



Executive Summary

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THE GROWING COMPLEXITY OF SINO-INDIAN TIES

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According to most political observers, the global political architecture is undergoing a transformation, with power increasingly shifting from the West to the East, in what has been called the Asian Century. The two most populous nations on the earth, China and India, are on their way to becoming economic powerhouses and are shedding their reticence in asserting their global profiles, all of which makes their relationship of still greater importance for the international system. The future of this Asian Century will, to a large extent, depend upon the relationship between these two regional giants. The bilateral relationship between China and India will define the contours of the new international political architecture in Asia and the world at large. This monograph examines the evolution of Sino-Indian ties over the last few decades and the constraints that continue to inhibit this relationship from achieving its full potential before delineating the implications of this for the United States and the wider international system.

At the global level, the rhetoric is all about cooperation, and, indeed, the two sides have worked together on climate change, global trade negotiations, and demanding a restructuring of global financial institutions in view of the global economy's shifting center of gravity. At the bilateral level, however, tensions are mounting. Sino-Indian frictions are growing, and the potential for conflict remains high. China's recent hardening toward India might well be a function of its own internal vulnerabilities, but that

is hardly a consolation to Indian policymakers who have to respond to an Indian public that increasingly wants the country to assert itself in the region and beyond.

New Delhi has responded to the challenge posed by a rising China by adopting a more hard-nosed policy vis-à-vis Beijing. Though it is not entirely clear if China has well-defined policy objectives vis-à-vis India, Beijing's means, both economic and military, to pursue its goals are greater than at any time in the recent past. In response, a process of military consolidation and build-up of key external partnerships is underway in India.

Indian policy trajectory toward China is evolving as India starts to pursue more forcefully a policy of internal and external balancing in an attempt to protect its core interests. The government is trying to fashion an effective response to the rise of China at a time of great regional and global turbulence. Though it is not entirely clear if there is a larger strategic framework shaping India's China policy, India's approach toward China is, indeed, undergoing a transformation, the full consequences of which will only be visible a few years down the line.

The United States faces the prospect of an emerging power transition in Asia, and a robust partnership with India will go a long way towards stabilizing the strategic landscape in the region. This is especially true at a time when China's faster-than-expected rise is generating widespread apprehensions. The United

States should encourage New Delhi to enhance its presence further in East and Southeast Asia. That process is already underway, but India needs to do a better job of articulating its readiness to emerge as a credible actor in the region. The United States can help by encouraging its allies and partners in the region to engage with India more substantively.

Although it is clearly in the interests of both China and India to stabilize their relationship by seeking out convergent issue areas, a troubled history, coupled with the structural uncertainties engendered by their simultaneous rise, is propelling the two Asian giants on a trajectory that they might find rather difficult to navigate in the coming years. Pursuing mutually desirable interests does not inevitably produce satisfactory solutions to strategic problems. Sino-Indian ties have entered turbulent times, and they are likely to remain there for the foreseeable future.

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