



# China's Involvement in India's Internal Security Threats: An Analytical Appraisal



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Twenty-first-century India faces multitude of security challenges. At the core of India's security concerns is its 'internal security' – a major national security challenge. Among many imponderable factors of India's security calculus, internal security is regarded as one of the principal underlying aspects. In the present context, it is considered "the most urgent issue". Unfortunately, today, there is a blurring distinction between internal and external threats. Some go to the extent of arguing that "India does not face an external threat in the conventional sense" but only internal security threats from external sources. These external sources, consisting of both state and non-state actors, combined with those anti-state forces within India, have made the situation more complex in a daily situation. Very few countries in the world are placed in such an unfavourable, troubled and uncertain security environment as India. External sources of threats to India's internal security, therefore, spring from almost all countries of its neighbourhood. China is not an exception.

There are several findings that have been discerned while examining Chinese involvement in India's internal security threats that are encapsulated below:

- It is generally understood that the 'spirit of revolution' during Mao's period was high and Mao's China indiscriminately exported and supported revolutions abroad. This is not fully true. Even when Mao was alive, "national interest" and "diplomatic needs" were given preference over "revolution" per se. For instance, Beijing disregarded the leftist revolution in Ceylon and Bangladesh in 1971 considering good diplomatic relations respectively with the governments of Ceylon and Pakistan. Similarly, China faced criticism from the World Communist Movement on "opportunistic betrayal" in 1971 for maintaining strong relations with the then Sudanese government that ruthlessly suppressed Communists.

In the Indian case, “revolution” was not the motivation for China’s involvement. In fact, most of the insurgent groups in the Northeast with Chinese connections are ethnic nationalists rather than leftists, although some of the militant groups like Manipur’s PLA are left-leaning. Most leaders of these separatist or autonomist movements were comfortable in using the Maoist tactics of guerrilla warfare, but generally ignored its political ideology. The Mizo National Front pointedly refused to use Maoist rhetoric even though hundreds of its guerrillas were trained in China. Interestingly, China’s involvement in the Naxal struggle was more of inspirational than any form of direct material support, although, in the recent phase there is an indirect support mechanism exists via militant groups of the Northeast.

One should note that in the 1950s revolutionary Communist parties in various countries of Southeast Asia were mostly staffed by ethnic Chinese. This led to the perception that Chinese as a whole were a ‘fifth column’ of Communist revolution in the region. Such ‘fifth column’ was not available in India, although some of the northeast militant groups tried to project the aspect of “Mongolian” stock to China. China was conscious of this stark difference.

- While the policy of deliberate “stimulation” to insurgents of Southeast Asia included an entire range of methods of practical support, China’s support to Indian militant groups was not comprehensive. In Burma and Thailand, the PLA at times undertook command and operational roles, apart from indulging in anti-government propaganda through China-based “insurgent” radio stations and hospitals to treat the injured militants. To Indian militant groups, Chinese support was limited to training, arms and, funding to an extent. While the Chinese effectively transformed the Viet Minh from elusive bands of guerrillas into a formidable conventional army, the Indian militant groups were left on their own.

- To serve its national interests, China not only supported insurgencies abroad, but interestingly also did the reverse. When it found the Malacca Straits sea route to be circuitous and cumbersome to get its supplies, it explored an alternative route through Myanmar. China tried convening in Kunming the leaders of various armed Burmese ethnic groups to press them to consider disarming and enter into political negotiations with the Burmese government. Beijing wanted a peaceful Myanmar for its trade and transit. But in Indian case, it did not do anything like that because China was not going to achieve anything by having a peaceful Northeast. On the other hand, it suggested a 'United Front' of northeast militant groups for easy handling.
- The initiative for involvement came not from China but from the Northeast militants groups. The Nagas were the first to approach Beijing, but China made best use of it. Other groups like MNF, ULFA, PLA, ATTF and NDFB followed. However, it is difficult to say that the linkage was unilateral. It was a relationship of convenience and an alliance of opportunism between China and Indian militant groups.
- Involvement of China also depended on the character of the leadership and internal developments in China. While Mao had enthusiastically favoured China's export and support of "revolutions" abroad, Deng Xiaoping, through his policy of "reform and opening" subordinated the revolutionary and anti-imperialist elements of China's foreign policy in favour of economic development. The dynamics of involvement reflected the characteristics of 'Third' and 'Fourth' Generation leadership as well. The role was subtle.

- China's involvement was also based on the state of bilateral relations. In general, if the state-to-state relations were good, China did not support insurgencies against that country. But, Beijing's involvement increased as and when bilateral relations soured. In the initial years, China conducted its relations with India under the larger framework of 'Panchsheel' in which a policy of assurance against subversion was also included. But, the course witnessed a U-turn in the late 1950s. China was initially involved in the Northeast insurgencies during Mao's period in the 1960s and 1970s. Bilateral relations were low during this phase. When bilateral ties improved in the late 1970s and 1980s (roughly coterminous with Deng's period), the level of Chinese support to Indian militant groups dwindled. At the same time, one cannot assert that the Chinese fully abstained from their involvement during Deng's period; the meddling continued throughout, but with less intensity.
- In that case, did the dwindling of Chinese support encourage peace process in the Northeast? In other words, is there a direct coincidence between Chinese involvement and rise and fall of militancy in the region? External support is an important aspect of sustenance of militant groups of India. Loss of external assistance has indeed forced some of the militant groups like MNF, NSCN and ULFA to the negotiating table. When Chinese support was marginal as was in the late 1970s and 1980s, there was stability in the region.
- The Northeast militants preferred to obtain sanctuary in geographical proximity: East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. China was the preferred choice for sophisticated arms, diplomatic support, and sanctuary only when all proximate sanctuaries dried up. It is, therefore, important for India to secure fullest cooperation from its neighbours.

Security forces in these countries are now willing to take on the Indian militant groups based in their territories. But, they are not strong enough to match them and thus India has to provide training, arms and other requisite resources to them.

- In general, externally-trained militants are more hardened, fight better and less amenable to negotiated settlement. This applies to Indian militants trained either in Pakistan or China. However, China-trained militants obtained a more of leftist ideological orientation. The dynamics of Northeast militancy would have been different had Laldenga gone to China for training and got its support and had Muivah and Swu not gone to China and sought its help? In this context, Paresh Barua's presence in China now is a serious concern.
- Of the three phases, the present phase is the most dangerous one because of diversification of China's involvement: arms, offer of sanctuary to Indian militant leaders and cyber warfare. Earlier China was supporting insurgent groups, especially those based in the Northeast. But, now China has been adopting more of 'Pakistani Model' of involving its Intelligence agencies in the sub-conventional warfare strategy. In the recent phase, the role is much more subtle, but broad-based to avoid international attention and the consequent stigma. Most importantly, it provided China with the 'plausible deniability' factor. China's interest in utilizing cyberspace against India is more than as a mere tool of espionage.
- Compared to Pakistan, China poses less threat to India's internal security. But the nexus between China and Pakistan aimed at achieving the larger strategic objective of undermining India's growth is a matter of serious concern. At the tactical level, the aim of China and Pakistan is to tie down Indian security forces in counter-insurgency operations and weaken its conventional warfare potential.

- What has been the Indian response to Chinese involvement in its internal affairs? From time-to-time, India has brought up the issue of China's involvement with Beijing both diplomatically and through the aegis of counter-terror cooperation. However, China has categorically denied giving any help to insurgent groups, particularly the ULFA, UNLF, NSCN (I-M) and PLA. The surprising fact is the low level of confidence on which the issue is raised and discussed with the Chinese. India's official position on the entire gamut of China's involvement has been soft. One agrees that opinions and assessment on the state of China's involvement should be expressed after careful judgment based on the long-term interests of building a stable relationship between the two countries. But, there is nothing wrong in having a structured mechanism to discuss this issue specifically.
- All the possible routes of Chinese interactions with Indian militant groups should be blocked. This requires enhancement of India's border security apart from cooperation of India's other neighbours like Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Other than Bhutan, none of India's neighbours are serious or consistent in cooperating with India in tackling this problem manifested in the Northeast.

## INTRODUCTION

The internal security situation in India is troublesome; the challenges are numerous and the extent and scope of threats are complex, varied and vast. No other country in the world confronts so many threats, and with so much intensity, all at the same time.<sup>1</sup> In a recent report, *Global Risks Atlas 2011*, India is rated to be under the “extreme risk” category on security issues “as it faces simultaneous threats of terrorist attacks from militant Islamic extremists and Naxalite Maoist insurgents.”<sup>2</sup>

Since independence, India has confronted at least one major upheaval every decade compounded by the prevailing existing threats. In the late 1940s, immediately after independence, it was the massive refugee flows in and out of the country, and the bloody communal violence that shook the young nation. In the 1950s, problems surfaced in the Northeast in the form of a Naga insurgency. The third decade of independent India (1960s) witnessed peasant revolts manifest in the form of ‘Naxalism’, which recurred from time-to-time in various parts of India. In the 1970s, insurgency in the Northeast took firm root, gradually engulfing the whole of the region subsequently. The state of Punjab exploded in the 1980s and secessionism ran deep enough for its perpetrators to kill an incumbent prime minister of the country. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Pranab Mukherjee, the then Defence Minister of India, Address at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 June 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The *Global Risks Atlas 2011*, released by risk analysis and mapping firm Maplecroft, evaluates the impact of 32 ‘global risks,’ which are risks outside the control of an individual government or business that have the ability to affect multiple regions and industry sectors. The Atlas focuses on seven key ‘global risk’ areas: macroeconomic risk; security risk; governance risk and illicit economies; resource security; climate change; pandemics; and societal resilience, including human rights. For details, see [http://www.maplecroft.com/about/news/gra\\_2011.html](http://www.maplecroft.com/about/news/gra_2011.html), accessed on 01 January 2012.

1990s, militancy took birth in the state of Jammu and Kashmir which continues unabated; Naxalism recurred, especially in the state of Andhra Pradesh at around the same time.

In the 2000s, a new form of violence appeared in the form of 'jihadi terrorism' that came to haunt India. Presently, Naxalism, also popularly known as Left Wing Extremism (LWE), has spread to other parts especially tribal-dominated central India. Overall, more than 50 percent of India is said to be affected by one or the other type of threats outlined above, and are not merely 'law and order' problems. They have an increasing external dimension which falsifies the conventional wisdom that internal security threats are primarily caused by internal domestic sources. It is clearly discernible that external support with malafide intent to destabilize India has added to their complexity. In the external abetment, how far has China been involved? What were the motives behind it? Was it to create a 'million mutinies' in India or just to deter India from behaving in a manner that is in opposition to Chinese national interests? What has been the *modus operandi*? These are some issues which are analyzed in the paper.

## PANGS OF THE DRAGON

To Mohan Malik, China's strategy towards India has three elements viz. encirclement, envelopment and entanglement. 'Encirclement' is a kind of "strengthened Chinese strategic presence in Tibet, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma and in the Indian Ocean island states." 'Envelopment' is essentially "integrating all of India's neighbours into the Chinese economy." 'Entanglement' is "exploiting India's domestic contradictions and multiple security concerns."<sup>3</sup> The 'entanglement' part of the strategy has the capacity to threaten India's internal security the most. However, unlike Pakistan, the involvement of China in meddling in India's internal security matters is not simply a case of "sub-conventional warfare" as is alleged. It is a more nuanced and complex involvement both in direct and indirect manifestations. China's role can be suitably analysed by examining its three phases in the development marked by the Mao era, Deng's period, and the current phase.

### 1. Mao's Era: 'Export of Revolution'

Communist China pronounced five core principles (*Panchsheel*) of its foreign policy that included non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and respect for those states' territorial integrity and sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> In practice, however, these principles were often overlooked and justified on grounds of securing its national interests. Under Mao Zedong, China supported revolutionary insurgencies throughout the world. There was a strong revolutionary

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<sup>3</sup> For details, see Mohan Malik, *China and India: Great Power Rivals* (Boulder: FirstForumPress, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The other principles being non-aggression, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

internationalist orientation in the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>5</sup> Mao firmly believed that the fate of the Chinese revolution was linked inseparably with those of the revolutionary forces in the world and *vice versa*. And, therefore, China felt that it was the obligation of the Communist Party of China to aid “all fraternal parties which are struggling for a just cause and for their liberation.”<sup>6</sup> A report to the Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1969 asserted:

The revolutionary movement of the proletariat of the world and of the people of various countries is vigorously surging forward. The armed struggles of the people of southern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, India, Palestine and other countries, and regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America are steadily growing in strength. The truth that ‘political power grows out of the barrel of a gun’ is being grasped by ever broader masses of the oppressed people and nations.<sup>7</sup>

At the international level, during the 1970s and 1980s, China operated on ‘dual-track diplomacy’: one track dealing with normal inter-state relations and the other dealing with inter-party ties.<sup>8</sup> While the former was handled by the state, the latter was looked after by the CPC. During this phase, Chinese policymakers considered “imperialism and its lackeys” to be its principal enemies. The US was dubbed as “imperialist”; the Soviet Union “revisionist” and India

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<sup>5</sup> MLM Revolutionary Study Group, “Chinese Foreign Policy during the Maoist Era and its Lessons for Today,” January 2007, available at [http://www.mlmrsg.com/attachments/051\\_ChForPol-Final-4-09.pdf](http://www.mlmrsg.com/attachments/051_ChForPol-Final-4-09.pdf), accessed on 07 November 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, “Peking’s Support of Insurgencies in Southeast Asia,” RSS No. 0065/73, April 1973, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Lin Biao, “Report to the Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” delivered on 1 April 1969, available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1969/04/01.htm>, accessed on 07 November 2011.

<sup>8</sup> William Heaton, “China and Southeast Asian communist movements: The decline of dual track diplomacy,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 8, 1982, pp. 779–800.

“reactionary”. Within months of its formation, China committed its “People’s Volunteers” in Korea and later provided all out support to Viet Minh in Vietnam against the United States. China was also deeply wary of upstaging by any new Soviet presence in support of revolutionary movements especially in its neighbourhood.<sup>9</sup> Personally, Mao had wanted to prove that his version of Communism was “more revolutionary” than the Soviet’s.<sup>10</sup> But, when it came to national interests and diplomatic needs, China gave subordinate priority to supporting revolutionary leftist movements. For instance, the leftist rebels of Sri Lanka and East Pakistan did not receive Beijing’s support in 1971 because the Sino-Sri Lanka and Sino-Pakistan relations were cordial; as were the cases involving Ethiopia and Zaire. On the other hand, China supported ethnic nationalist groups in Burma when relations with Ne Win’s left-leaning government soured.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, China did not pay heed when the World Communist Movement accused it of “opportunistic betrayal” in its complicity with the anti-communist regimes in Sudan, Zaire and Ethiopia in the early 1970s.

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<sup>9</sup> Hal Ford, Chief, DD/I Special Research Staff, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, “Peking’s Support of Insurgencies in Southeast Asia,” RSS No. 0065/73, April 1973, see Executive Summary.

<sup>10</sup> In 1963, the Chinese Communist Party published ‘A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement’ in which it attacked Soviet Union’s “three peacefuls”: Peaceful coexistence with U.S. imperialism, peaceful competition between the capitalist and socialist camps, and a peaceful transition to socialism. Mao in fact insisted that the major Communist powers must play a proactive role in inciting revolution. He advised the visiting Soviet leader Kosygin on 11 February 1965: “We must stimulate.” Mao asserted this in a direct rejection of Kosygin’s statement that it should be the sole decision of “each party” whether guerrilla war should be started. Full text of the document is available at <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/PGL63.html>, accessed on 2 January 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Haacke, “The Nature and Management of Myanmar’s Alignment with China: The SLORC/SPDC Years,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2011, pp. 105-40.

The spirit of the *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* pervaded between India and China, and the former was tagged as “neutrals” in the initial years.<sup>12</sup> But, the question remains what made China take an interest in the struggles for “national self-determination in various parts of India? Partly it was due to Beijing’s perception that its southern neighbour had been turning into an “anti-China base”.<sup>13</sup> Neither did the Chinese take lightly Indian sympathy towards Tibetan refugees, who were fleeing the state repression. China also suspected Indian covert hands in Khampas rebellion in Tibet.<sup>14</sup>

However, the actual support by China to rebel movements in India commenced gradually after the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict when bilateral relations between the two countries had hit rock bottom. According to Lt Gen V. K. Nayar, it was “part of the psychological containment of India.”<sup>15</sup> China preferred to have a chain of friendly buffer states all along the boundary with India, in addition to existing Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.<sup>16</sup> In the east, the Chinese opted to support secessionist groups, which would allow the buffer envelop to be complete. Ideological motivation was clearly secondary. For Beijing, patronage to insurgent groups in Northeast India looked ideal not only because of geographical proximity, but also due to the region’s isolation

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<sup>12</sup> The other neighbouring countries dubbed as “neutrals” by China were Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma Nepal, Afghanistan, Ceylon and Pakistan; and “non-neutrals” were Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong and Macao. See Director General of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, “Ten Years of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy: South and Southeast Asia,” RSS No. 0026/68, 04 April 1968.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabani Sen Gupta, “A Maoist Line for India,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 33, January - March 1968, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> B. N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1971), p. 178. For details on Khampa Uprising and involvement of various actors, see Yuliya Babayeva, “The Khampa Uprising: Tibetan Resistance Against the Chinese Invasion,” 2006, *Honors College Theses*. Paper 31, available at [http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege\\_theses/31](http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege_theses/31); and Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> V. K. Nayar, “India’s Internal Security Compulsions,” in Planning Commission, *India – 2025* (Planning Commission: New Delhi, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), p. 246.

from the Indian mainland,<sup>17</sup> Importantly, the Northeastern militant groups have also looked for support from countries like China and Pakistan, with whom India had unfriendly relations. Rebel groups thought China was a better option, since it won the 1962 conflict, compared to Pakistan who had lost the 1965 War to India. China also was preferred, especially by Naga militants, to internationalise their cause.<sup>18</sup> Some militant groups of the region, like the Nagas, were able to exploit the presence of related tribes on the Burmese side to gain sanctuary and passage to China.<sup>19</sup> For instance, the Naga National Council (NNC) established links with the Burmese militant group Kachin Independence Army (KIA) through the Eastern Naga Regional Council (ENRC), a Naga rebel group in the Sagaing division of Burma. The KIA, in turn, helped NNC cadres to obtain Chinese assistance. Insurgency in northern Myanmar has also acted as an enabling factor for the Northeast Indian militant groups for the link-up. Back in the 1950s India had feared spillover of Communist insurrection in Burma to India's Northeast and, in fact, offered military and financial help to the Burmese government to counter that.<sup>20</sup>

From 1966, China started training several batches of rebels from the Northeast. Incidentally, the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', popularly known as the 'Cultural Revolution' commenced in the same year in China.<sup>21</sup> The first to reach out to the Chinese for

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, less than one percent of the borders in the Northeast are contiguous with India; the remaining 99 percent borders on Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh and China. See B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance and Development* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> J. J. Roy Burman, "Contours of the Naga Upsurge," *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 2008, pp. 145-56.

<sup>19</sup> Walter C. Ladwig III, "Managing Separatist Insurgencies: Insights from Northeastern India," Paper prepared for International Studies Association Annual Conference, 16-18 February 2009, New York, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Speaking at the UN General Assembly on 17 April 1953, V. K. Krishna Menon said, "What hurt Burma would hurt India because of links of friendship, geography and history between the two countries."

<sup>21</sup> 'Cultural Revolution' was a complex social upheaval that extended roughly for a decade (1966 – 1976) set in motion by Mao Zedong and his confidants aimed at imposing Maoist orthodoxy within the Chinese Communist Party by removing capitalist, traditional and cultural elements. The revolution marked the return of Mao Zedong to a position of political power, after he lost most of his political influence after his failed Great Leap Forward.

help were the Nagas. China was considered as the “only hope for revolutionaries”. In a letter dated 05 May 1966, Scato Swu, “Kedhage” (President) of “Federal Government of Nagaland” addressed to the President People’s Republic of China, wrote,

... as it has become impossible for us to resist unaided the military might of Indian Armed Forces, we have to look to your Government and to your people for any possible assistance in any form so that we may properly safeguard our sovereignty through the liberal hand of your people. Our government feels the paramount necessity of your kind recognition of the existence of the Naga nation and the legality of the Federal Government of Nagaland.<sup>22</sup>

The letter identified T. H. Muivah as “plenipotentiary” of “command” that was sent to China for training with an amount of Rs 30,000. The “command” took nearly three months to reach its destination in Yunnan province of China through Myanmar.<sup>23</sup> Apart from providing military training, the Chinese imparted the Naga rebels with politico-ideological indoctrination and arms.<sup>24</sup> Rebel leaders like Muivah and Swu participated in high-level meetings with the Chinese leadership in Beijing. They were told by the Chinese to follow the Vietnamese model of struggle to gain sovereign Nagaland – carve out liberated zones and gradually consolidate it before declaring a sovereign state. They were also promised all possible help in their struggle.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Nirmal Nibedon, *Nagaland: The Night of the Guerillas* (New Delhi: Lancers Publishers, 1978), p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Col. Ved Prakash, *Terrorism in India's North-East: A Gathering Storm* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2008), p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Thuingaleng Muivah, chief negotiator and Secretary General of the Nationalist Social Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) by Francis Adams, *Rediff News*, 25 June 2001, available at <http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/jun/25inter.htm>, accessed on 02 January 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Sangupo Chase by Avalok Langer, *Tehelka Magazine*, Vol. 8, Issue 33, 20 Aug 2011.

Taking a cue from the Nagas, other groups in the region, especially the Mizos and the Meities hooked on to China as well. Coincidentally at about the same time in 1966 when the Nagas were reaching out to the Chinese, the Mizo rebellion broke out. The Mizo National Front (MNF) under Pu Laldenga was mostly dependent on East Pakistan for its external support in the beginning. However, when East Pakistan fell in the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the MNF initially took refuge in Myanmar<sup>26</sup> and then turned to China for support in 1972. When Laldenga fled from Myanmar to Pakistan, it was “Major” Damkoshiak who took a group of Mizo guerillas to Yunnan through ‘Kachin corridor’. Until then, the linkage with Beijing was only restricted to request for “recognition of independent Mizoram”.<sup>27</sup> But the linkage gradually waned as the peace process between the MNF and the Government of India commenced in the mid-1970s.

Neighbouring Pakistan had already been supporting these insurgent groups since the mid-1950s. The infrastructure and methodology was available to internalize and adopt. And it became easy for China to take on. With the formation of a “Coordination Bureau” in the late 1960s between Pakistan and China to coordinate the training, arming and funding of insurgency movements in the Northeastern region, the joint venture got institutionalised.<sup>28</sup> However, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh, the Northeast rebels found it difficult to enjoy the same

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<sup>26</sup> In what was termed as “great escape”, MNA leader Laldenga fled to Myanmar on 17 December 1971, the day after the end of Bangladesh Liberation War.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, it is generally believed that the Mizos possibly moved, under forces of circumstances, “from Shinlung or Chhinlungsan located on the banks of the river Yalung in China. They first settled in the Shan State and moved on to Kabaw Valley to Khampat and then to the Chin Hills in the middle of the 16th century.” <http://mizoram.nic.in/about/history.htm>, accessed on 13 December 2011. Also see H. G. Joshi, *Mizoram: Past and Present* (New Delhi: Mittal and Mittal Publications, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> V. K. Nayar, “India’s Internal Security Compulsions,” in Planning Commission, *India – 2025* (Planning Commission: New Delhi, 2003).

patronage with the India-friendly Mujib regime in Dhaka. They had to pack their bags to go elsewhere. As a result, the Northeastern rebel groups' reliance on China intensified post-1971.

The Chinese trained guerillas gave a difficult time to Indian security forces. The availability of Chinese weapons had invigorated the rebels, who until then had only World War II vintage arms left by the retreating Japanese, and limited arms supplied by Pakistan. They not only fought better, but were not amenable to negotiations when the time was ripe for resolving conflicts.<sup>29</sup> For instance, the Naga leaders Issac Swu and Thanglang Muivah, rejected the 'Shillong Accord', and formed the NSCN to continue the insurgency. Similarly, the MNF that almost lost ground after the loss of support and sanctuary from newly independent Bangladesh got a major boost and revival from new-found linkages and support from China since 1972.<sup>30</sup> To cite yet another instance, Chinese-trained "Col" Baikvela of the MNF dodged the peace agreement signed by Laldenga with the Indian government, escaped with his men to Myanmar and sent secret signals to other MNF units in Mizoram not to fall "into traps created by Indian agencies."<sup>31</sup>

Some of the rebels from Manipur, influenced by Chinese ideology and support started gravitating towards Beijing for help. Nameirakpam Bisheshwar Singh, who was earlier with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), took a group of rebels to China for training in 1975.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Highlighting the Chinese influence as an obstacle during negotiations Mr K. Padmanabhaiah, interlocutor in the Naga Issue, observed, "You know he is cast in the mould of a Marxist revolutionary. So, we had our problems." Interview to Sheela Bhatt, *Rediffnews*, 31 July 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire: Northeast India* (Delhi: Spantech and Lancer, 1996), pp. 173-74.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>32</sup> Sanjoy Hazarika claims that the Manipuri militants were given urban guerilla warfare training in Lhasa by the Chinese PLA. See Sanjoy Hazarika, "Ethnic conflict and civil society in the Northeast," *Bloodsport*, Vol. III, Issue 5&6, available at <http://www.littlemag.com/bloodsport/sanjoyhazarika.html>, accessed on 28 February 2012.

Interestingly, the Manipuri rebels went via Nepal to reach Lhasa, as opposed to using the 'Kachin corridor' (northern Myanmar) route taken by Nagas and Mizos. The level of indoctrination was so deep in Maoist ideology that on their return to India in September 1978 they named their newly formed militant group to be the 'People's Liberation Army (PLA)', akin to the Chinese Army. The Chinese also found in the Manipuri PLA more ideological commitment than other groups of the Northeast.<sup>33</sup> The extent of Maoist influence also got reflected in the objectives of the PLA: to liberate Manipur through armed struggle and establish "a society based on socialistic principles."<sup>34</sup> The group regarded China as the "fountainhead of international proletarian revolution."

However, when it came to China's involvement in Naxalism, it was more inspirational than any sort of direct material support. The Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal of May 1967 was keenly noted by China.<sup>35</sup> The official newspaper of the Communist Party of China, *People's Daily* (dated 05 July 1967), called the revolt a "pearl of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India." It noted, "the revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party has done the absolutely correct thing" by adopting the revolutionary line advanced by Chinese leader Mao Zedong. The editorial went on to conclude that "a single spark can start a prairie fire" and that "a great storm of revolutionary armed struggle will eventually sweep across the length and

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<sup>33</sup> To R. Sanjoubha, Manipur's leading political analyst, "The Chinese were dismayed with the Nagas and Mizos, as they were with the Kachins in Burma later. They wanted a more ideologically committed group, which they found in the Manipuri PLA leaders." Quoted in Subhir Bhaumik, "The (North) East is Red," *Himal South Asian*, September 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Prakash Singh, *India's Northeast: Frontiers in Ferment* (Florida: JSOU Press, 2008), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Incidentally, two border skirmishes between India and China took place in the same year in Sikkim, then a protectorate of India. There were known as "Nathula Incident" and "Chola Incident"

breadth of India.”<sup>36</sup> The Naxalites were indeed deeply influenced by Mao Zedong's proletarian revolution in China and wanted to emulate the same in India. Lin Biao's pamphlet “Long Live the Victory of People's War” seemed to have inspired many of the ideas advocated by the Naxals.<sup>37</sup> Charu Mazumdar, one of the pioneering leaders of the Naxalite movement, famously remarked: “China's Chairman is our Chairman and China's path is our path”.<sup>38</sup> The Naxals viewed Maoist ideology as the right template for a revolution in India. There was an attempt to copy the analysis of China's experience mechanically in India with declarations like armed struggle is the only path, denouncing all other forms of struggle and class/mass organisations.<sup>39</sup> Even today, Maoist China is regarded by the Indian Maoists as “the rightful leader of the revolutionaries across the world” and Maoism as “the perfect ideology” to deal with “class enemies” and establish “New Democracy” through “protracted people's war”.<sup>40</sup> It is “protracted” because no time limit is set for achieving the end objective. Some call it as “proxy war by China

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<sup>36</sup> The translated version of the ‘Editorial’ was reproduced in *Liberation* (the central organ of the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries), Vol. I, No. 1, November 1967. Available at <http://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/peoples-daily/1967/07/05.htm>, accessed on 28 December 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Lin Biao, “Long Live the Victory of People's War!” Written in Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japan, 03 September 1965, for full text of the document, see [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples\\_war/](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/)

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Arundhati Roy, “Walking With The Comrades,” *Outlook*, 22 March 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Communist Party of India (ML), “Contribution of CPI (ML) Red Flag, India,” available at [http://www.icmlpo.de/us/8con/country/cpi\\_india\\_us.htm](http://www.icmlpo.de/us/8con/country/cpi_india_us.htm), accessed on 07 November 2011.

<sup>40</sup> “People's War” called for a period of underground political organization followed by guerrilla war. The ultimate objective was seizure of power and creation of a communist state. While the insurgents were prepared for a long struggle involving occasional military setbacks, they sought to launch increasingly larger military operations. In the “pure” form of Maoist People's War, the final phase was conventional maneuver warfare after the regime was weakened by prolonged guerrilla operations. The People's War strategy also directed insurgents to develop “liberated areas” that they could administer more justly than government-controlled regions. This too was a means of psychological warfare and propaganda designed to win over the “undecideds” to the rebel side. See Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response,” Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004, available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub586.pdf>, accessed on 03 November 2011.

being waged against India” although there are no evidences of China’s direct involvement as of now.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. Deng’s Period: ‘Slow Down’

After 1978, Deng Xiaoping put Chinese economic, security and foreign policies on a new footing. Under his leadership, Beijing launched the ambitious and comprehensive ‘Four Modernizations’ policy in 1978.<sup>42</sup> In order to achieve the objectives of ‘Four Modernisations’, the Chinese leadership decided to adopt an ‘Open Door’ policy for foreign investment, trade, commerce, markets and foreign resources and technologies. Deng averred, “China cannot rebuild itself with its doors closed to the outside world and it cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world.”<sup>43</sup> His policy of “reform and opening” subordinated the revolutionary and anti-imperialist elements of China's foreign policy to the overriding imperative of economic development. Recognizing that China was falling behind economically, Deng pushed for the need “for China to adapt and respond to those changes to achieve the economic development he saw as crucial for the Party’s survival.”<sup>44</sup> In his address at the CPC’s 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress, Deng Xiaoping emphasised that “building socialism with Chinese characteristics” was necessary for China’s development. He urged the party to pursue this line and stressed the “need to seek

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<sup>41</sup> “Joint Interview of the General Secretaries of the erstwhile CPI (ML), (PW) and MCCI,” *People’s March*, supplementary issue, November-December 2004, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> They include modernisations in agriculture, industry, national defence (military) and science and technology.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Pozeb Vang, *Five Principles of Chinese Foreign Policies* (Bloomington: Author House, 2008), p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Stuart Harris, “Globalisation and China's diplomacy: Structure and process,” Department of International Relations, Australian National University, Working Paper No. 9, Canberra, December 2002, p. 6.

truth from facts".<sup>45</sup> His catch phrase was "To Get Rich is Glorious". Therefore, it was strongly felt that a shift in the focus of the CPC's external outlook – from "supporting the left-wing groups and opposing the revisionists" to "working for an international environment favourable for reform and opening-up and the modernisation drive" – was necessary.<sup>46</sup> The CCP's previous strategy of "marking out a broad front" against Soviet-type communism became no longer necessary. Whatever it might have been, as with Stalin in Soviet's case, after the demise of the dominant leader, some of the older leader's obsessions "withered away" in the Chinese situation too.

After Mao's death, the Cultural Revolution was severely condemned for having obstructed and delayed China's economic and technological progress, and for the divisions it brought about in both its 'inner' and 'outer' worlds. In due course, Mao's 'export of revolution' phase in the Chinese foreign policy came to a naught. Instead, China's foreign and security policy in the 1980s basically followed Deng's 24-character strategy: "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership."<sup>47</sup> China suspended its support for communist insurgencies throughout the world, and its general approach to diplomacy became non-

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<sup>45</sup> It meant that facts rather than ideology should be the criterion of the "correctness" of a policy; the policy had to work in practice. To explain this point, Deng Xiaoping had said, "It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches the mouse."

<sup>46</sup> D. S. Rajan, "China: Signs of Attention to the Communist Party of India (Maoists)," South Asia Analysis Group, Paper no. 3280, 28 June 2009, available at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers33%5Cpaper3280.html>, accessed on 04 November 2011.

<sup>47</sup> The Strategy in short suggests maximizing future options through avoiding unnecessary provocations, shunning excessive international burdens, and building up China's power over a long-term.

ideological.<sup>48</sup> This perhaps partly explains why the intensity of China's support to militant groups of India's Northeast dwindled in the late 1970s, if not dried out completely.

Soon thereafter there was a gradual normalisation of relations between Indian and China. In July 1976, both countries restored ambassador-level relations. Higher political contacts were revived with the visit of the then Indian External Affairs Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee to China in February 1979. Huang Hua, Vice Premier and Foreign Minister of China, had reciprocated Vajpayee's visit in June 1981. It was the first visit by a senior Chinese leader to India since 1960. During the visits, the two governments had agreed to commence negotiations on mutual understanding on the boundary and other issues. However, the full normalisation of bilateral ties at the summit level commenced only in December 1988 when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China and both sides agreed to develop and expand bilateral relations in all fields based on the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'. It was agreed to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) to seek fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution on the boundary question and setting up a Joint Economic Group (JEG).

On the Chinese part, Premier Li Peng visited India in December 1991. President R. Venkataraman paid a state visit to China in May 1992. This was the first head of state-level visit from India to China. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited China in September 1993. The Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the India – China Border Area was signed during this visit. President Jiang Zemin's state visit to India in November 1996 was similarly, the first by a PRC head of state to India. The four agreements signed during his visit included the one on CBMs in the Military Field along the

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<sup>48</sup> Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy," *The New York Times*, 28 January 2008.

LAC covering adoption of concrete measures between the two militaries to enhance exchanges and to promote cooperation and trust.<sup>49</sup>

Following these developments, Beijing became more realistic in its support for insurgencies. As Julian Paget points out, “no one likes backing a loser, particularly in an insurgency.”<sup>50</sup> The Naga insurgency was diluted after the Shillong Accord of 1975 and the Chinese-trained leaders Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, who had opposed the Shillong Accord, went underground and formed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980. The aim of the NSCN was to establish a separate socialist state - ‘Greater Nagaland’ (‘Nagalim’ or the People’s Republic of Nagaland) based on Mao Tse Tung’s ideology. The NSCN in due course emerged as the most powerful and popular militant group among the Nagas.<sup>51</sup> Its linkage with China, although at a low-key in Burmese territory, continued. Muivah, during his stint in China as a trainee and as a representative of NNC, was influenced by the socialist philosophies and guerilla warfare methods of Mao.<sup>52</sup> However, a split in NSCN between Issac-Muivah on the one side, and Kaplang on the other, led to loss of base for the IM faction in Burma in 1988. This factor *inter alia* gradually forced the NSCN-IM to declare a ceasefire and open talks with the Indian government in 1997.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For detailed Indian Government brief on “India-China Relations” visit <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=50042452>, accessed on 26 December 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning* (London: Faber, 1967), p. 176.

<sup>51</sup> Subir Bhaumik claims that NSCN’s success was largely due to its strategy of “creating ‘satellites’ – training arming and guiding smaller insurgent groups in the neighbouring states in return for safe bases, routes to reach key foreign locations and support in operations.” See his “Insurgencies in India’s Northeast: Conflict, Co-option and Change,” *Working paper No. 10*, East-West Center Washington, July 2007, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Chandrika Singh, *Naga Politics: A Critical Account* (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2004), pp. 173-74.

<sup>53</sup> H. Srikanth and C.J. Thomas, “Naga Resistance Movement and the Peace Process in Northeast India,” *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2005, pp. 63-64.

Meanwhile, in the mid 1970s, the Northeast militant groups found an alternative support base in Bangladesh. The military leaders of the newly independent state, who had usurped power after assassinating Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, “revived the Pakistani policy of sheltering, arming and training rebel groups from Northeast India.”<sup>54</sup> At a later date, in early 1990s the militant organisations ULFA, NDFB and KLO found the kingdom of Bhutan too as an alternative for their operations. Had it not been for the safe havens provided by Bangladesh and Bhutan, the Northeast insurgents would have tried to gain at least unofficial access and support from China. In any case, for sanctuary, militants always preferred a proximate location rather than a distant base.

### **3. The Present Phase: ‘Revival, but Delicate Balance’**

A revival of Chinese involvement in India's internal security threats commenced roughly in mid-1998 when Sino-Indian relations witnessed strains in the wake of nuclear tests by India. The Pokhran-II nuclear tests by India in May 1998 put the Sino-Indian rapprochement that set-in in the late 1970s in the reverse gear.<sup>55</sup> Earlier, the then Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandes' remarks identifying China as “potential threat number one” did not go well with Beijing. But, what upset China further was Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee's letter to the then US President Clinton explicitly linking the nuclear tests *inter alia* to a threat from China. The Prime Minister had stated,

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<sup>54</sup> Subir Bhaumik, “Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India's Northeast,” in Satu P. Limaye, Robert G. Wirsing and Mohan Malik, *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), p. 224.

<sup>55</sup> In any case, a large section of China's political and military elite viewed that the United States “allowed” India to go nuclear to check China. See Shen Dingli, “Building China-India Reconciliation,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2010, pp. 139-63.

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 neighbor 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, specially Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.<sup>56</sup>

Rejecting the purported rationale of India to be “totally unreasonable”, the Chinese riposte noted, “this gratuitous accusation by India against China is solely for [the] purpose of finding excuses for the development of its nuclear weapons.”<sup>57</sup> Beijing also singled out George Fernandes, India's Defense Minister, accusing him of recklessly using Beijing as an excuse for New Delhi's nuclear tests and warning of the terrible consequences of such words. “If this arrogant bluster and military expansionism is not effectively checked, the consequences will not even bear thinking about,” the *Liberation Army Daily*, exhorted.<sup>58</sup> Although India tried to downplay the ‘China threat theory’, the dip in the level of confidence resulted in the cancellation of a Joint Working Group meeting scheduled for later that year.

Bilateral ties eventually resumed in the subsequent year, but the nuclear tests and the terms of reference clearly revealed “some of the deep and enduring cleavages between the two countries, but also the high costs and dangers for both countries associated with too direct or

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<sup>56</sup> For full text of the letter see “Nuclear Anxiety: India's Letter to Clinton on Nuclear Testing,” *The New York Times*, 13 May 1998.

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Kang Lim, “China Strongly Condemns India Nuclear Tests,” *Reuters*, 14 May 1998.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies Monterey, [http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country\\_india/china/nsacris.htm](http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country_india/china/nsacris.htm), accessed on 16 January 2012.

intense confrontation” in a nuclear environment.<sup>59</sup> It was plausible that Beijing considered reviving the sub-conventional warfare strategy against nuclear India at this juncture. In the India-Pakistan context, noted analysts observed,

Once India and Pakistan accepted the basic reality of nuclear deterrence, Islamabad quickly escalated sub-conventional conflict, causing what nuclear theorists calls the “stability-instability paradox” (meaning the presence of nuclear weapons decreases the likelihood of direct war between India and Pakistan, but increases the chance of having minor conflicts). With nuclear deterrence in place, the Pakistani threat is largely manifested as an internal security issue.<sup>60</sup>

Some experts identify 2005 as yet another tipping point of China's outlook towards India. Brajesh Mishra, former National Security Advisor of India, had significantly observed, “in recent times, their [Chinese] media and even some PLA members have struck an anti-India stance. I think the changed attitude might be due to the Indo-US civil nuclear pact which has led Beijing to think that its position is shrinking in South Asia.”<sup>61</sup> However, it should be noted that Beijing was viewing things with apprehension in the larger context of the spread of “colour revolutions” in the Caucasus and beyond at around the same time, and the second Bush administration's assertive democratisation agenda.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John W. Garver, “The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity following India's Nuclear Tests,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 168, December 2001, pp. 865-89

<sup>60</sup> Sunil Dasgupta and Stephen P. Cohen, “Is India Ending its Strategic Restraint Doctrine?” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Spring 2011, p. 166.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra by Swati Chaturvedi, *Zee News*, 08 November 2009.

<sup>62</sup> In his ‘State of Union Address’ George Bush remarked “The only force powerful enough to stop the rise of tyranny and terror, and replace hatred with hope, is the force of human freedom.... And we've declared our own intention: America will stand with the allies of freedom to support democratic movements in the Middle East and beyond, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”

India and the United States were already warming towards each other following President Bill Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 and leaving the contentious issues of nuclear tests conducted by India and the consequent US sanctions, far behind. Committing themselves to "new beginnings", the two countries identified democracy as a key element to "create a closer and qualitatively new relationship between the United States and India."<sup>63</sup> The joint communiqué signed on 21 March 2000 between Bill Clinton and Atal Bihari Vajpayee affirmed that "the United States and India are and will be allies in the cause of democracy. We will share our experience in nurturing and strengthening democratic institutions the world over and fighting the challenge to democratic order from forces such as terrorism. We will cooperate with others to launch an international Community of Democracies..."<sup>64</sup> The succeeding Bush administration "reaffirmed the enduring ties between both nations, and the importance of further transforming the India-US relationship."<sup>65</sup> When the two countries signed the 'New Framework for the India-U.S. Defense Relationship' on 28 June 2005 "belief in freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and shared security interests" were identified as common derivatives for the bilateral relations. The scope of the engagement was vast enough to cover various aspects of defence cooperation.<sup>66</sup>

As Stephen Cohen puts it, "India suddenly seemed more attractive to the United States as a

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<sup>63</sup> See the joint communiqué titled "India-U.S. Relations. A Vision for the 21st Century" published in *India News* (Special Edition), Embassy of India, Washington D.C., September 2000, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Press Information Bureau, "India-US Joint Statement on the Occasion of the Official Working Visit of Prime Minister to Washington D.C.," 10 November 2001. Full text available at <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/ireleng/lyr2001/rnov2001/10112001/r101120011.html>, accessed on 10 February 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Major areas include joint and combined exercises and exchanges, collaborate in multinational operations, strengthen the capabilities of our militaries to promote security and defeat terrorism, promote regional and global peace and stability, enhance capabilities to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, expand two-way defense trade, increase opportunities for technology transfer, collaboration, co-production, and research and development, expand collaboration relating to missile defense, conduct exchanges on defense strategy and defense transformation, increase exchanges of intelligence, and continue strategic-level discussions by senior leadership.

balancer to China.”<sup>67</sup> Some analysts from the US argued that “a partnership between India and the United States is vital for the success of US’ geostrategic objectives.”<sup>68</sup> The Bush Administration’s decision to accommodate India on the issue of nuclear cooperation with access to space-related and dual-use high technology was, therefore, justified on the premise that it “would speed up India’s pace for economic transformation and growth and strengthen its geopolitical importance, buttress its potential as a hedge against a rising China and encourage it to pursue economic and strategic policies aligned with US interests.”<sup>69</sup> Economically, India is regarded as a potential economic powerhouse with a growth rate of 8-9 percent with a vast market for investment and consumerism. Moreover, India’s geographic surroundings are areas that are vital for the US - West Asia, East Asia and the Indian Ocean. India is viewed as the most important ‘swing state’ in the international system with overlapping interests with the United States on issues like “stable Asia, democracy, market-driven growth, the rule of law, and opposition to violent extremism.”<sup>70</sup> In short, the core belief is that “an ever more powerful and influential India in the international arena is deeply in the United States’ national interest.”<sup>71</sup> In the Asian context, India is considered as the most important partner in maintaining a broad balance of power in the continent.

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<sup>67</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, “India and America: An Emerging Relationship,” paper presented at a conference on ‘The Nation-State System and Transnational Forces in South Asia’, 8-10 December 2000, Kyoto, Japan.

<sup>68</sup> Statement of Francine R. Frankel, Director, Center for The Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, “The U.S.–India Global Partnership: How Significant For American Interests?” Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, 16 November 2005, Serial No. 109–130.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and Aspen Institute India (Aii), “The United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future,” *Joint Study Group Report*, September 2011, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

However, India's aim in forging closer relations with the United States is not to have an alliance against China, rather an opportunity to enhance its economic and trade interests, access to technology in the military sphere, aerospace, and commercial arenas, gain influence in global institutions, obtain nuclear fuel without hindrance, and countering extremism within its borders and in the neighbourhood. New Delhi has dismissed the idea that India could ever be used as a bulwark against China. At best, the commonly held view is that a close partnership with the United States would allow India to bridge the economic gap with China and also enforce China to view India seriously. In doing so, New Delhi has not walked into "a US trap by becoming overtly anti-Chinese" but tried to maintain a balance of relations between the two countries. "Our aim is to have cooperative ties with both China and USA. It is not zero-sum game. I do not think that large and dynamic countries like China can be contained," observed the Indian Prime Minister in March 2012.<sup>72</sup> Months before signing the Indo-US Nuclear Deal, India had inked a Joint Statement with China in April 2005 establishing a 'Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity', reflecting a "readiness of the two sides to resolve outstanding differences in a proactive manner without letting them come in the way of the continued development of bilateral relations."<sup>73</sup> Subsequently, during Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to India in November 2006, both sides issued a Joint Declaration formulating a "ten-pronged strategy" to intensify cooperation in all areas and to give greater content to India-China Strategic

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<sup>72</sup> Translated text of Prime Minister's interview in Korean Daily, JoongAng Ilbo, 23 March 2012, available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=501019143&flg=1>, accessed on 01 April 2012.

<sup>73</sup> See para III of the Joint Statement. In spelling out the framework of cooperation the Statement said: "Such a partnership is based on the principles of Panchsheel, mutual respect and sensitivity for each other's concerns and aspirations, and equality; provides a sound framework for an all-round and comprehensive development of bilateral relations based on mutual and equal security, development and prosperity of the two peoples; and contributes to jointly addressing global challenges and threats." Full text of the Statement is available at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2005/Apr/125627.htm>, accessed on 05 April 2012.

and Cooperative Partnership.<sup>74</sup> In January 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited China and a joint document on 'A Shared Vision for the 21st Century of the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China' was issued, outlining common positions on a number of international and some bilateral issues.<sup>75</sup> All these positive bilateral interactions between the two countries may seem to convey that Beijing and Delhi refuse "to become sacrifices of contention between big powers", and that "neither of them has seen the growth of the other side as a threat but, instead, as a development opportunity for itself."<sup>76</sup> However, the pertinent question really is how far has China taken this seriously?

Despite India's conscious balancing attempts in its relationships with the US and China, Beijing has viewed developments in its strategic landscape with concern and suspicion. Since Beijing has played a "zero-sum game of using its friendship with the US in the period 1979 to

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<sup>74</sup> The "ten-pronged strategy" included:

- i. Ensuring comprehensive development of bilateral relations.
- ii. Strengthening institutional linkages and dialogue mechanisms.
- iii. Consolidating commercial and economic exchanges.
- iv. Expanding all round mutually beneficial cooperation
- v. Instilling mutual trust and confidence through defence cooperation.
- vi. Seeking early settlement of outstanding issues.
- vii. Promoting trans-border connectivity and cooperation
- viii. Boosting cooperation in science and technology
- ix. Revitalising cultural ties and nurturing people-to-people exchanges.
- x. Expanding cooperation on regional and international stage.

The full text of the Declaration is available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=22168>, accessed on 05 April 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Key issues identified were democratization of international relations and multilateralism, regional integration, economic globalization, international energy order, climate change, multilateral arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, terrorism, inter-civilizational and inter-faith dialogues, and confidence building measures.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Christopher Griffin, "Containment with Chinese Characteristics: Beijing Hedges against the Rise of India," *Asian Outlook*, No. 3, September 2006. Available at <http://www.aei.org/outlook/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/asia/containment-with-chinese-characteristics/>, accessed on 06 April 2012. Original Source: Shih Chun-yu, "China and India Explore New Type of Relationship between Big Powers," *Ta Kung Pao*, July 11, 2006.

1989 to facilitate US victory in the Cold War, China fear[ed] the US may use India in a similar manoeuvre to contain and weaken China.”<sup>77</sup> More than the Nuclear Deal, China was far more concerned about the increasing defence cooperation between India and the United States, and concluded that defence ties between the two democracies would have far reaching implications for the military balance in Asia. The Chinese did not hesitate in pointing out that “the provisions for defense industrial cooperation are “of special significance given the fact that the United States, on the one hand, presses the European Union to keep [its] arms embargo on China and urges Israel to cancel arms sales to China, while on the other hand, sign[ed] a wide-based defense agreement with India.”<sup>78</sup> Convinced that it is being treated unfairly because of the socialist system that it was upholding, China propounded the “harmonious world” theory and projected itself as a peace-loving country. Beneath the proclamation was a realistic consideration designed to counter the apprehension that China’s one-party dictatorship might be on a collision course with major democracies, such as the United States.<sup>79</sup>

It was important for China to contain the fallout from the Indo-US Nuclear Deal and Defence Cooperation Agreement, and equally maintain its longstanding conventional military superiority over India. But, China did not wish to do anything overtly as it had until the 1970s under the garb of its “revolutionary spirit”. Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s speech marking the 80<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the CPC declared openly that the party was no longer a “revolutionary

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<sup>77</sup> Sanjaya Baru, “China, India and the US,” *Business Standard*, 10 October 2011.

<sup>78</sup> “Washington Draws India in against China,” *People’s Daily*, 07 July 2005, available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200507/07/eng20050707\\_194676.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200507/07/eng20050707_194676.html), accessed on 27 April 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Chien-min Chao and Chih-Chia Hsu, “The Worldviews of Chinese Leadership and Sino–U.S. Relations,” in Suisheng Zhao (ed.), *China and the United States: Cooperation and Competition in Northeast Asia* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 88-89.

party”, but a “ruling party”.<sup>80</sup> China’s preference to not to involve itself openly or officially rather pursue a sub-conventional war strategy was for few obvious reasons.

Firstly, China came to the conclusion that in achieving its aim of “building indirect threats to India” it was better to “use Pakistan, India’s main adversary, as a frontline surrogate.”<sup>81</sup> Beijing and Islamabad shared the same objective, but only differed in the methodology: if you can do it by proxy, then avoid direct involvement. This was considered to be a viable low cost option. China thought “India’s definition of national security is confined to the traditional spheres of military and territorial security”<sup>82</sup> and the window of non-traditional security threats was considered left wide open for exploitation. This is when the importance of India’s Northeast region and its militant groups in the large schema of China’s foreign and security policy received emphasis. As one scholar observed,

The main objective in extending support to insurgent and other divisive activities is to dismember India along the fault lines. Since the region lies at the extreme periphery (political, economic and cultural), it has been considered as a soft target all along. Even if dismemberment is not possible, the purpose is at least to bleed the Indian military machine and its economy to the maximum possible extent that will considerably weaken the Indian state.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This was subsequently clarified in 2002 at the 16<sup>th</sup> CPC Congress by Jiang as “Three Represents”: that the CPC should represent the most advanced culture, advanced relations of production, and the interests of the broad masses of people.

<sup>81</sup> V. K. Nayar, “India’s Internal Security Compulsions,” in Planning Commission, *India – 2025* (Planning Commission: New Delhi, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> Li Li, “India’s Security Concept and Its China Policy in the Post-Cold War Era,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2008, p. 230.

<sup>83</sup> Gurudas Das, “India’s North-East Soft Underbelly: Strategic Vulnerability and Security,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 26, Issue 4, 2002, p. 537.

Reflecting this view, an article by Zhan Lue titled “If China takes a little action, the so-called Great Indian Federation can be broken up” argued that “China in its own interest and the progress of Asia, should join forces with different nationalities like the Assamese, Tamils, and Kashmiris and support the latter in establishing independent nation-states of their own, out of India.”<sup>84</sup> Even if one could dismiss this as a private view of some “nationalist Chinese bloggers”, one cannot miss the line of thinking that China could employ a strategy of “murdering with borrowed knives” against India.<sup>85</sup> The article did not go unnoticed by Indian secessionist groups and had an impact on their thinking.<sup>86</sup> The rebels of the Northeast, apart from their nuisance value to the Indian security forces deployed in the region, are also amenable to motivation by the Chinese to attack key Tibetan leaders in exile based in India<sup>87</sup>, and to gather vital intelligence information about Indian long-range missiles that are directed towards China and troop deployments along India-China borders.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> D. S. Rajan, “China Should break up the Indian Union, suggests a Chinese Strategist,” Chennai Centre for Strategic Studies, Paper No. 325, 09 August 2009, available at <http://www.c3sindia.org/india/719>, accessed on 04 April 2012. The website [www.iiss.cn](http://www.iiss.cn) where the said article in Chinese language reportedly appeared does not exist now.

<sup>85</sup> “China's India policy: Murder with borrowed knives,” *The Economic Times*, 12 August 2009.

<sup>86</sup> For instance, National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) chief, Ranjan Daimary alias D. R. Nabla, in his appeal to China, asked “to consider and take immediate action on the basis of recommendations of Zhan Lue.” Speech of D. R. Nabla on the occasion of 23<sup>rd</sup> Founding Anniversary of NDFB, 03 October 2009. Full text of the speech is available at <http://www.nagalim.nl/news/archive-102009.html>, accessed on 26 June 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Subir Bhaumik, “China Starts Backing India's North-East Rebels,” 11 September 2009, available at <http://subirbhowmikscolumn.blogspot.in/2009/09/china-starts-backing-indias-north-east.html>, accessed on 15 February 2012.

<sup>88</sup> This was established after an examination of the laptop of Ningombam Dilip alias Ibochou, an UNLF leader, who was arrested in Guwahati on 07 September 2010. See Nishit Dholabhai, “‘Missile spy’ slur on Northeast rebels,” *The Telegraph*, 31 January 2011.

Secondly, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US inevitably had a strong impact on China, both in terms of its domestic politics and its foreign policy initiatives. Despite an uneasy bilateral relationship, Beijing readily supported Washington's call for anti-terrorist cooperation and responsive action, including the adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution that condemned the terrorist attacks, and calling on all states to take measures to combat and prevent terrorist activities and organisations.<sup>89</sup> It immediately sent a team of 32 anti-terrorist experts to the US for intelligence sharing about the Taliban/al-Qaeda, and closed the Sino-Afghan and Sino-Pakistan borders to restrict the movement of leaders and followers of Taliban and Al Qaeda into China.<sup>90</sup> The Chinese readiness to cooperate emanated from its overwhelming concerns on insurgency in Muslim-dominated Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.<sup>91</sup> The event offered an opportunity to China to showcase to the West, which until then took notice of the problem from the perspective of "human rights and religious freedom", "the composition of the Uighur resistance movements in Xinjiang and how they operate in and around the Sino-Russian-Central Asian Corridor" and its links with Islamic groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Jamaat-i-Islami, Tableegi Jamaat, Taliban and Al Qaeda.<sup>92</sup> The Chinese did not hesitate to call the Uighur separatists as "a faction in the international terrorist movement."<sup>93</sup> In a

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<sup>89</sup> See U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1368, 1373, 1378, 1386 (2001), 1390, and 1441 (2002).

<sup>90</sup> You Ji, "China's Post 9/11 Terrorism Strategy," The James Town Foundation, *China Brief*, Vol. 4, Issue 8, 14 April 2004.

<sup>91</sup> Situated in the northwestern part of China, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is the largest province of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and is the homeland of the Uighur people, a Turkic Muslim ethnic group. The two main Uighur Separatist groups are the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the East Turkistan Liberation Organisation (ETLO), whose aim was to establish an independent Turkic state of East Turkistan under ethnic Uighur control.

<sup>92</sup> Dewardric L. McNeal, "China's Relations with Central Asian States and Problems with Terrorism," *CRS Report for Congress*, 17 December 2001.

<sup>93</sup> See the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue's statement dated 23 November 2001, available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200111/22/eng20011122\\_85127.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200111/22/eng20011122_85127.shtml), accessed on 01 March 2012.

first official document on the issue released by the Chinese Information Office of the State Council on 21 January 2002 titled “‘East Turkistan’ Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity”, Beijing called “all peace-loving people throughout the world, regardless of ethnic status or religious belief, region or country, political or social system” to “jointly crackdown on their terrorist activities, leaving not a single opportunity for them to exploit to their advantage.”<sup>94</sup>

This strategy worked to the benefit of China when the Bush Administration included the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in its official list of ‘Other Selected Terrorist Organizations’ in September 2002.<sup>95</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that much before 9/11, China had realised that international terrorism was an emerging threat to regional stability and that international cooperation was essential in combating the “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism and extremism. This, in fact, formed the motivation for the development of Shanghai Five in 1996 and later, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001.<sup>96</sup> But, its covert support to Northeast Indian militant groups defied this logic. To be fair to the Chinese, however, following 9/11, Beijing prevailed on arms companies like NORINCO to curb sales of arms to militant groups for brief period.

Thirdly, starting from 2002, the “Fourth Generation” leadership of China, dominated by technocrats, took over the reins of power in Beijing who were considered to be more pragmatic than their revolutionary predecessors. By establishing a National Security Leading Group, China

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<sup>94</sup> The full text of the document is available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200201/21/eng20020121\\_89078.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200201/21/eng20020121_89078.shtml), accessed on 29 February 2012.

<sup>95</sup> Designated under EO 13224 as “a supporter of terrorist activity”, the list mentions that the “ETIM has received training and financial assistance from al-Qa’ida.”

<sup>96</sup> James P. Muldoon, Jr., “The Impact Of 9/11 On Chinese Regional Security Cooperation,” *China Brief* (of the Jamestown Foundation), Vol. 4, Issue 12, 31 December 1969.

made its foreign and security policy decision-making process more decentralised rather than simply depending on the whims and fancies of one particular individual or faction at the helm. During Mao's period, while the government conducted normal diplomatic relations, the CPC involved itself in supporting leftist insurgencies. In the present phase, Chinese intelligence agencies have taken over the role of Mao's CPC. Chinese intelligence, in a matter of pragmatic maneuvering, "sends agents to meet with rebels to assess the ground realities and needs of its anti-Indian clients and likely forwards them discarded arms stock as the People's Liberation Army continues to modernize in a bid to raise China's military stature in the Asian realm."<sup>97</sup> However, one has to wait to see how the "Fifth Generation" leadership is going to handle the issue.<sup>98</sup>

China's role in India's internal security threats in this phase has been wide-ranging: clandestine support to militant groups, no objection to Indian insurgent leaders taking asylum in its territory, turning a blind eye to Chinese arms flows into India and conducting cyber warfare.

It went on to revive its contacts with old militant groups like NSCN and PLA, and extended support to newer groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF). After the crackdown on anti-India militant groups by the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina

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<sup>97</sup> Derek Henry Flood, "India coy over 'Chinese spy'," *Asia Times Online*, 04 February 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Xi Jinping, tipped as the next President of China, observed during his visit to Mexico in 2009, "Some foreigners with full bellies and nothing better to do engage in finger-pointing at us.... First, China does not export revolution; second, it does not export famine and poverty; and third, it does not mess around with you. So what else is there to say?"

in Bangladesh, ULFA's military chief Paresh Barua fled to China in early 2009.<sup>99</sup> This implies that the Chinese-ULFA connections had prevailed much before this development. According to Bertil Lintner, in the mid 1990s, "ULFA units trekked through northern Burma to the Sino-Burmese border areas and even opened an unofficial 'office' in the Chinese frontier town of Ruili", and "managed to buy weapons from Chinese dealers as well as former rebel groups that also had made peace with the Burmese government."<sup>100</sup> Barua had allegedly based himself in Yunnan and guided the operations of the ULFA, although a section of the militant group under Arabinda Rajkhowa was in negotiations with the Government of India. The "anti-talk faction" of Paresh Barua has been procuring Chinese assistance in the form of arms transfers and training to its cadres. To please his new hosts, Barua had issued statements like "With government of India preparing to install BrahMos cruise missile in Nagaland and Akash missile in Assam targeting China, the Northeastern region including Assam will become the target of Red China thereby jeopardising lives of the people of the region" and appealing to the people of Assam to "resist India army from stockpiling missiles and aircrafts thereby converting it to a target of powerful China."<sup>101</sup> According to a China watcher, "Beijing doesn't mind him [Paresh Barua] being there, as a tit-for-tat for India allowing the Dalai Lama to have a base in McLeodganj."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> "ULFA commander Paresh Barua moves to China," *The Indian Express*, 01 June 2009. This was confirmed later by the former Home Secretary of India, G. K. Pillai, at a seminar in Guwahati held on 14 February 2012. He observed: "Now Barua is shuttling between the jungles of Yunnan province in China and Myanmar.... We have even provided a copy of Barua's air ticket from Dhaka to Yunnan. But, as usual, China has been denying Barua's presence in its territory." See "Paresh desperate for funds: G. K. Pillai," *The Times of India*, 14 February 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Bertil Lintner, "Northeast India: Boiling Pot of International Rivalry – Part I," *YaleGlobal*, 17 February 2010.

<sup>101</sup> "Paresh Baruah flays India for installing missiles in NE," *Rediff News*, 26 March 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Bertil Lintner by Surajit Talukdar, 01 November 2011, available at <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-china-shelters-ulfa-leader-as-reply-to-dalai-lamas-base-in-india/20111101.htm>, accessed on 17 November 2011.

The linkages between NSCN (IM) and China reflected a continuity the extent that the militant group hosted a permanent representative, Kholose Swu Sumi, in China as the regular interface. According to Antony Shimray, the chief arms procurer of the NSCN (IM), who frequently travelled to China for the purpose, the Chinese suggested that the north-eastern guerillas came together under one organisation to facilitate better interaction.<sup>103</sup> The Manipur-based People's Liberation Army (PLA) was in charge of evolving a 'United Front' that would be a "conglomerate of militant groups comprising cadre strength of over 30,000 militants."<sup>104</sup> The Chinese intelligence (People's Security Bureau), apart from liaising with the leadership of anti-Indian militant groups based in its territory, also sends agents to meet with rebels to assess the ground realities and their needs.<sup>105</sup> The NSCN (IM) has maintained a permanent representative, "Col" Gholose Swu Sumi ever since 2007 to liaise with the Chinese Intelligence agents in Yunnan province of China, principally for arms procurement.<sup>106</sup> The direct involvement of the Chinese intelligence agents came to the fore with the arrest of a 39-year-old Chinese woman, Wang Qing, for travelling illegally to Nagaland and meeting NSCN leader Muivah there.<sup>107</sup> Wang had arrived in Delhi on 01 January 2011 posing as an employee of a Chinese timber

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<sup>103</sup> Sandeep Unnithan, "Gunrunners of North-East," *India Today*, 28 May 2011.

<sup>104</sup> Ajai Sahni, "Good and Bad News from the Northeast," *Outlook*, 28 March 2012. Two 'fronts' of Northeast militant groups are reported: one being United Indo-Burma Liberation Front consisting of ULFA, NSCN (K), UNLF, KNA, and KCP; and the other is United Self Defence-Southeast Himalay Region comprising NSCN (IM), NDFB, NLFT, KYKL, HNLC and ANVC. However, there is no unity between these two groups.

<sup>105</sup> Derek Henry Flood, "India coy over 'Chinese spy'," *Asia Times Online*, 04 February 2011.

<sup>106</sup> The other tasks entrusted to Gholose were to keep an eye on Manipuri rebel groups based in northern Myanmar and to develop rapport with Myamarese rebel groups in the 'Kachin Corridor' for smooth transfer of weapons through land route.

<sup>107</sup> "Chinese 'spy' detained but deported without noise," *The Telegraph*, 25 January 2011.

company but, later travelled without permission to Nagaland and met Muivah at NSCN (IM) headquarters in Hebron under the guise of a Hong Kong-based TV reporter.

On the issue of arms flow from China, Kanwal Sibal, former foreign secretary of India, pertinently noted, “a lot of arms are flowing from China into Myanmar and other countries in the region, but it’s difficult to judge whether the Chinese authorities are behind such activities.”<sup>108</sup> At the same time, it is difficult to believe that Beijing is totally unaware of the arms flows to Indian insurgent groups from its borders. The problem is China’s opaque system that makes it hard to determine whether arms flows are instigated by companies operating outside the control of Beijing, or the rogue elements in China’s military and intelligence services, or the decision-makers in Beijing. NSCN (IM) leader T. Muivah himself admitted arms flow from China to the militant group.<sup>109</sup> The confessions by Antony Shimray threw further light on the arms links subject and it was discerned that arms and ammunition were procured from Chinese arms companies like China Xinshidai<sup>110</sup> and NORINCO (China North Industries Corporation)<sup>111</sup>, and transported in small consignments either through sea route and were delivered at Cox’s Bazar or

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<sup>108</sup> Kanwal Sibal, Quoted in Pranay Sharma, “A Mandarin Riddle,” *Outlook*, 07 February 2011.

<sup>109</sup> The Rediff Interview/NSCN (I-M) General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, January 25, 2001, [www.rediff.com/news/2001/jun/25inter.htm](http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/jun/25inter.htm).

<sup>110</sup> The company claims itself as “an independent legal entity with the approval of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China and the Central Military Commission.” It deals with explosives like TNT, HMX, and PETN and also communication devices. For more details, see <http://www.xsd.com.cn/EN/aboutus.asp>

<sup>111</sup> According to NORINCO website ([www.norinco.com](http://www.norinco.com)), “NORINCO has been ranked among the forefront of China’s 500 largest state-owned enterprises in terms of total assets and revenue.” It claims “development of updated high-tech defense products” like “precision strike systems, amphibious assault weapons and equipment, long-range suppression weapon systems, anti-aircraft & anti-missile systems, information & night vision products, highly effective destruction systems, anti-terrorism & anti-riot equipment as well as small arms.” Interestingly, it also claims to “uphold the spirit of collaboration, trying to realize win-win through internal and external collaboration.” For details about NORINCO, see <http://www.norinco.com/c1024/english/aboutnorinco/index.html>, accessed on 10 July 2012.

transited by land through Myanmar.<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, the United States Department of State imposed sanctions on both NORINCO and Xinshidai in 2003 and 2004 respectively, “for material contributions to missile technology proliferation in a publicly unnamed country.”<sup>113</sup> According to a *Jane's Intelligence* report, the arms transfers through Myanmar were facilitated by the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a Myanmarese militant group. The UWSA has found it lucrative to act as an intermediary.<sup>114</sup> For trans-shipment through the sea corridors, Southeast Asian gun-runners are used and militant groups like ULFA “use their own trawlers for re-shipment of arms at the outer harbour and ferrying them to the Chittagong coast for their own safety and security.”<sup>115</sup> The list of goods included ammunition rounds, AK series rifles, M16 automatic assault rifles, sub-machine guns, pistols, snipers, rocket propelled grenade launchers, light machine guns and even RDX.<sup>116</sup>

While examining Chinese links with the Indian Maoists, it is pertinent to understand China's outlook towards Maoist groups of South Asia. For instance, till 2006 China had dubbed the Nepali Maoists as an “anti-government guerilla group” and pronounced, “This group [Nepal Maoists] had nothing to do with China, and we felt indignant that they usurped the name of Mao

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<sup>112</sup> Response at Rajya Sabha by Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs, Mullappally Ramachandran, Unstarred Question No 1610, 07 December 2011.

<sup>113</sup> Under E.O. 12938 (amended by E.O. 13094) dated 23 May 2003 for NORINCO and dated 20 September 2004 for Xinshidai. The list is available at <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/c15233.htm>, accessed on 23 July 2012. But the sanctions expired in 2006.

<sup>114</sup> According to Jane's a Chinese automatic rifle that is available for US \$ 500 in eastern Myanmar can be sold at US \$ 2,500 in Northeast.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Anthony Davis, representative of Asia Region of Jane's Intelligence Review (JIR), reproduced in *The Daily Star* (Dhaka), 08 March 2009.

<sup>116</sup> Saikat Datta, “The Great Claw of China,” *Outlook*, 07 February 2011.

Zedong, the great leader of the Chinese people.”<sup>117</sup> However, when CPN (Maoists) entered into the political mainstream with a majority to form the government in 2008, pragmatism dictated Beijing to establish contacts with the group. Similarly, China may be waiting for Indian Maoists to gain grounds in achieving their objective of capturing state power in India.<sup>118</sup> Although there is no evidence to suggest China's direct support to Indian Maoists, one cannot deny indirect or, more precisely, ‘passive’ links between the two. It is known that Naxals have good network with several key militant groups of the Northeast India. In fact, with some groups, the exact modalities of working – formal, semi-formal and informal – are spelled out through a “memoranda of understanding”.<sup>119</sup> The Naxals get arms and training from the Northeast militant groups like National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Prepak), Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), Gorkha Liberation Tiger Force (GLTF), Gurkha Liberation Organisation (GLO), Adibasi National Liberation Army and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Chinese small arms find their way to the ‘Red Corridor’ mainly through these militant groups.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Kong Quan's Press Conference, 03 February 2005, Available at <http://toronto.china-consulate.org/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzdh/t182609.htm>, accessed on 14 November 2011.

<sup>118</sup> D. S. Rajan, “China: Signs of Attention to the Communist Party of India (Maoists),” South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 3280, 28 June 2009, available at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers33%5Cpaper3280.html>, accessed on 04 November 2011.

<sup>119</sup> “PLA, Naxals signed MoU in 2008 for fighting govt. cops,” *The Indian Express*, 02 April 2012.

<sup>120</sup> “Security forces recover Chinese arms from Naxals, militants,” *Daily News & Analysis*, 16 November 2009.

The Maoists' strategy is to expand through mergers and networking with like-minded revolutionary organisations to "fight against the common enemy: Imperialism".<sup>121</sup> They call this as the "second wave" (the "first wave" was said to have begun with the Russian Revolution under Lenin and ended with the Cultural Revolution in China under Mao). They have clearly stated that it is "part of our policy to have relations with all communists and nationality struggles."<sup>122</sup> They opine that the CPI (Maoist) is part of World Proletariat Revolution and is not independent. If it succeeds, then one part of the revolutionary world would succeed. It would work as a part of the World Socialist Revolution and is strictly related to its success or failure. At the same time, more working class struggles in the imperialist/capitalist countries will have a favorable impact on Indian revolution. They are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, "it is important for the success of the Indian revolution as an inseparable part of great world socialist revolution to actively defend Maoism, fight imperialism and support the class struggle throughout the world and also take the support of the International Maoist Parties/Organizations/Forces, proletariat and people."<sup>123</sup> It is for this purpose, they maintain fraternal relations with Maoist and anti-imperialist forces and firmly believe that it is both, important to extend help as well as take international help for the success of any revolution but because of the ongoing repression the relations are maintained through several umbrella organisations that exist at regional and global levels. Some suggest that "ultra-leftist elements" in the People's Republic of China (PRC) (like for instance 'Mao Zedong Flag Net Executive Council'), claiming absolute loyalty to Mao

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with Mupalla Lakshmana Rao alias Ganapathy, 07 October 1998, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/07gana.htm>, accessed on 26 April 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Ganapathy, the General Secretary of the CPI (Maoists), by Jan Myrdal and Gautam Navlakha, January 2010, <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Interviews/Ganapathy-Myrdal-100100.pdf>, accessed on 20 April 2011.

Zedong and firmly against the present Chinese regime's reformist course at home and abroad, are in favour of supporting Maoist groups in India and Nepal.<sup>124</sup>

In addition, in the current phase, Beijing has gone beyond the traditional mode of support to Indian insurgencies and tried to explore cyber space in pursuing its strategy of waging a sub-conventional war against India. There cannot be a better low cost option with greater sophistication than the cyber domain. Cyber warfare has turned out to be one of the serious threats to Indian security. It is, in fact, considered as the "next generation of threats".<sup>125</sup> Much of India's critical infrastructure lies in this 'fifth domain', following land, sea, air and space. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently identified cyber warfare as an "area of emerging concern".<sup>126</sup> Statistically, India has always been among the top five targets of malicious activity on the Internet that ranges from virus, Trojan, malware, identity theft, hacking, cyber stalking, cyber squatting, spamming, email-bombing, email-spoofing, cyber defamation, web defacement, data diddling, web jacking, denial of service attack, key logging and Internet time theft. Threats in the cyber space confronted by India emanate from individual criminal hackers to organised criminal groups, and from terrorist networks to sovereign states.

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<sup>124</sup> D. S. Rajan, "China; Signs of Ultra-Leftist Support to Maoists of India and Nepal," South Asia Analysis Group, Paper no. 1565, 15 October 2005, available at [http://www.saag.org/common/uploaded\\_files/paper1565.html](http://www.saag.org/common/uploaded_files/paper1565.html), accessed on 04 November 2011.

<sup>125</sup> This was noted by Defence Minister A. K. Antony at the Army Commanders' conference held in New Delhi on 19 May 2010. Available at <http://sainiksamachar.nic.in/englisharchives/2010/jun01-10/h3.htm>, accessed on 20 May 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's valedictory address at the seminar on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of National Defence College, 22 October 2010, New Delhi. For full text of the address, see <http://pmindia.nic.in/speeches.htm>

Cyber warfare has evolved as a pillar of Chinese military strategy. In the past decade they have perfected the 'art of cyber war' aimed at "collecting sensitive information, but also on achieving military effects capable of causing economic harm, damaging critical infrastructure, and influencing the outcome of conventional armed conflicts."<sup>127</sup> According to a report by Munk Center for International Studies, University of Toronto, more than 35 sensitive computers belonging to the Indian NSCS, Air Force, the Army's Military Intelligence and Indian missions in Kabul and Moscow were accessed by a Chinese cyber network after they got infected by 'GhostNet.'<sup>128</sup> The methodology adopted by China is simple: use a network of cultivated and loosely controlled "patriotic" and mercenary hackers that allows the state to deny responsibility something similar to the method used in the case of small arms.

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<sup>127</sup> Brian M. Mazanec, "The Art of (Cyber) War," *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, No. 16, Spring 2009

<sup>128</sup> Information Warfare Monitor and Shadowserver Foundation, "Shadows in the Cloud: Investigating Cyber Espionage 2.0," 06 April 2010, available at <http://www.nartv.org/mirror/shadows-in-the-cloud.pdf>, accessed on 04 November 2011.

## CONCLUSION

Twenty-first-century India faces multitude of security challenges. At the core of India's security concerns is its 'internal security' – a major national security challenge.<sup>129</sup> Among many imponderable factors of India's security calculus, internal security is regarded as one of the principal underlying aspects.<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, there is a blurring distinction between internal and external threats.<sup>131</sup> Some go to the extent of arguing that "India does not face an external threat in the conventional sense" but only internal security threats from external sources.<sup>132</sup> These external sources, consisting of both state and non-state actors, combined with those anti-state forces within India, have made the situation more complex on a daily scale. Very few countries in the world are placed in such an unfavourable, troubled and uncertain security environment as India. External sources of threats to India's internal security spring from almost all countries of its neighbourhood; China is not an exception.

There are several findings that have been determined in the examination of China's involvement in India's internal security threats encapsulated below:

- It is generally understood that the 'spirit of revolution' during Mao's period was high, and Mao's China indiscriminately exported and supported revolutions abroad. This is not fully

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<sup>129</sup> In Kautilya's 'mandala' conception, a ruler conceives of security in a series of concentric circles around his/her domestic realm. At the core is 'internal security'; in the next circle, there are neighbours; and in the outermost circle, distant great powers. Any security strategy has to deal with these three circles.

<sup>130</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's speech at the Chief Minister's conference, New Delhi, 06 January 2009. Full text of the speech is available at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=747>, accessed on 04 July 2012.

<sup>131</sup> N. S. Sisodia, "Effective Policing for National Security," [http://commoncause.in/whatsNew/EffectivePolicingforNationalSecurityN\\_S\\_Sisodia.pdf](http://commoncause.in/whatsNew/EffectivePolicingforNationalSecurityN_S_Sisodia.pdf), accessed on 10 November 2010.

<sup>132</sup> Interaction with Mr K. Subrahmanyam, New Delhi, 16 March 2010.

true. Even when Mao was alive, “national interest” and “diplomatic needs” were given preference over “revolution” per se. For instance, Beijing disregarded the Leftist revolution in Ceylon and Bangladesh in 1971, considering good diplomatic relations with the governments of Ceylon and Pakistan to be more favourable. Similarly, China faced criticism from the World Communist Movement on the count of an “opportunistic betrayal” in 1971 and for maintaining strong relations with the then Sudanese government that had ruthlessly suppressed the Communists.<sup>133</sup>

In the Indian case, “revolution” was not the motivation for China's involvement. In fact, most of the insurgent groups in the Northeast with Chinese connections are ethnic nationalists rather than leftists, although some of the militant groups like Manipur's PLA are Left-leaning. Most leaders of these separatist or autonomist movements were comfortable in using the Maoist tactics of guerrilla warfare, but generally ignored its political ideology. The Mizo National Front pointedly refused to use Maoist rhetoric even though hundreds of its guerrillas were trained in China. Interestingly, China's involvement in the Naxal struggle was more of inspirational than any form of direct material support, although, in the recent phase there is an indirect support mechanism exists via militant groups of the Northeast.

One should note that in the 1950s revolutionary Communist parties in various countries of Southeast Asia were mostly staffed by ethnic Chinese. This led to the perception that Chinese as a whole were a ‘fifth column’ of Communist revolution in the region. Such a ‘fifth column’ was not available in India, although some of the Northeast militant groups

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<sup>133</sup> Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, “Peking's Support of Insurgencies in Southeast Asia,” RSS No. 0065/73, April 1973. p. ii.

tried to project the aspect of “Mongolian” stock to China.<sup>134</sup> China was conscious of this stark difference.

- While the policy of deliberate “stimulation” to insurgents of Southeast Asia included an entire range of methods of practical support, China’s support to Indian militant groups was not comprehensive. In Burma and Thailand, the PLA at times undertook command and operational roles, apart from indulging in anti-government propaganda through China-based “insurgent” radio stations and hospitals to treat the injured militants.<sup>135</sup> To the Indian militant groups, Chinese support was limited to training, arms and funding to some extent. While the Chinese effectively transformed the Viet Minh from elusive bands of guerrillas into a formidable conventional army,<sup>136</sup> the Indian militant groups were largely left on their own.
- To serve its national interests, China not only supported insurgencies abroad, but interestingly also did the reverse. When it found the Malacca Straits sea route to be circuitous and cumbersome to get its supplies, it explored an alternative route through Myanmar. China tried convening in Kunming the leaders of various armed Burmese ethnic groups to press them to consider disarming and enter into political negotiations with the Burmese government. Beijing had wanted a peaceful Myanmar for its trade and transit. But in the Indian case, it did not do anything like that because China would not have achieved much in

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<sup>134</sup> In his letter to Chinese leaders, Kughato Sukhai, the self-styled Naga prime minister, wrote on 29 May 1963 requesting them to “honour and follow their principle of safeguarding and upholding the cause of any suppressed nation of Mongolian stock”. Quoted in Ajit Doval, “Remote Control Rebels,” *Outlook*, 07 February 2011.

<sup>135</sup> Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, “Peking’s Support of Insurgencies in Southeast Asia,” RSS No. 0065/73, April 1973.

<sup>136</sup> Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (London: Cassell, 2005), pp. 152, 154

a peaceful Northeast of India. On the other hand, it made the case for the formation of a 'United Front' of northeast militant groups for easy handling.

- The initiative for Chinese involvement had come at the behest of the Northeast militants groups. The Nagas approached Beijing first and China made the best use of this opportunity. Other groups like MNF, ULFA, PLA, ATTF and NDFB followed suit. However, it is difficult to say that the linkages were unilateral, but a relationship of convenience and an alliance of opportunism between China and Indian militant groups.
- The involvement of China depended on the character of the leadership and internal developments of China. While Mao had enthusiastically favoured China's export and support of "revolutions" abroad, Deng Xiaoping, through his policy of "reform and opening" subordinated the revolutionary and anti-imperialist elements of China's foreign policy in favour of economic development. The dynamics of involvement reflected the characteristics of 'Third' and 'Fourth' Generation leadership as well. The role was subtle.
- China's involvement was equally based on the level of bilateral ties. In general, if the state-to-state relations were good, China did not support insurgencies against that country. But, Beijing's involvement increased as and when bilateral relations soured. With India, initially, China conducted its relations under the framework of 'Panchsheel' in which a policy of assurance against subversion was also included which did encounter a turnaround in the late-1950s. China was initially involved in the Northeast insurgencies during Mao's period in the 1960s and 1970s. Bilateral relations were low during this phase. When bilateral ties improved in the late 1970s and 1980s (roughly coterminous with Deng's period), the level of Chinese support to Indian militant groups dwindled. At the same time, one cannot assert that

the Chinese fully abstained from their involvement during Deng's period; the meddling continued throughout, but with less intensity.

- In that case, did dwindling Chinese support encourage peace process in the Northeast? In other words, is there a direct coincidence between Chinese involvement and rise and fall of militancy in the region? External support is an important aspect of sustenance of militant groups of India. Loss of external assistance has indeed forced some of the militant groups like MNF, NSCN and ULFA to the negotiating table. When Chinese support was marginal, as was in the late 1970s and 1980s, there was stability in the region.
- The Northeastern militants preferred to obtain sanctuary in geographical proximity: East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. China was the preferred choice for sophisticated arms, diplomatic support, and sanctuary only when all proximate sanctuaries dried up. It is, therefore, important for India to secure the full cooperation from its neighbours. The security forces in these countries are now willing to take on the Indian militant groups based in their territories but, they are not strong enough to withhold them. Thus, India has to provide training, arms and other requisite resources to bolster these initiatives.
- In general, externally-trained militants are more hardened, fight better and less amenable to negotiated settlement. This applied to the Indian militants trained either in Pakistan or China too. The China-trained militants obtained a more of leftist ideological orientation. The dynamics of Northeast militancy would have been different had Laldenga gone to China for training and got its support and had Muivah and Swu not gone to China and sought its help? In this context, Paresh Barua's presence in China now is of grave concern.

- Of the three phases, the present phase is the most dangerous one because of the diversified range of China's involvement: arms, offer of sanctuary to Indian militant leaders and cyber warfare. Earlier China was supporting insurgent groups, especially those based in the Northeast. But, now China has been adopting the more 'Pakistani Model' by using its Intelligence agencies in the sub-conventional war strategy. In the recent phase, the role is much more subtle, but broad-based to avoid international attention and the consequent stigma. Most importantly, it provided China with the 'plausible deniability' factor. Furthermore, China's interest in utilizing the cyber space against India is more than as a mere tool of espionage.
- In comparison to Pakistan, China poses a lesser threat to India's internal security. But the nexus between China and Pakistan aimed at achieving the larger strategic objective of undermining India's growth is grave. At the tactical level, the aim of China and Pakistan is to tie down Indian security forces in counter-insurgency operations and weaken its conventional warfare potential.
- What has been the Indian response to Chinese involvement in its internal affairs? From time-to-time, India has brought up the issue of China's involvement with Beijing both diplomatically and under the aegis of counter-terror cooperation. However, China has categorically denied giving any help to insurgent groups, particularly the ULFA, UNLF, NSCN (I-M) and PLA.<sup>137</sup> The surprising fact is the low level of confidence on which the issue is raised and discussed with the Chinese. India's official position on the entire gamut of

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<sup>137</sup> "China helps NE groups with arms," *Hindustan Times*, 16 September 2011.

China's involvement has been soft.<sup>138</sup> It is acceptable that any analysis and assessment on the level and scope of China's involvement should be after careful scrutiny based on the long-term interests of building a stable relationship between the two countries. Nevertheless, it is pragmatic to aim for a structured mechanism to discuss this issue specifically.

- All possible routes for Chinese interaction and cooperation with the Indian militant groups should be blocked effectively. This requires an enhancement of India's border security and equal cooperation from India's neighbours like Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

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<sup>138</sup> For instance, on the reports of Indian militant groups operating from the Chinese territory, the Ministry of External Affairs has responded by saying, "The presence of Indian insurgent groups in the region and availability of arms to them, has figured in our discussions with our Chinese friends in the past. We also have seen these reports that have appeared in the Indian media in the last few days. We do not, however, have any credible information at our disposal at the moment to comment on it in any manner." See Ministry of External Affairs (India), "Briefing by Secretary (East) on PM's visits to Bali and Singapore," 16 November 2011.

On the availability of Chinese arms to Indian insurgents, the response was "Today, China is the manufacturer of cheapest arms in the world.... There are weapons flowing all over the place. But to say that China is supplying them directly is difficult to establish." On the article that suggested breaking up of India into many pieces, the Indian foreign ministry in a statement clarified that "the article in question appears to be an expression of an individual's opinion and does not accord with the officially-stated position of China on India-China relations conveyed to us on several occasions."

## **Acknowledgements**

*The author profoundly thanks Mr. Ajit Doval, Director, VIF, for his constant guidance. He is grateful to Ms. Nidhi Narain Bhatnagar for editing the manuscript.*



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