

CHINA-PAKISTAN STRATEGIC COLLABORATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

PARTH SHARMA*

China and Pakistan have shared a very special relationship that had been affirmed by the rhetoric of 'indispensable friendship' that is 'deeper than the Arabian Sea and higher than the Himalayas'. The divergence in their political systems, social cultures, overall size, level of development and the consequent absence of visible reciprocity in their interactions and policies have hardly affected this bonhomie. A unique aspect of this relationship is that it is India centric. China and Pakistan's relationship remains driven by their shared concerns and threat perceptions about India and vice versa.

The recent rise of China had brought enormous opportunities for Pakistan. China is investing heavily in major infrastructure projects in Pakistan like the up gradation of Karakorum highway, Gwadar Port and the rail link between China and Pakistan. From the Chinese perspective, Pakistan is a growing consumption lead economy, a conduit of energy and strategic commodities. Pakistan's strategic location makes it vital in order to ensure a smooth flow of energy resources. China since the very beginning has used Pakistan as a proxy state to confine India within South Asia and developments like these will affect India in more than one way.

The present paper will argue why India needs to be cautious and what should be its response against such developments.

Keywords: Pakistan, China, Energy, Gwadar Port, Karakoram Highway.

** Doctorate Fellow, Dept. of Political Science, A.M.U, Aligarh.*

The history of China's relations with most of the nations has been chequered one whether it was with former USSR, U.S, Japan or India. In this scheme of things one could argue that Pakistan stands out as the lone country which has exhibited the most durable relationship with PRC. The Sino Pak Bonhomie has been a mystery to many foreign observers keeping in view the difference in the political systems, social structures and economic systems. Above all there is absence of visible reciprocity in the interactions between the two countries. Swaran Singh observes "What makes the China-Pakistan relationship an enigma is the divergence in their political systems, social cultures, overall size, level of development and the consequent absence of visible reciprocity in their interactions and mutuality in their interests and policies".¹

Various metaphors are being used to describe this special relationship. . In February 2006, while speaking before the Pakistan-China Business Forum, the then Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf described that their bilateral relationship 'is deeper than the oceans, and higher than the mountains'. Prime Minister Gilani coined yet another metaphor when he described the relationship between the two as 'one nation, two countries'.² China too have used metaphors like "all weather friendship" and 'brothers forever'. What are the possible explanations for this unique relationship? The standard explanations would be off course the Sino-Pak shared hostilities towards India. This off course is there but does not provide the complete picture and would be rather gross simplification of events that led to this unique bonding. This rationale fails to explain why would Pakistan, an impoverished Islamic country with 40 percent of its budget and almost all of its defence requirements dependent on United States risk its relations with its powerful patron, for friendship with a poor isolated communist China? ³ Again the above rationale fails to explains Sino-Pak collaboration in the 1950's when India enjoyed a good

relationship with China characterised by the slogan ‘Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai’, also one must not forget that Pakistan was part of the U.S led military alliance(SEATO/CENTO).

In fact, the primary factor pushing Pakistan towards China was the U.S economic and military aid to India, a pro-Soviet leader of Non-Aligned Movement, at the cost of Pakistan, the ‘most allied ally’. It has been said that from 1951 and 1964 India received an economic aid of US \$6 billion in comparison to Pakistan which received just US \$3million via Aid India Club⁴. This naturally was resented by Pakistan where people started questioning the very logic of joining US alliance. In 1958, Prime Minister, F.K. Noon, widely considered pro-western and weak on India, declared in the parliament, ‘our people’ if they find their freedom threatened by Bharat[India], will break all pacts [CENTO and SEATO] and shake hands with people[Soviet Union and China] whom we had made enemies because of others[US]. Let there be no mistake about it.⁵ Pakistan was also annoyed by the fact that despite repeated assurances by given by US it had failed to convince India on the issue of Kashmir. Consequently, the policy makers and people in Pakistan were forced to think that the latter was not interested in resolving Kashmir dispute with India. The 1965 war with Pakistan proved a watershed for Pakistan as during the war U.S declined to extend any military and economic support to Pakistan. For Pakistan, the US (notwithstanding its ‘us vs. them’ mentality) seemed less reliable as an ally when India was concerned, and Pakistan increasingly veered towards China and thus began the special relationship between the two.⁶ For China, embracing Pakistan provided many benefits (a) breaking away from US encirclement (b) a valuable link to the Muslim and Western World, (c) a credible counterweight to Indian hegemonic designs which was at that time being assisted by the Soviet Union and US perceived by China as hostile powers.⁷

Pakistan recognised PRC (People's Republic of China) on 4th January 1950, within a few days of India's doing so. Pakistan entered into a military alliance with the US and became a vital cog in the containment of communism. However, Pakistan was able to convince China that her relationship with U.S would not be at the cost of People's Republic of China. Sino-Pakistani ties gained particular momentum in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian war when the two states signed a boundary agreement recognising Chinese control over portions of the disputed Kashmir territory and since then the ties have been so strong that the Chinese President Hu Jintao has described the relationship as "higher than mountains and deeper than the oceans".⁸ The 1962 war brought great humiliation for India. It exposed India's military unpreparedness. Pakistan motivated by the Indian defeat in 1962 and the hope that China would come to rescue her in case there is a need tried to force a military solution to the Kashmir issue. In 1965, when Pakistan went to war with India, U.S not only declined to give military and economic assistance to Pakistan. Starved of armaments Pakistan turned towards China. Herein the seeds of broader defence cooperation for future were sowed between the two countries. Further, a deep sense of mistrust towards U.S crept in Pakistan's mindset. Pakistan played the role of a facilitator in Sino-U.S détente. The three countries together worked together in overthrowing socialist government in Afghanistan. The robust economic growth that China had achieved since its opening up to the outside world is seen by Pakistan as a historic opportunity. China is investing heavily in major infrastructure projects the principle among them being up gradation of Karakoram Highway, Gwadar Port and a rail link between China and Pakistan. All these projects have geopolitical implications for India.

Karakoram highway: Defence cooperation is at the heart of cooperation between Pakistan and China. China has already emerged as the largest defence supplier of Pakistan. "China has

become the world's fifth largest weapons exporter on the back of a rapid increase in sales to Pakistan".⁹ The increase in supplies to Pakistan which now accounts for more than half of China's arms export, and a booming domestic arms manufacturing sector have enabled China's rise as a global weapons player.¹⁰ China's weapons sale to Pakistan is naturally generating a sense of anxiety for India. Manoj Joshi a strategic analyst says "China exports almost 70 percent of its weapons to India's neighbourhood of which Pakistan accounts for 55 percent, Bangladesh and Myanmar about 13 percent and Srilanka two percent".¹¹ Not only China had supported Pakistan in exporting conventional Arms but clandestinely supported her in going nuclear despite being a member of Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. Although, it has been stated that India's nuclear bomb act as a precursor for Pakistan's quest for a nuclear bomb but this is not true. "Pakistan's quest for nuclear bomb predated the Indian nuclear explosion of 1974, originating at the famous Multan meeting of 1972 addressed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto."¹² In fact, the catastrophic defeat in the hands of India forced Pakistan to think in terms of acquiring a nuclear bomb. What greatly facilitated China-Pakistan's nuclear cooperation is that China had kept itself isolated from nuclear non proliferation regimes, during the decades of 1950's, 1960's and 1970's and was not part of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and more importantly from the nuclear export guidelines.¹³ China joined IAEA only in 1984; voluntarily placing its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. It acceded to NPT only in 1992. The rationale behind keeping isolated from all these international regimes was to see that nothing could hamper the growth of Chinese industries more particularly the nuclear industry.¹⁴ The Chinese help to Pakistan ranges from transfer of weapon design, information, assistance in setting up enrichment plant, supply of nuclear test data, conduct of nuclear test on Pakistan's behalf or provision of a test site, supply of heavy water and supply of reprocessing technology to

transfer of nuclear weapons itself. Even after signing the treaty on the Non- proliferation of nuclear arms(NPT), intelligence –based reports appeared in the American media about supply of 5000 ring magnets by China to Pakistan for its A.Q khan laboratories in Kahuta.¹⁵ It is to be noted that India is not the only country which has voiced its concern against China’s covert assistance to Pakistan in its nuclear weapons programme. The United States too had voiced equal concerns about the proliferation behaviour of Chinese. Paula A. DeSutter, the then U.S Assistant Secretary for Verification and Compliance, in a testimony in July 2003, said that U.S continued to be deeply concerned about the Chinese government’s often narrow interpretation of non-proliferation commitments and lack of enforcement of non-proliferation regulations. The government of China has not done enough to ensure that all Chinese entities abide by the non proliferation commitments the Chinese government has made.¹⁶ In a June 1997 report on spread of technologies related to weapons of mass destruction, the CIA said that, China was the ‘primary source of nuclear related equipment and technology to Pakistan’(for the latter half of 1996).this was despite the pledge in May 1996 made in context of ring magnets controversy not to provide assistance to unsafeguarded facilities.¹⁷

China, in terms of its civilian cooperation with Pakistan had helped in building 300 MGe Power Reactor at Chasma. The interesting point here is that China took this decision after Japanese, German and French firms refused to provide supporting systems and components for this power reactor.¹⁸China was also believed to have assisted Pakistan with Pakistan with building an unsafeguarded 50-70 MW plutonium production reactor at Khushab and has also helped in developing an unsafeguarded plutonium facility at Chasma that was left unfinished when earlier French assistance was terminated in the late 1970’s.¹⁹ China had been instrumental in Pakistan’s nuclear parity with India. China had been providing Pakistan heavy water facilities.

It had supplied Pakistan special industrial furnace during mid 1990's as part of civilian cooperation. The special furnace supplied by China to Pakistan was apparently for Khushab facility, which was an unsafeguarded one²⁰. Although, China had played a crucial role in the development of Pakistan's nuclear programme, It had time and gain opposed India's bid to end nuclear isolation. C.Raja Mohan, a foreign policy expert and an expert in this field observes

“History reminds us that without China's support, Pakistan could not have easily become a nuclear weapon power. Even as Delhi reconciled to that fact, it had to confront Chinese resistance to the historic U.S. initiative to end India's nuclear isolation during 2005-08”.²¹ He further argues “India is faced with a nuclear problem that it cannot really ignore. It is about Beijing's opposition to India's integration with the global nuclear order and China's determination to ensure Pakistan's nuclear parity with India”.²² The Sino-Indian nuclear cooperation was the major reason for India conducting a nuclear test in 1998. In a letter sent to President Clinton our than Prime Minister explained his apprehensions

“I have been deeply concerned at the deteriorating security environment, specially the nuclear environment, faced by India for some years past. We have an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapons state. At the hands of this bitter neighbour we have suffered three aggressions in the last 50 years. And for the last ten years we have been the victim of unremitting terrorism and militancy sponsored by it in several parts of our country, especially Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. Fortunately, the faith of

the people in our democratic system as also their patriotism has enabled India to counter the activities of the terrorists and militants aided and abetted from abroad".²³

An evaluation of Sino-Pak nuclear cooperation bring us to the conclusion that nuclear cooperation had been the mainstay of the larger defence cooperation between the two countries. China in his larger bid to contain India within South Asia had tried to ensure Pakistan's nuclear parity with India. Although, it is a member of NPT, CTBT and had acceded to the norms of IAEA but this had not affected its nuclear collaboration with Pakistan. China had adopted dual standards with regard to India and Pakistan. With regard to India it has opposed U.S led efforts to end India's nuclear isolation. China's nuclear policy towards India currently is both hostile and unacceptable.

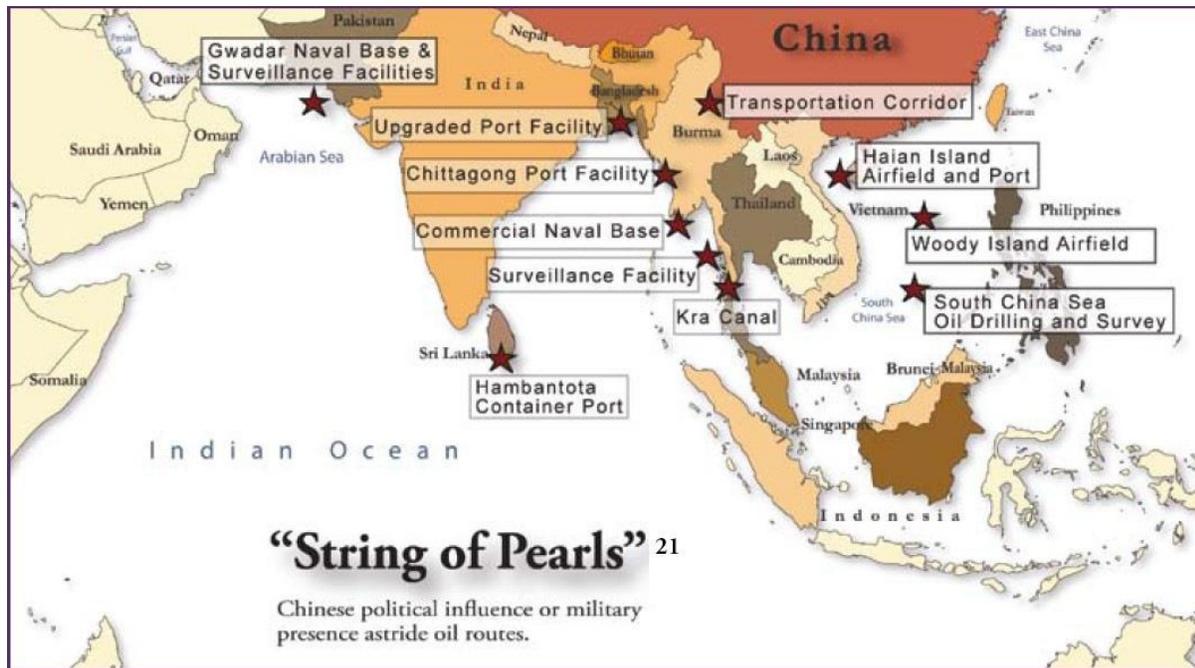
Trade and Energy Corridor:

Pakistan's will continue to remain important for China as its shifts its focus to Indian Ocean where China's interest in energy security and economic development lie. Pakistan is located at the crossroads of three important Asian regions and offers connectivity through what has been termed as the 'trade and energy corridor'. The corridor vision includes oil and gas pipelines, railways and road links with Iran, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States.²⁴ For China, the acquisition of oil and natural gas assets abroad and securing their transportation to China is a top priority, to ensure its economic growth stays on track. In 1985, China was East Asia's largest petroleum exporter; in 1993, China became a net oil importer; and in 2004, China leapfrogged Japan to become the world's second largest oil importer.²⁵ Secure access to foreign oil resources will be necessary both for continued economic growth and, because growth is the cornerstone of China's domestic stability, for the survival of the Chinese Communist regime.²⁶ Vulnerability of SLOCs is perceived as a geopolitical risk because China's current means

of protecting these sea routes is extremely limited, as the chokepoint at the Strait of Malacca clearly illustrates. SLOCs connecting China with Africa and the Middle East pass through the Strait of Malacca, a narrow passage jointly administered by Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Ninety five percent of the oil used in China is transported by sea, and 80 percent of that is shipped through the strait. Shipping in the straits is not easy as the region is infested with piracy. Shipping in the strait is extremely crowded, and it is a haven for pirates and terrorists.

According to the International Maritime Bureau's annual piracy report, 37 incidents occurred in the Malacca Strait in 2004, many of which "involved the crew being kidnapped for ransom" or "attacked by machine guns and rocket launchers." Malacca is along China's "seaborne oil lifeline," but it is beyond the reach of the Chinese Navy.²⁷ The situation is compounded by the fact that there is considerable U.S. naval presence there. Having, no blue water capacity of its own, China fears that U.S. may impose a naval blockade in case of any conflict with her. This Malacca dilemma²⁸ has been playing in the back of Chinese minds. Malacca dilemma triggered a debate in China whether to have forward military presence in the Indian Ocean Asian littoral. Some Chinese analysts clearly support establishing at least a limited number of facilities capable of supporting Chinese forces in areas deemed vital to China's expanding political and economic interests.²⁹ China has been building and assisting commercial and naval ports in friendly countries along the shipping routes. The strategy had been termed as "strings of pearls". The term was first used in a report on Asia's Energy futures commissioned by Pentagon. Each "pearl" in the "String of Pearls" is a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence. The "pearls" extend from the coast of mainland China through the littorals of the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on to the littorals of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. China is building strategic relationships and developing a capability to

establish a forward presence along the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that connect China to the Middle East³⁰ (see Figure 1



available at : (<http://stratrisk.com/geostrat/13282>) accessed on-12 January 2014.

The Gwadar port holds key to China strategy so as to bypass Malacca straits. A modern port at Gwadar would enhance Pakistan’s strategic depth along its coastline with respect to India. For China, the strategic value of Gwadar is its 240-mile distance from the Strait of Hormuz. China is facilitating development of Gwadar and paving the way for future access by funding a majority of the \$1.2 billion project and providing the technical expertise of hundreds of engineers.³¹ Although, China had proclaimed the development of these ports as purely commercial and non confrontational, strategists in India view it as an attempt to encircle India. They argue that these pearls can be turned into military hotspots if a situation arises. Now, a new dimension had been added to Sino – Indian rivalry i.e. the maritime domain.

China's quest to secure its oil supply hinges on two things – Gwador port and its subsequent linkage with Karakoram highway. It has been said that “Karakoram highway and now the Gwador port, which are on either end of Pakistan's geographical limits, are the two foundations for a long term vision of Sino-Pakistan Relations.³² Karakoram Highway thus presents a unique opportunity to both Pakistan and China. For China, the highway which connects Xinjiang to Islamabad is a gateway to reach Central Asia and warm waters of Indian Ocean. China hopes to quell the unrest in Xinjiang by connecting it with rest of China. It is investing heavily in Xinjiang. The ports of South Asia in Pakistan, India and Burma were closest to western China offered the shortest routes to the sea. Therefore, building transport corridors linking Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan to the ports of South Asia became an integral element of China's go west strategy.³³ The major components of this strategy include massive infrastructure development (highways, hydro power projects and telecommunications) so that the region may attract higher FDI like that of Eastern China. The western China contributes 17.8 percent to China's G.D.P in comparison to Eastern China which contributes to 41.1 percent³⁴. As against the previous era in which Tibet, Xinjiang and Yunnan were closed and national and ethnic conflicts there were great sources of insecurity, Beijing new approach sees nationally and internationally integrated infrastructural development and pro-active open door policies as answers to the challenges of both security and modernisation³⁵.

On the other hand Pakistan which badly needs infrastructure is getting benefitted too. Gwador port and Karakoram highway is touted as one of the largest infrastructure projects in Pakistan. Gwadar port will help Pakistan in decongesting the Karachi port which currently is overburdened. Further, there is always the danger persisting in Pakistani minds of it being

blocked in case of fight with India. Chinese presence will help them to allay those fears. India on the other hand is naturally concerned due to Chinese presence very close to it in Arabian Sea.

Chinese government is working day and night so as to transform Karakoram Highway into an “all weather highway”. The strategic importance of the highway is also due to its proximity to Siachen which is the highest battleground on Earth. India and Pakistan have fought intermittently since April 1984. Both countries maintain a permanent military presence in the region at a height of over 6,000 m. Presence of Pakistan and China close to Siachen is naturally going to wary India. The recent Sino-Pak collaboration in the Pok region is resented by India which considers it as a disputed territory. In 2012 (as has been in past), the Defence Minister A K Antony while replying to a Lok Sabha question (in writing) noted that “the government is aware of the infrastructure development by China at the border and their (Chinese) undertaking infrastructure projects in PoK. The government has conveyed its concerns to China about its activities in PoK and asked to them to cease such activities.”³⁶ The strategic collaboration has been the linchpin of Sino-Pakistan relations in the past and will likely to continue in future too.

END NOTES

¹ Singh, Swaran, " *Introduction. China-Pakistan strategic cooperation: Indian Perspectives*", Edited by Swaran Singh. New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, 17.

² Das Rup, Narayan, "*India-China relations a new paradigm*. New Delhi: Institute of Defence and Strategic affairs", 2013. <http://idsa.in/system/files/Monograph19.pdf> (accessed November 5, 2013).

³ Ifftikar Lodhi A, "Pakistan: Perceptions and Responses of an All-Weather Friend ," *A Resurgent China: South Asian Perspectives* , ed. S.D Muni, Tai Tai Yong (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), 182.

⁴ Lodhi "Pakistan, 182,183.

⁵ Lodhi, "Pakistan, 183.

⁶ Anindiyo Mazumdar J, "The Changing Imperatives," ed. Swaran Singh (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007).37

⁷ Lodhi.."Pakistan: 182.

⁸ Pant V, Harsh, "*China in South Asia: A tightening Embrace. The Rise of China: Implications for India*", Edited by Harsh V Pant. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India Limited, 2012,234.

⁹ Krishnan, Anantha. "China shoots into top arms exporters club." *The Hindu*, Morning edition, sec. International, 19 03, 2013.

¹⁰ Krishnan, Anantha. "China shoots into top arms exporters club." *The Hindu*, Morning edition, sec. International, 19 03, 2013

¹¹ Krishnan, Anantha. "China shoots into top arms exporters club." *The Hindu*, Morning edition, sec. International, 19 03, 2013.

¹² Pande Savita, "Nuclear Proliferation Concerns", ed. Swaran Singh (New Delhi: Mamohar,2007),160.

¹³ Kumar Arvind, "Civilian Nuclear Cooperation", ed. . Swaran Singh (New Delhi: Mamohar,2007),302.

¹⁴ Kumar,"Civilian." 302

¹⁵ Pande," Nuclear.." , 160.

¹⁶ Pande,” Nuclear..”, 161.

¹⁷ Pande, “ Nuclear, 163.

¹⁸ Kumar. “Civilian, 307.

¹⁹ Kumar. “Civilian, 307.

²⁰ Kumar. “Civilian 308.

²¹ Mohan C, Raja. "Sino-Pak Alliance: Naval and Nuclear Cooperation." *The Indian Express*, 17 05, 2013. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/sinopak-alliance-naval-and-nuclear-cooperation/1117018/0> (accessed September 19, 2013).

²² Mohan C, Raja. "Sino-Pak Alliance: Naval and Nuclear Cooperation." *The Indian Express*, 17 05, 2013. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/sinopak-alliance-naval-and-nuclear-cooperation/1117018/0> (accessed September 19, 2013).

²³ "Nuclear Weapon's Archive." Accessed September 19, <http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/VajpayeeLetter.txt>.

²⁴ Lodhi, “ Pakistan,”. 193.

²⁵ Pehrson J, Christopher. "*string of Pearls: meeting the challenge of china's rising Power across the asian littoral*". 2006. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=721> (accessed October 13, 2013).

²⁶ Pehrson “Strings, 6.

²⁷ Pehrson “Strings, 7.

²⁸ The term Malacca dilemma was been coined by the President Hu Jin Tao in a speech to a Chinese Communist Party in 2003. Hu reportedly dwelled on the challenges inherent in supplying the nation’s growing dependence on imported energy resources, which had to traverse the Indian Ocean and come into the pacific through the Strait of Malacca.

²⁹ Mohan. “ Samudra,”.126.

³⁰ Pherson, “ Strings, 3.

³¹ V. Arun Kumar, . "CHINA and ‘STRING OF PEARLS’ – India’s Security Dilemma?." southasianthinkers, dec 17, 2012. <http://southasianthinkers.wordpress.com/2012/12/17/china-and-string-of-pearls-indias-security-dilemma/> (accessed July 17, 2014).

³² Verma Sahai, virendra, "*The Karakoram Highway. China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation: Indian Perspectives*", Edited by Swaran Singh. New Delhi: Manohar, 2007.

³³ Mohan. "Samudra,".112

³⁴ By Andrew Moody, Hu Haiyan and Ma Wei, . "'Go West' policy is an economic milestone for nation." *ChinaDaily*, 09 12, 2011. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-12/09/content_14236090.htm (accessed November 11, 2013).

³⁵ Mohan. "Samudra,".112.

³⁶ Rajat , Pandit. "Stop all ventures in PoK, India tells China." *The Times of India*, , sec. India, September 04, 2012. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Stop-all-ventures-in-PoK-India-tells-China/articleshow/16243143.cms> (accessed July 17, 2014).

