



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title:	Chinese Foreign policy towards South Asia in the 21st Century
Chairperson:	Ms Swati Arun , Associate Fellow, CAPS
Speaker:	Ms Shaheli Das , Research Associate, CAPS
Discussant:	Ms Manisha Chaurasiya , Research Associate, CAPS
Rapporteur:	Dr Temjenmeren Ao , Research Associate, CAPS
Date:	17 July 2015

As part of the ongoing activities at the Centre for Air Power Studies, a Fellows' Seminar titled; "China's Foreign Policy towards South Asia in the 21st Century", was presented by Ms Shaheli Das, Research Associate, CAPS, on Friday, July 17, 2015.

The presenter began by stating that the region of South Asia consists of eight countries, however, she would focus only on two countries, namely India and Pakistan in today's presentation, and would cover the other countries in her subsequent presentations. According to the speaker, from 1950 to 1970, there has been a dramatic change in China's policy towards South Asia. Since the 1970s till the present time, China's policy in South Asia has continued to change from exporting its ideology to exporting consumer durables and benevolence to the region. According to the speaker, the principle tenets of China's policy in South Asia are, energy needs, terrorism and its 'One China Policy'. The speaker also brought out the fact that the main reason for the increasing importance of South Asia in China's policy is the trouble in its autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Tibet and also China's desire to extend its strategic and economic sphere of influence around the region.



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The speaker then deliberated on the Sino-Pak relations, and defined their relationship as one based on intimacy and trust. The speaker also highlighted the shallowness of this relationship. Although economically, Pakistan is seen by China as a mere economic corridor, China lays more importance to its strategic alliance with Pakistan. The importance of Pakistan in China's foreign policy emerged as a result of a rising India and China's need to gain entry into South Asia. Furthermore, China's troubles in Xinjiang have enabled it to further relook its policy towards Pakistan. Through the establishment of naval bases in the Indian Ocean it has ensured strategic benefits to both the countries, resulting in a win-win situation.

The second half of the presentation looked into the India-China relations as they constitute the twin engines of global economic growth. According to the speaker, commercial diplomacy is at the core of this relationship. However, the speaker felt that, China does not consider India as a threat to its rise in global primacy and seeks only a 'good neighbourly relationship' with India. However, issues pertaining to the border dispute still exist between the two nations and the chances of a resolution in this regard seem most unlikely in the near future. The continued rise of China's military defence budget should also be a cause for concern for India along with the various inroads that China is making in the region by engaging with India's neighbouring nations. According to the speaker there exists a trust deficit between India and China and this could be hard to do away with.

The speaker also highlighted some of the future trends with respect to Pakistan, its anti-India sentiments, along with its current estranged relationship with the United States; and how this would lead to a stronger, strategic Sino-Pak alliance. According to the speaker, China seeks to have good relations with India, and similarly India would also seek a good relationship with China, mainly because of the economic benefits that would accrue from such a relationship. The speaker concluded by stating that issues between India and



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China would persist and this relationship would continue to evolve as a consequence of commercial diplomacy, although China would continue to be crippled with its own issues of Xinjiang and its future unfavourable demographic age profile.

The talk was followed by the views of the discussant, Ms Manisha Chaurasiya, on the paper. The discussant stated that China's South Asia policy has changed dramatically mainly because of its need for energy, its own problem of terrorism and its 'One China policy'. Furthermore, the shared "Anti-India" perception of both Pakistan and China puts the two nations together, even though China's rivalry with India was not historic but emerged only after the 1960's. The discussant also stated that China sees India not as a challenger in the realms of China's strategy, and therefore would continue to have 'good neighbourly relations' with India. Commercial diplomacy is at the core of the China-India relationship, according to the discussant.

During the question and answer session, it was suggested that the entire issue of China-Pak and China-India relations should be separately considered. Sino-Pak relationship is a deep strategic relationship, and not a shallow one, and is aimed at containing India, containing the expansion of US into the region and aimed at gaining access to the oil rich nations through Pakistan. It was further stated that economic relations between the two are more recent. However, the strategic relationship between Pakistan and China could be traced way back to the 1960's when China offered defence assistance to Pakistan as well as cooperation in the nuclear field. Finally, it was opined that the issue such as Xinjiang would not cause any disruption in Sino-Pak relationship; and the relationship would remain strong in the foreseeable future.
