position on the Eve of the Crisis

The developing crisis in the subcontinent in early 1971, with the political movement for independence in then East Pakistan, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s Awami League, gaining momentum with India’s moral support and Islamabad’s fierce opposition, placed China between the devil and the deep blue sea.⁸ For China, a united Pakistan, given the strategic bilateral relations of the 1960s, would be ideal.⁹ This would continue to be so even if the Awami League came into power at the all-Pakistan level in consonance with the results of the elections of December 1970, because individual Awami League leaders had good rapport with Beijing.¹⁰

What was disturbing to China was a potential conflict within Pakistan between Mujib’s Awami League and the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which had won a majority of the Parliamentary seats in West Pakistan in the 1970 elections, although only a minority nationwide.¹¹ That could provide the Soviet Union, and to some extent India, a perceived source of threat to China particularly since the Indo-Chinese War of 1962, an opportunity to exploit the situation by picking up clients from among the disputants. Zhou’s concern was evident in the letters he wrote both Bhutto and President Mohammed Yahya Khan, who succeeded Ayub in 1969, urging them to come to satisfactory terms with the Awami League and Mujib.¹²

As the political crisis in Pakistan deepened after the 1970 elections, when the West Pakistani Yahya-Bhutto combination prevented the East Pakistani Mujib from assuming the prime ministership of Pakistan despite an Awami League majority in the National Parliament, two major pro-China political parties of then East Pakistan, Mowlana Bhashani’s National Awami Party (NAP-Bhashani) and the East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP Marxist-Leninist), led

⁸ For a study of the run-up to the crisis, see Chowdhury, Iftexhar Ahmed, *The Roots of Bangladeshi National Identity*, ISAS Working Paper No. 63, 10 June 2009.

⁹ China and Pakistan enjoyed extremely close relations through the 1960s (and beyond). The relationship offset India’s preeminent role in South Asia. Pakistan, a technical United States’ ally through its membership of the Central Treaty Organization and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization defence pacts, helped act as a bridge between the West, particularly the United States and China, facilitating the Kissinger visit to Peking in 1971. This relationship has sustained over time, though it has not precluded China from developing other connections in the region, including with India. For an analysis of China-Pakistan relationship, see Pan, Esther, ‘China and Pakistan: A Deepening Bond’ (New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 8 March 2006). <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10070> – accessed on 23 June 2009.

¹⁰ Even though President Mohammed Ayub Khan is generally seen as the architect of Pakistan’s policy of friendship towards China, the process was initiated earlier by H. S. Suhrawardy, the Awami League Prime Minister of Pakistan, who visited China in the mid-1950s, as had Mujib, and played host to Zhou En-lai, the Chinese Prime Minister, in 1956.

¹¹ The PPP projected itself as a pro-China socialist party and Bhutto was seen as a particular friend of China for having been instrumental in forging the 1963 bilateral Boundary Agreement.

¹² Choudhury, G. W., *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1974), p. 211.

by Mohammad Toaha and Abdul Huq, had developed their own attitudes towards the issue of separation from Pakistan. Abdul Huq was stronger in his view that the separation would aid 'Indo-Soviet expansionism' than Toaha, who later initiated the concept of a two-way war against both the Pakistan Army and the Awami League.¹³ There was a consequent split between Toaha and Huq.

The Huq line seems to have attracted Beijing's favour as his views, along with similar ones held by Ashim Chatterjee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) were broadcast on 'Radio Peking' and 'Radio Tirana' in Albania (Albania was a close ally of China during the phase of the Sino-Soviet dispute in the 1960s and 1970s).¹⁴ Bhashani, on the other hand, sent impassioned appeals to Mao and Zhou seeking assistance in the movement for separation,¹⁵ but without success.

China's role as the crisis unfolds

The first Chinese reaction following the Pakistani military crackdown in East Pakistan on 25 March 1971 came in a letter from Zhou to Yahya written on 11 April 1971 and published in the *Pakistan Times* on 13 April 1971. On the surface the letter appeared to express strong support for Pakistan:¹⁶

Your Excellency may rest assured that should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan the Chinese government and people will, *as always* (emphasis added) firmly support the Pakistan government and people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence.

Such support was, however, confined to countering the potential threat from India, and seemed not to apply to any emanating in Pakistan domestically. On the domestic situation the letter was far more ambiguous:

We believe that through the wise consultations and efforts of Your Excellency and *the leaders of various quarters* (emphasis added) the situation in Pakistan will certainly return to normal.

By exhorting negotiations with 'leaders of various quarters', China was encouraging talks with the dissident Awami League as well. However, support for a united Pakistan was expressed thus:

In our opinion the unification of Pakistan and the unity of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength.

¹³ For a study of the attitudes of the radical Bengali political parties towards the issue, see Maniruzzaman, Talukdar, *Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Dacca: Bangladesh books International, 1978), pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ Ali, Tariq, 'Pakistan and Bangladesh: Results and Prospects,' in Blackburn, Robin (ed.) *Explosion in a Subcontinent* (Penguin, 1975), p. 318.

¹⁵ *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani's Appeal to World Leaders* (Dacca: Public Relations Department of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh u. d.), pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ For the text, see Naik, J. A., *India, Russia, China and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1972), Appendix 7, p. 138.

A Bengali foreign language expert in Beijing, who had translated the letter into Bengali for a 'Radio Peking' broadcast, said later that the published excerpts in the Pakistani media left out what could be the most important sentence of the letter in which Zhou had also said:

The question of East Pakistan should be settled according to the *wishes of the people of East Pakistan* (emphasis added).¹⁷

Three aspects of the Chinese stance emerge from this letter. First, China would support Pakistan in case of an external threat from India; secondly, in China's calculations, a united Pakistan was more desirable; and finally, in its view the way to normalcy was through negotiations with the dissidents. The third point indicated the disinclination of the Chinese to fully endorse Yahya's methods. With some deviation this was to broadly remain the Chinese position until there was a definite veering towards Yahya in reaction to the Indo-Soviet *entente*.

On a theoretical plane China believed the Bangladesh movement to be one of Bengali elite interests rather than a genuine grassroots peasant movement.¹⁸ They had no ideological motive, therefore, to support its cause.

Although they would rather see the issue peacefully resolved between the disputants at this stage, and therefore took no sides in the domestic scene in Pakistan with regard to India, Beijing was rendering strong verbal support to Islamabad. In April 1971, a *Renmin Ribao* commentator wrote:

Of late, the Indian government has redoubled its efforts to interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs disregarding repeated stern protests of the Pakistan government. The overbearing action of the Indian government cannot but arouse the indignation of all justice upholding countries.¹⁹

While support was being accorded as against India, at another level the Chinese were urging negotiations. Zhou sent back a two member Pakistani delegation comprising Foreign Secretary S. M. Khan and General Gul Hassan, a senior military officer, with a request for political settlement.²⁰

The Chinese opposition to Yahya's suppressive measures was indicated in an interview given later in 1973 to a group of Australian National University scholars by Assistant Foreign Minister Chang-wang Chin.²¹ The Chinese feared deeper Indo-Soviet involvement if the situation deteriorated.

Even though Yahya paid little heed to Chinese counsel against the use of force, and this is important in terms of Bangladeshi perception of the Chinese role, the Chinese may have calculated they would have little to lose whether Yahya successfully crushed the movement, in which case Pakistan would remain intact, or whether the movement transformed itself into a protracted war of liberation in which case there was the likelihood of its leadership passing

¹⁷ 'A Bengali's Grandstand View', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 October 1974, p. 7.

¹⁸ Tahir-Kheli, Shirin, 'The Foreign policy of "New" Pakistan', *Orbis*, Vol. 20, No. 3, (Fall 1976), p. 735.

¹⁹ 'What are the Indian Expansionists Trying to Do?', *Peking Review*, Vol. 14., No. 16, (16 April 1971), p. 7.

²⁰ Choudhury, G.W., op. cit., p. 212.

²¹ Armstrong, James David, 'The United Front Doctrine and China's Foreign Policy', (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, July 1975), p. 238.

into Maoist hands. The Chinese, therefore, kept a low profile until India's intervention became imminent, negating the prospects of a prolonged struggle, and the emergence of Bangladesh under Indo-Soviet auspices became a distinct probability.

The Chinese decision to lie low was evident in the fact that it sent no arms to Pakistan until October,²² that is, until after the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship in August. Moreover, from the Pakistani point of view, the failure of Bhutto's military mission to China in November 1971 supports this. At a banquet in honour of the Pakistani leader who was sent to Beijing by Yahya, the Chinese acting Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei urged *that a reasonable settlement* should be made by the *Pakistani people themselves*. Assurances were provided for the defence of Pakistan's state sovereignty and national independence, but any mention of support for *territorial integrity* was now conspicuously absent.²³ In the return banquet by Bhutto, which Premier Zhou also attended, the latter in his speech dwelt on Sino-Pakistan relations but made no mention of any *external threats* to Pakistan.²⁴ Bhutto was so disappointed that he later remarked to a journalist that 'Pakistan can hope for little help from China'.²⁵

Chinese fears were, however, raised with the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 1971 as well as the support-seeking travels abroad of India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. China began to gradually stiffen her pro-Pakistani posture on the international plane. On 24 November 1971, Zhou expressed his concern to the Pakistani Ambassador over 'India's military provocations' along the borders with Pakistan.²⁶ Public assertions in support of Pakistan were made by Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien on 29 November on the occasion of the anniversary of the Albanian Liberation.²⁷

China's hopes of a protracted struggle leading to a radical transformation of the character of the Bangladesh movement evaporated when actual hostilities between India and Pakistan broke out in early December 1971. At the UN, the Chinese chief delegate Huang Hua trenchantly criticised the Indo-Soviet 'song in a duet' and noted that the speech of the Soviet representative *Mister* (not *Comrade*) Malik had confirmed his suspicion that 'the Soviet social imperialists are carrying out aggression, interference, subversion, and expansion everywhere'.²⁸

Indeed, Huang Hua conveyed to United States National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, after whose visit to China in 1971 the Chinese had developed close working relations with the United States, his apprehensions that a 'precedence was being established by which other countries (China?) may be dismembered by Indo-Soviet collusion'.²⁹ In fact Kissinger's own assessment was that the Soviets were encouraging India to exploit Pakistan's travail in part to deliver a blow to the United States system of alliances, and 'in even greater measure to demonstrate China's impotence'.³⁰ On 6 December 1971, as war in the subcontinent was breaking out, Huang Hua compared the nascent Bangladeshi Government to the 'puppet

²² George, T. J. S., 'Peking's Prewar Message to Bhutto', *Far Eastern Economic Review* (5 February 1978), p. 8.

²³ For a full text of the speech, see *Peking Review*, Vol. 14, No. 46, (12 November 1971), p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁵ Siddiqui, Kalim, *Conflict Crisis and War in Pakistan*, (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 174.

²⁶ *Peking Review*, Vol. 14, No. 49, (3 December 1971), p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, No. 50, (10 December 1971), pp. 8-10.

²⁹ Kissinger, Henry, *White House Years*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1982), p. 906.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 886.

Manchukuo' regime, and opposed the presence of a Bangladeshi representative in the UN Security Council.³¹ What was alarming the Chinese most was the extension of Soviet influence, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.

However, China's vigorous moral, political, and diplomatic support to Pakistan was not translated into military action. Why? The reasons can be analysed as follows. First, there was the possibility of a Soviet counteraction and China was prudently mindful of the fact that it was not militarily strong enough to take on both India and the Soviet Union simultaneously, and here was a situation in which Chinese territory was not directly threatened.³² Secondly, China was itself passing through a series of political crises that involved the purging of leaders like Lin Biao, Hung Yang-shem (Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces), Wu Fa-hsien (the Air Force commander) and forty other top military officers that precluded serious military engagement at that time.³³ Thirdly, at a tactical level, winter was a most inconvenient season for military manoeuvres in the Himalayas as the mountain passes were likely to remain snowed in. Finally, the Chinese may have simply given up on Yahya who had adamantly paid no heed to their counsels of moderation. Though the Chinese did make a rather mild protest about the intrusion into Chinese territory on 15 December of 'eight armed Indian personnel' at the China-Sikkim boundary and an airspace violation over the Tsayal area in Tibet,³⁴ there was no ultimatum delivered as had been the case during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War.

However, there appeared to have been an understanding of the Chinese role among Bangladeshi pro-liberation leaders. They included Awami Leaguers, some of whom later stated that they would have contacted Beijing were it not for fear of attracting Indian disapproval.³⁵ Officials of the Bangladesh government-in-exile in 1971 noted the unconfirmed reports that the Pakistani Ambassador in Beijing, K. M. Kaiser, a Bengali and close friend of Mujib, had been briefing Zhou sympathetically about Bangladesh.³⁶ Also important was the fact that China was avoiding direct criticism of the Bengali leadership, concentrating instead on India and the Soviet Union,³⁷ thereby keeping the doors of future relations wide open. This was a clever tactic to keep any Bengali criticism of China muted.

Post-war Sino-Bangla Bilateral Relations

From Chinese opposition to acceptance of Bangladesh

The appreciation of China's 1971 role among Bangladeshi policy-making circles led to a One-China policy by Dhaka whereby criticism of Beijing was carefully eschewed by Bengali

³¹ *Peking Review*, Vol. 14, No. 51, (17 December 1971), pp. 15-16.

³² Unlike the situation with India prior to the 1962 War, when China let it be known it would never accept the McMahon line drawn by the colonial powers in defining the boundary with China, also on the backdrop of a situation being 'further complicated' by Indian military, diplomatic and media actions. Maxwell, Neville *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970) p. 123

³³ Syed, Anwar, *China and Pakistan: Diplomacy of an Entente Cordiale*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), p. 152.

³⁴ *Peking Review*, Vol. 14, No.53, (31 December 1971), p. 4.

³⁵ Interview with Moudud Ahmed, Minister for Posts, Telephones and Telegraphs, Dhaka, 19 July 1978. Ahmed was a key figure based in the headquarters of the Bangladesh government-in-exile in Mujibnagar in 1971.

³⁶ *Crisis in Bangladesh Movement*, Bangladesh Foreign Ministry, 25 September 1971, pp. 5-6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

leaders in the immediate post-independence period.³⁸ Mujib himself declared, “We have great regard for the people of China. We admire their leaders and supported their revolution.”³⁹ More directly, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad said in August 1972:

We have extended our hands of friendship towards China and we sincerely hope that this will be reciprocated by the Chinese leaders who, I am sure, will find profound goodwill and respect for them among the people of Bangladesh.⁴⁰

The reciprocation, however, was slow in coming. Even so, the ability of the Chinese to keep tacking close to Pakistan, at the same time without affronting Bangladesh seems remarkable. This, despite the fact that when Bangladesh applied for the membership of the UN in 1972, China vetoed the application and moved a separate resolution that its consideration be delayed until all Pakistani prisoners-of-war were repatriated and all ‘foreign soldiers’ (meaning Indians) were removed from Bangladeshi soil.⁴¹ Huang Hua, the Chinese Ambassador to the UN, subjected the Soviet Union and India to a virulent attack in a statement. ‘Soviet socialist imperialism’ was playing a ‘most insidious role in South Asia’, in Huang’s words, and India, in concluding ‘an aggressive military alliance (with the USSR) had stripped off its own cloak of non-alliance’. It was further alleged that ‘the sole purpose of Soviet socialist imperialism was to expand the spheres of influence and to bully Pakistan at will’.⁴²

It appeared that Bangladesh took the following readings from the Chinese position. First, since China was unable to render military support to its closest ally Pakistan when the latter sorely needed it, diplomatic support was now being given to make up for the inaction. Secondly, the Chinese wrath was mainly directed towards Indo-Soviet collusion, and China was not fundamentally opposed to Bangladesh, and when the situation in the subcontinent untangled itself, China would eventually accept the new state. Bangladesh, therefore, adopted the tactic of refraining from giving umbrage to China by publicly criticising its actions.

The strategy that Bangladesh followed was that, while a way out of the political impasse in India-Pakistan-Bangladesh was being sought, feelers would be continually sent to Beijing.⁴³ This was done by the following means: first, by the placement of the experienced China-hand, Kaiser as Ambassador to Rangoon, obviously charged with the task of liaising with Beijing (Kaiser would normally have been considered too senior otherwise for the Rangoon post); secondly, by seeking to forge close links with China’s socialist allies and neighbours such as Vietnam to which the Foreign Minister, Dr Kamal Hussain (who had succeeded

³⁸ The Pakistan army surrendered in Dhaka on 16 December 1971 and Bangladesh thereafter became independent and sovereign.

³⁹ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (1 April 1972), p. 14.

⁴⁰ “Address in a Joint Meeting of the Lions International, Zonta International and Apex Clubs’, *Bangladesh Documents*, Vol. 7, No. 4, July-September 1972), p. 4.

⁴¹ *New York Times*, 26 August 1971.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ At an earlier stage Bangladesh had, however, failed to follow up on a lead given by China. Beijing, through Kaiser, had offered to initiate trade relations through the purchase of a quantum of Bangladeshi jute in May 1972. Bangladesh had actually accepted the proposal in principle (*Times of India*, 12 June 1972). Later, perhaps from fear of Indian unhappiness, it delayed its reactions. By the time it sent a representative to Beijing to pursue the offer, China had cast its negative veto on Bangladesh’s admission to the UN and the despatch of the representative was overtaken by events. Consequently he was unable to make any worthwhile contacts in Beijing. (Discussions with Bangladeshi diplomats, May 1978).

Azad), paid a visit in July 1973; and finally, by direct appeals to China itself in various international fora.

At this stage, it seemed that the return of the Pakistani prisoners-of-war was a key issue with China. Having been unable to intervene militarily on Pakistan's behalf, China was focused on assisting Pakistan with resolving other issues before addressing the question of establishing any substantive relations with Bangladesh. Holding up Bangladeshi membership of the UN which would seal the new state's sovereignty and legitimacy, was a lever China had and was ready to use in Pakistan's support. In this regard, the Chinese position as expressed by Vice Foreign Minister Chiao Kua Hua remained firm:

The Chinese government holds that the question of admitting Bangladesh into the UN can be considered once the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council are implemented without qualification. But this can be done only after the thorough implementation of the UN Resolution and not before.⁴⁴

There were times, however, that a modicum of impatience was evident in Bangladeshi reactions. For instance, during a visit to Tokyo in the same month, Mujib said that 'dependent Bangladesh' had consistently reaffirmed the desire to develop friendly relations with 'our great neighbour' China, and it was now China which should make the positive move since till then it had churned Dhaka's overtures. "We have our self respect", he added, "We are not going to beg".⁴⁵ However, it was obvious that unless the Gordian knot of the subcontinental impasse was cut, the Chinese position would remain unaltered.

The softening of Beijing's position began with the mutual recognition of Pakistan and Bangladesh in February 1974. On 7 June in the same year, when the Bangladesh application to join the UN was unanimously approved by the Security Council, the Chinese delegate Chung-Yen expressed gratification at the settlement of Bangladesh's dispute with Pakistan and on the tripartite agreement between the two countries and India.⁴⁶

The changing Chinese attitude was also evidenced in Beijing's announcement of a donation of relief goods worth US\$4 million to Bangladesh following the 1974 floods. Also, China did not oppose Bangladesh's UN admission. To thank the Chinese on both these scores, Kamal Hussain met the Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhou Kuang Hua in New York on 30 September 1974 in what turned out to be a most significant political meeting.⁴⁷

At that meeting the Chinese Minister stressed that, as far as *personal* (not 'official') relations were concerned, there was no gap between the Bangladeshi and Chinese leaderships. He added that China had nothing but goodwill for the leaders and the people of Bangladesh (the expression *government* was still noticeably avoided as Beijing had not yet formally recognised the government of Bangladesh) although it had reservations about India and the Soviet Union, particularly the latter (the subtlety of the choice of appropriate terms in diplomatic interactions is truly remarkable). He said China was also telling Pakistan to improve relations with Bangladesh.

⁴⁴ *Pakistan Times*, 4 October 1973.

⁴⁵ *Japan Times*, 24 October 1973.

⁴⁶ *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (8-14 July 1974), p. 26610.

⁴⁷ Details of the meeting were obtained through interviews with Dr Kamal Hussain, Oxford, October 1978, and with Ambassador Faruq Chowdhury, who was present at the meeting, Abu Dhabi, July 1978.

The meeting brought into relief two broad points. One was that although the theoretical barriers to China's acceptance of Bangladesh no longer existed, the actual recognition and establishment of diplomatic links were tied to the solution of outstanding issues with Pakistan. The other was that although China was far too committed to Islamabad in establishing formal links with Dhaka without the latter's approval, Dhaka could also count on Beijing to apply some pressure on Pakistan.

The stage was well set for bilateral connections, starting in this case with the economic. In May 1975 a three-member trade delegation was sent to China by the Commerce Ministry.⁴⁸ Kaiser also visited Beijing and met Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Han Nien-lung.⁴⁹ It must be said that the Bangladeshi government was so far matching the Chinese in subtleties. Unfortunately Mujib could not see the fruition of these endeavours during his lifetime. He was assassinated with most members of his family in a bloody coup on 15 August 1975. The aftermath received a fillip in Bangladesh's post-coup government's relationship with Pakistan and accompanying deterioration of that with India.

However, by mid-August 1975 the Chinese had a fair working relationship with Mujib and recognition was seen as only a matter of time. The coup was assessed by China as being 'embarrassing to India and the Soviet Union'.⁵⁰ The formal Chinese recognition of Bangladesh came on 31 August 1975, and on 6 October 1975, *Xinhua News Agency* announced the decision on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Resumption of China's balancing Role in South Asia

With the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Bangladesh, which were actually implemented in January 1976, the Chinese traditional role of according support to smaller South Asian powers vis-à-vis India was resumed. While attempts to mend fences with India were in progress, and over time the Chinese dragon and the Indian elephant were happy to mutually co-exist, the Chinese strategy was to continue to humour the other subcontinental actors like Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and now Bangladesh.

Current Sino-Bangla Bilateral Relations

From then on, China's relations with Bangladesh progressed by leaps and bounds. Although strictly speaking, the two countries do not share a common border, the gap is small enough to be insignificant should the situation call for a linkage. In January 1977, Ziaur Rahman, then Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator (second in the government, and later to become the President), visited Beijing and, in a banquet in his honour, Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien, in an obvious reference to Bangladesh's differences with India over the Farakka Barrage, declared that, 'China firmly supports the government and the people of Bangladesh in their just struggle to safeguard national independence and state sovereignty and resist foreign

⁴⁸ The delegation comprised Mr Enam Ahmed Choudhury, the Director General of Bangladesh Export promotion Bureau, Mr A. K. M. Moosa, a retired senior official, and Mr. M.L. Rahman, a businessman. The visit was kept a secret till the delegation's return. Apart from initiating trade contacts, the visit had significant political ramifications. Interviews with Mr. E. A. Choudhury, London, 15 October 1978, and discussions with Mr Moosa, Dhaka, 3 November, 1978.

⁴⁹ *Pakistan Times*, 6 June 1975.

⁵⁰ Li Hsien-nien, Chinese Vice Premier, quoted in *Japan Times*, 10 September 1975.

interference'.⁵¹ These kinds of remarks were reminiscent of Chinese sentiments towards Pakistan.

Bangladesh's relations at that time with India were quite low, and so Dhaka was happy to receive Chinese support even though only verbal, against (India's) expansionism. What the Chinese would have liked in return ideally was a clear Bangladeshi position against (Soviet) hegemonism. But this was not quite forthcoming because Bangladesh was not yet in a position to alienate the USSR, still a superpower (although this came about in the 1980s in the strong position Bangladesh adopted on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, but in this Bangladesh had unswerving backing of the United States and the Muslim world). It appears that China understood Bangladesh's inability to offer a *quid pro quo* and remained content with such support as was given when, at the Non-Aligned Movement Conference in Havana in September 1979, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Shamsul Huq stressed the right of the Kampuchean people 'to freely choose a government without any *external interference or foreign military presence or intervention* (emphasis added). The reference was obviously to Vietnam with whom China had fallen out. This was designed without a doubt to please China, which seemed quite happy to pick up whatever support, however indirect, its friends could accord, without being too demanding.

On the international stage, China and Bangladesh grew closer through common positions on such issues as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia. By the mid-1980s, like Pakistan, Bangladesh had become a major procurer of Chinese military hardware. Bangladesh's President Hossain Mohammad Ershad was very warmly received when he visited Beijing in July 1987. During the 1990s, Bangladeshi politics were dominated by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by the widow of President Ziaur Rahman, and the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's daughter, with both of whom Beijing kept close ties.

In December 2002, when Begum Zia, as Prime Minister, visited Beijing, the Defence Cooperation agreement with China was signed. Some Indian analysts saw this as reinforcing China's 'intrusiveness' in South Asia,⁵² though Bangladeshis claimed it was only to formalise existing relations as, in any case by then, most of Bangladesh's weaponry, including tanks, naval frigates and combat aircraft, were of Chinese origin. In April 2005, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao led a 102-member entourage to Bangladesh, signed nine agreements and both countries declared 2005 as "Bangladesh-China Friendship Year".⁵³

It is noteworthy that Beijing was all the time extremely sensitive to Bangladesh's forging any kind of relationship with Taiwan. At one stage, around this time, Bangladesh had consented to set up a Taipei Representative Office in Dhaka. This was done for a variety of reasons. Taiwan assured Bangladesh that it would be the number one foreign investor in Bangladesh by 2006. Also that it would employ Bangladeshi labour, a favour that China could not deliver. There was also the possibility of the relocation of some industries from Taiwan to

⁵¹ *Bangladesh*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (Dacca, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 15 January 1977), p. 5. Though Zia was the second ranking Bangladeshi, Chairman Hua Guo-feng, Mao's successor, broke protocol and personally received him at the airport.

⁵² See Dr Kapila, Subhash, 'Bangladesh-China Defence Cooperation Agreement's Strategic Implications: An Analysis', South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 582, (14 January 2003), [http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers6/paper 582.html](http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers6/paper%20582.html) – accessed on 23 June 2009

⁵³ *The Hindu*, 9 April 1995. It may be worthwhile mentioning that Wen's eight-day visit to South Asia began with Pakistan and also included Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh.⁵⁴ However, the Chinese reaction through pressure and diplomacy was so strong that Bangladesh eventually relented. Bangladesh assessed that the Chinese friendship was more valuable. Taiwan was, therefore, clearly a *red line* for China.

Indeed, China in fact depended on the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN to lead the voice against Taiwan's quest for UN membership.⁵⁵ In June 2006, on a visit to Bangladesh, the Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said that China appreciates the valuable support offered by Bangladesh on issues such as Taiwan, human rights and Tibet, expressing the willingness to make concerted efforts with Bangladesh to achieve "new progress" on bilateral relations.⁵⁶

The Chinese also cultivated the caretaker government in Bangladesh which was in office between 2007 and 2009. The caretaker government was in need of international support and the Chinese indicated their endorsement by a visit to Dhaka by China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on 24 and 25 April 2008. Thereafter, Beijing hosted the head of the caretaker government, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, from 15 to 18 September 2008. He was warmly received by President Hu Jintao, Vice President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. During this time, Bangladesh championed China's Observer status in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and China, in return, backed Bangladesh's membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which focused on security issues.⁵⁷

China also played a constructive role in a spat between Bangladesh and Myanmar in November 2008 when Myanmar placed an oil-drilling rig within territorial waters claimed by Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal. The author, then Foreign Advisor (Foreign Minister), called in the Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka, Zheng Qingdian, and requested Beijing's help to secure Myanmar's withdrawal of the rig.

Immediately, in Beijing, the Foreign Ministry invited the Ambassadors of Myanmar and Bangladesh and urged calm. The Chinese Foreign office spokesman Qin Gang issued a statement, "We hope the countries will settle it (the dispute) through equal and friendly negotiations and maintain a stable bilateral relationship. As their friend, China will contribute in an appropriate manner".⁵⁸

Bilateral economic ties between China and Bangladesh were also strong. In 2006, bilateral trade recorded an increase of 28.5 percent over the previous year reaching US\$3.19 billion. However, Bangladesh exports to China amounted to only US\$98.8 million. To offset this imbalance, China granted tariff-free access to 84 Bangladeshi commodities within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement and expanded aid. During a visit of the Chinese Assistant Trade Minister Wang Chao to Dhaka, China and Bangladesh signed

⁵⁴ See Kumar, Anand, 'Changing Dynamics of Sino-Bangladesh Relations', *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 1345, 21 April 2005. http://www.saag.org/?uploaded_files?paper1345.html – accessed on 8 July 2009.

⁵⁵ The author was the Bangladesh Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN between 2001 and 2007, and was approached on the subject by the Chinese Mission several times and complied under instructions from headquarters.

⁵⁶ 'China pledges to further promote China-Bangladesh ties, *People's Daily*, 7 June 2006.

⁵⁷ During this period, between 2007 and 2009, the author served as Foreign Advisor (Foreign Minister) of the caretaker government in Bangladesh, hosted Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Dhaka, accompanied Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed to Beijing and attended the SAARC Summits and ARF Ministerial Meeting in which his Chinese counterpart was also present.

⁵⁸ "Maritime Security: The Case of Bangladesh", Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, Issue Brief No. 4, January 2009.

economic aid agreements totalling US\$23.7 million. While a landmark Chinese-built Friendship Centre already exists in Dhaka, an agreement was reached to build yet another Exhibition Centre.⁵⁹ China has already constructed six 'Friendship Bridges' in Bangladesh, and discussions on the seventh and eighth are ongoing.⁶⁰ In an interview on 20 June 2009 in Dhaka, the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Zhang Xianyi announced (which was also an endorsement of the new Awami League-led government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which took office in January 2009):

As a responsible member of the international community China will continue to offer assistance to Bangladesh and other developing countries, to the best of its ability, in the form of grant, debt relief and aid for trade.⁶¹

It was obvious now that Bangladesh was fitting the bill of an 'all-weather friend', an expression by which China was defining its relations with Pakistan. As this paper demonstrates, it took years of sustained efforts to reach this state, a process which often experienced many vicissitudes of fortune. The ties with the smaller South Asian countries for China were also sought to be "multi-dimensional", which in the views of an analyst signified 'military ties as more innocuous political cooperation'.⁶² This paper has also shown that over time, Chinese postures towards Bangladesh shifted from opposition to support, adjusting to the broader strategy of denying influence in the region of its perceived major adversaries, the Soviet Union and India. As perceived major adversaries will alter over time, the method to deal with them will gain consistency.

China's Global Behaviour: Some Extrapolations

Mao had once said to the American journalist Edgar Snow that China had no troops outside its own frontiers and had no intention to fight anybody unless its territory was attacked.⁶³ It is true that post-revolution China did not then, as it does not now, have troops beyond its borders and when it was involved in any wars or conflicts with outside powers such as India in 1962 and along the Ussuri River with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, it was when Beijing perceived a threat to what it saw as its territory, protection of which is obviously a 'core' interest.

Conversely, when its territory was not directly threatened, as during the Bangladesh War between India and Pakistan, it did not 'militarise' its strong verbal support to its closest ally Pakistan. But can Mao's words be taken literally, especially when we have seen how subtle the Chinese can be both in terms of language and diplomacy?⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Details from *People's Daily*, 23 July 2007.

⁶⁰ This subject featured in the bilateral talks between Wen Jiabao and Fakhruddin Ahmed in Beijing in September 2008. The matter of Chinese support to a road construction within Myanmar linking Bangladesh and China through that country was raised by the author with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.

⁶¹ 'China offers aid to Bangladesh to fight economic recession', *Financial Express*, 20 July 2009.

⁶² Garver, John W., 'China's South Asian Interests and Policies', prepared for a panel on "China's Approaches to South Asia and the former Soviet States", United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 22 July 2005.

⁶³ Cited in Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 725.

⁶⁴ Kissinger had written, "Beijing's diplomacy was so subtle and indirect that it largely went over our heads in Washington", *Ibid.*

As for there being no Chinese troops outside its frontiers, China will soon possess the capability of rapidly projecting military power beyond its borders. It is now focused on building a powerful navy⁶⁵ which can transport men and material, if need be rather quickly. At a seminar last year in Singapore, a participant Huang Jin said that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is the fastest growing force in China's military.⁶⁶ Since 2000, China has procured around 20 major surface vessels as destroyers and frigates, at least 31 new submarines and plans to build four to six aircraft carriers, commissioning the first by 2015.⁶⁷

In addition, China does not need to have forces outside the country to be able to strike at an enemy. China has an array of nuclear warheads, well over 400 in number, deployed on long and short range missiles, capable of hitting targets near and far from within Chinese territory.⁶⁸ A senior Chinese military officer, Major General Yang Huan has written, "Our armed forces are now capable of striking back with nuclear weapons, which greatly strengthens our national defence and our international status. Additionally, it helps to weaken the nuclear monopoly of the superpowers, contain nuclear war and safeguard world peace".⁶⁹ In March 2009, China announced an increase of 15 percent in its defence budget, raising it to US\$70 billion, becoming the second largest defence spender in the world (after the United States), overtaking Russia, Japan, Britain and France.⁷⁰

As for 'its territory', the conventional definition, as perhaps in Mao's days, meaning mainland China including Tibet and now Hong Kong, may also change to include other strategic interests such as economic assets in energy investments in Africa, such as in Sudan and Central Asia. These could also be *red lines* attacks on which could attract Chinese retaliation. We simply do not know for certain as yet.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the strategic decline of Europe in the global scene, the principal protagonists remain the United States and China. The Harvard historian Niall Ferguson coined the term "Chimerica" to describe the duo, and Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski floated the concept of the 'Group of Two' (G-2).⁷¹ During the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, China's ability to absorb the shocks continue to grow, and its strong fundamentals led the World Bank to predict that China would be the first country in the region to experience a 'rebound'.⁷² Indeed, Goldman Sachs has predicted that, by 2041, China would overtake the United States as the world's largest economy.⁷³

⁶⁵ See Mohan, Raja C., 'Maritime Power: India and China Turn to Mahan', ISAS Working Paper No.71, 7 July 2009.

⁶⁶ 'Between Rising Naval Powers: Implications for Southeast Asia of the Rise of Chinese and Indian Naval Power', S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 18-19 November 2008.

⁶⁷ Bitzinger, Richard A., 'China's Naval Ambitions: Aircraft Carriers will Make Waves', *The Straits Times*, 10 April 2009.

⁶⁸ See Moore, Frank W., 'China's Military Capabilities', (Cambridge MA 02139: Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies, June 2000). <http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/iddschina.html> – accessed on 4 May 2009.

⁶⁹ 'China's Strategic Nuclear Weapons' – <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/huan.htm> – accessed on 4 May 2009.

⁷⁰ Bitzinger, Richard A., *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Eyal, Jonathan, 'United States-China team just part of wider league', *Straits Times*, 8 July 2009.

⁷² 'Crisis Focus: A Leg Up for China', *Beijing Review*, 15 April 2009.

⁷³ Wilson, Dominic & Purushothaman, Roopa, 'Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050', Goldman Sachs, Global Economic Paper No. 99, October 2003. <http://www2.goldman.sachs.com?insight?research/reports/99.pdf>. Cited in Mohan, Raja C., *op. cit.*

The United States leadership has noted this burgeoning influence and, indeed, the power of China and the need to engage it. United States Secretary of State, then a presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton wrote in an article last year, “Our relationship with China will be the most important bilateral relationship in the world in this century.”⁷⁴ United States’ President Barack Obama, also a presidential candidate then, observed, a touch more realistically perhaps that, “We will compete with China in some areas and cooperate in others. Our essential challenge is to build a relationship that broadens cooperation while strengthening our ability to compete”.⁷⁵

The Columbia economist Jeffrey Sachs simply described China as “the most successful development story in world history”.⁷⁶ There have been apprehensions by some American analysts of an aggressive “string of pearls” policy whereby China would aggressively expand global influence by forging a linkage of ports and bases from the South China Sea through the Straits of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean and to the Arabian Gulf, which does not appear to fit into the Chinese behaviour-pattern.⁷⁷

If China was, at times, somewhat concerned about the negative implications on Chinese security of the growing ties between the United States and India, these were dispelled due largely to Washington’s post-9/11 focus on ‘terrorism’ with which China, for its own reasons, had no quarrel.⁷⁸ In fact, China endeavoured to rope India into the Kunming Initiative aiming to improve communications, trade, and investment links among Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, and India.⁷⁹ The so-far somewhat muted Western reaction to the Chinese governmental actions in Xinjiang recently points to Western disinclination to annoy a rising China. However, the events in Urumqi may somehow strain China’s relationship with the Central Asian Republics, to Russia’s temporary benefit, but it is likely that China will continue to make all possible efforts to maintain its traditional links with Muslim countries in general.

With China’s rise, an accompanying feature would be China’s aspirations to have a greater say in global economic policy-making. In 1997, following the East Asian financial crisis the Japanese offered US\$1 billion to create an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) in order to finance required stimulus actions. With Japan and China as major contributors to this proposed AMF, they could have provided a real challenger to the United States leadership and control. According to Professor Joseph Stiglitz, it was this fear that drove the United States Treasury Department and the International Monetary Fund to squelch the idea.⁸⁰

The Chinese took note and, as they often do in such situations, learnt from it. So when following the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, there was talk of replacing the United States dollar with some other currencies to be the major global reserve, the Chinese ‘soft-

⁷⁴ Clinton, Hillary Rodham, ‘Security and Opportunity for the Twenty-first Century’ *Foreign Affairs*, (Special Edition, Davos 2008) p. 83.

⁷⁵ ‘Renewing American Leadership’, *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Zakaria, Fareed, *The Post American World*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 89.

⁷⁷ For one such study, see Pehrson, Christopher, J., *String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China’s Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral*, Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs?display.cfm?Pubid=721> – accessed on 9 July 2009.

⁷⁸ See Yuan, Jing-dong, ‘The Dragon and the Elephant: Chinese-Indian Relations in the 21st Century’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2007.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁸⁰ Stiglitz, Joseph, E., *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), p. 112.

floated' the candidacy of the Yuan (*renminbi*) and then took a restrained position. Thereafter ensued a process of taking steps to prepare its currency for such an eventual role over a long term by making it convertible and taking other relevant steps.⁸¹ China has already been allowing companies to settle cross-border trade with the Yuan. Its declared goal to convert Shanghai into an international financial centre by 2020 suggests that the Yuan will have been fully convertible by then. All indications are that China will pursue this policy, too, slowly and cautiously. President Hu's cutting short his stay at the G-8 Summit in Italy due to the unrest in Urumqi, deprived other Western leaders from the chance to engage him substantively on this sensitive topic (the other being 'environment').

The Chinese role at the UN also suggests circumspection and avoidance of unnecessary diplomatic conflicts. However, they do take a firm position against any attempt by any other power to oppose a stated Chinese posture. For instance, anything that resembles 'interference in internal affairs', such as in the case of Myanmar or Sudan, is not allowed to pass muster in the Security Council. In 2005, the Chinese did not stand in the way of the adoption of the principle of 'Responsibility to Protect' but has been chary of allowing any external intervention under it.⁸² Also, the Chinese did not block the election in 2006 of the South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon as the Secretary General of the UN despite the fact of its close links with North Korea, because Ban's election satisfied the main Chinese given criterion that Kofi Annan's successor should be 'an Asian'. Therefore, the characteristic of Chinese behaviour pattern in the UN Security Council in particular, and the UN in general, has been moderate and not flashy, unlike that of the USSR in the Cold War era, and the United States later on. On the issue of the expansion of the Security Council, a sensitive one because of the Indian interest in it, China has not definitely pronounced itself because it has not yet needed to.

Deng once remarked, metaphorically as the Chinese are often wont to do, that 'it does not matter whether a cat is black or white, just as long as it catches mice'. In many ways, this explains China's attitude towards the world. The country with the world's largest population, and with the prospects of being the world's largest economy within decades is surely and inexorably on the 'rise'. China has said this 'rise' will be 'peaceful' and there is no evidence to point to the fact that it will be otherwise. China's close ties with Singapore, for instance, with which it signed a Free Trade Agreement during Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's visit to that country in 2008, incidentally the first with any Asian state,⁸³ and that too with one which is one of the world's most open economies, is testimony to the fact of China's wish to be practical rather than be driven by narrow ideology. Beijing will formulate and follow policies consciously directed towards its goals, but always tempered with practicality and pragmatism.

Andre Gunder Frank had stated before he died in 2005 that the only thing to fear about a rising China is the United States' response to it. Indeed, it is said that the Bush Administration's March 2002 Nuclear Posture Review had identified China as a potential

⁸¹ Bradsher, Keith, 'China is Taking Steps to Free its Currency', *International Herald Tribune*, 8 July 2009.

⁸² According to this principle, adopted also known as 'R2P' (simply put), it is the responsibility of every state to protect its citizens. Should any state fail or is unwilling to do so, then the responsibility will devolve on the international community to execute it, but only operating through the UN, and that too only under certain circumstances. There has been some talk of applying it in Sri Lanka or Myanmar but the Chinese are likely to veto it in the UN Security Council, if such attempts are made.

⁸³ Yongnian Zheng, Lian Fook, Lye, and Gang Chen, 'China's Politics in 2008: Year of Celebration and Crises', *East Asian Policy*, East Asian Institute, Singapore, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan/Mar 2009, p. 12.

target for nuclear weapons.⁸⁴ China appears to take a mature view of these facts as it quietly moves to position itself pivotally in the globe, which is its abiding aspiration. Thus the mood of the Chinese dragon, even when at times shifting, conforms to a method. This must be clearly understood if the world wishes to, as it must, accommodate China's 'rise'. China's external policy resembles a river that slowly meanders but does not suddenly change course. Time is on its side, and is not necessarily of the essence. Once asked about the impact on history of the French Revolution of 1789, Zhou En-lai famously replied, "It is too soon to tell!" That says it all.

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⁸⁴ Chalmers, Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the end of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Harry Holt and Company, 2004), p. 290. The other countries, according to this source, were Russia, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya.