

CHINA AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

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China's growing role as a regional and global power may translate to greater Chinese third-party involvement in the management of future interstate crises. The nature of this involvement is uncertain, but historical trajectories of China's approach to the subcontinent offer some insight. In South Asia, despite shared borders and historic relations with both India and Pakistan, China has played a minimal role in the actual and near-wars between its southern neighbors, instead leaving any third-party management largely in the hands of the United States and European powers.

China does not yet view itself as either a military or political global superpower, and thus the incentive to adopt U.S.-style leadership in crisis management is low. Moreover, even as China rises as a global leader, it approaches third-party crisis management differently than the United States and views its interests and exposure to risks abroad through a distinct prism. Yet, as a part of China's immediate periphery, the peace and stability of the subcontinent constitutes a key area for China's national security — particularly after the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. Crises between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan could have catastrophic implications for China's critical national interests. Further, as the global geography of China's economy expands, Beijing's risk exposure as a third party in emerging bilateral crises increases.

Historically, when India-Pakistan crises have emerged, the United States has intervened in a third-party manager role. This became increasingly true after the 1998 nuclear tests.¹ China's rise as a major geopolitical power has occurred during a period of deepening China-Pakistan relations and a souring of U.S.-Pakistan relations. Simultaneously, recent developments have led to a decline in China-India relations (evidenced most recently during the 2017 Doklam crisis) and a strengthening of the U.S.-India relationship. These shifts add salience to a long-time question posed by U.S. and South Asian policymakers on

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1. Moeed Yusuf, *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Moeed Yusuf and Jason A. Kirk, "Keeping an Eye on South Asian Skies: America's Pivotal Deterrence in Nuclearized India-Pakistan Crises," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 2 (2016): 246-72; Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2014); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); Michael Krepon, "Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences," in *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences*, ed. Michael Krepon and Nathan Cohn (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, September 2011), 20-26; and P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

whether China may play a larger role in a future India-Pakistan crisis. China has historically striven to maintain a balanced approach to India-Pakistan security crises. It regularly advocates for tension de-escalation and diplomatic negotiations. However, China's ostensibly neutral position neither negates nor disguises a long-standing geostrategic instinct on Beijing's part to shield and protect Pakistan — the lynchpin of its balancing strategy on the subcontinent. This instinct has created intrinsic tensions in China's India and Pakistan policies during past South Asian crises that the shifting American role in the region under the Trump administration may exacerbate.

China's South Asia policy community disagrees on the proper role China could or should play in South Asian crises and the possible utility and risks of third-party involvement. During past India-Pakistan crises, both Pakistan and the United States have asked China to deepen its involvement. However, while China often claims neutrality in security crises between India and Pakistan, its strategic conflicts with and long-term concerns over India, along with its historical alignment and support of Pakistan, inevitably undermine its credibility as a neutral third-party crisis manager. Nevertheless, Chinese interests have at different times motivated Beijing to resort to multilateral coordination — China playing a “backstopper” role to the United States in great power management — and even pushed it toward direct bilateral engagement with India and Pakistan to encourage de-escalation during crises.

There are reasons to expect a possible change in China's approach to future crises. Chinese influence in Pakistan has grown and diversified. The relationship between China and Pakistan is often described by officials from both countries as “higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans.”² Thirty percent of Pakistan's imports came from China in 2016, and Pakistan is the world's largest importer of Chinese arms.³ China has made the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) the flagship and testing ground for its broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — the signature project of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Simultaneously, China has significant interests in keeping India a part of its economic engagement in the region.⁴ Developments in the China-Pakistan relationship, as well as general growth in China's geopolitical influence in South Asia, generate questions about China's stakes in future India-Pakistan crises.

Despite a long history of engagement, China's role in India-Pakistan crises is understudied. This essay reviews the history of China in South Asian crises and

2. “Pakistan and China: Sweet as Can Be?” *The Economist*, May 12, 2011.

3. For more on Pakistan's imports, see AJG Simoes and CA Hidalgo, “The Economic Complexity Observatory: An Analytical Tool for Understanding the Dynamics of Economic Development,” Workshops at the Twenty-Fifth AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence, 2011, <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/pak/#Imports>; and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database,” <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

4. China continues its attempts to entice Indian participation in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. And India, as a market in its own right, receiving 2.8 percent of China's exports in 2016, is one of China's largest export destinations. See where China exports to at Simoes and Hidalgo, “The Economic Complexity Observatory,” https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/chn/show/all/2016.

considers the prospects for an expanded future Chinese third-party role in crisis management. We argue that China's increasing global presence will expose it to new risks and that risks resulting from crises may in turn increase incentives for China to more actively facilitate de-escalation. In section one, we review the evolution of China's India and Pakistan policies together with China's strategic interests in South Asia. Section two surveys Chinese perspectives on crises and third-party management. In section three, we consider the upward trajectory of Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises since 1950. Finally, we analyze what has changed since the iconic 2008 Mumbai crisis, or "26/11," and what China's future role may be in India-Pakistan crises.

The nuclearization of the subcontinent, together with China's growing role in global and regional affairs, has yielded greater Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises. This upward historical trajectory suggests that in a future crisis, China may be well-positioned to play a more direct management role. This role will likely not take the form of a U.S.-style central mediator. Rather, China might bring Pakistan to the table to discuss de-escalation. China playing a more active role in future South Asian crisis management may be possible and productive but would require adjustments in crisis management approaches in the region by both Washington and Beijing. The United States will need to recognize it may have lost the requisite neutrality to play the solitary third-party manager role in de-escalation. China may have to re-evaluate the possible costs and benefits of whether its new endeavors in South Asia require a more involved, hands-on approach to India-Pakistan crises.⁵

Balancing Acts: Evolving Chinese Policies toward India and Pakistan

Understanding the history of Chinese policies on South Asia is key to assessing whether and how China might approach a future India-Pakistan crisis. Assessments of whether China may enhance its role in future crisis management must account for the evolution of China's cost-benefit calculations over time and whether current developments have significantly shifted the balance. China's South Asia policies since 1949 suggest that China has not seen itself as a principal player or manager in past South Asian crises. A decision to expand its role in the future would have to originate from an event that risked or caused major damage to China's national interests or offered the prospect of significant reward for Chinese intervention. Beyond the question of incentives, a review of China's South Asia policies also demonstrates Beijing's varying ability to play the role of a third-party broker with some neutrality. Ultimately, increased stakes resulting from China's expanding global presence could motivate China to play a more active third-party management role in a future India-Pakistan crisis.

5. For an early version of many of these arguments see one of the author's piece, Yun Sun, "Create a Channel for a U.S.-China Dialogue on South Asia," Stimson Center, *Off Ramps Initiative*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/create-channel-us-china-dialogue-south-asia>.

In many ways, China's South Asia policy, not unlike that of the United States, is an ongoing balancing act, with attempts to both maintain cooperative ties with India when possible while supporting Pakistan as a check to India's rapid rise. For the first decade after the founding of the People's Republic of China, this approach took the form of neutrality on India-Pakistan issues. Later, after the 1962 China-India War, as India's rising desire and capability to challenge China became more apparent, China's South Asia policies shifted to distinctly support Pakistan. This was particularly true during key developmental moments in India's nuclear program, namely the 1974 "peaceful nuclear explosion" and the 1998 tests. China's various policies since then have moved in gradual increments back toward neutrality. More recently, as the United States invests in India to check China's rise as a leading regional and global power, Beijing's positions are more about counter-balancing than being balanced.

Some Chinese crisis management studies have described crises as periods "between war and peace,"⁶ while the history of India-Pakistan relations might be characterized as unending crisis punctuated by periods of peace or war. From China's perspective, this pattern — so long as tensions remain below the nuclear threshold — has long-standing utility. While India and China share significant interests, Chinese strategic concerns with regards to India and counteracting U.S. initiatives to support India's challenge of Chinese power in the region take priority. Chinese strategic investment in Pakistan to counteract or balance India's rise intensified significantly after the 1998 tests, which for India were aimed at addressing a perceived Chinese threat.

Roughly speaking, the consensus in the Chinese policy community divides China's policy toward India-Pakistan into three stages along a spectrum of neutrality: 1950-62, 1962-89, and 1990-present. This essay further divides this political history of Chinese stakes on the subcontinent into four phases — breaking up the third stage — and suggests that a fifth future stage may be in the offing (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Evolution of China's South Asia Policies

Stage 1	1950-62	General neutrality
Stage 2	1962-89	Not neutral; pro-Pakistan (balancing)
Stage 3	1989-99	Somewhat more neutral (Pakistan is cornerstone of China's South Asia policy); advocate de-escalation
Stage 4	1999-2017	More neutral; active bilateral or "shuttle" diplomacy (initially just with Pakistan, later with both India and Pakistan)
Stage 5	Future	Likely less neutral; greater stakes; larger third-party role

6. Liu Junbo 刘俊波, "Shixi Disanfang Guoji Weiji Guanli de Tiaojian" 试析第三方国际危机管理的条件 [Analyzing the Conditions of Third-Party International Crisis Management], *Waijiao pinglun* 外交评论 [Foreign Affairs Review], no. 12 (2007): 44-49, cited in Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 28-71, 30.

India and Pakistan were among the first countries to extend political recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1950, establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing in April 1950 and May 1951, respectively. Between the early 1950s and the Sino-India Border War of 1962, China maintained a largely neutral position between the two countries. During this period, although China joined with India to advocate the famous Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, relations with India were undermined by border disputes between the two states and what China perceived as an indecent Indian role in the 1959 riots in Tibet. In comparison, despite Chinese concern over Pakistan's ambivalence on issues such as China's seat at the United Nations, China and Pakistan successfully reached a border boundary agreement in 1962.

The 1962 border war with India shifted China's alignment choices in South Asia in a pro-Pakistan direction.⁷ From 1962 until the end of the Cold War, China was almost entirely supportive of Pakistan's position on bilateral India-Pakistan issues, including Kashmir, and provided Pakistan with economic and military aid to balance against and contain India. China supported Pakistan in the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, as well as in the pursuit of a plebiscite in Kashmir under U.N. Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 47.⁸ China's support was rewarded by ardent Pakistani support of the PRC's resumption of China's seat at the U.N. and on the UNSC. Pakistan also played a critical role in private dialogues between China and the United States over Sino-U.S. rapprochement at this time, including a secret trip by President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to Beijing that paved the ground for Nixon's historic China visit in 1972.

The end of the Cold War necessitated a Chinese reassessment of India's strategic importance, resulting in China's South Asia policies becoming more neutral. The rising unilateralism in U.S. foreign policy exacerbated China's concern over U.S. hegemony globally and fostered a shared aspiration with India for a more multipolar world. Indian economic reforms and development increased incentives for China to pursue both political and economic cooperation with India as a fellow leader in the developing world. Meanwhile, though China strived to maintain its traditional friendship with Pakistan, it could no longer fully publicly endorse Pakistan's position on Kashmir.⁹ This movement toward a more neutral policy, while maintaining key economic, political, and defense support for Pakistan, continued through 2016.

It is important to recognize that China's approach to its South Asian neighbors does not reflect a zero-sum perspective. Periods of improved Sino-Indian

7. For more on "Beijing's interest in cultivating and sustaining the Sino-Pakistani relationship" at this time, and how Chinese interests in Pakistan went beyond "the India factor" and the catalyst of the 1962 war, see Christopher Tang, *Beyond India: The Utility of Sino-Pakistani Relations in Chinese Foreign Policy, 1963-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2012).

8. This support, while aggravating for India, often fell short of Pakistani hopes for Chinese diplomatic and military commitments.

9. For further reading on Chinese perspectives on Kashmir see, Cheng Ruisheng 程瑞生, "Nanya de Redian Keshimier" 南亚的热点克什米尔 [The Hot Spot in South Asia: Kashmir] (Beijing: International Culture Publishing Company, 2007).

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relations did not lead to a weakening of China's long friendship with Pakistan.¹⁰ China and India comprise two of the world's largest economies and emerging markets and have shared diplomatic interests as members of the global south on international issues related to energy, climate change, and the global economic order, yielding what one scholar terms "macrodiplomatic cooperation."¹¹ However, such alignments on lower-priority global issues fail to overcome divergence between China and India on core bilateral issues including territorial disputes, Tibet, and strategic competition in the region. China sees India as the only regional power in South Asia with the potential to compete for regional dominance. U.S. investment in India as a balance to China's emerging regional leadership role further antagonizes Beijing, convincing it of a shared aspiration and plan between Washington and New Delhi to contain Chinese aspirations and movements in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean.¹²

Consequently, Pakistan, rather than India, is the cornerstone of China's South Asia policy. Regardless of its internal fragility, Pakistan remains China's main channel of "checks and balances" against India. Given that lasting peaceful and stable relations between India and Pakistan are desirable but improbable in the near term, China essentially sees a balance of power between the two states as the key to stability in South Asia. The more asymmetrical the power equilibrium, the more unstable South Asia will be.

The introduction of nuclear weapons added new dynamics to the regional equilibrium. As one scholar notes, Chinese support of Pakistan's nuclear program historically and today is aimed at promoting strategic stability between India and Pakistan:

10. John W. Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (1996): 326.

11. Garver posits that, "macrodiplomatic cooperation is a substitute for a lack of convergent Chinese and Indian interests on security issues and for the paltry results of efforts to increase trade and economic relations between the two countries." Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement," 326.

12. On the United States' role in Sino-India relations see, Ge Han Wen and Li Gang 葛汉文 and 李刚, "Kan Daguo Jingji Zai Yin-Ba Weijishi" 看大国竞技在印巴危机时 [In the India-Pakistan Crisis, Look at the Big Powers], *World Affairs* no 13. (2002): 16-17; and Cheng Xiaoyong 程晓勇, "Guoji Heweiji de Kongzhi yu Guanli" 国际核危机的控制与管理 [International Nuclear Crisis Control and Management: Case Study of South Asian Nuclear Crisis], *Nanya Yanjiu* 南亚研究 [South Asian Studies] no. 3 (March 2010): 17-29.

China's goal is not to check the development of India's nuclear power. Nor does it seek a comparable Pakistani nuclear arsenal. However, when Pakistan needs it, China has to provide the support as long as it is within the international laws and rules, so that the gap between Pakistan's nuclear power and that of India will not become so significant (that it is destabilizing).¹³

China has received much criticism for its support of Pakistan's nuclear program. According to some analysts, Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons emboldens risky behavior such as low-scale conventional aggression against India and support of non-state proxy groups.¹⁴ From this perspective, China's support of Pakistan — both generally and specifically on its nuclear development — further strengthens Pakistan's security establishment's rationale to engage in this risky behavior. A more optimistic assessment is that China's leverage over Pakistan, both in terms of defense cooperation and on broader economic and diplomatic levels, increases the inducements for Pakistan to behave less aggressively. Some analysts posit that China's leverage in Pakistan is already having this effect, galvanizing Pakistan's perennial struggle with domestic terrorism.¹⁵ Ultimately, China's incentives in encouraging or discouraging certain Pakistani behaviors return Beijing to its balancing policy in South Asia. In any India-Pakistan crisis, this strategy emphasizes China's short-term goals of preventing severe escalation without disrupting its long-term agenda in balancing Pakistan against India's rise.¹⁶

Crisis Perspectives: Increasing Chinese Stakes and Role in Third-Party Crisis Management?

The gradual upward trajectory of Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises suggests China may have increasing stakes in escalation control and third-party management on the subcontinent. This upward historical trajectory is in comparison to China's past roles — not a comparison of China to other third-party actors. Chinese perspectives on crises and crisis management are distinct from

13. Zhang Jie Gen 章节根, "Yin-Ba Hezhanlue Wending Jiqi Dui Zhongguo de Yingxiang" 印巴核战略稳定及其对中国的影响 [The Stability of India-Pakistan Nuclear Strategy and Its Impact on China], *Yinduyang Jingji Ti Yanjiu* 印度洋经济体研究 [Indian Ocean Economic and Political Review] no 4. (2014): 21-34.

14. See for example, "Seeking Security under a Nuclear Umbrella," in Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 202-25; and Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). For a response to the emboldenment argument, see Sameer P. Lalwani, "Re-evaluating the Emboldenment Argument: Evidence from South Asia" (paper presented at International Studies Association Annual Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, March 16-19, 2016).

15. Abbas Nasir, "A Welcome CPEC Benefit," *Dawn*, March 18, 2017; and Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland, "Don't Fear Pakistan's Participation in China's 'New Silk Road,'" *Defense One*, May 12, 2017. For a Chinese overview of CPEC as the flagship of BRI see, Li Xi Guang 李希光, *Zhong-Ba Jingji Zoulang: Zhongguo 'Yidai-Yi-lu' Zhanlue Qijian Xiangmu Yanjiu* 中巴经济走廊: 中国 "一带一路" 战略旗舰项目研究 [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Study of China's One Belt One Road Flagship Project] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing Group Corporation, 2016).

16. Some analysts will take issue with the very nature of such a policy considering the significant asymmetry between India and Pakistan — in conventional military terms but also in other significant arenas including national economies and broader geopolitical clout. Nevertheless, the nuclearization of the subcontinent has lent Pakistan a degree of asymmetric parity with India. China's manipulation of an asymmetric pairing in a balancing strategy is quite common. Consider India's own strategy to use Afghanistan to balance Pakistan. For recent scholarship on this Indian strategy see, Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017).

the United States. China eschews less interventionist tactics and does not yet see itself as a political or military superpower. As a result, it has and will continue to take a different third-party approach than that of the United States to interstate crises. In this section, we briefly review Chinese crisis perspectives and management approaches. In the case of South Asia, we argue that a gradual increase in stakes (and risk exposure) has corresponded with an increase in Chinese incentives to ensure crises de-escalate.

Chinese studies define crises as involving a negative departure from a norm of stable bilateral relations, the use of force being probable or imminent, and a sense of urgency to prevent outright conflict based on perceived time constraints. Review studies also highlight an element of uncertainty (*buquedingxing*) as a key factor in Chinese understandings of crisis.¹⁷ China's expanding geopolitical influence, particularly through global investment projects like those under BRI, correlates with the geographical expansion of the Chinese economy and may lead China to perceive greater exposure to risks around the world. As one study from China's National Defense University puts it:

[A]s a rising power takes on more responsibilities (e.g., peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance) or expands its energy sources, it generates more contact points with other actors that could lead to conflict (e.g., threats to nationals living abroad, threats to energy shipments, the possibility of being pulled into conflicts during humanitarian activities).¹⁸

These aspects of China's approach to crises in which it is a direct party and overall Chinese concepts of "war control" help inform China's approach to third-party involvement in crises in which China is not a party but has great interest.¹⁹ The inherent heightened uncertainty of a crisis may be compounded by the sometimes-novel contexts where Chinese core interests are expanding. Beijing is implementing BRI in areas far from China's traditional core geographic interests. Navigating recently developed "contact points" during a crisis on unfamiliar geography with emerging technologies and new state and non-state actors at play may introduce even greater degrees of uncertainty.

Chinese perspectives on crises, and their preferred management approach, can be distilled into three basic types: (1) international crises (e.g., the ongoing Syria crisis), (2) standoffs or conflicts where Chinese intervention is instigated not by a direct threat to Chinese interests but by U.S. demand (e.g., the 1990 Compound crisis), and (3) crises where Chinese interests are directly threatened (e.g., Taiwan crises). China's interest and its corresponding involvement in the first two situations are indirect. In such cases, China advocates multilateral

17. Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," 30-31.

18. Wang Yong and Chen Senlin 王勇 和陈森林, *Guojia anquan weiji guanli yanjiu* 国家安全危机管理研究 [*National Security Crisis-Management Research*] (Beijing, National Defense University Press, 2011), paraphrased in Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," 33-34, 216.

19. See for example, Burgess Laird, *War Control: Chinese Writings on the Control of Escalation in Crisis and Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2017).

approaches to managing international crises (e.g., U.N.-led). Instances of the second type of crises require great power third-party management, largely to date the self-appointed responsibility of the United States, that China may be induced to backstop. This second type of crisis might even be in China's immediate geographic proximity — as the 1990 Compound crisis was — but nevertheless does not imminently threaten Chinese core interests.

There are two key variables in Chinese determination of the third type of crisis: the degree of proximity to core Chinese economic and national security geography and the degree of intensity/escalatory potential — imminence of actual conflict with the potential to cross the nuclear threshold. The third type of crisis occurs most often in proximity to China's eastern seaboard. These measuring sticks explain why China fails to understand, and sometimes resents, U.S. involvement in crises so far from the geography of American core interests. For China, proximity to core interests have to do with geography — both core versus peripheral physical territory (e.g., routine border tensions with India versus China-Japan standoffs over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands) and economic geography. In contrast, the U.S. collective and cooperative security perspectives that have animated U.S. post-Cold War foreign policy broadly see the threat of chaos anywhere as a threat to U.S. security and economic interests.²⁰ Thus Chinese “war control” is different from U.S. escalation control/crisis management in that China prioritizes crises with the potential to directly impact Chinese critical national security and economic stability (to maintain domestic stability politically — legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party), whereas the United States has been committed to ensuring a stable global environment. In South Asia, historically, India-Pakistan crises have only actually moved toward the characteristics of the third type of crises for China when the risk of nuclear escalation appeared imminent.

When we compare U.S. to Chinese engagement in South Asia, both states' stakes and crisis management activity increased over time. In the 1990s, the United States was closely involved in third-party crisis management in India-Pakistan crises, but both stakes and activity were raised after the 1998 tests added an overtly nuclear dynamic to South Asian crises.²¹ From 1999 through the 2000s, U.S. stakes and crisis management activity were both high. China, by comparison, had essentially no stakes or crisis management activity prior to 1998. After India and Pakistan became overt nuclear powers, however, and as China's global role expanded and its investments in relations with and development of Pakistan grew, its stakes and activity during bilateral crises increased. In the following section, we detail the chronology of this upward trajectory. As the geography of China's economy diversifies and expands globally, its definition

20. For a good review, see Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1997): 23-32.

21. Yusuf, *Brokering Peace*; Yusuf and Kirk, “Keeping an Eye on South Asian Skies;” Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*; Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*; and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*.

of core interests will similarly gradually expand. Increasing stakes and willingness to play a role in ensuring crises do not escalate suggest that a future India-Pakistan crisis may involve higher Chinese crisis management activity.

Parsing China's Historical Roles in India-Pakistan Crises

A review of India-Pakistan crises shows that over time China has become increasingly involved as a third party. Chinese responses to subcontinental escalation draw a broad range of reactions: disengaged statements of neutrality, public support for Pakistan, backchannel engagement with Pakistan alone, support of multilateral, international crisis management efforts, and direct third-party shuttle diplomacy with one or both countries. These responses vary depending on Chinese perceptions of the type of crisis at hand and, if a crisis threatens core Chinese interests (type three crisis), the degree to which those interests are at risk.

India-Pakistan crises began to elicit direct Chinese bilateral diplomacy at the turn of the century. Prior to 1999, China did very little active third-party crisis management to stymie escalation between its subcontinental neighbors. After India and Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, however, the stakes rose for successive crises and their potential to escalate to outright conflict. Beyond becoming more vocal, a critical difference in Chinese engagement after the 1998 crisis was that it began actively engaging in shuttle diplomacy, first with just Pakistan, and later with India also.

Table 2: Chinese Involvement in India-Pakistan Crises

PERIOD	YEARS	INDIA-PAKISTAN CRISES	POLICY STAGE
1	1950-90	1965 India-Pakistan War; 1971 War; 1987 Brasstacks crisis	1 and 2
2	1990-99	1990 Compound crisis; 1998 nuclear tests	3
3	1999-2008	1999 Kargil War; 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis	4
4	2008-17	2008 Mumbai crisis; 2016 Uri crisis	4

This essay divides the history of Chinese involvement in South Asian crises into four phases (see *Table 2*), which roughly align with the four developing stages of China's stakes in South Asia and resulting India and Pakistan policies outlined in *Table 1*. Period 1, approximately 1950 to 1990, is characterized by China approaching India-Pakistan crises with minimal overall involvement beyond clear and public support for Pakistan. From 1990 to 1999, in Period 2, China advocated a multilateral, international approach to crises in South Asia while continuing to express general support for Pakistan and exerting influence on Islamabad to de-escalate in a quiet, backroom setting. Later, after the 1999 Kargil crisis, China's role as a third party in India-Pakistan crises became

both more direct and increasingly involved in manager-like engagement with both Pakistan and India. Throughout this crisis history, however, regardless of China's crisis management activities, its military cooperation with Pakistan continued — a perennial thorn in Sino-Indian relations. China has consistently promoted some degree of India-Pakistan parity as a part of its strategic balancing policy on the subcontinent.

Period 1: 1950-90

Two of the three major India-Pakistan crises during this first period escalated to full-scale war. In both instances, China consistently and publicly communicated support for Pakistan — offering criticism for Indian aggression and expressing general appreciation for the challenges Pakistan faced. This support, however, became more measured over the course of this period. Throughout all three crises, China pushed for restraint through direct, bilateral engagement with Pakistan, but at no point was China playing a role that resembled a third-party crisis manager. The risks for Chinese interests posed by war between India and Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s were comparatively low.

For India, the 1965 India-Pakistan war (coming right on the heels of China's war with India in 1962) was the first major conflict with Pakistan in which India grappled with the idea of China coming to Pakistan's aid militarily to create a two-front war.²² In this incident, China publicly supported Pakistan and was quite critical of India, asserting that the latter “must bear responsibility for all the consequences of its criminal and extended aggression.”²³

During the 1971 India-Pakistan war, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, China offered more measured support and strategic reassurance to Pakistan. China sought to balance its advocacy of sovereignty of states' internal affairs and continuing general support of Pakistan with its unwillingness to overly involve itself in a possible war and desire to not alienate India. The mechanisms for Chinese offerings of support included both private and public statements and subtle messaging like Zhou Enlai sending Yahya Khan a letter expressing support for a unified Pakistan and suggesting “the Pakistanis might release it to the press.”²⁴ A major impetus for this shift in China's approach back in the direction of neutrality was a decision by Moscow to arm Pakistan in 1968.²⁵

Soviet behavior created both a challenge and opportunity. On the one hand, India and the Soviet Union's close relations at the time — culminating in the August 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty — presented the risk of direct Soviet involvement in the

22. Tang, *Beyond India*, 11-12.

23. Official People's Republic of China statement, quoted in Tang, *Beyond India*, 12.

24. Srinath Raghavan, *1971* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 187. For more on China's role in the 1971 war, see Raghavan's chapter, “The Chinese Puzzle,” 184-203.

25. For more on responses in New Delhi to this controversial arms deal see Girilal Jain, “Soviet Arms for Pakistan: I — Success of Ayub's Diplomacy,” *Times of India*, July 17, 1968, 8. For more on the arms deal itself and a brief history of Soviet arms deals in South Asia see, Zubeida Hasan, “Soviet Arms Aid to Pakistan and India,” *Pakistan Horizon* 21, no. 4 (1986): 352-54.

event of an India-Pakistan war. On the other hand, Soviet willingness to deal with both India and Pakistan created a window of opportunity for Sino-Indian rapprochement. After exporting defense technology to India, the Soviet Union began engaging Pakistan with arms sales. Additionally, China's "avowed support for 'national liberation movements'" meant it was wary of appearing hypocritical by opposing the Bangla freedom movement during West Pakistan's violent military crackdown. China had strong relationships with power brokers in East Pakistan and was hedging against a separated, independent Bangladesh to counter Indian influence. Ultimately, "Beijing was vociferous in the attempt to dissuade military action by India, but gave no concrete assurances of military support to Pakistan" and made no commitments to protect the territorial integrity of Pakistan.²⁶

By the late 1980s, Sino-Indian relations were on the upswing, positioning China to play a more neutral — or at least a more passive — role in India-Pakistan crises. During the 1987 Brasstacks crisis, for example, a leading study on India-Pakistan crises asserts that China played "no role" in de-escalation²⁷ — any influence that may have been wielded seems to have been done quietly behind the scenes. This shift in China's approach to India corresponded with what one scholar terms "a weakening of China's verbal deterrent support for Pakistan," during periods of crisis with India.²⁸ As India and Pakistan's nuclear programs made key developmental strides, however, China's more neutral approach changed again. The 1974 Indian nuclear test was a key moment in this transition, but it was not until the 1998 nuclear tests and the 1999 Kargil crisis that the nuclear risks began to overtly shape China's responses to escalation on the subcontinent.

Period 2: 1990-99

In India and Pakistan's 1990 Compound crisis, China played a minimal, one-sided management role. Chinese politicians and military officials encouraged Pakistan to peacefully resolve the issue of Kashmir and refused Pakistan's requests for China to facilitate negotiations.²⁹ Adjustments in China's language and approach to Kashmir, a perennial source of India-Pakistan tension, during this crisis are a good example of the shift that took place in the 1990s. In previous decades, Chinese statements on Kashmir generally supported Pakistan's position that both countries ought to settle the issue based on past U.N. resolutions (rather than the more recent Simla accords — which India maintains supersede the U.N. resolutions on the issue). In the 1980s, messaging mentioned "both the Simla accords and the UN resolutions," allowing China to "straddl[e] the

26. Raghavan, 1971, 188.

27. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 67.

28. Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement," 330. Garver goes on to define this deterrent as, "threats, explicit or implicit, that China might enter an Indo-Pakistan military conflict on the side of Pakistan."

29. For a timeline-review of news accounts of these and other statements during several India-Pakistan crises, see William Shimer, "Appendix V: Chinese Involvement in South Asian Crises," in *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences*, ed. Michael Krepon and Nate Cohn (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2011).

Overt nuclearization of the subcontinent swung the pendulum of China's approach to India-Pakistan tensions from neutrality back to a decidedly pro-Pakistan, anti-India position.

Pakistan and Indian positions.”³⁰ Prior to this, Chinese language consistently promoted the multilateral, international crisis management mechanisms of U.N. resolutions. During the 1990 crisis, India successfully lobbied China to play a more neutral role, evidenced in a change of tone in Chinese messaging on the issue of Kashmir.

Multiple early Chinese statements in February and March during the 1990 Compound crisis included references to “relevant UN resolutions and accords reached by both countries” and reiterations that the Kashmir issue “has been discussed by the United Nations.”³¹ By April and May, however, Chinese statements became much more neutral from an Indian perspective, as China began to advocate bilateral “negotiations,” “mutual consultation,” and “dialogue” with no mention of the United Nations.³²

Almost a decade later, however, overt nuclearization of the subcontinent swung the pendulum of China's approach to India-Pakistan tensions from neutrality back to a decidedly pro-Pakistan, anti-India position. The 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan spurred a crisis that uniquely affected Chinese interests. Specifically, India's heavy China-focused rationale for testing prompted a severe downturn in China's relationship with India that lasted until 2000.³³ Given that the crises in South Asia now challenged not only regional peace but also global nuclear stability, China's response to both the crisis spurred by the tests and the tension in early 1999 over Kashmir was to advocate a multilateral, international management approach.³⁴ China's approach to crisis management went from

30. Garver, “Sino-Indian Rapprochement,” 328.

31. Garver, “Sino-Indian Rapprochement,” 329.

32. *Ibid.*, 330.

33. John Garver, “The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity Following India's Nuclear Tests,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (2001): 865-89, 865.

34. For more reading on Chinese perspectives on Chinese interests in relation to South Asian security crises, see: Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇, “Yin-Ba Heshiyan” 印巴核试验 [India-Pakistan Nuclear Tests], in Jing Yu Xu Feng 劲雨煦风 [Heavy Storm and Gentle Breeze], by Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇 Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe 北京:世界知识出版社 [Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House], (2009): 388-414. and Yuan Di 原狄, “Zhongguo Dui Nanyan Anquan De Yingxiang Jiqi Zhiyue Yinsu : Kajier Chongtu Weilil” 中国对南亚安全的影响及其制约因素: 卡吉尔冲突为例 [The Influence of and Restrictions to China's Influence on South Asian Security: The Case of Kargil] *Nan Yan Jiu Ji Kan* 南亚研究季刊 [South Asian Studies Quarterly], no. 3 (2001): 8-14.

moderate and one-sided bilateral engagement in 1990 to a multilateral approach, strongly critical of India.

From an Indian perspective, the Chinese role in the 1998 crisis was simply one of an enabler for irresponsible Pakistani behavior. One Indian foreign secretary goes so far as to argue that with so much collaboration, “[f]rom the Indian point of view the Chinese and Pakistani nuclear weapons programs are so closely linked and have been for so long that they may effectively be treated as one.”³⁵ In turn, China’s reactions to the Indian and Pakistani tests were clearly differentiated. While the Chinese government “strongly condemned” the Indian tests, it only expressed “regrets” about the Pakistani tests.³⁶ In particular, India’s justification for its nuclear capabilities as a counter to a Chinese threat elicited a harsh response from Beijing.³⁷ When Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests in response to India’s, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Zhu Bangzao reaffirmed that India was at fault for the instability in South Asia as “Pakistan’s nuclear tests were conducted as reactions to India’s ‘intimidation.’”³⁸

China’s position was that the UNSC is the primary international governance entity responsible for the “maintenance of international peace and security.” Then Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan argued that great power coordination, as manifested through the UNSC process, had the best legality and highest authority in dealing with the nuclear crisis in South Asia.³⁹ China reviewed the U.S. proposal to organize both a UNSC permanent members (P5) meeting and a Group of Eight meeting to discuss the nuclear crisis and preferred the P5 foreign minister meeting to protect the authority of the U.N. and prevent diffusion of decision-making authority. The eventual June 4 Geneva meeting produced a joint communiqué followed by UNSC Resolution 1172, clarifying the international community’s opposition to the nuclear tests and announcing a series of punitive measures.

From the Chinese perspective, this crisis demonstrated the efficacy of a multilateral international approach to manage nuclear crises. This is consistent with the Chinese position that nuclear proliferation, such as in the cases of Iranian and North Korean nuclear development, constitutes a major threat to international peace and stability as well as to the global nonproliferation regime. Great power consensus against the tests brought India and Pakistan to re-engage one another in dialogue, which led to the Lahore Declaration in February 1999. China also argues that joint efforts by the international community have prevented further nuclear tests by either India or Pakistan. Although the two countries continued

35. Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India’s Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 114.

36. “The Chinese Government Strongly Condemns India’s Nuclear Test,” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 14, 1998; and “A Foreign Ministry Spokesman Said China Deeply Regrets the Nuclear Test Conducted by Pakistan,” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 29, 1998. For the original statement in Chinese on India see, <http://www.people.com.cn/9805/15/current/newfiles/a1040.html>; on Pakistan, see <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/4157/4160/20010213/394640.html>.

37. “China Joins Criticism of India,” *BBC*, May 14, 1998. For more on responses to the 1998 nuclear tests, see Ming Zhang, *Changing Nuclear Posture: Reactions to the South Asian Nuclear Tests*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

38. *Ibid.*, 32.

39. Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇, “Yin-Ba Heshiyan” 印巴核试验 [India-Pakistan Nuclear Tests].

to defy UNSC Resolution 1172, refused to join the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and continued to expand their nuclear arsenals, Chinese analysts tend to attribute blame primarily to the United States, rather than the U.N., for compromising its nonproliferation policies toward both India and Pakistan in favor of counterterrorism priorities after the 9/11 attacks. Perhaps partially in response to this vacuum, in Period 3, during the 1999 Kargil and 2001-2 India-Pakistan crises, China adjusted its crisis management approach to rely more heavily on direct bilateral engagement. Severe crises now carried the risk of escalating to nuclear use very close to home.

Period 3: 1999-2008

Beginning with the 1999 Kargil crisis, Chinese involvement in South Asian crisis management shifted significantly from support for multilateral international approaches to initially backstopping U.S.-led third-party management at the request of U.S. leadership, to directly engaging in shuttle diplomacy—initially with Pakistan, and later with both Pakistan and India. These shifts were prompted in large part because the nuclearization of the subcontinent raised the stakes of any major India-Pakistan crisis for China. Overall, this period suggests that China's role as a global and regional player is moving in the direction of playing a more active third-party role in South Asia's bilateral crisis.

Despite deteriorating China-India relations after the 1998 nuclear tests, China's third-party involvement in the 1999 Kargil crisis was more neutral. During Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz's trip to Beijing in June 1999, China advocated de-escalation and was unwilling to lend the international support that Pakistan sought.⁴⁰ China privately disapproved of Pakistan's military adventurism and publicly urged India and Pakistan to "respect the LoC and resume negotiations at an early date."⁴¹ In New Delhi, China's "neutral" position was lauded as a welcome change from its approach to "all previous conflicts between India and Pakistan [in which] China had sided with Islamabad."⁴² Despite this shift, however, some scholars observe that the Indian Army was unnerved by what might be deemed opportunistic People's Liberation Army activities on shared Sino-Indian borders beginning in June of 1999.⁴³ Support for de-escalation of the India-Pakistan war did not negate the potential for jockeying on other areas of Chinese interest.

China's continued approach to Kashmir being an issue for bilateral negotiation (rather than international mediation, as previously endorsed through U.N.

40. See, for example, Devin Hagerty, "The Kargil War: An Optimistic Assessment," in *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 105.

41. Zhang Qiyue, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, quoted in "China Asks India, Pakistan to Hold Early Dialogue," *Times of India*, July 7, 1999.

42. Seema Guha, "India Welcomes China's Neutral Stand on Kargil," *Times of India*, July 3, 1999.

43. To read more People's Liberation Army border activity during the Kargil crisis, see V.P. Malik, "The China Factor," in *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory* (Noida, Uttar Pradesh: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2006), 295-302. Also see Pravin Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab, *Dragon on our Doorstep: Managing China through Military Power* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2017), 45-46.

resolution language) was another broad indication of China's more neutral stance as a third party in 1999:

[PLA Chief of General Staff Fu Quanyou's] endorsement of "[bilateral] dialogue" was equivalent to implicit rejection of Pakistan's efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue through its precipitation of the confrontation over Kargil.⁴⁴

On the ground, China's attitude on the Kashmir dispute has shifted since the 1990s toward a preference for the Line of Actual Control and eventual resolution of border disputes with India through peaceful negotiation. This approach coincided with the U.S. position against unilateral actions by Pakistan to change the status quo in Kashmir.

In the case of Kargil War, most of the bilateral meetings took place in Beijing itself between senior Chinese leaders and visiting Pakistani and Indian top officials, including the then Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif, Chief of Army Staff Pervez Musharraf, and Foreign Minister Aziz, together with Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh. Through a series of high-level meetings, China conveyed its cautious and careful rejection of Pakistan's request for support, expressed its understanding of India's position, and called for the diplomatic solution to the armed conflict. Later, in the case of the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis, then Chinese President Jiang Zemin met with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani President Musharraf during the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in June 2002. China urged peaceful resolution.⁴⁵ Earlier that year, Chinese leadership had several other meetings with Musharraf and others in the Pakistani security establishment, urging de-escalation. There was one instance of a high-level trip to India when the Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji had a 10 day visit in January 2002; however, Indian Foreign Minister Singh went so far as to make a statement to clarify overtly that, "China has neither any intention nor shall it play any mediatory role in matters that involve India and Pakistan."⁴⁶ Beijing would go on to engage in more overt shuttle diplomacy with *both* India and Pakistan in the next major bilateral crisis.

In both the 1999 Kargil crisis and the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis Beijing utilized bilateral channels to publicly signal its position and advocate tension de-escalation. The degree to which China's efforts had an effect is subject to debate. After all, the impact of bilateral diplomacy during crises is difficult to measure unless it results in a clear statement or agreement from the involved parties. However, as

44. Garver, "The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity," 882.

45. Hu Shisheng and Jiang Yili 胡仕胜 and 江亦丽, "Shi 'Zhan' Shi 'He' Yin-Ba Jushi Chuyu Shi Zi Lukou" 是“战”是“和”印巴局势处于十字路口 [India and Pakistan are At a Crossroads between War and Peace] Moderated Discussion, *China Report*, CCTV 中国报道, 中国中央电视台; Shimer, "Appendix V: Chinese Involvement in South Asian Crises," 96.

46. Singh went on to say, "We know that China has a special relationship with Pakistan and that they have military equipment supply relationship also. Notwithstanding all this, India remains committed to improve its relations with China." The transcript of the press conference on January 13, 2002, was printed in, "Let Pakistan Operationalise What The President of Pakistan Has Announced," *Outlook*, January 14, 2002.

an important party with vested interests in South Asia and major influence over Pakistan, China's shuttle diplomacy between India and Pakistan inevitably has had some de-escalating effect — even if by simply conveying China's bottom-line preferences and signaling against moves toward nuclear escalation.⁴⁷ In November 2008, China's involvement became even more pronounced, amplifying this effect.

Period 4: 2008-17

In the fourth period of this timeline, Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises began to more closely resemble that of a great power broker. China started engaging in public bilateral shuttle diplomacy with both India and Pakistan, actively sending high-level representatives to Islamabad and New Delhi. This shift became clear during the 2008 Mumbai crisis. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei conducted shuttle diplomacy by visiting Islamabad on Dec. 28 and 29, 2008, and visiting New Delhi on Jan. 5, 2009.⁴⁸ He worked to highlight common ground between India and Pakistan on the importance of peace, development, and the international campaign to counter terrorism. It is also noteworthy that the Chinese military also assumed an active diplomatic role during the 2008 crisis. On Dec. 15, China and India held the second round of defense and security consultations in New Delhi, which was attended by Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army Ma Xiaotian and Indian Defense Secretary Vijay Singh. Three days later, China and Pakistan hosted the sixth round of defense consultations in Beijing, attended by the chiefs of staff of both countries.⁴⁹ These high-level military and diplomatic engagements with both parties in the aftermath of a major India-Pakistan crisis were emblematic mechanisms of a mature third-party manager.

China seems to be holding to this more active and neutral third-party approach to handling India-Pakistan crises. In response to the 2016 Pathankot attack, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying expressed concerns that the “attack might have been launched intentionally to disrupt” diplomatic momentum in India-Pakistan relations, imploring both countries to “enhance their cooperation and dialogue regardless.”⁵⁰ Later, after the attack that led to the 2016 Uri crisis, China encouraged “all relevant parties to exercise restraint and avoid escalating tensions.”⁵¹

47. In a recent study from China's National Defence University, Wang Yong and Chen Senlin hold high-level shuttle diplomacy up as a key crisis management tool, more effective than military deterrence or economic sanctions alone. Wang Yong and Chen Senlin 王勇 and 陈森林, *Guojia anquan wiji guanli yanjiu* 国家安全危机管理研究 [National Security Crisis-Management Research] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2011), cited in Johnston, 32.

48. “Zhongguo Zhengfu Teshi, Wajiaio Fubuzhang He Ya Fei Fangwen Yindu” 中国政府特使，外交副部长何亚非访问印度 [Chinese Special Envoy and Vice-Minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs He Yafei Visit India] *People's Republic of China Embassy in India*, January 1, 2009, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjwb_673085/zjzg_673183/xwsw_674681/xgxw_674683/t530426.shtml; “He Yafei Fangwen Yindu Zhongfang Wangnanya Diqu Baochi Heping Yu Wending” 何亚非访问印度 中方望南亚地区保持和平与稳定 [He Yafei Visits India, China, and South Asia, Maintaining Peace and Stability] *Zhong Guo Wang* 中国网 [China Net], January 6, 2009; and Mengxiang Lin 孟祥麟, “Zhongguo Zhengfu Teshi He Ya Fei Fang Bajistan Guanzhu Yindu Lianxi” 中国政府特使何亚非访巴基斯坦关注印度关系 [China Special Envoy He Yafei Visits Pakistan, Expresses Concern About India-Pakistan Relations] *Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报 [Global Times], December 29, 2008.

49. For an example of reporting at the time on China's approach to the 2008 Mumbai crisis see, “Yin-Ba Jianba Nuzhang, Beijing Ruanying Jianshi,” 印巴剑拔弩张，张北京软硬兼施 [Tension Escalates Between India and Pakistan, Beijing Adopt Both Hard and Soft Approach] *Taiyang Bao* 太阳报 [The Sun], December 31, 2008.

50. Atul Aneja, “China: Pathankot Attacks Aimed at Disrupting India-Pakistan Ties,” *The Hindu*, January 4, 2016.

51. Lu Kang, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, “China Urges India, Pakistan to Exercise ‘Restraint’ after Uri Attack,” *Financial Express*, September 21, 2016.

Evaluating whether a fifth period in Chinese third-party involvement in South Asian crises has emerged will require further study of ongoing developments in China's global rise and in the emerging strategic competition in Southern Asia.⁵² In the following concluding section, we lay out factors that may precipitate China's possible involvement in a future India-Pakistan crisis and suggest further avenues for study.

China's Management Future on the Subcontinent: Potential for a Greater Role?

Although Beijing values productive relations with both India and Pakistan and genuinely desires peace on the subcontinent, its long-term geopolitical vision is inevitably shaped by concern over India's regional ambitions and strategic alignment with the United States. As a result, China is unlikely to play a sole or even leading third-party mediator role in a future India-Pakistan crisis. Such a proposal would be rejected outright by India. An expanded role for China as a third party in a future India-Pakistan crisis would therefore likely involve cooperation with the United States.

China has a mixed attitude toward the U.S. role in India-Pakistan crisis management. It acknowledges that Washington and Beijing share a common interest in preventing escalation between two nuclear powers. However, China also views the U.S. position as consistently biased, favoring India while failing to accommodate Pakistan's legitimate security concerns. As a result, China tends to see the United States as the primary third party responsible for crises occurring in the first place—or at least the most culpable third party aggravating the root causes behind crises. Furthermore, many Chinese analysts highlight the United States' repeated failure in mediation attempts between India and Pakistan as evidence for why China should not adopt an institutionally fixated manager role that could saddle China with unwanted responsibilities. From this vantage, Washington should carry more responsibility in third-party crisis management than China. Though China's special relationship with Pakistan receives much attention, Beijing believed the United States still had stronger ties and influence in Islamabad during previous South Asian crises.

During the 1999 Kargil crisis, according to many Chinese diplomats, the United States took the initiative to reach out to China and requested that Beijing exercise its influence over Pakistan to urge de-escalation. From a Chinese perspective, although China was not able to directly tell Pakistan to withdraw its troops from Indian-administered Kashmir, its refusal to support Pakistan's position backstopped the U.S. demand for such a withdrawal and contributed to Pakistan's decision to do so. In the Chinese foreign policy lexicon, the case

52. For more on these developments, see the 2017 joint *War on the Rocks*–Stimson Center series “Southern (Dis)Comfort” at <https://warontherocks.com/category/special-series/southern-discomfort>.

The case of Kargil is a successful example, and potential model, of the United States and China's joint efforts to halt escalation of a severe crisis in South Asia.

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Some in Washington's strategic community assume or hope that China's rise will result in it having a greater stake in ensuring stability in Southern Asia.⁵³ To be sure, China's stake in South Asian stability is diversifying and growing. Evidence for this ranges from Afghanistan, where China has shown increasing interest in reconciliation efforts, to pressuring Pakistan on sensitive issues like addressing certain domestic Islamist groups. This latter point bears special significance because such pressure has remained a sticking point for U.S.-Pakistan relations — particularly with respect to groups that target U.S. forces in Afghanistan and those that launch attacks in India. For example, in late 2016, Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper leaked a conversation in which Pakistani Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry admitted that China was beginning to question Pakistani leadership on the prudence of providing cover for Jaish-e-Mohammed leader Masood Azhar. Publicly, China has vetoed Azhar's inclusion on the U.N. sanctioned terrorist list for years. In February 2017, media analysis suggested that Chinese pressure was behind the arrest of Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed.⁵⁴ Taken together with the downturn in Pakistan's relations with the United States and the implementation of CPEC, China's all-weather friendship may give it the "upper hand" over the United States to influence Pakistan.⁵⁵ This could mean that Beijing will be better positioned to bring Pakistan to a negotiating table in a future India-Pakistan crisis. Beyond diplomatic leverage to compel stabilizing behavior, China's growing exposure on the subcontinent, both in personnel and economic and infrastructure investments, may accidentally involve it in a future crisis.⁵⁶

53. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 219; and Jennifer Chang, "China's Kashmir Policies and Crisis Management in South Asia," (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2017).

54. Michael Kugelman, "China, Not America, Likely Behind Hafiz Saeed's House Arrest," *Dawn*, February 1, 2017.

55. Ashley Tellis, *Are India-Pakistan Peace Talks Worth a Damn?* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 51.

56. For analysis on possible future scenarios in South Asia, see the essay by Iskander Rehman in this volume, "New Horizons, New Risks: A Scenario-based Approach to Thinking about the Future of Crisis Stability in South Asia."

Lessons on Chinese third-party crisis behavior in South Asia are not easily applied to other areas of the world — whether nearby on the Korean Peninsula or further west. Nevertheless, trends in Chinese engagement in India-Pakistan crises do shed light on broader developments in China's role as a global power — and how China's approach to core versus peripheral interests differs from that of the United States. Understanding these differences can help scholars and policymakers think about future crises and their management.

For the United States, personnel exposure increases risks and U.S. stakes in a country, making that location part of U.S. core interests.⁵⁷ U.S. personnel being targeted in a terrorist attack or imprisoned by a foreign government has the potential to trigger diplomatic tension. Historically, Chinese citizens killed abroad are typically portrayed by the Chinese government as dutiful workers spreading China's economic vision that knowingly chose to accept risk in pursuit of economic gains. Thus, the death of Chinese nationals abroad has not served as a trigger for tension unless those countries were already sensitive areas in close proximity to China's core interests (e.g., on China's eastern seaboard). In Pakistan, for example, official Chinese responses were muted after three Chinese engineers were killed in Hub (near Karachi) in 2006 as well as after three Chinese nationals were killed in a terrorist attack on Gwadar port in 2004.⁵⁸ The scale of Chinese nationals exposed to risks abroad, however, is expected to grow exponentially under BRI. Estimates for Chinese living in Pakistan in 2007 were around 5,000.⁵⁹ As of September 2017, there were an estimated 30,000.⁶⁰ Housing is currently being developed for 500,000 incoming Chinese professionals in Gwadar alone by 2023.⁶¹ As China's exposure to the infrastructure and personnel risks associated with Pakistan's instability challenges with domestic terrorism expands, so too does its exposure in the event of an India-Pakistan war.⁶² What kind of Chinese response would emerge from an Indian attack on Gwadar during an India-Pakistan crisis that inadvertently resulted in the death of Chinese citizens?

For now, China seems to be satisfied with continuing to play the role of a semi-passive encourager, utilizing shuttle diplomacy to push for dialogues and peace when a severe crisis emerges between India and Pakistan. Without a doubt, China leverages its influence to discourage the most escalatory of Pakistan's behaviors. Today, many Chinese officials and military officers are confident that without China's approval, Pakistan may prod and test New Delhi but it will not

57. Consider, for example, Afghanistan's importance to the U.S. strategy prior to and since troop deployment.

58. "China Workers Killed in Pakistan," *BBC*, February 15, 2006; and "Pakistan Car Bomb Kills Chinese," *BBC*, May 3, 2004.

59. "Peshawar Killing Evokes Fear among Foreigners," *Dawn*, July 10, 2007.

60. "Massive Chinese Investment Is a Boon for Pakistan," *The Economist*, September 9, 2017.

61. Murtaza Ali Shah, "Chinese Company Invests \$500m in Gwadar Residential Project," *Geo TV*, October 20, 2017.

62. After 9/11 in late 2001, Chinese residents in Pakistan began to leave out of concern for exposure to a different possible war. See "Danxin Dazhan Baofa, Bajisidan Huaren Fenfen Hui" 担心大战爆发 巴基斯坦华人纷纷回[Worrying that War Will Explode, Chinese in Pakistan Go Home One by One], *People's Daily*, September 27, 2001.

risk a major confrontation with India.⁶³ Short of an imminent nuclear exchange, China may not even see the need for an overbearing intervention to restrain Pakistan during a future India-Pakistan crisis.

A key variable that could tip the scale in China's pragmatic cost-benefit analysis on the utility of playing a more active management role is whether the United States advocates Chinese involvement in a future India-Pakistan crisis. If the United States engages China with concerted political will and diplomatic capital, it would enhance China's willingness to be more involved. Such a move by the United States would acknowledge Chinese leadership, to some extent giving it peer-status with the United States. Moreover, by offering China the opportunity to give the United States something it wanted, China would gain leverage in dealing with its largest competitor and the greatest threat to Chinese security. Chinese fear of U.S. mismanagement resulting in a significantly weakened Pakistan might also prompt greater Chinese involvement.⁶⁴ It is key to note, however, that were both China and the United States to engage as third-party managers in a future India-Pakistan standoff, it is unlikely that this shared work toward crisis de-escalation would resemble a re-emergence of the failed Obama-era G2 vision.⁶⁵ Instead, we might see an Asia further stratified than it already is, with a widened divide between U.S. strategic alignments with India, Japan, Korea, and Australia, and growing Chinese geoeconomic entrenchment in Western Asia and the Pacific Ocean.

Despite myriad challenges, China's manager role could become critical in a future India-Pakistan crisis if Islamabad becomes even further estranged from Washington (as political developments under the Trump administration suggest it may). China may be necessary to bring Pakistan to the negotiating table if the United States can no longer present itself to both parties as an honest broker. Considering the cost of escalation on the subcontinent, it is critical to lay the groundwork for this type of coordination early — from mechanisms, including bilateral diplomatic and military discussions, to high-level political signaling.⁶⁶ In particular, bilateral military-military discussions between China and the United States but also between each third party and India and Pakistan could facilitate helpful conversations about pragmatic planning for inadvertent or unauthorized nuclear escalation during a future crisis.

63. Author Yun Sun's interviews with anonymous Chinese officials, Beijing, January 2017.

64. See for example Mohan Malik on China's concern over U.S. (mis)management of the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis: "Describing the US diplomatic moves (i.e., the dispatch of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in early June 2002) to defuse the India-Pakistan military stand-off as 'too little too late,' the state-run media accused Washington of showing 'no genuine desire to resolve the Kashmir issue.'" Quoted in Mohan Malik, "The China Factor in the India-Pakistan Conflict," *Parameters* (2003): 35-50.

65. Elizabeth Economy and Adam Segal, "Foreign Policy: The Demise of the G-2," *NPR*, May 25, 2010.

66. For a practical overview of one way a bilateral U.S.-China dialogue could be set up, see Sun, "Create a Channel for a U.S.-China Dialogue on South Asia." Sun "proposes a senior-level (subcabinet or vice-ministerial) routine dialogue between American and Chinese officials, either annually or bi-annually, dedicated to preventing a potential crisis and facilitating crisis management on the subcontinent."

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