Chapter Two

Cold War Mindset and China-India “Cold” Relations during the Cold War (1950-1990)

Before examining the kinds of change in the security perceptions of China and India respectively since 1991, it is necessary to explore their security perceptions during the Cold War as well as the implications of these perceptions for the bilateral relationship between the two nations. When India achieved independence in 1947 and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, the Cold War had already commenced and the world was being divided into two opposing and confrontational camps: the Western camp led by the United States and the Eastern camp led by the Soviet Union. In spite of their desires and efforts to keep aloof from the two-bloc confrontation, in the following decades, China and India got involved into the Cold War to different extents. What is more important is that neither of them was capable of staying immune to the then prevalent international strategic culture. For most of the time since 1950 when the two countries established diplomatic relations till the end of the Cold War in 1991\(^2\), China and India saw and dealt with each other through the prism of the Cold War mindset; and hence underwent a three-decade-long “cold” relationship.

2.1 China’s Security Perception

Since the foundation of the PRC in 1949 till 1991, the Chinese had experienced two generations of leadership, i.e., Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Mao was at the

\(^2\) Although Mikhail Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush declared the Cold War officially over at a summit meeting in Malta in December 1989, the drastic changes of the political scenario in Eastern Europe during 1989-1990 and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 were also seen as symbols of the end of the Cold War. See Wikipedia (Internet Source).
helm for nearly three decades, and he viewed security issues through the prism of "war and revolution". (Qi in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 44) Since the time Deng came into power in 1978, China started to depart from Mao’s era in terms of both domestic focus and external strategy, although it was not an overnight transformation. The launch of the Chinese economic reforms at the end of 1970s was followed by a big change in its security perception and foreign policy in the mid 1980s.

2.1 (1) Mao’s Era

China’s security perception under Mao was characterised by “war and revolution”. On the one hand, “war and revolution” represented Mao’s general assessment of the then international security environment. His two well-known judgments in this regard were: “The danger of a new world war still exists;” “the main trend of the current world is revolution.” (Mao 1998: 444) On the other, it is not difficult to find the deep mark of “war and revolution” in the way by which China safeguarded its national security interests in this period.

Mao’s Assessment of China’s Security Environment

In Mao’s perspective, Imperialism and Hegemonism were the biggest threat to China’s national security. In the first decade of New China, Mao conceived the “imperialist” United States as the major threat to China’s territorial unity and independence. Even on the eve of the founding of the PRC, Mao already started to worry about a future military intervention in the Communist China by the United States, which had firmly supported Chiang Kai-Shek during the 1946-1949 Civil War of China. (Ibid: 75-80) After new China came into being, a series of actions taken by the United States in Asia seemed to justify Mao’s suspicion of American

\[\text{From 1949 to 1976, Mao passed away on September 9, 1976.}\]
intentions. The US’ refusal to recognise the PRC and its continuous support to the Chiang Kai-Shek nationalist government in Taiwan were viewed by Mao Zedong as a big challenge to the safety of China’s territory and the stability of the new communist regime. Mao saw the Korean War as a prelude or a trial balloon of the US’ ultimate aggression vis-à-vis China. (Ibid: 106-111) Along with the US military actions and deployments in the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, the creation of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the later Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) military alliance by John Foster Dulles in the 1950s was seen by Mao Zedong as an accelerated implementation of the US intrigue of containing China and the Soviet Union. (Ibid: 126-136) After Beijing’s split with Moscow in the late 1950s, the “revisionist” USSR became another major threat to China. While the ideological debates between China and the Soviet Union had major effects on China’s image and status in the international socialist community as well as in the entire world stage, the military strength of the Soviet Union had turned into a major security concern of China. Meanwhile, the American government, especially the Kennedy administration, continued its hostility to China due to its then assessment that “China was more belligerent than the Soviet Union”. (Zhang in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 7-8) Therefore, Mao saw a very dangerous picture: a massive and surprise aggression by either of the two superpowers or even jointly by them, in which the very existence of the PRC would be seriously threatened. (Xie 2004: 242-243) Entering into the 1970s, the “hegemonist” Soviet Union singly was viewed by Mao Zedong as China’s major enemy. The rapidly deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations, especially the outbreak of the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969, made Mao draw the conclusion that the major threat to China came from its neighbour in the North and that the Soviet Union was more malevolent to China than the United States. (Zhang in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 10-11)

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In 1960s, Mao called the USSR “revisionist”, a word characterised by ideological elements. From early 1970s, China replaced “revisionist” with “hegemonist”, a word Mao used to specify the “expansionist ambition” of the Soviet Union.
Apart from the above direct war threat to China posed by the “imperialist” and the “hegemonist”, a shadow of an imminent Third World War, which would be very possibly nuclear, had been following Mao’s China for three decades. In the first decade of new China, Mao looked at the postwar world through the prism of his own “two camps” theory. He named the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union as “the world front of peace and democracy” while the Western camp led by the United States as the “imperial camp”. Although the socialist camp appreciated peace very much, Mao argued, the risk of a new world war was very high due to the aggressive nature of the imperialists. (Mao 1998: 104, 264-269) In the 1960s when Beijing was trapped in open antagonism with both superpowers, Mao’s security forecasts were locked by “a nightmare of an immediate, large-scale and nuclear strike”. (Wu 2000: 2) He thus talked more about a “nuclear war” than about a new world war during this period. (Mao 1998: 413-414, 416-428) In the 1970s, Mao conceived that the new world war might be triggered by the “expansionist” Soviet Union which was active in worldwide military “adventures” rather than the United States which was in “a state of strategic withdrawal”. (Xie 2004: 285-286)

**National Security Strategy of China under Mao**

Worrying about the above-mentioned severe war threats throughout the first three decades of New China, the maintenance of the very existence of the PRC led by the Chinese Communist Party was the major objective of the national security strategy of China under Mao, while safeguarding China’s territorial unity came second. Specifically, these strategic objectives were reflected in the following security interests of China. First, the PRC being able to survive the coming war, no matter whether it was an aggression by either of the superpowers or a new world war, and irrespective of whether it was a conventional war or a nuclear war, was the most
significant. (Mao 1998: 221, 416-428) Second, the PRC led by the Chinese Communist Party should be capable of preventing the Chiang Kai-Shek nationalists in Taiwan, who were enjoying strong support from the United States, from overthrowing the new China. (Ibid: 293-297) Third, the PRC should replace Chiang Kai-Shek nationalist government to represent China in the United Nations. (Ibid: 204-212) Fourth, the PRC should prevent the secessionist tendencies in its border areas, like Tibet and Xin Jiang. (Zhirong Zhang 2005: 232-234, 268-269)

In this period, the approaches which China used to realise its strategic objectives and safeguard its national security interests were characterised by alignment, self-reliance, “Third World-ism”, and “World Revolution”. As early as in June 1949, Mao asserted that the upcoming New China should side with the Soviet Union to confront the United States and its allies. (Zhang in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 2) The weakness of China and its ideological similarity with the Soviet Union were the two decisive factors contributing to this policy which was called “leaning to one side”. In the first decade of New China, the alliance with Moscow and the unity of the Communist bloc were deemed as major security guarantees for the PRC, and “centralism” was firmly rejected by Mao Zedong. (Mao 1998: 215-216) In the 1970s, learning lessons from its confrontation with both superpowers, Mao decided to side with the United States to confront the Soviet Union which was then viewed as the No.1 enemy of China.

Self-reliance carries two meanings. On the one hand, it refers specifically to the strategy Mao used in 1960s in dealing with its strains with both the United States and the Soviet Union. In this context, self-reliance is a concept contrary to alignment. On the other hand, the word “self-reliance” has reflected Mao’s emphasis on the significance of military power in safeguarding China’s national security. Mao attributed the ill intentions the superpowers had towards China to the big gap of
military strength between the powerful former and the weak latter, especially the nuclear superiority the former enjoyed over the latter. Therefore, Mao never shunned from talking about China’s desire and efforts to build a strong army and to “make some nuclear weapons”. (Ibid: 87-89, 364-365)

As a weak country, China had been exploring a moral alignment with the underdeveloped states in Asia and Africa, which shared a common feeling towards colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism, although sometimes they disagreed on which countries should be put into this category. China actively participated in the Bandung Conference in 1955, which aimed at Afro-Asian solidarity. In the 1960s, despite its own poverty and economic difficulties, China provided economic aid for African countries like Tanzania and Zambia. (Yang 2002: 96-99) In the 1970s, China joined hands with other Third World countries to call for a new international economic order. (Xie 2004: 300-304)

To promote global revolutionary movements was considered by Mao as another significant approach to China’s security. As early as in November 1949, the Chinese government openly declared its obligation to aid revolutions in other countries. (Niu 2001: 3) Mao argued that imperialism and capitalism were the source of war; to put an end to war, it was imperative to put an end to imperialism and capitalism through revolution. (Ibid: 1) In the 1950s, this kind of aid was represented by China’s own participation in the socialist camp and its moral support for the movements for national liberation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In 1960s, due to its domestic excesses of ideological fervour, particularly the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China went as far to putting forward the strategy of “world revolution”. The goal of world revolution was to found a new world free from imperialism, capitalism, and

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© China’s decisions to aid Korea against the US and Vietnam against France were made more on the basis of pragmatic security requirement than out of ideological consideration.
system of exploitation; and the way was to “take on the form of surrounding cities (i.e. North America and West Europe) from the countryside (i.e. Asia, Africa and Latin America)”, which featured the Chinese revolution. (Xie 2004: 239-241) In this period, China made vocal propaganda for world revolution. “Spreading Mao Zedong thoughts worldwide” was “the central mission” of Chinese envoys all over the world. (Niu 2000: 5) Activists of Cultural Revolution launched protests against and even attack on foreign diplomatic missions in China. (Yang 2002: 152-153) To get rid of the diplomatic isolation caused by this kind of chaos, Mao started to depart from this strategy of world revolution since 1969.

Mao’s India Perspective

Like Nehru’s perspective of China, Mao’s perspective of India also experienced a shift, from viewing it as a friend in the 1950s to considering it as a threat to China from the early 1960s onwards; and Mao’s India perspective had a strong ideological nature.

In the first decade of the PRC, Mao firmly treated India as a friend in spite of their divergence on ideology and even some friction on the Tibet issue. In his talks with Nehru in 1954, Mao made it clear that China and India were friends. He said, “China and India do not need to be on alert against each other,” and the Chinese “have no apprehension that India would harm us”. (Mao 1998: 134) Mao gave the following reasons for this stance. First, facing a strong opponent like the United States, China was in great need of friends. Second, the fact that India was not an ally of the US made it possible for it to be considered China’s friend. (Ibid: 126-135) Third, having commonalities in terms of their Asian identities, their weakness, and their revulsion against colonialism, imperialism and war, China expected that a moral solidarity with India might become a supplement to its security strategy based on the then
Sino-Soviet alliance. (Yang 2002: 75) Fourth, China could not deal with two-front threats. Even in mid-1959, when the strain between China and India rapidly increased due to the Tibet rebellion, Mao reiterated to the Indian government that China “cannot, nor is it necessary to, focus its attention to the southwest” while its major threat came from the east. (Mao 1998: 291-292)

Notwithstanding his insistence on China-India friendship, Mao’s India perspective turned negative after the Tibet rebellion. Mao used the dichotomy to explain the contradictory nature of the Indian bourgeoisie represented by Nehru. On the one hand, as the leading class in its independent movement, the Indian bourgeoisie had a tendency of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. On the other hand, it could not get rid of “its lust for expansion”, an intrinsic nature of its class. Nehru’s support and instigation of the Tibet rebellion had exposed the negative part of the Indian Bourgeoisie’s nature. (Editorial of People’s Daily, 1959) The China-India border clashes at Longju and Kongka in the same year accentuated Mao’s negative feeling about Nehru and the Indian government. As the rift between China and the Soviet Union grew, the proximity developed between India and the Soviet Union confirmed Mao’s perception of India’s threat to China. This was explained in detail by Deng Xiaoping in an interview with an Indian statesman in 1981, which will be discussed later in this section.

2.1 (2) Deng’s Era

As Deng Xiaoping took power in 1978, the PRC entered into a new era characterised by significant transformations in terms of its domestic politics and external policies.

In contrast to Mao’s war/threat-featured security perception, Deng introduced fresh

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*The convocation of the Third Plenary Session of the CPC’s Eleventh Central Committee indicated the beginning of Deng’s era. From then on till early 1990s, Deng had been the de-facto leader of China, though his official posts (such as chairman of the State and Communist Party Central Military Commissions) were not the highest, and though the third generation of collective leadership with Jiang Zemin at the core was formed in 1989. After 1993, Deng gradually retired from the political scene of China. He passed away on February 19, 1997.*
air into the cognition of the Chinese decision-makers. This culminated in his affirmation in 1985 that "peace and development are the two outstanding issues in the world today". (Deng 1993: 104)

**Deng’s Assessment of China’s Security Environment**

Deng’s repeated assumptions in 1980s that the new world war was avoidable indicated a fundamental transformation of China’s assessment of the international security environment. As early as in 1983 when the “second Cold War” was at its peak, Deng assumed that “(world) war is not going to break out...I don’t think there will be war for at least the next ten years.” (Ibid: 25) He attributed such possibility to the unreadiness of both superpowers and the increasing voice from the international anti-war forces. (Ibid: 82, 127) As détente between the two superpowers emerged in the mid-1980s after Mikhail Gorbachev’s assumption of power in the Soviet Union in 1985, Deng was more convinced that “relatively long-lasting peace is possible and that war can be avoided”. (Ibid: 233)

Although China was still facing the military threat from the Soviet Union mainly caused by the “three hurdles”\(^\text{2}\), Deng perceived that it was not serious enough for an immediate military intervention in China. This assessment was accentuated by the messages Moscow passed to Beijing for reconciliation, especially by the 1986 Vladivostok speech of Gorbachev\(^\text{2}\). Deng therefore believed that China was

\(^{2}\) This refers to the Soviet heavy military deployment in the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian border areas, its occupation of Afghanistan and its support for Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia.

\(^{2}\) On July 28, 1986, President Mikhail Gorbachev made a speech in Vladivostok dealing with the Soviet Union’s Asia policy, including relations with China. With regard to China, he made the following points: the Soviet Union was ready to hold serious discussions with China at any time and at any level to create a good-neighbourly atmosphere and hoped that the border between the two countries would soon become an area of peace and friendship; the Soviet Union was willing to take the main course of the Heilongjiang (Amur) River as the official boundary line between the two countries; the Soviet and Mongolian leaders were studying the withdrawal of a considerable portion of the Soviet troops from Mongolia; the Soviet Union would withdraw six regiments from Afghanistan before the end of 1989; and the Soviet Union understood and respected China’s goal of modernisation.
enjoying the best security environment since the PRC was founded.

As the external military threat to China’s existence was rapidly decreasing, China started to come under increasing political and ideological pressures, mainly from the Western countries. In the mid-1980s, China launched a movement against the so-called “bourgeois liberalization”, which was challenging domestic stability and the communist rule in China. While Deng insisted that China could not “copy” Western democracy, he did not relate it, until 1989, with the intention of the Western countries to promote “peaceful evolution” in the socialist countries. (Ibid: 123-125, 194-197, 207-209) Witnessing the “democratization” of many socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union as well as the Tiananmen Incident at home, Deng warned against the risk of “a third world war without gunsmoke” waged by the Western countries to overthrow the socialist regimes in the world. (Ibid: 344) The Western sanctions and their increasing criticism of China’s human rights records alerted Deng to a new type of intervention in China’s internal affairs and impingement on China’s sovereignty. (Ibid: 344-349)

National Security Strategy of China under Deng

Viewing peace and development rather than war and revolution as the main trends of the world at that time, Deng made the creation of a peaceful environment for China’s economic development a major objective of its national security strategy, though he insisted that “first priority should always be given to national sovereignty and (territorial) security”. (Ibid: 348; Qi in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 47) In his address to the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held in September 1982, he listed the three main tasks for the Chinese people in the 1980s as follows: “to accelerate socialist modernization, to strive for China’s reunification and particularly for the return of Taiwan to the motherland, and to oppose hegemonism
and work to safeguard world peace.” (Deng 1993: 3) Among them the economic development was the core issue, which formed “the basis for the solution of our external and internal problems”. (Ibid) In other words, Deng conceived economic strength as a more important means than military capability for China to safeguard its national interests.

A peaceful security environment of China should start from its periphery regions, which demanded that China first improve its relationship with the Soviet Union. According to Deng Xiaoping, China’s coordination since 1972 with the United States in opposing the Soviet Union did increase China’s sense of security, on the one hand; it also aggravated the Soviet hostility to China and therefore further deteriorated China’s security environment, on the other. (Zhang in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 15) Secondly, it was in China’s interests to be flexible and innovative on issues of the return of Hong Kong and Macao to China and the peaceful solution of the Taiwan question. (Yang 2002: 260-262) Thirdly, defence buildup should be subordinate to economic development. In the context of China’s new focus on economic growth and the assessment of no imminent war threat, Deng insisted that the major destination of China’s limited resources should be shifted from the military sections to the economic fields. To quote him:

What is essential now is that the Party, government, army and people throughout the land work wholeheartedly for national development, taking it into account in everything they do. The army has its role to play here. It must do nothing harmful to the general interest, and all its work must conform to it and be governed by it. Since the development of all our armed services is tied to national development, they should devise ways to assist and actively participate in it. The air force, the navy and the Commission in Charge of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence should divert some of their resources to foster the development of the economy. (Deng 1993: 99)
Moreover, keeping a low profile on defence would show China’s goodwill and help China set up a peace-loving image on the world stage. (Ibid: 126-129)

Independence, economic cooperation, “one country, two systems”, and disarmament can be summed up as the keywords of Deng’s approaches to safeguarding China’s strategic security interests in this period characterised by significant transformation both domestically and internationally. While independence had been perceived as a fundamental principle of China’s external strategy since the PRC was founded in 1949, it was not till 1982 that it carried the specific meaning of non-alignment. (Zhang in Liu and Hsueh 1997: 14) China’s independent foreign policy, in Deng’s words, meant “truly non-aligned”. (Deng 1993: 57) China decided to keep aloof from the Cold War for the first time by discarding its earlier strategy of siding with one superpower against the other. As Deng further explained, in dealing with the world affairs, “we will not play the ‘United States card’ or the ‘Soviet Union card’. Nor will we allow others to play the ‘China card’”. (Ibid) Apart from seeking for a normalization of its bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union, China also explored as to how it could improve its relationship with other neighbours like India and Indonesia. Secondly, Deng was convinced that economic cooperation could precede political normalization. (Ibid: 99) This was not only meant to expand foreign trade and attract investments but also bound to contribute to the political relationship due to the emergence and increase of the common economic interests. In China’s talks with the British about the return of Hong Kong and with the Portuguese about that of Macao, Deng put forwards with his idea of “one country, two systems”. (Ibid: 12-15, 58-61) He also expressed China’s willingness to realise Taiwan’s reunification with China by applying the same principle. (Ibid: 30-31, 58-61) By thinking out of the box, Deng was trying to convince the world that China was a peace-lover and it would try its best to solve its territorial problems peacefully. Another significant step to win over the international confidence in China was its efforts with respect to
disarmament. At home, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) volunteered to
demobilize one million servicemen. (Ibid: 126) Internationally, China took part in
negotiations on multiparty security regimes under UN, including treaties on chemical
weapons, comprehensive disarmament, and outer space. (Xie 2004: 353)

**Deng’s India Perspective**

In the early years of his era, Deng basically inherited Mao’s perspective of India. In a
meeting with Dr. Subramanian Swamy, the Janata Party MP®, in 1981, Deng made it
very clear that China had a strong will to befriend India but viewed India as a threat
only because the latter had been siding with the Soviet Union, China’s major enemy
since 1960s. (Swamy 2001: Appendix III, 175-181) India could not be a threat by
itself, he said, even taking into account the fact that “you have many more troops on
your side of the border than we have on ours”. The real danger was the Soviet
hegemonism. The USSR was threatening China’s security from all directions, he
further explained. In the north, there were a million Soviet troops deployed along the
Sino-Soviet border and the Sino-Mongolian border. In the south, the USSR was
instigating Vietnam to be a threat to China. In the southwest, it attempted to “get to
the Indian Ocean” by way of its aggressive action in Afghanistan. Therefore, what
was of greater concern to China was that the Soviet Union “may take a hand” in the
subcontinent, especially in view of the fact that “the Russians always tried to use
others even the war between China and India”.® According to these remarks, Deng
obviously attributed the major barrier in the China-India relations to the
quasi-military alliance® between India and the Soviet Union.

One and a half years later, Deng made another important remark on improving

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® Member of Parliament.
® All the quotations of Deng in this paragraph are extracted from Dr. Subramanian Swamy’s historic 100-minute
® See the later discussion of India’s national security strategy under Mrs. Gandhi.
China-India relations during his meeting with an Indian delegation. This time he did not mention the Soviet threat to China or China’s suspicion of India’s quasi-military alliance with the USSR. On the contrary, he said:

The problem between China and India is not a serious one. Neither country poses a threat to the other. The problem we have is simply about the border. Both countries should make an effort to restore the friendship that existed between them in the 1950s. As long as we go about it in a reasonable way, I think it will be easy for us to settle our border question. (Deng 1993: 19)

This represents a prominent shift in China’s perspective of India. China no longer viewed India through the prism of the confrontation of the two blocs. On the basis of Deng’s reassessment, just as discussed earlier in this chapter, of the international security environment and China’s national security interests, China viewed India as a natural and near neighbour, with which it had boundary dispute, rather than an ally of its major enemy.

On the solution of the Sino-Indian boundary dispute and the improvement of their bilateral relations, Deng made two important points in the same remark as follows. First, the approach to border issue required mutual concessions. Second, bilateral exchanges in areas such as trade, economy and culture could precede the solution of the border problem. In other words, the normalisation of the bilateral relations between China and India should not be predicated on the solution of the boundary problem. This was in accord with Deng’s belief that economic cooperation could promote political proximity. To quote him:

When I met your former foreign minister in 1979, I put forward a “package solution” to the problem. If both countries make some concessions, it will be settled... We have settled border questions with many other countries simply by having both parties make concessions. I
believe that we shall eventually find a good solution. Even if the border question cannot be resolved for the time being, we can leave it as it is for a while. We still have many things to do in the fields of trade, the economy and culture and can still increase our exchanges so as to promote understanding and friendship between us. The two countries have broad prospects for cooperation. We hope that we shall develop and that you will too. (Ibid: 19-20)

2.2 India’s Security Perception

In the four decades from its independence in 1947 to 1990, the Indian strategic perspective had been dominated by Jawaharlal Nehru’s view of India and the world, which is generally known as “Nehruvianism”. The lengthy dominance in Indian politics by the Congress Party and the Nehru-Gandhi family contributed quite significantly to this domination of strategic thought. As the first Prime Minister of the Republic of India (ROI), Nehru served his country in the same position till the last second of his life. He was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri, a disciple of him, from 1964 to 1966. Nehru’s daughter, Indira Gandhi, served as Prime Minister in 1966-77 and 1980-84. Nehru’s grandson, Rajiv Gandhi, succeeded his mother in power from 1984 to 1989. This power chain of the Congress party was only shortly broken by governments like the Janata government under the leadership of Morarji Desai from 1977 to 1979 and the Janata Dal government led by V.P. Singh from the end of 1989 to the end of 1990. Therefore, this section will only examine the security perceptions of the three longest lasting governments during this period, i.e., the Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indira Gandhi and the Rajiv Gandhi governments.

2.2 (1) Nehru’s Era

As the first prime minister of the Republic of India after independence, Nehru took charge at a time when the world order was experiencing a significant change. On the one hand, the ideological conflict and the competition for strategic influence between
the United States and the USSR had finally evolved into the Cold War, in which the world was divided into two camps of confrontation: the Western camp led by the former and the Socialist camp led by the latter. On the other hand, the old colonial system was wavering due to the widespread freedom movements by the African and Asian colonial countries who wanted to follow India's example. Unlike his Chinese counterpart, Nehru held a relatively optimistic view of India's security environment. Apart from the specific threat from its immediate neighbour Pakistan, Nehru saw "remote" chances of external attack on or invasion of India. (Jayaramu 1987: 13)

While the Cold War posed a general challenge to India's security, it also provided a room for India to play a meaningful role in world politics. As the leader of a weak state, Nehru conceived that an effective foreign policy could make up for military preparedness in safeguarding national security. (Ibid: 14)

Nehru's Assessment of India's Security Environment

Internationally, Nehru saw no imminent war threat by outside powers to the newly independent India, although the politics of Cold War did challenge its independence to certain extent. He argued that the danger from powers like Russia was caused solely by the rivalry between them and Britain. After independence, as British domination was removed, India was free from this kind of rivalry. Therefore, India should not "be unduly worried about external threats to its security". (Ibid: 12-13) In other words, in early years of the Cold War, Nehru had ruled out the possibility of any invasion of India by either the United States or the Soviet Union. In his view, the real challenge of the Cold War to India's security was its threat to India's national independence. From the first day of its independence onwards, India was expected to take sides by each camp. The United States expected it to join them in the ideological confrontation against the Soviet Union. This expectation was mainly based on "India's historical connections with Britain." (Dixit 2003: 22) The Soviet
Union recognised the geopolitical significance of India for its influence on Central and West Asia as well as South Asia itself. Especially after the anti-Soviet strategic arrangements like the CENTO and SEATO were created, the Soviet Union believed that it was imperative to have India on its side. (Ibid: 23, 53) The choice before India was either to accept a policy of alignment or keep independent and stay away from bloc politics. The former would put India in a subordinate position and let “foreign relations get out of hand into the charge of somebody else”. (Jayaramu 1987: 16) The latter would be a “difficult” path to pursue, since “both America and Russia are extra-ordinarily suspicious of each other as well as of others...and we may be suspected of leaning towards the other.” (Menon 1965: 229) Moreover, as the forerunner of freedom movements after the World War II, Nehru considered that Colonialism and Imperialism were still threatening India’s independence. He was really worried about the remnants of the influence of colonial powers. He believed that India’s independence and sovereignty “could not be sustained in a vacuum, when other countries and societies remained under colonial rule.” (Dixit 2003: 31)

Regionally speaking, Pakistan was accorded a prime place in Nehru’s threat perception. In his view, the Pakistani threat had a “multidimensional nature”, i.e., territorial, ideological and politico-strategic. (Jayaramu 1987: 19) Pakistan’s defiance of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India was considered a direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial consolidation of the newly independent India. Pakistan’s promotion of the argument that Kashmir should belong to Pakistan in view of its Muslim majority “also posed an ideological threat to India’s secular edifice”. (Ibid) India even suspected that Pakistan was seeking to exploit its relationship with the Islamic States of West Asia to embarrass India in the region. (Ibid) Pakistan’s decision of joining the CENTO and SEATO pacts added a politico-strategic dimension to the threat it posed to India, especially when Pakistan claimed that the commitments by the West to support it politically and militarily in its disputes with
India were the quid pro quo for its membership of the anti-communist alliances. (Dixit 2003: 51-52) Apart from Pakistan, Nehru considered China, India’s largest neighbour, another major security concern for India. Although Nehru was convinced that a friendly working relationship with China was essential for Asian resurgence, he was “conscious of China’s influence, and also of its great power orientations towards Asia, and the Sino-centric assertive mindset of the Chinese leadership.” (Ibid: 48) Nehru’s China perspective will be discussed later in detail in this section.

Domestically, India’s primary security concern was regarding the possibility of some large and important Princely States rejecting accession to India, which would fragment the geopolitical cohesion and territorial integrity of the Indian Republic, especially in the context of British connivance and Pakistan’s encouragement towards the independent tendencies of these Princely States. After these Princely States were successfully integrated with India, due to the multinational and multi-religious nature of India, ethnic centrifugal tendencies emerged quite soon “as manifested in the demand for linguistic states.” (Ibid: 29, 52)

National Security Strategy of India under Nehru

Based on the above-mentioned assessments of India’s security environment, Nehru set two-fold objectives for India’s national security strategy. Preserving India’s independence and maintaining its national unity and territorial integrity was the fundamental task, while playing a leading role in Asian and world affairs was the other, which more ambitious. The latter objective derived from Nehru’s belief in India’s greatness. India’s geographical size and the demographic and natural resources entitled it a unique position in the international system. Its civilisational legacy constituted a source of tremendous influence over other Asian countries. (Nehru 1958: 253) Furthermore, in spite of its poverty and backwardness, the ancient
and yet young India was “industrially more developed than many less fortunate countries.” (Nehru 1963a: 199) Therefore, India merited a leading role at the regional level on contemporary politico-cultural grounds and at the global level because of the moral stance which it adopted on world issues. (Dixit 2003: 21)

In Nehru’s perspective, India’s security interests comprised a number of inter-related dimensions. First, Nehru was convinced that India’s stability and influence depended on genuine independence. He insisted that India should avoid involvement in Cold War power politics. India should not take sides with one bloc or the other in the East-West confrontation but “keep aloof from that and at the same time develop closest relations with all the countries.” (Nehru 1958: 247) Second, the freedom of all the colonies and the creation of an equitable world order would consolidate India’s independence and stability. India should promote the unity of the newly independent nations in Asia and Africa and lead them to become a significant force in international relations. (Dixit 2003: 18; 35) Third, Nehru considered that a friendly and peaceful equation with China was in the interest of India. On the one hand, Chinese support was imperative for Nehru’s vision of Asian resurgence and Third World solidarity. On the other, in view of its military weakness, India “was not in a position to protect and preserve its security if it had to face two enemies on its borders—Pakistan and China.” (Jayaramu 1987: 25) Fourth, as far as Pakistan was concerned, the “idealista” Nehru turned into a complete realist, insisting that strong defence capacities and friends were needed to meet the Pakistani threat to India. (Cohen 2002: 39-40; Dixit 2003: 37)

Bearing in mind the above aspirations and the understanding of India’s security interests, Nehru considered non-alignment, Third World-ism, moralism and defence preparedness as the core approaches to India’s national security. Nehru responded to the Cold War with non-alignment, which became a fundamental term of reference.
for India's foreign policy. Guided by this principle, Nehru sought equally good relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union while refusing to take anyone's side, especially in the first decade of India's independence. Third World-ism found manifestation in Nehru's endeavour to consolidate Afro-Asian unity on the basis of common interest in anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. Bilaterally, India extended substantive support to Indonesia, to other countries of South-East Asia and later to the African countries in their freedom struggle. (Dixit 2003: 18) Multilaterally, this endeavour had commenced with the convening of the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947, followed by the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955, culminating in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. Convinced by the unique experience of India's freedom struggle, Nehru emphasised the role of moral force in safeguarding the national security for a weak and vulnerable state like India. He saw India "as a torch-bearer of freedom, of conscience, mediation and as a peace-maker in the world." (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 15) He believed that India could transform the world by promoting "the universal causes of disarmament, racial equality, international cooperation for economic development, and peaceful resolution of disputes." (Ibid) Guided by this principle, Nehru clearly ruled out the possibility of India's going nuclear. India under him took the lead in the global campaign for nuclear disarmament, although he kept the option open for the future generations of Indian leaders to make nuclear weapons.

Defence preparedness was illustrated by Nehru's effort to constitute a sub-continental security order based on India's special relationships with its smaller neighbours and the way in which he responded to the Pakistani challenge. The Indo-Sikkimese Treaty of 1950 made the defence of Sikkim a responsibility of the Indian Government; the Indo-Bhutanese Friendship Treaty of 1949 asked Bhutan to be "guided by the advice of Government of India in regard to its external relations"; the Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 provided for mutual
consultations and devising of effective counter-measures to deal with threats to their security. (Jayaramu 1987: 25-26) A secret codicil of the Indo-Nepalese treaty not made public until 1959 went still further, providing that any aggression against Nepal would be considered as aggression against India and would be dealt with accordingly. (Garver 2001: 141) On the one hand, Nehru saw these special relationships as a guarantee of keeping the subcontinent an exclusive sphere of influence for India and preventing the great powers from intervening in the region. (Mohan 2003, 238-239) On the other, the series of diplomatic/security agreements were specifically regarded as a supplement to India’s engagement with China in dealing with the Chinese challenge for India’s security in the Himalayan perimeter. (Jayaramu 1987: 25-26) As for Pakistan, Nehru assumed a decisive politico-military posture. Within a few months after partition, India, without hesitation, took necessary military steps against Pakistan to “protect India’s vital interests in the Kashmir” and hasten the process of Kashmir’s accession to India. (Ibid: 20) An objective of Nehru’s search of friendship with China and the post-Stalin Soviet Union was to counterbalance Pakistan buttressed by Western military aid. (Ibid: 22-23) After the border war of 1962 with China, Nehru started to lay more stress on military preparedness in safeguarding India’s national security. In 1963, he wrote: “We will have to clearly give considerably more attention to strengthening our armed forces and to the production within the extent possible, of all weapons and equipment needed by them.” (Nehru 1963b: 459)

Nehru’s China Perspective

Nehru’s perspective on China experienced a categorical change during his 17-year-long tenure as the prime minister of India, from regarding China as a friend in the first decade to a rival and even an enemy in the rest years of his life.
Nehru made significant and substantial efforts to build a national consensus on defining communist China as a friend rather than an enemy of India during the early years after the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, when some of his cabinet members like the then Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel were very suspicious of China’s intentions. In his letter of 18 November 1950 to Patel whose apprehension was accentuated especially by China’s liberation of Tibet, Nehru clearly illustrated his perspective on China. First, he assumed that China was not an enemy to India. Being hostile to India was not in the interests of new China, which was preparing for a fight on the main front in South and East against a real threat to its very existence. Any major attack on India by China would be “a wild adventure” which would “greatly weaken China’s capacity to meet its real enemies.” (Nehru in Swamy 2001: Appendix II, 171-172) Nehru thus considered an Indo-China war “exceedingly unlikely”. (Ibid: 171) He also rejected the idea that communism inevitably means expansion and war. He thought it important to distinguish military invasion from infiltration of ideas. Chinese communism might have a tendency of exporting ideology, but it did not mean inevitably a military expansion vis-à-vis India. Secondly, he was convinced that a friendly China would serve India’s interests. Taking into account the limitations of India’s strength, it was not wise to have two enemies on either side of India. When Pakistan was India’s “major possible enemy”, unreasoning fears of and preparations for a war with China would only play into the hands of Pakistan. (Ibid: 172) On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Nehru considered a friendly working relationship with China as essential for his vision of Asian resurgence. As he wrote in the same letter, “India and China, at peace with each other, would make a vast difference to the whole set-up and balance of the world.” (Ibid: 173) Thirdly, any dispute with China could only be solved on the diplomatic level. As India shared a tremendously long common frontier with China and the “present” communist government in China was quite “unlikely” to “collapse giving place to another”, any decision of India to “have really hostile China on our
doorstep” would mean “continuous tension and apprehension”. (Ibid: 171) Unlike other powers like the UK and the US who were just interested in embarrassing China, India had vital interests in Tibet. Helping Tibet to retain a large measure of autonomy would better “serve that interest” than trying to prevent China from taking possession of it which would be an impossible mission. (Ibid: 173-174) He even believed that the PLA’s march into Tibet might help ensure the security of its Northern borders as long as good relations with China could be maintained. (Ranganathan and Khanna 2000: 28)

While advocating a friendly relationship with China, at the very beginning, Nehru had “no romantic or idealistic views about Sino-Indian relations”. (Dixit 2003: 18) He was conscious of China’s influence and kept a close watch on China’s act in Tibet and its attitude towards their border problem as well. To quote him:

Ever since the Chinese Revolution we naturally had to think of what the new China was likely to be. We realised that this revolution was going to be a very big factor in Asia, in the world and in regard to us...Taken also with the fact of China’s somewhat inherent tendency to be expansive when she is strong, we realised the danger to India...If any person imagines that we have followed our policy without realising the consequences, he is mistaken. (Nehru 1961: 369)

Two developments in early 1959 deepened his suspicions about China. One was Zhou Enlai’s letter of January 1959 to Nehru, in which China affirmed that border disputes did exist between India and China, rejecting Nehru’s claim that the Indo-China boundary was a settled matter. The other was China’s suppression of the rebellion in Tibet and its accusation of India’s involvement in this incident. Insisting that there were private promises by Zhou Enlai on China’s willingness to accept the McMahon Line and preservation of Tibetan autonomy, Nehru viewed these two events as signs of China’s betrayal and hostility to India. (Nehru 1964: 185-192)
Moreover, China’s diplomatic activities in the subcontinent during the same period also raised serious apprehensions in Nehru’s mind. Neither China nor Burma preinformed India about the settlement of their border dispute on the basis of the 1941 line drawn by the then British authority. Without consultation with India, China and Nepal concluded the Kathmandu-Tibet highway agreement in 1961. Nehru interpreted the intensification of China’s relations with both Burma and Nepal as “an incipient act of strategic encirclement of India”. (Dixit 2003: 62) As tensions between China and India heightened in the early 1960s, Nehru warned about the emergence of an impossible alliance between China and Pakistan on the basis of their common dislike of India. (Nehru 1964: 225) After the 1962 war with China, Nehru was obsessed with the danger of renewed conflict between the two countries. (Ibid: 267-268)

2.2 (2) Mrs. Gandhi’s Era

India’s military defeat in the Sino-Indian armed conflict of 1962 had a significant impact on the worldview and strategic thinking of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Nehru’s daughter, who was India’s prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and from 1980 to 1984. While sharing Nehru’s assumptions about the greatness of India and remaining committed to non-alignment, Indira Gandhi rejected her father’s “softness” and sought “tangible” power to cope with the threats facing India. (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 32-41) In other words, she downplayed the role of moral force in India’s national security strategy and believed that safeguarding security interests of India “primarily depended on India becoming self-reliant and strong”. (Dixit 2003: 88-89)

Mrs. Gandhi’s Assessment of India’s Security Environment

Nehru looked at the world during the Cold War through a “positive” prism. (Nehru 1955) As mentioned before, although he was aware of the strategic threat to India by the confrontation between the two camps, he was convinced that there was an
opportunity for India to play a leading role outside the bipolar system in the world affairs. Taking office in the post-1962 era, Indira Gandhi found it difficult to inherit Nehru's "rather benign" threat perception. (Jayaramu 1987: 13) In her view, new developments in international and regional environments put India in a more unfavorable and insecure position. Internationally, as the transformation of strategic and power equations between important members of the international community led the Cold War into the subcontinent, Mrs. Gandhi's distrust of Washington was greatly accentuated by the fact that the United States opposed India's support for the Bangladesh movement in 1971 and allied with China in the 1970s and 1980s. (Indira Gandhi 1984: 634-636; Surjit Mansingh 1984: 4-5) Earlier, it had adopted the policy of arming Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s. The Afghan crisis which commenced in 1979 contributed to the consolidation of relations among Pakistan, the US and China, especially the revival of the erstwhile US-Pakistan military alliance. Indira Gandhi was convinced that "the general international environment, dominated by the US and the Soviet Union, was hostile to the development of India as an independent power centre challenging their respective assumptions of security management and world order." (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 55) Regionally, India first faced the threat posed by Pakistan, against which it fought two wars respectively in 1965 and in 1971. Second, a more powerful China after the 1962 Sino-Indian military conflict, which became a nuclear weapon power endowed with missile capacity and politically a permanent member of the UN Security Council, was a major security concern for India. (Dixit 2003: 89-90, 119) Third, Sino-Pak collaboration established soon after 1962 and greatly accelerated thereafter, compounded India's regional security environment which was characterised by a two-front threat. (Jayaramu 1987: 29) Fourth, as "the entire Indian Ocean region was increasingly militarised by the direct presence of outside powers and the flow of arms to the littoral states of the Persian Gulf," and the smaller regional states like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka "turn(ed) to China and the US at various times", India's "natural" regional dominance was under a great
challenge. (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 38, 55, 302) Domestically, the political uncertainties which accompanied Indira Gandhi for most years of her tenures, from the break-up of the Congress in 1969 to the declaration of a state of emergency in India in 1975, had weakened India's position in defending its national security and damaged India's prestige in the international community. (Dixit 2003: 89, 91, 119) Meanwhile, rebels “in the culturally distinct and strategically vulnerable northeastern part of India” were a very difficult security problem for Indira Gandhi. (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 55-56)

National Security Strategy of India under Mrs. Gandhi

As did her father, Indira Gandhi also conceived the preservation of India's independence and maintaining its territorial integrity as the predominant objective of India's national security strategy. Where she disagreed with Nehru was only over the magnitude of the toughness of this task. Facing a considerably deteriorated security environment, Indira Gandhi laid much more stress on Nehru's first objective while toning down his second. Although she shared his father's assumption about the greatness of India, “she consistently scorned the idea of India becoming a 'great power' in the conventional sense.” (Ibid: 2) Thus, she focused on achieving an “Indo-centric” role for India, which means autonomy and stability of its own on the one hand, and India's dominance in the subcontinent rather than a pivotal role in the world on the other. (Dixit 2003: 96; Surjit Mansingh 1984: 41)

From the perspective of Indira Gandhi, the following security demands assumed greater urgency than before. First, India should be capable of “preventing any further military adventurism” by either of its two major enemies, i.e., Pakistan and China. (Dixit 2003: 90) Second, the support of the Soviet Union was imperative for India to protect its economic and defence interests, even though she clung to her father's view that India had to remain outside of the major international alliances. (Indira
Gandhi 1984: 634) Third, India should prevent external powers from changing the status quo in the subcontinent and make "a discernible effort to have its own superior position in the region recognised by all other states concerned." (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 41, 264) Fourth, India should develop its own nuclear weapons capacity to respond to China's explosion in 1964, to counterbalance the increasing deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean region by the US, and to neutralize the possible threat posed by Pakistan's nuclear weapons acquisition programme. (Dixit 2003: 95-96, 116)

While inheriting her father's vision and principles in dealing with the challenges to India, Indira Gandhi made some significant changes in Indian national security policy. She emphasised the role of tangible power in international politics, deviating from Nehru's moralism. First of all, "she brought an increased preoccupation with the need for military power, and she demonstrated a willingness to use this power boldly in her response to the Bangladesh crisis." (Surjit Mansingh 1984: Foreword, xi) The Indian military reforms, which commenced after 1962 due to India's defeat at the hands of the Chinese, were accelerated by Mrs. Gandhi's government. These reforms consisted of the review of India's military doctrines, the upgrading of the weapons system, the military logistical infrastructure, the arms production, the defence supplies acquisition, etc. (Dixit 2003: 57-60, 97) In Mrs. Gandhi's era, India became a military power whose might in southern Asia could not be ignored either by regional or outside powers. (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 52) While pursuing a conventional military superiority of India over Pakistan and China, Indira Gandhi adopted a nuclear option strategy which "implied clearly India's right to make the bomb". (Jayaramu 1987: 28) Indira Gandhi and her Cabinet decided not to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968. Defying the intense international pressure at that time, Indira Gandhi "authorised India's Department of Atomic Energy and the Department of Space to commence research for making India
self-reliant in the spheres of nuclear weapons and missile capacity,” which culminated in India’s first underground nuclear test in 1974. (Dixit 2003: 95) Secondly, barring the upgrading of India’s military capabilities, Indira Gandhi regarded balance of power or alliance security as an effective approach to deal with the strategic threat to India. At the beginning of her first tenure, “she looked both to the US and to the USSR for strategic deterrence against China and subtle pressure on Pakistan.” (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 142) Thanks to the cold shoulder from the United States but the warm response from the Soviet Union (Dixit 2003: 91-92), in 1971 she decided to sign a de facto alliance treaty with the latter. (Mohan 2003: 11) This decision seems to have been justified by the subsequent transformation of the strategic chessboard in India’s neighbourhood, characterised by the proximity between China and the United States. Thirdly, as far as the smaller neighbours of India are concerned, Indira Gandhi buttressed Nehru’s approach through the principle of bilateralism. (Ibid: 239) She insisted on bilateralism in solving problems in the region, eschewing any role for external powers. (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 293) Furthermore, Indira Gandhi was tough in “demanding that the smaller countries of the subcontinent desist from activities which could be construed as anti-Indian.” (Ibid: 27) Her forceful actions in the protectorate of Sikkim and hard line in dealing with what she called “anti-Indian nonsense” in Nepal and Bangladesh, contributed to the image of her seeking hegemony. (Ibid: 39, 263)

Mrs. Gandhi’s China Perspective

China acquired a totally negative image in Indira Gandhi’s strategic thinking. When she first came to power in 1966, rivalry with China appeared to be an inescapable fact. (Ibid: 196) Throughout her two tenures, Indira Gandhi viewed China with alertness and suspicion. She was convinced that the rivalry between China and India went beyond the border dispute. She asserted that China had a more complex policy

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^ It has been dubbed as “India’s Monroe Doctrine”. (Mohan 2003: 238-239)
which was aimed at defeating India in an Asian power rivalry game. China was seeking a dominant position in Asia by eclipsing India’s international standing and prestige and reducing it to a position of subordination. (Ranganathan and Khanna 2000: 54) To quote her:

It would be an over-simplification to regard this merely as the result of a border dispute. Simultaneous or subsequent developments—such as China’s systematic support of Pakistan against India, her provocative criticism of India for alleged subservience to the United States and later the Soviet Union, and her persistent, though futile efforts to promote internal subversion—leave us no option but to infer that border dispute was the outcome of a more complex policy which was aimed at undermining India’s stability and at obstructing her rapid and orderly progress. (Indira Gandhi 1984: 633)

In Indira Gandhi’s perspective, China then posed a great threat to India in both military-strategic and political categories. In the military-strategic dimension, Indira Gandhi first kept a close eye on the implication of China’s acquisition of nuclear capability for India’s security. Not having fully recovered from the trauma of the humiliating military defeat by the Chinese in 1962, Indira Gandhi considered that the nuclear bomb gave China further superiority over India in terms of defence capability. Mrs. Gandhi’s government even feared that “China might use nuclear weapons or resort to nuclear blackmail in the event of a future conflict”. (Jayaramu 1987: 28) Secondly, the proximity that rapidly grew between China and Pakistan after the 1962 India-China military conflict was a grave security concern to India. The Sino-Pak border agreement signed in March 1963 and their later formal arrangements for defence and strategic cooperation were interpreted in India as the outcome of an anti-India alliance. The risk of a joint Sino-Pak military attack on India appeared very real to Indira Gandhi during the 1971 Eastern Pakistan Crisis, though China took a relatively low-key approach to this crisis in contrast to the
United States, which embarked on naval diplomacy\(^\circ\) on Pakistan's behalf. (Garver 2001: 22) China's support for Pakistan and the use of veto on Bangladesh's application of membership to the United Nations "fuelled hostile opinion in India". (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 205) Thirdly, when the US-China rapprochement emerged in early 1970s, China's threat to India was put into a much broader picture which was dubbed as the "China-Pakistan-US axis". (Ibid: 247) In the political dimension, India accused China of endangering India's national security through "fomenting dissent and subversion within India and in the neighbourhood". (Ranganathan and Khanna 2000: 54) Indira Gandhi's government was convinced that China's intention of giving moral and material support to the Naxalbari Movement which started in 1967 and Naga rebellious elements was to undermine India's stability by exploiting the "two basic weaknesses in the governance of India". (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 202) Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi was very alert regarding China's efforts to strengthen its relations with the smaller countries in the subcontinent, which might dilute India's influence and position in the region.

2.2 (3) Rajiv Gandhi's Era

Compared to Nehru and Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's five-year tenure from 1984 to 1989 as India's prime minister was quite short. The tasks he assumed were not easier, especially taking into account the then dramatic transformation of world politics, which ultimately led to the end of the Cold War.

Rajiv Gandhi's Assessment of India's Security Environment

When Rajiv Gandhi took charge as Prime Minister, he was conscious of the changing international power equations. Keeping a close watch on the emerging USSR-USA détente and the Vladivostok speech of Gorbachev, Rajiv Gandhi perceived that the great challenge for India's national security at that stage was how

\(^\circ\) The Nixon Administration sent its naval aircraft carrier Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal in December 1971.
to respond appropriately to those dramatic changes. In his view, the good news for India was that the strategic pressure on India for decades due to the superpowers confrontation in world and in subcontinent as well might decrease. (Dixit 2003: 170)

On the regional level, Rajiv Gandhi saw a less “aggressive” China, whereas there were many “troublesome” neighbours within the subcontinent. (Ibid: 171) Taking note of the fact that China was focusing on its internal consolidation and economic development and that the antagonistic Sino-Soviet relations were thawing, Rajiv Gandhi expected that Beijing would adopt “a more tactful approach towards India”. (Ibid) As far as Pakistan was concerned, it remained a major threat to India. First of all, Rajiv Gandhi was “extremely worried about Pakistan’s nuclear programme” and its acquisition of “ultra-sophisticated” armaments, which might lead to a transformation of the South Asian military balance. (Rajiv Gandhi 1985: 15, 59) Secondly, the likelihood of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan would increase the regional influence of Pakistan, whose “intervention” in Afghanistan, backed by the US, was then at its peak. (Dixit 2003: 170-171) Moreover, Pakistan’s “support” for “the separatist Sikhs in the Punjab” was challenging Rajiv Gandhi’s capability in dealing with the thorniest issue facing him internally. (Rajiv Gandhi 1985: 50) As a fallout of Mrs. Gandhi’s tough stance on regional issues, a negative perception about India came into being in the subcontinent. India’s other neighbours such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were forging political and defence relationship with the USA, China and Israel due to their suspicion of India’s hegemonic ambitions. (Dixit 2003: 171-172)

India’s National Security Strategy under Rajiv Gandhi

Upholding most of Indira Gandhi’s views about India’s national security strategy, Rajiv Gandhi made some detailed adjustments on India’s national security policy in accordance with the changes in its security environment. In the context of the détente
emerging between the two superpowers, Rajiv Gandhi perceived that it was in India’s interests to readjust its relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union and seek a balance between them. Taking into account his still deep suspicions of the United States and China’s intentions towards India and the latter’s heavy dependence on the Soviet Union in terms of defence supplies, high technology and trade, Rajiv Gandhi insisted on giving “the central place in his foreign policy to Moscow”. (Rasgotra in Aiyar and Rasgotra 1998: 14) Meanwhile, he “worked assiduously to expand and strengthen relations with America”, despite their differences over the questions of nuclear disarmament and Pakistan. (Ibid: 14-15) Secondly, Rajiv Gandhi believed that the profound changes occurring in China under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping offered India an opportunity to improve its prolonged bitter security environment. He paid a historic visit to Beijing in December 1988. It had been 34 years since the last visit to China by an Indian prime minister. Moreover, Rajiv Gandhi, like his mother, also believed in tangible power. During his time, there was a considerable strengthening of India’s armed forces. (Ibid: 17) Despite his world-level anti-nuclear campaign, an important theme of his foreign policy, he continued to keep India’s nuclear option open. Although he tried to improve India’s relations with all countries in the subcontinent and endorsed South Asian regional cooperation, Rajiv Gandhi maintained a strong attitude towards issues which had effects on the vital interests of India. (Rajiv Gandhi 1985: 20; Rasgotra in Aiyar and Rasgotra 1998: 18) During his tenure, India imposed a trade embargo against Nepal, intervened in Sri Lanka’s internal turmoil, and offered “help in quelling the coup” in the Maldives. (Phadnis in Rasgotra et al 1990: 262)

Rajiv Gandhi’s China Perspective

Rajiv Gandhi’s perception of China was ambivalent due to the complex international situation of his time. Taking note that China was placing greater emphasis on internal consolidation and economic development and trying to keep aloof from the Cold War,
Rajiv Gandhi felt a decreasing military threat from China. With "an economically resurgent and politically assertive China" on the north-eastern flank of India, however, Rajiv Gandhi thought that India’s position in the world as a whole and its dominance in the subcontinent in particular, were under a new type of pressure. (Dixit 2003: 135) In spite of his doubt about China’s intentions, the rapidly transforming international situation, especially the Soviet decision to improve its relations with China, convinced Rajiv Gandhi that a tense relationship with China would not serve India’s security interests. In his 1986 visit to India, Gorbachev conveyed a very clear message to Rajiv Gandhi that a normal China-India relationship was in Soviet interests and that India should not expect as before the Soviet Union to extend it unqualified and categorical support in any possible conflict between India and China. (Ranganathan and Khanna 2000: 59-60) This message made a significant contribution to Rajiv’s decision to send P.N. Haksar as Special Envoy to China to affirm the Chinese leaders that India desired good relations with China and that “India was prepared to adopt a forward looking policy without being mired in the past”. (Ibid: 60) This had been the essence of the proposal put forward by Deng Xiaoping during his meeting with the then Indian Foreign Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in 1979.

2.3 Cold War Mindset and Its Implications for China-India Relations during the Cold War

Despite their respective resistance, to a certain extent, against getting involved into the Cold War of the bipolar confrontation, it is not difficult to find the imprint of the Cold War mindset on the above-mentioned security perceptions of both China and India. This has in turn verified one of Wendt’s assumptions that the structure of international politics has constitutive effects on states, as discussed in chapter one.
On China’s part, Mao’s security perception was deeply influenced by the Cold War mindset. It was not till the early 1980s that Deng Xiaoping brought some sea change in the cognition of Chinese decision-makers, leading China to a gradual departure from the mindset which then was still prevalent around the world. During Mao’s era, China considered that the imbalance of military power among nations was the major source of threat. Mao took for granted the intention of a state with outstanding military capability to obtain benefits through force. Therefore, as a newly liberated and weak country in the post-war era, China under Mao had been staying under the shadow of an imminent third world war as well as a military invasion by the superpowers, i.e., the United States in 1950s, both the United States and the Soviet Union in 1960s, and the Soviet Union in 1970s. In early 1980s, Deng started to downplay the role of the imbalance of military power in threat construction. Though China’s military capability was still prominently inferior to either of the two superpowers, he predicted the possibility that China could enjoy a relatively peaceful security environment for a comparatively long time.

Secondly, China’s security perception during the Cold War was imbued with the colour of ideology. As discussed earlier, ideology had been a principal prism through which Mao looked at the security issues. While the ideological consideration to a great extent contributed to China’s decision to side with the Soviet Union in 1950s, it also led to the Sino-Soviet split. To pursue and safeguard pure socialism, China took an extremely difficult journey to fight against both US capitalism and the Soviet revisionism throughout the 1960s. China’s strategic alliance with the United States did not mean that it had given up its ideological pursuit in its national security strategy. On the contrary, it was only an expedient move for China, which was by then convinced that the Soviet revisionism or social hegemonism posed a much greater threat to China than US capitalism did. Mao’s India perspective manifested his emphasis on the ideological factor. Although Nehru held sympathy for the
socialist cause of the Soviet Union and adopted a socialist-oriented policy in managing the national economy, Mao had never viewed Nehru as a socialist but a representative of the big bourgeoisie of India. In the early days when the PRC was just founded, Mao expressed his profound suspicion of the Indian bourgeois government under Nehru. In a message to B.T. Ranadive, Secretary General of the Communist Party of India, he wrote, “I firmly believe that India, relying on the brave Communist Party of India and the unity and struggle of all Indian patriots, will certainly not remain long under the yoke of imperialism and its collaborators.” (Ibid: 25) As mentioned earlier, Mao attributed Nehru’s “instigation” of the 1959 Tibet rebellion and the follow-up border crisis between China and India to the aggressive and expansive nature of the big bourgeoisie of India. China’s later support to the Naxalbari movement was also justified by this ideological backdrop. An article in the People’s Daily entitled “A Single Spark can light a Prairie Fire” extolled the movement as an authentic peasant armed rebellion against the big bourgeoisie, proving its earlier prophecy that India was ripe for a revolution. (Ibid: 55) As history has indicated, the ideological factor in Mao’s India perspective had contributed, to a certain extent, to the mutual distrust between the two countries. Even Deng Xiaoping, who had tried to downplay the role of ideological factor in China’s domestic policy and external relations since 1978, had to keep an eye on the political and ideological pressures on China by the Western countries at that time. Since the mid-1980s, he warned against the conspiracy of the Western countries to promote “peaceful evolution” in the socialist countries. He called it a third world war without gunsmoke. However, there was no trace of ideology in Deng’s India perspective.

Thirdly, during Mao’s era, China was convinced that military strength played a vital role in safeguarding national security. On the one hand, in order to build a strong army, Mao gave the army the priority of access to the limited resources China had at that time. He also resolutely allowed China to go nuclear in 1964. On the other hand,
China regarded alignment as an effective way to enhance its military capability along with its military build-up. In the very early days of the PRC, Mao firmly chose a military alliance with the Soviet Union to neutralize the threat by the United States. In 1970s, facing the intensifying threat from the Soviet Union, China forged a strategic alliance with the United States. Meanwhile, China also explored a moral alignment with the Third World countries. In short, self-help security plus alliance security were Mao’s approaches to security. It was since 1982 that China started to drop alliance security and try to safeguard its national security through economic cooperation and international security dialogue.

On the part of India, although Nehru tried to give India and the world an alternative way to address security issues, since the mid-1950s, the more India got involved into the bipolar confrontation, the more deeply its security perception was influenced by the Cold War mindset. First of all, India, like China, attributed its sense of insecurity to its inferiority in national power, especially in military strength. Despite Nehru not seeing any prospect of direct military invasion by the superpowers, he was worried about the military threat from Pakistan backed by the United States and the remnant influence of the colonialism. As mentioned earlier, in the days of his advocating a friendly relationship with China, he was “realistic” enough to believe that China had an “inherent tendency to be expansive when she is strong”. In other words, he took China’s intention of expansion for granted and attributed the fact that China did not constitute a threat to India to China’s lack of capability. As China showed its political influence in Bandung and military strength in its 1959 action in Tibet, Nehru’s China perspective underwent a negative change. From 1962 onwards, as the winner of the China-India border conflict and a nuclear weapon power since 1964, China was viewed, along with Pakistan, as a major military threat to India. During Mrs. Gandhi’s era, India’s feeling of its military inferiority was enhanced by the Sino-Pak, the Sino-US and the Sino-US-Pak collaborations, which emerged in sequence since
the mid-1960s. Therefore, Mrs. Gandhi was very pessimistic about India’s security environment at her time and concerned about military threats all around.

Apart from military threat, India during the Cold War laid stress on the political dimension of national security. Unlike China which focused on the survival of the Chinese communist regime, India emphasised its external position, i.e., its political influence in the region and in the world. Due to Nehru’s political aspiration of wanting India to play a leading role in Asian and world affairs, India was very sensitive to the emergence of China. Through the 1960s and 1970s, India was upset by the fact that, “to many in the Third World, including some Indians, the revolutionary and self-reliant path tried by Mao Zedong’s China appeared more appealing and more honourable than India’s middle way of nonalignment and mixed economy.” (Surjit Mansingh 1984: 196) On the subcontinent, as India considered this region naturally an exclusive sphere of influence of India, it had been on the alert for the relationship between its smaller neighbours and outside powers, including China. As history indicated, from time to time, this led India into tensions not only with outside powers but also with its smaller neighbours.

Finally, during the Cold War, India also viewed self-help security and alliance security as the major approaches to national security. The successive top leaders of India during the Cold War attached great importance to its own military build-up. In the light of its three wars with Pakistan and one war with China during this period, military superiority over Pakistan and China was viewed as a guarantee to India’s security, and wars were sometimes thought to be the best way to get out of insecurity. During Mrs. Gandhi’s first tenure, India even exploded a nuclear device in 1974. Meanwhile, in 1970s and 1980s, India viewed its quasi-military alliance with the Soviet Union as a major provider of security. Before that, Nehru tried to form a moral alliance with the Third World through the Non-Aligned Movement to resist
the threat of the two-bloc confrontation to India's security interests.

Based on the above analysis, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the security perceptions of China and India, both of which were characterised by the Cold War mindset, have played a significant role in the ups and downs of the bilateral relations during the Cold War era, despite the fact that there have already been so many explanations. Obviously, it was the determination of Mao and Nehru to befriend each other that has contributed to the China-India “honeymoon” till the mid-1950s. However, the mutual distrust inherent in their respective security perceptions gained momentum with the passage of time. As discussed earlier, since both Nehru’s India and Mao’s China took each other’s expansive nature for granted, they were very sensitive to any change of their power relations. China’s gain in Bandung and military action in Tibet appeared to be alarms for Nehru; Nehru’s sympathy for the Tibet rebellion, claim to the British legacy of the Sino-Indian border and intimacy with Khrushev sound a series of warning for Mao. The mutual distrust led to much mutual misperception, culminating in a military confrontation. As many scholars have argued, the 1962 armed conflict between China and India might have been avoided if there were not so many mutual misperceptions. (Ranganathan and Khanna 2000: 25-55) This thesis concurs with the view that there were opportunities for Nehru and Mao to have lowered down their temper and shunned the extremity, but also argues that it appeared to be very difficult for them to overcome these mutual misunderstandings given the nature of their respective security perceptions at that time.

From 1962 onwards, with both sides getting further involved in the Cold War, especially when the hostility between China and India was formally fixed in the structure of Cold War confrontation since 1970s, with the US-China-Pak strategic collaboration on one side and the Soviet-Indian alliance on the other, it was
impossible for them to find an exit for their mutual distrust. As a result, the rest of the Cold War era witnessed lengthy “cold” relations between China and India, although the bilateral diplomatic relations were restored at the ambassadorial level in July 1976.

It was Deng Xiaoping who brought some light to the China-India relations in the darkness. In his meeting of February 1979 with the visiting Indian Foreign Minister Vajpayee, Deng Xiaoping put forward the proposal for the first time that China and India could normalise their relations without predicking the process on the resolution of their boundary dispute. As mentioned earlier, in 1982, when he was determined to keep aloof from the Cold War and put China’s focus on its economic development, Deng Xiaoping repeated this view to India. Due to the slow pace of the perspective adjustment on the India side, Rajiv Gandhi caught up with Deng only by late 1988.

Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to Beijing of December 1988 is a major landmark in China-India relations. It broke the impasse of the process of normalisation between the two countries. Based on the consensus the two sides reached during this visit that the improvement and development of bilateral relations should not be predicated on the solution to the boundary dispute, some concrete agreements were made to promote an all-round cooperation between them. (Sino-Indian Joint Press Communiqué 1988) A joint working group at the level of vice ministers for negotiations on the boundary question was established, whereas another joint working group at the level of ministers was set up to promote trade and investment. Three agreements were also signed on cooperation in the field of science and technology, on civil aviation and on cultural exchanges.

To sum up, if the China-India “cold” relations of the Cold War era can be attributed
to their respective Cold War mentalities, then Rajiv Gandhi’s visit, which led China-India relations into a new page of increasingly positive interaction, can be attributed to the respective adjustment of their security perceptions due to the rapidly changing world situation. It is against this backdrop that this research will focus on the transformation of their security perceptions from 1991 to 2004, a post-Cold War period that represents a different international strategic culture, and its implications for the development of this bilateral relations, one of the most important bilateral relations in the world of the 21st century.