

MYANMAR'S SITTWE:

A CASE OF SINO-INDIAN GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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Introduction

Sittwe: A Case Study of Sino-Indian Geopolitical Competition in the Indian Ocean

Both China and India are major powers in the Asia, and their relationship, for better or for worse, has implications for the region. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the competition specific to the development of Indian and Chinese projects at Sittwe, a port in Myanmar. The Indian funding and development of the port at Sittwe intersects with Chinese construction underway to build an oil pipeline that begins at Sittwe and terminates at Kunming in Yunnan province.

This project is particularly useful because while the study of Sino-Indian relations have been gaining traction in US, few have attempted to conduct a more comprehensive analysis on a narrow location in order to extrapolate the direction of Sino-Indian relations. Much of the literature that exists comes in the form of academic articles that either examine one driver in depth (energy security, maritime security) or books that skim over multiple drivers in a discussion of the dynamics in the broader South Asian region.

Coverage of Sittwe is especially scant. The projects that are occurring in Myanmar have only begun construction in the last few years, and were negotiated only a few years before that, so much of the book-based publications do not explicitly account for this. While there has been some coverage from the press, particularly over the Sino-Myanmar Pipeline, no academic source has focused on Sittwe and attempted a more-indepth analysis, from the media standpoint or otherwise, on the implications of Sittwe for Sino-Indian relations. Organizations that study the social and environmental impact of these projects do not compare them to one another, nor do they discuss how these projects are indicative of the direction of Sino-Indian relations.

Thus, an examination of the developments at Sittwe, driven by both India and China interests, could prove useful because it provides a lens to view Sino-Indian relations in Myanmar and throughout the region. This is especially relevant as India and China fund similar development projects in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Thus, an analysis of the evolving situation at Sittwe could demonstrate a more general dynamic that is occurring throughout the Asia-Pacific.

The first chapter covers an outline of the background and the specifics of the projects in Sittwe. Both projects are relatively recent. The Indian proposal to develop Sittwe as a port dates back to 2006, though efforts to move on the project have been delayed to earlier this year because of bureaucratic inefficiencies and increase in estimated costs. The project is estimated to be around \$134 million. Other projects that revolve around Sittwe include the dredging of the river Kalandan for transshipment access from Sittwe to the northeastern Indian states. For the Chinese project, the Sino-Burmese pipeline is to be built under the auspices of a joint agreement by the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) and the Myanma Oil and Gas Company (MOGE). Construction began in 2009, and the estimated costs are \$2.5 billion. Both projects are due to be completed in 2013.

The second chapter looks at the broader reasons for why China and India are converging on Sittwe in particular. Beyond reasons such as energy security or economic gain, this section also examines the notion of the Chinese ‘string of pearls’ and the parallel response of India through the ‘Look East policy’. These policies have resulted in an expansion of their respective spheres of influence, projected by an increase in naval power. The overlapping of their spheres of influence results in the emergence of a security dilemma between India and China, which adds

a significant political dimension to what might be seen as government-funded development projects at Sittwe.

The third chapter examines the projects in Myanmar through a media lens, through a survey of the Chinese, Indian and Singaporean media. The press influences policy-makers and the public, as well as aggregating political and public opinion. Understanding how the national press views the projects at Sittwe are an important part of understanding how each country views the competition between China and India in proxy countries.

The final chapter will examine the implications of the project on Chinese and Indian interests and outline possible directions that Sino-Indian convergence in Myanmar could take in the coming years, given the recent nature of both these projects. What do China and India have to gain or lose by participating in these projects? Given the inherently competitive nature of the political dimension, is there the possibility that China and India will dispute over these projects? Or will the high economic stakes and potential for collaboration open up windows of opportunity for cooperation?

Chapter 1 – Sittwe and the Specifics of the Port Project

A Meeting of Rising Powers in Myanmar: The Port of Sittwe

The port town of Sittwe lies at the center of an injection of development assistance from both India and China. The capital of Rakhine State, Sittwe sits on an estuarial island where the Kaladan, Myu and the Lemyo rivers empty out into the Bay of Bengal, and is located 250km from the Indian border on the northwest coast of Myanmar. Sittwe's confluence of land, river and sea transport, matched with its proximity to the oil- and gas-rich Shwe oil fields, places it in a commercially and strategically important position.



Source: The Pakistan Patriot

Sittwe was formerly known as Akyab under British rule. Initially a sleepy fishing and farming village, it grew in prominence as a center for rice export after British occupation in 1826 after the First Anglo-Burma War. The port benefitted from the British lifting restrictions on trade

placed on it by the Burmese, and after the cession of Arakan by the treaty of Yandaboo in 1926, the seat of government was moved from Myohaung to Akyab on the seacoast. Under the first 40 years of British control, it rapidly grew from a village to a town.¹

In an echo of its colonial past, foreign powers again begin to move on this port town. The strategic location of Sittwe makes it the meeting place of projects that the Indian and the Chinese government are pursuing.

An Outline of the Projects

The Indian government has proposed to build and renovate Sittwe port and dredge the Kaladan river, opening Sittwe up for increased port traffic. The Chinese government is investing large quantities of capital to build two pipelines – one for oil, and one for gas – that will cross Myanmar and terminate in Kunming in Yunnan Province. The oil pipeline is slated for construction at Sittwe, while the gas pipeline will begin at Kyaukphyu, which is a relatively short distance from Sittwe.² These are two of the many projects in Myanmar sponsored by the Indians and the Chinese, who have signaled their willingness to fund all or significant portions of these projects.

The Indian Port Project

The Indian proposal to renovate Sittwe port dates back to 2004, with concrete proposals initially floated in 2006. This project was endorsed by the Indian government in the 2007 high level talks between India and Myanmar. The hope for the port was to facilitate access to the

¹"Sittwe." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online.* Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011. Web. 23 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/546867/Sittwe>>.

² Bo Kong. "The Geopolitics of the Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipelines," in *Pipeline Politics in Asia: The Intersection of Demand, Energy Markets, and Supply Routes.* Edward C. Chow and others, National Bureau of Asia Research, September 2010.

north eastern Indian states as well as to boost sea traffic to Indian ports.³ The agreement was finally inked on April 2, 2008.⁴

The construction will proceed under the auspices of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project that is supervised by the Inland Waterways Authority of India.⁵ There are three phases to this project – the first is the renovation of Sittwe port, the second is the dredging and development of the Kaladan River between Sittwe and Kaletwa, and the third is the construction of highway between Kaletwa and the Mizoram border to support this development. This project is being piloted and funded by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, with the Government of the Union of Myanmar providing the land and security for Indian workers, and with the Indian government paying US\$110 million and loaning a further US\$10 million.⁶

However, this project has met with several setbacks. The costs of the project were underestimated, with the 2008 proposal of US\$120 million being revised to US\$134 million in 2010.⁷ Moreover, the project has been slow in completing the bidding process, and there was a reduction in the budgetary allocation because of this.⁸

³ “India to revamp Sittwe Port.” Burma News International, 21 February 2007. Accessed at <http://bnionline.net/news/narinjara/1326-india-to-revamp-sittwe-port.html>

⁴ Preliminary Report on Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, Arakan River Network, November 2009. Accessed at http://burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/Preliminary_Report_of_KaladanMulti-Mulda_Transit_Transport_Project%282%29.pdf

⁵ “Invitation for Expression of Interest (EOI) for Shortlisting of Supervision Consultants for Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project, Myanmar.” Inland Waterways Authority of India, Ministry of Shipping, Government of India. 8 March, 2010. Accessed at <http://iwai.gov.in/nit/Shortlistingofsupervisionconsultanthq080310.pdf>

⁶ Preliminary Report on Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, Arakan River Network, November 2009. Accessed at http://burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/Preliminary_Report_of_KaladanMulti-Mulda_Transit_Transport_Project%282%29.pdf

⁷ Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. Arakan Rivers Network. Accessed at: http://www.arakanrivers.net/?page_id=135

⁸ “Kaladan transit project likely to be delayed.” The Assam Tribune, 11 May 2010.



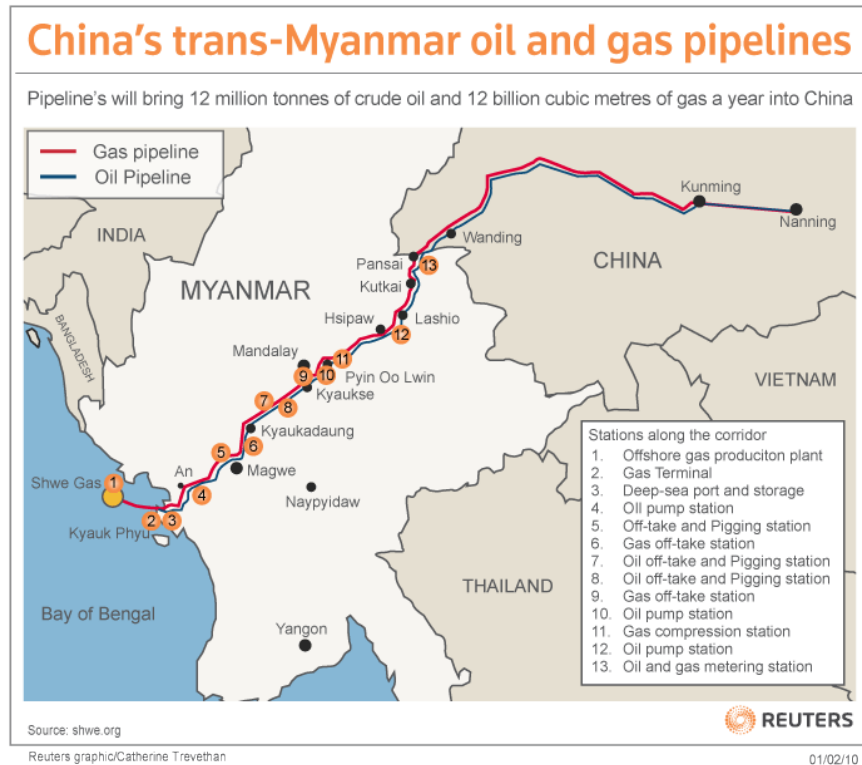
Source: Arakanrivers.net

There have also been a number of revisions to the plan.⁹ Initially, the Indian government wanted to build and operate the Sittwe port for a period of three years. However, given opposition from the Myanmar government, the model has been changed to a “build, transfer, then use” one, where the port would be built by the Indian government then turned over to the Myanmar government. However, it is expected that it will be primarily Indian companies who will use the port in order to access Southeast Asia and to join the landlocked Northeastern India to the sea.

⁹ William Boot, “India Battling China for Influence.” *The Irrawaddy*, 22 February 2008.

The Sino-Myanmar Pipeline

For the Chinese project, the Sino-Myanmar Pipeline is to be built under the auspices of a joint agreement by the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) and the Myanmar Oil and Gas Company (MOGE).¹⁰ This comprises of two pipelines – one for oil and one for gas.



Source: Reuters

For most part, the gas and oil pipelines will run parallel to each other. Both pipelines are designed to carry large quantities of gas and oil across Burma to southwest China. The natural gas pipeline is estimated to be 2800km long, with an annual capacity of 12 billion cubic meters. The oil pipeline to Kunming will be 1100km long, with an annual transport capacity of 22

¹⁰ CNPC in Myanmar. China National Petroleum Corporation. Accessed at: <http://www.cnpc.com.cn/en/cnpcworldwide/myanmar/>

million tons.¹¹ Construction began in late 2009, and the estimated costs are \$2.5 billion. The project is due to be completed in 2013.

The Sino-Myanmar Pipeline, like the Indian project, also is under the auspices of state-to-state diplomatic relations. In June 2009, China's Vice-President Xi Jinping signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Burma's Vice-Senior General Maung Aye relating to the development, operation, and management of 'Myanmar-China Crude Oil Pipeline Projects.'¹² Moreover, the CNPC, as China's largest oil and gas producer, and as one of the three big Chinese oil companies, is strongly linked to the Chinese state.

Conclusions

The projects at Sittwe, while geographically confined to Myanmar, have regional implications for India and China. These regional implications are of great importance to India and China, and elicit government response at the highest level.

Moreover, as the following chapter demonstrates, the development at Sittwe is symptomatic of broader trends that are outcomes of Indian and Chinese domestic policies, as well as the geopolitical interplay between China and India as they bolster their influence in the Indian Ocean. Thus, the projects at Sittwe represent a case study of Sino-Indian relations, set against competing aspirations in the Indian Ocean.

¹¹ "Corridor of Power: China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines", The Shwe Gas Movement, September 2009.

¹² Ibid.

Chapter 2 – Drivers for Chinese and Indian Rapprochement with Myanmar

Introduction

This second chapter looks at the broader drivers for why China and India are converging on Sittwe. China's presence in Sittwe is driven largely by its desire to mitigate the Malacca Dilemma, though both countries are driven by a thirst for natural resources because of their rapid development. India's project hopes to circumvent the border issues faced with Bangladesh in reaching the northeastern states, and to access the markets of Southeast Asia. Moreover, the projects at Sittwe are but part of a broader Sino-Indian diplomatic engagement with Myanmar, which seek to ameliorate security concerns stemming from unstable borders with Myanmar, access to natural gas and other resources, and assist in aspirations for greater influence in the Indian Ocean.

China's Interests in Myanmar

China's Malacca Dilemma

China's energy consumption has increased rapidly in the past decade. Energy-hungry industries such as manufacturing and infrastructure building have arisen as part of China's drive for industrialization. According to the Wall Street Journal, China's energy consumption was half that of the US a decade ago, but has just outstripped the US in June 2010.¹³

The Chinese need for energy is not purely economic. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) derives its political mandate from continued economic growth. Over the past decade, the

¹³ Spenser Swartz and Shai Oster, "China Tops U.S. in Energy Use," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2010.

Chinese government's strategy of high economic growth has quelled dissent from the population.¹⁴ Therefore, there are high political stakes for the continued access to oil.

Moreover, the situation is now more precarious than ever. The Chinese government is a victim of its own successful industrialization policies. A trend of rural-urban migration, driving workers from the underdeveloped western provinces to the coastal zones where industries and factories are popping up has led to a host of social problems. A cap on the continued growth of China by a disruption of its access to energy resources would lead to massive unemployment and the social instability that this entails - issues that China is already facing now.¹⁵ China's foreign policy is held hostage to domestic constraints.

Therefore, China's social stability is intimately linked to the openness of the sea lanes of communication. Most of Chinese oil imports pass through the Malacca Strait, which has long been one of the most important shipping lanes in the world. The narrow strait lies between the Malayan Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, linking the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. The strait provides vital maritime trade to economies that lie divided on either side of the Malayan Peninsula. The narrowness and heavy use of the Strait means that China's rivals with naval power can block this flow, rendering China vulnerable to coercion.¹⁶

US navy superiority and presence in the Asia-Pacific is particularly threatening, and the US and China have had confrontations before, most notably over the Taiwan Straits. The stakes are too high for the Chinese government to trust to the vicissitudes of US-China diplomatic relations. A naval blockade along the Malacca Strait could give the US an edge in a diplomatic

¹⁴ Baogang Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 8, No. 1 & 2 (Fall 2003).

¹⁵ Economist Intelligence Unit, *China Country Report*, July 2010, 14.

¹⁶ David Zweig and Jianhui Bi, "China's Global Hunt for Energy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (Sep. – Oct., 2005): 25 – 36.

faceoff with China. By building oil and gas pipelines that travel overland, China attempts to circumvent the vagaries of its relations with other naval powers.

Diplomatic Returns: China's Border Security and Access to Natural Resources

China's interests in Myanmar come not just by sea, but also from land. China and Myanmar share an extensive and porous land border. This border in the past has allowed for instability within Myanmar to spill over into China. For example, in 2009, more than 30,000 refugees fleeing military clashes in Myanmar crossed the border into Yunnan province, destabilizing the Chinese side of the border.¹⁷

As the Chinese government views the maintenance of stability as paramount, the issue of border security is one of the key issues that are in discussion between Myanmar and China. Moreover, the Chinese government has higher stakes in border security with the ongoing construction of the pipeline. In a meeting between China and Myanmar, the Chinese side sought assurances from Myanmar on securing the stability of the border.¹⁸ Developing closer diplomatic relations through investing in the Sino-Burma Pipeline sets the stage for greater influence over the Myanmar junta.

Just as investment in the pipelines allows the Chinese government greater influence over the Myanmar junta on border security matters, it also allows for continued access to the natural resources that Myanmar possesses. Myanmar is rich in timber, oil and natural gas – all which are in demand by the rapidly industrializing China.

¹⁷ Hannah Beech. "Why Violence Erupted on the China-Burma Border." *Time*, 31 August 2009.

¹⁸ Ben Blanchard. "China gets Myanmar assurances on pipeline, border." *Reuters*, 21 December 2009.

India's Interests in Myanmar

Ensuring a Future Supply of Energy and Natural Resources

The strengthening ties between Myanmar and China prepare China for the acquisition of future natural resources (including oil and gas) from Myanmar, and smoothes the way for other agreements to be forged. Likewise, India faces many of the same issues. India also requires raw materials and energy resources to feed its rapidly growing industries and infrastructure.

Thus, India has been aggressive in acquiring stakes in Myanmar's natural gas fields. India, through ONGC Videsh Ltd. and the Gas Authority of India, has a 30% stake in the A1 and A3 gas reserve blocks near to Sittwe.¹⁹ The bidding process is run through the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, part of the Ministry of Energy, making the process susceptible to political influence. India is thus assisted by the diplomatic efforts by the Ministry of External Affairs to maintain good relations with the military junta.

Border Security

Like China, India also shares a long, porous border with Myanmar. The northeastern states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram share an unfenced border that stretches 1643 km. The area is home to Indian separatists, allowing them to take shelter in Myanmar when the Indian military cracks down on them.

One of India's key security concerns is dealing effectively with these separatists. Thus, India seeks closer security cooperation with Myanmar. Such efforts are closely linked to diplomatic engagement with Myanmar and joint-military cooperation. In 2010, an agreement between India

¹⁹ R.K. Batra, "Natural Gas Pipelines: Myanmar-India gas pipeline: geopolitics, affordability, security dimension" in *India's Energy Security*, ed. Ligia Noronha, Anat Sudarshan, (New York: Routledge, 2009).

and Myanmar allowed Indian forces to cross the Myanmar border in pursuit of terrorists.²⁰ Such an agreement could only be forged through political and economic ties forged through investment on favorable terms such as the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project.

Countering the Chinese “String of Pearls”

India, beyond the direct domestic benefits from good relations with China, also seeks to prevent the strengthening of China in Myanmar through its diplomatic engagement. The increasing geopolitical influence that China wields in South Asia as it builds stronger diplomatic links with India’s neighbors brings Beijing’s influence to India’s doorstep. Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan accept Chinese assistance and development aid; all share land borders with India.

This perceived encirclement is not just by land. Chinese investment in deep-water port construction creates platforms for Chinese naval force projection around India. China has provided military aid to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, building stronger military ties with these countries. Armed with good relations with these countries, China gains a stronger foothold through a “string of pearls” of ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar which lie along the essential sea lanes of communication from the Middle East.²¹

The Chinese “String of Pearls” strategy, described in a U.S. China Commission Report to Congress, is the securing of foreign oil and trade routes critical to Chinese development. This involves building Chinese influence and developing the capability of nations friendly to China

²⁰ “Indian Forces can enter Myanmar chasing terrorists.” IANS, 20 December, 2010.

²¹ Iskander Rehman, “China’s String of Pearls and India’s Enduring Tactical Advantage,” *Institute for Defense Studies & Analyses*, June 8, 2010.

along the sea route from Africa and the Middle East into Pacific-Asia to protect the flow of resources into China.

This is in conjunction with China's rapid modernization, and the expansion of the PLAN boosts their military power. A strong navy enables China to project force into the Indian Ocean, a territory that India believes to be within its sphere of influence. India's fear of a Chinese navy in the Indian Ocean is particularly salient because the past growth of the Indian navy has been slowed by budget undercuts, and has lagged behind China's naval modernization.²² Moreover, India's burgeoning trade with ASEAN bolsters the importance of the sea-lines in its eastern seaboard.²³ and thus China's aspirations to become a "two-ocean" power in the China Seas and Indian Ocean strikes directly at India's energy security.²⁴

The fear of this encirclement is present in at least some section of the Indian security establishment, and as my study on perceptions in the press later in this paper shows, in the Indian media. Indian elites have used the term "concirclement" to capture the perception that China is seeking to both "contain" and "encircle" India by building stronger relations with India's neighbors.²⁵

²² David Scott, "India's Drive for a 'Blue Water' Navy," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2008).

²³ Gurpreet S. Kuranan, "Securing the Maritime Silk Route: Is there a Sino-Indian Confluence," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2006), 89- 103

Also see, Gurpreet S. Khuranan, "Security of maritime energy lifelines: policy imperatives for Indian" in *India's Energy Security*, ed. Ligia Noronha, Anat Sudarshan, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 118

²⁴ Robert D. Kaplan. *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the future of American Power*. (New York: Random House, 2010)

²⁵ Mohan Malik, "Eyeing the Dragon: India's China Debate," *Asia's China Debate*, Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, December 2003.

India's Response: The Look East Policy

Fueled by this perception of encirclement and fear of waning geopolitical influence vis-à-vis China, India has been motivated to “Look East.” The “Look East Policy” was formulated in 1991, and calls for the building of stronger relations with Southeast Asian and East Asian nations. As a result of this policy, India enjoys close diplomatic and economic ties with ASEAN and East Asian countries that have traditionally been wary of China, such as Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.²⁶

Such initiatives that India have taken to grow these ties includes engagement in regional organizations, such as ASEAN and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. India has also focused on building bilateral relations. In a November 2009 memorandum, India strengthened defense ties with Vietnam (a rival claimant to China in the Spratly Islands) by promising to lend its expertise and training to upgrade Vietnam's military capabilities.²⁷

India's navy has also established a strategic command in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. These islands are in close proximity to both Myanmar and Indonesia, and strengthen India's presence in the Bay of Bengal. The command is also not far from the Malacca Strait, giving the Indian navy a key position to engage in counter-piracy initiatives, but also to threaten China's unfettered flow of energy resources through the narrow strait.²⁸

India's project, while not directly dealing with the transfer of oil and gas, facilitates the interconnection of India's landlocked Northeastern states with the rest of India and with

²⁶ C. S. Kuppuswamy, “India's Look East Policy- A Review,” *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 3662, February 12, 2010.

²⁷ P. S. Suryanarayana, “India, Vietnam to extend defence ties,” *The Hindu*, October 14, 2010.

²⁸ R. V. R. Murthy, “*Andaman and Nicobar Islands: a geo-political and strategic perspective*,” (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2007), 161.

Myanmar. Moreover, the port at Sittwe becomes a gateway through which Indian companies can trade with the rest of Southeast Asia. This is in line with the goals of the “Look East Policy” which involves building stronger economic relations with ASEAN nations. Southeast Asia is seen as an untapped market that is ready to take off, and stronger relations with these countries will help generate economic returns for India.

While these projects seem primarily economic in nature, the underlying dynamic is arguably political, and targeted at both domestic and international audiences. China seeks resource and energy security because the political mandate of the Chinese Communist Party’s rule is based on continued high economic growth, though this may be read as a search for power outside its traditional sphere of influence. India’s search for rapprochement with Myanmar and Southeast Asia is at least partly driven by concerns of China’s growing political influence in these countries and fears of “falling behind” China as it grows in economic and political power. The “Look East Policy” can also be read as a means of countermanding growing Chinese influence.

These drivers overlay the economic, domestic-focused aspect of the projects with a more security-oriented, outwards-focused aspect. Sittwe thus becomes an excellent study of the competitive dynamic that emerges as China and India seek stronger relations with smaller countries that lie within their overlapping spheres of influence.

Chapter 3 – Sittwe as a Symbol for Sino-Indian Tensions

Given the previous chapter's discussion of the broad drivers for Chinese and Indian convergence in Myanmar, it is important to discuss how the public, politicians and media perceive these projects. These groups play an important role in determining the direction of Sino-Indian positioning over the projects occurring at Sittwe.

The political and commercial aspects of the development at Sittwe make it a test for whether political or economic aspects are weighted more heavily in the perception and conduct of Sino-Indian relations. If security aspects are paramount, then there should be a more competitive dynamic between Indian and Chinese positions on Sittwe, with each party attempting to negotiate to reduce or limit the stake that the other party has in the location. The dominant perspective from which Sittwe and Myanmar relations would be discussed from statements by the government and the media would be strategic, not commercial. Assistance given to Myanmar and agreements signed should concentrate more on strategic concerns or be aimed at building goodwill with the regime.

On the other hand, if commercial aspects are more important to both the Chinese and the Indians, then there should be a trend for cooperation built around Sittwe and a search to cement the complementary aspects of the port and the pipeline. Statements from the government on the projects and Myanmar will be more conciliatory and stress the economic aspects of the projects. Assistance given from China or India will be chiefly directed towards the building of essential infrastructure necessary for the sustaining of the projects.

Assessing perceptions regarding the Sittwe projects is important. The degree to which perceptions of Sino-Indian stakes in Myanmar are weighed towards either more zero-sum

security concerns or more cooperative economic concerns has important implications for the likelihood of conflict or cooperation in Myanmar.

Methodology

Public opinion can be tricky to gauge. I tracked the publishing of articles relating to the Indian and Chinese projects in Myanmar as reported by national press. This metric helps track mutual perceptions by assuming that the press is an aggregator and shaper of public opinion. Intuitively, the press will report, and include the relevant information in its framing of, news that people are interested in reading or hearing about. Robert Entman's "Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm" discusses framing as that which selects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text. The frame determines "whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it."²⁹ Therefore, how the press frames the ongoing developments in the India-China-Myanmar triangle is a good proxy for domestic opinion.

Because relations go back a long way, I limit my examination to articles released between 2005 and 2010. This time period captures the initial diplomatic interactions and signing of agreements, up to the current day when the construction of the Sino-Burma Pipeline is underway and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport bidders have been finalized. The sources are The Times of India, The Press Trust of India, China Daily and Xinhua General News Agency on visits and speeches relating to Myanmar's developments. I also included the Singaporean English newspaper – the Straits Times - as a media source that is neither Indian nor Chinese. Singapore has relations with both India and China, and its geographical location in the

²⁹ Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Autumn 1993.

waterways that connect the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea places it in a unique position between these two giants.

In the process of gathering data, I used Lexis-Nexis, with the search terms “India / Myanmar” for the Chinese press, “China / Myanmar” for the Indian press, and “China / India / Myanmar” for the Singaporean press with dates. I manually sorted through the entries, discarding entries that did not refer to the development projects in Myanmar. For each press release thus sorted, I categorized the article’s characterization of the other country – whether it was explicitly recognized as a rival. Moreover, I examined whether the article related to political or economic themes (or both) and whether the rivalry or cooperation was characterized in political and/or economic terms. For the Singaporean press, I examined the characterization of India and China’s presence in Myanmar – whether it conforms to perceptions of political or economic rivalry.

Issues with Methodology

A number of issues do exist with this methodology, and I hope to call attention to and address a few of the concerns here.

The first concern lies with the distinction between opinion or editorial pieces, which may be more provocative and draw conclusions about the intent of the other country, and “hard news” (in contrast to “soft news”), which may just provide details on the project. A related concern is the mixing of news wires with newspapers. Xinhua General News Agency and the Press Trust of India are wires, and publish “hard news”. The Straits Times, China Daily and the Times of India tend to also publish analysis and opinion pieces. The inclusion of Chinese and Indian news wires will hopefully provide control for the effect of provocative opinion pieces.

There are also critiques that can be raised separately against either opinion or “hard news” pieces. An opinion piece will usually reflect the opinion of an expert, and may not adequately capture public opinion or political opinion which is much broader. However, in the politics-media-politics model, an opinion piece is indicative of, and influences, political and public opinion. This makes it a useful metric. “Hard news” may lack the easy characterization of Sino-Indian relations. “Hard news”, while certainly more objective, is nonetheless subject to a degree of framing – that is, the inclusion or exclusion of information - which is an editorial decision. Framing introduces the element of opinion into “hard news” that then can be used to take a pulse on mutual perceptions between the two countries.

The second concern related to the usefulness of the chosen sources in gauging public opinion. This critique can be leveled at all of the sources I have selected.

For the Chinese press – given that the press is regulated heavily by the government, examining the press may not prove useful in understanding public opinion. However, the heavy hand of the government ensures that what does go through is reflective of government press policy on Sino-Indian relations in Myanmar. This might suggest a shifting of expectations for an analysis of the Chinese press. A dearth of news from Xinhua or China Daily could reflect either a lack of concern by the government or a control of the press on what might be considered a sensitive issue.

The selection of Indian press faces a completely different problem. While there is much less government control on what is published, there are a multitude of newspapers in India, in an array of different languages. Selecting English newspapers may not adequately take the pulse of broader national perceptions of China, especially if the majority of the population reads Hindi-

only newspapers. Moreover, each newspaper may have an ideological reputation or cater to a certain demographic – this narrows the degree of usefulness an assessment of their articles would play in understanding public opinion.

However, both the Chinese and Indian sources were selected for having high circulations. According to the Indian Readership Survey of 2010, The Times of India has a readership of 71.42 lakhs, or 7.142 million, and is the most widely read English newspaper in India.³⁰ Likewise, the China Daily is China’s national English-language newspaper, with a circulation of 400,000.³¹ The broad circulations of these papers, according to the notion of indexing, could mean that the content or viewpoint put out by these papers would be targeted towards the broadest possible readership. Extreme opinions would be eliminated. This supports the case that these sources would be useful in assessing general public opinion and mutual perceptions.

These problems may also be moderated by the inclusion of The Straits Times, which is regulated for criticism against the Singapore government but tends to report more freely on matters beyond Singaporean shores. The Straits Times also has a vested interest in tracking political and economic developments in the Asia-Pacific, and may report or give analysis on issues that either government, for the sake of diplomatic relations, may avoid.

A third concern relates to purely using press media, when a range of media – such as radio or television – are available and may provide a different and perhaps more nuanced perspective on the presentation of the other country. While a more extensive assessment of

³⁰ Newswatch India, Top 10 English Dailies: Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2010- Quarter 1. Accessed on December 28, 2010. Available at <http://www.newswatch.in/newsblog/7983>.

³¹ China Daily, About China Daily. Accessed on December 28, 2010. Available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cd/introduction.html>.

different media sources may be useful, sourcing for radio and video sources across a five year period prove a significant barrier.

A final concern is that the selection criteria of projects that have economic value (such as the renovation of the port, or the oil and gas pipeline) to India and China for the pool of articles will naturally be tilted towards the economic in the discussion. However, given the broad range of initiatives that China and India cooperate with Myanmar on (such as border security, deflecting international pressure, and foreign aid – among many others), these projects provide a useful way of cutting down the sheer size of the material to be analyzed.

An Examination of the Press

India

The Times of India

Headline	Date	China?		
		Pol	Econ	Rivals?
India defies US, Myanmar project on	December 27, 2010	X	X	Y
MEA fought off US pressure on Myanmar	December 19, 2010	X	X	Y
China plans rail network in SE Asia	December 11, 2010		X	Y
China eyes rail link to Chittagong	September 18, 2010	X		Y
China signals enhanced military ties with Myanmar ahead of elections	August 31, 2010	X		N
Neighbourhood is top priority for Indian foreign policy	August 11, 2010	X		Y

Myanmarese leader's visit to deepen ties with New Delhi	July 26, 2010	X		Y
GAIL eyes 4% in Chinese pipeline, Q3 net trebles	January 19, 2010		X	N
CHINA GETS MORE CONCESSIONS ON PIPELINE TO MYANMAR	December 26, 2009			N
INDIA SHOULD ADOPT A MORE PRACTICAL APPROACH	November 8, 2009	X		Y
GAIL MAY BUY STAKE IN CHINA'S CNPC	September 9, 2009		X	N
CHINA TO BUILD OIL AND GAS PIPELINE TO MYANMAR	June 17, 2009		X	Y
MYANMAR ASKS ONGC, GAIL TO REDUCE STAKE	July 8, 2008		X	N
RAISING BAR CHINA POSES THREAT TO INDIA'S CENTRAL ASIA GAS PLAN	June 26, 2008		X	Y
INDIA TO SIGN TRADE PACT WITH MYANMAR	October 11, 2007		X	N
A FEW LESSONS FROM CHINA	May 11, 2007	X	X	Y
SARAN'S MYANMAR VISIT TO FOCUS ON ECONOMY	June 19, 2006	X	X	Y
INDIA STEPS ON GAS TO BLOCK CHINESE THREAT	June 16, 2006	X	X	Y
GAS PIPELINE MYANMAR TAKES INDIA FOR A RIDE	March 27, 2006		X	N
LOOKING EAST TO COUNTER CHINA	November 28, 2005	X	X	Y
DOES INDIA NEED NEW ENERGY HUBS?	June 13, 2005		X	Y
ENERGY: WHAT IS SECURITY?	February 16, 2005		X	N

SLICK RACE: INDIA, CHINA RACE TO LOP UP OIL RESERVES	February 15, 2005		X	Y
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A review of the Times of India shows that the selected articles cite both economic and political factors. The majority of the articles relate to the Sino-Myanmar Pipeline, and a smaller number of them cite the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport Project. The Indian project is almost always cited as a piece of information to denote growing India-Myanmar ties, while the Chinese project often garners press on its own, or is embedded in articles that discuss China’s search for oil and energy security. This could demonstrate a perception of China as a rival for oil – a perception that is supported by headlines such as “India, China race to lop up oil reserves” and “India steps on gas to block China threat.”

Out of the selected articles, the characterization of an explicit Sino-Indian rivalry was mixed. The articles that do not characterize China and India as rivals are often those that merely report on India-Myanmar relations, such as “Gas Pipeline Myanmar takes India for a ride,” or “Myanmar asks ONGC, GAIL to reduce stake,” or the articles that relate to Indian purchase of Chinese assets (“GAIL may buy stake in China’s CNPC”) with little pointing to China as a player in Sino-Indian relations.

The articles that do explicitly point to a Sino-Indian rivalry often employ the rhetoric of “being pragmatic” in dealing with Myanmar. The argument that they often have is that India cannot afford to have moral scruples about dealing with a military junta that has human rights issues when China has growing influence there (“India defies US; Myanmar project on”). These articles mostly deal with regional energy security analysis and political relations, and often espouse the need to “counter” China (“Looking East to Counter China”).

More interestingly, China is often used in the Times of India articles as a means of criticizing the Indian government in an often paradoxical manner. Indian government decision-making is characterized as slow and bureaucratic, and critics argue that the Indian government should be more like the Chinese government with regard to speedy and efficient decision-making in order to avoid “falling behind” China in the quest for energy resources (“A Few Lessons from China”). On the other hand, the Indian government is also criticized for suspending its democratic ideals to foster better relations with Myanmar (though the selected articles do not reflect this). The rhetoric of pragmatism is a response to this critique (“India should adopt a more practical approach”).

The Press Trust of India

Headline	Date	China?		
		Pol	Econ	Rivals?
China for strengthening of military cooperation with Myanmar	September 8, 2010	X	X	N
Myanmar military leader in Beijing for talks	September 07, 2010	X	X	N
Kapoor leaves for Yangon to hold cooperation talks	October 11, 2009	X		Y
No Chinese military bases in Indian Ocean, says Menon	September 12, 2009	X		Y
OVL may join Chinese gas pipeline from Myanmar	July 14, 2009		X	N
India optimistic of re-opening historic Stilwell road	June 25, 2009		X	N
'India to face gas crisis if Iran pipeline is scrapped'	January 23, 2009		X	Y
China pips India to sign gas deal with Myanmar	December 29, 2008	X	X	Y

India reiterates commitment to economic integration in Asia	December 19, 2008		X	N
China plans to build major oil, gas pipeline across Myanmar	November 19, 2008		X	N
ONGC, GAIL share in Myanmar blocks fall	June 30, 2008		X	Y
Indo-China Relations	June 18, 2008	X	X	Y
India's Defence Diplomacy in South East	March 8, 2008	X	X	Y
Controversies agog oil sector in 2007	December 27, 2007		X	Y
China edges out India from Myanmar gas field	December 5, 2007		X	Y
'India policy towards Myanmar has become obsolete'	November 30, 2007		X	Y
Churnings in Myanmar: Old Dilemma for India	October 30, 2007	X	X	Y
Myanmar Unrest: India's Response	October 16, 2007	X	X	Y
India to raise with Myanmar issue of gas sales to China	September 20, 2007		X	N
India loses to China for Myanmar gas	August 23, 2007		X	Y
Don't meddle in Myanmar's affairs: China tells UN envoy	July 10, 2007	X	X	N
Myanmar may select China over India for selling natural gas	April 26, 2007	X	X	Y
Myanmar refuses to export gas to India; opts for China	March 21, 2007		X	Y
Myanmar awards exploration rights to Chinese oil giant	January 16, 2007		X	N
India faces China, SKorea in race for Myanmar gas	September 21, 2006		X	Y
MYANMAR - OIL DIPLOMACY	September 1, 2006		X	Y

INDIA-MYANMAR ECONOMIC TIES SCALE NEW HEIGHTS	May 1, 2006		X	N
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The Press Trust of India, like the Times of India, has a mix of news articles on whether China is in competition with India. China is frequently mentioned in the articles, even if not explicitly in adversarial relationship with India. This could be because of China’s size and consideration as a major player for Myanmar’s gas reserves (when in discussion of the Sino-Burma Pipeline).

Articles that avoid discussion of tensions in Sino-Indian relations often only report on China-Myanmar or India-Myanmar developments, such as progress being made on one of the projects (“Myanmar awards exploration rights to Chinese oil giant”), or in articles that report on initiatives designed to boost Sino-Indian ties (“India optimistic of re-opening historic Stilwell road”).

If there is rivalry hinted at the article, it is almost always in the context of economic concerns. However, in many of the articles that use the projects as part of a report on broader regional developments, then China’s developments in Myanmar are used as evidence for greater geopolitical aspirations. In this case, the article will put forward both political and economic competition between India and China. Other articles that cover the political and the economic aspects are those that reflect on India’s role in the region (“Churning in Myanmar: Old Dilemma for India”).

Despite the Press Trust of India being a news wire, a fair amount of opinion does come through in the news articles that it publishes. The language of competition comes through in many articles, where India “loses” to China or was “outsmarted”, or where “[a Chinese oil

company was] threatening to hijack its share.” This language increased during and after 2007, when Myanmar decided against a proposed India-Bangladesh-Myanmar gas pipeline in order to sell gas to China and develop the Sino-Burma Pipeline.

China

China Daily

Headline	Date	India?		
		Pol	Econ	Rivals?
China wants mutual trust and benefit	November 12,2010	X	X	N
SENSIBLE MEASURES FOR ENERGY SECURITY	July 12, 2006		X	N
Build mutual trust in Sino-Indian Relations	May 30, 2006	X	X	Y
Chinese contractors ‘go global’	March 15, 2005		X	N

The China Daily, despite being the largest Chinese English newspaper in circulation, has surprisingly few articles that report on either the Sino-Burma Pipeline (in relation to India) or the Indian Kaladan project for the time period surveyed. The four articles that did fit the selection criteria either discuss economic interests in a narrow sense, or argue for stronger relations between India and China through building mutual trust.

One might speculate on why there are so few articles from China Daily. One reason might be that there is a certain degree of censorship exercised over reporting on the projects, though the expectation then might be that Xinhua would have few articles as well. Another explanation might be that the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport Project run by India does not have much impact on Chinese interests; conversely, the Sino-Myanmar Pipeline, while of interest to

the Chinese domestic audience, would not cite India – so it would not be picked up in the search criteria.

The articles that touched on the political aspects of the Sino-Indian relationship were generally upbeat about the relationship, noting the rapid development between China and India, the numerous agreements signed, and the trade relationship.

The one article that did acknowledge that distrust existed between China and India (“Build mutual trust in Sino-Indian Relations”) did so only in the context of the need to improve and to cooperate, and noted that the distrust existed on the side of the Indians.

Xinhua General News Agency

Headline	Date	India?		
		Pol	Econ	Rivals?
Myanmar-India Kaladan river project to complete by 2013: media	October 15, 2010	X	X	N
Roundup: Myanmar, India work for closer economic cooperation	July 24, 2010		X	N
Myanmar-India border road upgradation to complete by 2010: report	March 15, 2009		X	N
Roundup: Indian vice-president visits Myanmar to enhance bilateral economic cooperation	February 4, 2009		X	N
Roundup: Myanmar, India to cement economic and trade ties	November 24, 2008		X	N
Roundup: Myanmar, India finalizing river transportation project	August 28, 2007	X	X	N
Myanmar to build deep-sea port in western state	June 30, 2007		X	Y
India to invest in Myanmar port	December 16,		X	N

	2006			
Roundup: Myanmar takes measures to boost border trade with neighboring countries	August 2, 2006		X	Y
Myanmar, India sign three documents on bilateral cooperation	March 9, 2006	X	X	N
Indian president visits Myanmar	March 8, 2006	X	X	N
Roundup: Myanmar-India ties head for new high	March 7, 2006	X	X	N

The articles that Xinhua puts out almost universally avoid any language that pits India against China. They tend to report specifically on projects or diplomatic visits and are very detail-oriented, eschewing speculation on tensions in Sino-Indian relations. There is also the absence of any mention of China in India-Myanmar -related articles, especially in relation to the political.

Almost all the Xinhua articles deal with the economic aspects of these projects. There is a high sensitivity to the economic, with the reporting of trade statistics when India is mentioned. This might belie Chinese concerns with the economic impact of India in areas where China has economic interests.

Singapore

The Straits Times

Title	Date	Rivalry?			
		Pol	Econ	General	None
Myanmar, Cambodia & Laos: Juggling trade and diplomacy	October 8, 2010	X	X		
Myanmar becoming more crucial to China; Reclusive nation key to reducing	September 10, 2010	X	X		

its reliance on Strait of Malacca					
Myanmar leader plays his cards right; With stability in mind, India, China and Asean have to engage the junta	July 31, 2010	X	X		
India focuses on economy, security with Myanmar; Singh will boost alliance in talks with Than Shwe	July 27, 2010	X	X		
What China is doing in South Asia	April 2, 2010	X	X		
India sits up as China's footprint grows; Response to Beijing's ties with New Delhi's neighbours a mix of wariness and acceptance	April 2, 2010	X	X		
China a major player in S-E Asia pipeline politics	September 23, 2009	X	X		
Oil and gas riches in pipeline - but not for Rohingyas	April 19, 2009	X	X		
China signs natural gas deal with Myanmar; Pact boosts Beijing's energy security and may speed up plans for pipeline linking the two countries	July 1, 2008	X	X		
It's really all about economics	April 7, 2008	X	X		
An ethical accounting?	October 26, 2007		X		
Wedged between a rock and a hard place	October 26, 2007	X			
Concerted effort to engage junta is best option; Analysts say isolating Myanmar will make leaders more extreme	October 2, 2007	X			
Resource-rich nation 'a pawn in big-power rivalry'	September 8, 2007	X	X		
East Asia must join Asean in pressuring Myanmar	April 6, 2006	X	X		

Beijing needs its neighbour close	February 25, 2006	X	X		
New Delhi's land bridge to Asean	February 25, 2006	X			
Gas deal fuels China's plans for Myanmar	February 2, 2006	X	X		
Pipeline diplomacy shaping India's alliances	February 3, 2005	X	X		

Reporting from the Straits Times is remarkably conscious of Sino-Indian relations and is surprisingly prolific, with more articles than Xinhua in the same time period. The selected articles almost universally cover both the political and economic aspects of Sino-Indian relationship, and see China and India as locked in close competition. Some articles mention China and India in the same sentence, often as the “big powers” of the Asia region (“Resource-rich nation ‘a pawn in big power rivalry’”).

The high return on the number of articles despite more stringent search terms may be because of Myanmar’s status as a member of ASEAN. The Singaporean press may thus have a high degree of sensitivity to the political clout that China and India wield and how it affects ASEAN and Singapore. Much of the discussion of the political aspects of the China-India-Myanmar triangle was linked to ASEAN or pressure from the West on Myanmar regarding democracy and human rights (“East Asia must join ASEAN in pressuring Myanmar”).

Singapore also maintains an economic interest in Myanmar, China and India – all of which are major trading partners of Singapore. China and India are also major economic powers. Singapore, being a commercial hub in Southeast Asia, has incentives to follow these developments.

The Straits Times, while neither an Indian nor a Chinese newspaper, nonetheless provides a unique view into the Sino-Indian relationship. Singapore's position as a small country that has vested interests in the interactions between India and China in an ASEAN country generates insights that are significantly different from the Chinese and Indian newspapers.

Thoughts on the Analysis

Many issues that were not anticipated in the design of the methodology emerged during the analysis. I will outline a few of them here.

The first issue was that the search terms could perhaps have been more specific or changed. Picking the Kaladan project on the Indian side was not the best choice; selecting for the failed India-Bangladesh-Myanmar gas pipeline (rejected in favor of the Sino-Burma pipeline) would have perhaps been better. Much was written about Indian and Chinese oil diplomacy and the race for gas and oil – searching for the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar gas pipeline would have included more articles that were written pre-2007, and would have been a useful study to show how the rhetoric of competition in the Indian press became much stronger after that.

Likewise, there is a remarkable dearth of articles on the subject reported in the Chinese press, particularly from China Daily. Lexis-Nexis did not pick up on any articles after 2007, and manually searching from the site may have left out some relevant articles.

The second issue was that economic leverage in Myanmar is closely tied to political support for the regime. As noted earlier, the projects that were discussed, while executed by non-government companies, were nonetheless agreed upon between the different governments. Analysts also link Chinese political support for Myanmar to their success in signing agreements with the regime. It may be difficult to make a distinction between economic and political factors.

The third issue is that newspapers tend to take their content from news wires. This is particularly true for the Times of India – so the prevailing content reported in the newspapers may have been influenced by content reported by the wires. This lessens the usefulness of this study which tries to make a distinction between newspapers and news wires.

Observations

A number of observations might be drawn from this survey of articles. The first is there is much more reporting in the Indian press on both projects than there is in the Chinese press. The second is that the Chinese press by and large avoids characterizing India as a threat, while Indian press has a more mixed reaction. Finally, the wires and the Chinese press tended to report more on economic concerns, while the Times of India and the Straits Times tended to balance between the political and the economic.

There could be at least two explanations on why there is such a marked difference in reporting between the Indian and the Chinese press.

The first explanation could be that the strong control that the Chinese government has on the press makes Xinhua and China Daily, as major Chinese print media, a clear indicator of government policy. Any adversarial language in the press would set off alarm bells in New Delhi. Thus, there are incentives to control the language of the articles that are released by steering it away from possibly anxiety-causing positions and from sensitive topics such as the Sino-Myanmar Pipeline. Moreover, the press could be used as an instrument of foreign policy by downplaying tensions and by putting out the narrative that Sino-Indian relations are doing well.

Conversely, the freedom of the Indian press means that they are more likely to report how the relationship appears to the Indian public, or even seek to sensationalize the antagonism in

order to make headlines. This analysis can also be applied to the Straits Times- arguing for a competitive dynamic between India and China could possibly make for a more compelling read.

The second explanation is that the perception of a Sino-Indian rivalry might be less serious from the Chinese side. China's aspirations are not only within India's traditional sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean, but stretch over the rest of the Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, Africa and the Middle-East. Concerns with India and her projects in Myanmar are just a small part of broader Chinese concerns, and not an issue that has to be headlined with high priority.

This explanation might be plausible, especially given China's stronger economic and military position. India, given her more limited reach compared to China and how her military and economic growth lags behind China, might see China as more of a threat. The Indian press may see competition in Myanmar as a proxy for broader geopolitical rivalry with China, and report frequently on these events in the context of Sino-Indian relations. Put more simply, China has less to fear from India than India has to fear from China. The dearth of Chinese reporting on the political, therefore, has more to do with a preoccupation by the Chinese press on economic concerns that go beyond India's backyard.

The inclusion of the Straits Times in this study might give more credence to one explanation over the other. The similarity of the Straits Times in analysis and quantity to the Indian newspapers could belie a perception by outsiders that a rivalry between China and India is credible, and is currently taking place. The Chinese press is unlikely to be blind to such a widely held perception. This possibly undermines the second explanation, and could imply that the Chinese government is practicing a degree of restraint in reporting about competition between India and China.

Conclusions

This assessment of the Indian, Chinese, and Singaporean press in order to determine mutual perceptions, while not without difficulty, nonetheless has provided a number of insights. There is some degree of asymmetry in China's and India's perceptions surrounding their relations, especially in Myanmar.

The Indian press reflects a wariness of China's economic and political power, and the Singaporean media is sensitive to this distrust. On the other hand, the Chinese media tend to emphasize economic aspects, and the absence of the political or adversarial language in their reporting could reflect a lack of concern with India or a disciplined government press policy. Given that India is a major player in Asia, the Chinese government is unlikely to ignore them. Therefore, one might favor the second explanation.

If the press reporting by the respective media is reflective or influences political and public views, then what does the reporting demonstrate about the projects in Myanmar?

Outright conflict, at least from the media perspective, appears unlikely. Despite the recognition in both the Singaporean media and the Indian media that a competitive dynamic exists on both economic and political aspects overlays the Sittwe projects, the press is measured in its response. Neither the majority Indian press nor the Singaporean press advocates conflict with China – though some articles stress the need for India to 'keep up'.

Chapter 4: India and China in Myanmar - Cooperation or Conflict?

Introduction

The fourth chapter will examine the implications of the project on Chinese and Indian interests and, given the recent nature of both these projects, outline possible directions that Sino-Indian convergence in Myanmar could take in the coming years.

Just as the previous chapter assessed *perceptions* in the Indian, Chinese and Singaporean press on these projects, this chapter will examine the actual reasons and constraints that exist that can drive India and China towards or away from cooperation and conflict. Perceptions of competition may be inflated or suppressed by the press and by politicians for multiple reasons. Therefore, it is important to assess if there are the forces that exist beyond the perceptions.

Given inherently competitive nature of the political dimension, is there the possibility that China and India will dispute over these projects? Or given that there are high economic stakes and potential for collaboration in that location, what windows of opportunity exist for collaboration? An examination of the positive and negative implications for both entering Myanmar for the Chinese and the Indians will be discussed, as well as opportunities for collaboration and risks for conflict.

An Assessment of Indian and Chinese Investment in Myanmar

In assessing these projects, what are the opportunities and risks that India and China bear in investing in these projects? This assessment is relevant in projecting how India and China will respond to each other's presence in the region, especially given the competitive dynamic that characterizes relations between them.

India

India's strengths in entering the project at Sittwe include having the funding and political will under the "Look East Policy" to draw Myanmar to the table. That the project is piloted by the Ministry of External Affairs reflects a commitment formed at a governmental level to the execution of the project. Moreover, India's strong position as a political power means that it can translate its political capital into increased trade with Myanmar by giving the regime political support. Recent visits by General Than Shwe to India have been read by analysts as a means of increasing legitimacy for the November 2010 elections.³²

These strengths that derive from India's government as a partner also carry a host of weaknesses. India faces challenges in the policy-making realm, and the Kaladan project has been slowed at least in part by bureaucratic inefficiencies.³³ The Kaladan project was discussed in tandem with a potential Indo-Burma pipeline that would transport gas from the Shwe gas fields overland to Kolkota, but after years of talks and assessment, Myanmar decided to sell exclusive buyer rights to CNPC instead.³⁴ The slowness of the Indian government in executing has proven costly.

India's Opportunities

There are multiple benefits for developing the port at Sittwe. The port, in linking the northeastern Indian states with India, assists the domestic population and aids the economic development of a region that has lagged behind the rest of India.³⁵

³² "With China on Mind, India to host Myanmar ruler," IANS, July 23, 2010.

³³ "Kaladan transit project likely to be delayed," The Assam Tribune, May 11, 2010.

³⁴ Arati Jerath, "Home Alone in the Neighborhood," The Times of India, August 7, 2010.

³⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, India, "Keynote by Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs on "India's North-East and BIMSTEC- A Retrospect." April 9, 2010.

In the negotiations leading up to the signing of the agreement between India and Myanmar on the development of Sittwe Port, the Myanmar government promised that there would be future opportunity for India to gain access to Burmese gas. This came also as assurance to the Indian government in the aftermath of the Myanmar government rejecting proposals for a Myanmar-India pipeline in favor of piping gas to China instead.³⁶

The political goodwill that India is buying from Myanmar by paying for virtually the entire project also assists in the deepening of Indo-Myanmar relations. India already has growing trade relations with Myanmar, but the volume of trade nonetheless lags behind what the Indian government would like. An op-ed written by a former ambassador also notes that the balance of trade is unfavorable for Indian companies, and that a Myanmar minister had observed that Indian businesses were much slower to come to Myanmar compared to China and ASEAN countries.³⁷ Strong relations also facilitate the signing of future agreements, and help India cooperate with Myanmar on non-economic grounds, such as security issues. The long border that India shares with Myanmar means that the junta's cooperation is essential in dealing with Myanmar-based insurgency that affects India.³⁸

Finally, the rehabilitation of the Sittwe Port means that there will be greater access via the port for Indian companies to the rest of Southeast Asia. In 2008, total volume of trade between India and ASEAN stood at \$47.5 billion; the bilateral trade target was revised upwards to \$70

³⁶ Arati Jerath, "Home Alone in the Neighborhood," *The Times of India*, August 7, 2010.

³⁷ Rajiv Bhatia, "Crafting a Richer India-Myanmar Partnership," *The Hindu*, August 10, 2010

³⁸ "India, Myanmar to up security cooperation," *The Indian Express*, November 24, 2008.

billion during the 2009 India-ASEAN summit.³⁹ The renovation of the port will help India meet this stated goal.

India's Risks

Despite the opportunities that drive India to invest significant amounts of political and economic capital in Myanmar, there are several risks that India faces when investing in Myanmar.

The first risk comes from the competitive aspects of the investment and diplomatic game that is being played, in particular, the risk that China poses to India in Myanmar. The government-to-government nature of these projects means that the allocation and bidding process for scarce resources such as gas or developments in choice locations are bound up in current relations with the Myanmar regime. In the international realm, China wields relatively more political influence than India, and Myanmar has already demonstrated a preference for China when it comes to the development of certain projects.

Moreover, Myanmar has proven adept at playing India off with other regional players in order to extract as much as it can from the deal-making.⁴⁰ The ramifications for this is that India may get 'second-pick' in the scramble for natural resources or other projects that will further its interests, or may end up overpaying for projects that do not further its interests directly in the hopes of gaining favor with the regime.

The second risk comes from the criticism and reputational damage India faces for doing business with the junta. India has faced criticism both internationally and domestically for

³⁹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations", July 2010. Accessed December 13, 2010. Available at <http://www.aseansec.org/5738.htm>

⁴⁰C. Raja Mohan, "Myanmar Gen connects, plays India and China in new Bay geopolitics," The Indian Express, July 26, 2010.

seeking stronger ties with Myanmar because of the junta's poor human rights track record, particularly because India is a democracy and has a long history of supporting civil rights.⁴¹ India has already come under criticism by other countries, the press and non-governmental organizations for its signing of agreements with Myanmar.⁴² India's doing business with Myanmar breaks with the international sanctions that the US and the West have put into place, and India may face political costs in its relations with other countries in pursuing this project.

The third risk involves the lack of rule of law and political stability within Myanmar. The business environment faces risks, both in the form of inadequate protections against expropriation and dangers posed to the project from ongoing conflict between the regime and ethnic minority insurgents. However, the risk of expropriation is relatively low, as India is one of the largest trading partners with Myanmar, and good diplomatic relations with the Indian government are essential for the regime to maintain its hold on power.

On the other hand, Myanmar has a history of internal instability. The most recent fighting has been along the eastern Karen State, and along the Thai-Myanmar Border,⁴³ which is far from the site of India's project, and India's port development is unlikely to be hampered. However, Sittwe was one location where protests broke out in 2007 over the government's decision to remove fuel subsidies; political protests can still disrupt ongoing construction or damage the finished project. The responsibility of the Myanmar government to provide land for the project could mean forced relocations of the local population, local discontent with the project, negative environmental impacts, and possible instability.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Harsh V Pant, "Democracy Sidelined in India-Myanmar Ties," ISN Security Watch, August 2, 2010.

⁴² Sachin Parasar, "Barack frowns on India's silence on Myanmar regime," The Times of India, November 9, 2010.

⁴³ "Hundreds pour into Thailand after Myanmar clashes," Reuters, November 28, 2010.

⁴⁴ Preliminary Report on Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, Arakan River Network, November 2009.

A final risk returns to the competitive dynamic between China and India. Under the premise that a power struggle in the region is a zero-sum game, then if China and India are rivals for influence, the infrastructure that India is building directly benefits China. Under the current 'build-transfer-use' agreement, the port will be transferred to the Myanmar government for use once the Indians have finished building it. Therefore, the Indian government would not be able to stop Chinese ships from docking at the renovated Sittwe Port.

China

China's strengths in the execution of their project include their longstanding diplomatic relations with Myanmar, strong political position internationally, and ability to plan and execute construction with relatively few delays.

While diplomatic relations were poor before the 1980s because of the CCP's support for the Communist Party of Burma, China's diplomatic relations with the junta grew in 1988, when the West imposed sanctions on the regime and China was able to step into the void as a political supporter and supplier of military weapons to the junta.⁴⁵ China has demonstrated commitment to deflecting international criticism of the Burmese regime. China's seat as one of the permanent five members in the UN Security Council enables it to veto any multilateral sanctions that can be brought against Myanmar or weaken the degree of criticism raised against it in that forum. For example, in the lead-up to the November elections, China pushed back on US efforts to form a war crimes inquiry against the military leaders of the junta.⁴⁶

The prompt Chinese signing and execution of their project, especially in contrast with the delays that have plagued the Indian project, is also telling. Construction began on time and with

⁴⁵ R Hariharan, "India-Myanmar-China Relations," Asian Tribune, July 7, 2007.

⁴⁶ Colum Lynch, "China campaigns against Burma war crimes inquiry," Washington Post, October 26, 2010.

full approval of the relevant state agencies; the scale of their project is much larger than what the Indian project involved.

However, the weakness of the Chinese position is that the strength of Chinese political power, backed by the heavy investment of Chinese political and economic capital in Myanmar, creates a moral hazard problem. The more explicit backing of the Myanmar regime by the Chinese government means that any bad behavior on the Myanmar government's part will inevitably be blamed on the Chinese. Reports on leaked cables show that China faces frustrations in influencing the junta to reform politically and to maintain stability.⁴⁷

China's Opportunities

There are a number of opportunities open to China in the construction of the Sino-Burma Pipeline. The proximity of Sittwe to the Shwe gas fields, where CNPC has sole usage rights, means that there will be efficient movement of this gas across Myanmar to China. The renovation of Sittwe Port by the Indians and its eventual handing over to the Myanmar regime for operation also means that Chinese ships are likely to use that port for the transport of gas that will be fed into the Sino-Myanmar Pipeline.

Moreover, the Sino-Burma Pipeline also mitigates the vulnerability that China faces from dependency on sea lanes that are chiefly patrolled by US naval forces. While the Chinese navy is under the process of modernizing for operations further from the Chinese coast, the pipeline adds a layer of insurance against a possible naval blockade.

⁴⁷Ewen McAskill, "WikiLeaks cables: China 'fed up' with Burma's footdragging on reforms," The Guardian, December 9, 2010.

Finally, there are monetary opportunities in the building of the pipeline. Stakes in the Sino-Burmese Pipeline can be sold off to other interested parties. The acquisition of a 12.5% stake in the pipeline by Indian gas companies represents how the Chinese investment is already paying dividends prior to its actual construction.

China's Risks

China's risks are a mirror image of India's. China nonetheless has been able to mitigate the risks from regional competition because of its strength as a political ally. China does face some international criticism for doing business with Myanmar. However, China already faces criticism on a number of fronts, and arguably the reputational gains that it would make by reforming its Myanmar stance are relatively low.

However, the more expansive and expensive nature of the pipelines, stretching from Sittwe to Kunming, render it more vulnerable to disruption from political violence and civil unrest than India's project. The Myanmar government will likely engage in forceful relocation of civilians, creating grievances and political unrest. This is exacerbated by how the pipeline route passes through areas "partly controlled by ethnic cease fire groups, including the Shan State Army-North, the Kachin Defence Army (KDA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)."⁴⁸ These groups are not under Burmese government control, and armed fighting between the army and these groups will jeopardize the construction and maintenance of the Sino-Burmese Pipeline.

A Growing Presence in Myanmar: Conflict or Cooperation?

⁴⁸ Shwe Gas Movement, "Corridor Of Power: China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines," September 2009. Accessed December 13, 2010. Available at <http://www.shwe.org/Attachments/CorridorofPower.pdf>.

As these projects continue underway in Myanmar, the question is whether China and India will come to head in a conflict, or whether the developments in Myanmar will lead to possible integration and cooperation between the two. Any assessment of conflict must be carried out by thinking through under the interests of each party, what conditions a conflict will take place, and under what conditions would cooperation be facilitated.

As outlined before, dynamics are driven on the Chinese side by the need to mitigate energy security vulnerabilities and to maintain its high growth rate. Therefore, China is likely to aggressively bid for future oil and gas resources as Myanmar opens up, and has a strong incentive to avoid any action that causes instability within Myanmar as this will jeopardize the construction and smooth flow of oil and gas into China through the overland pipelines. India, as a similarly industrializing country, also has a strong incentive to bid for oil and gas resources in Myanmar and avoid causes of instability that undermine its usage of Sittwe as a port or access to gas resources.

These constraints strongly suggest that the competition will manifest itself in a less overt manner, possibly in diplomatic channels or in other countries. While historical tensions have existed between China and India, the outbreak of open conflict between the two powers is unlikely over the issue of gas in Myanmar, especially since this will undercut the economic benefits that both parties seek.

Nonetheless, these tensions inform current perceptions of each other's movements in the region. Chinese port development in the Indian Ocean is perceived as a strategy of "encircling"

India⁴⁹; Indian diplomatic visits to countries bordering China are seen as a strategy as balancing Chinese power.⁵⁰ The deficit in trust between the two governments is particularly relevant because the deals brokered in Myanmar are done at an intergovernmental level and executed by companies that have strong government links; the political distrust that exists between governments could certainly affect the degree of cooperation that could take place.

On the other hand, the upside and potential for cooperation is significant. While India was initially cut out of the gas supply from the Shwe fields, the buying of a stake in the Sino-Burma Pipeline could represent a move towards integrating the two projects. Better integration between the Indian renovation of Sittwe Port and the Chinese gas pipeline could also have benefits for both sides, where the port could act as a docking point for energy coming in via the SLOCs from the Middle East. Moreover, China and India both have a common interest in mitigating the risks that they share in Myanmar by maintaining political stability and nudging the junta towards political reform, though such initiatives are unlikely to be executed through the auspices of these projects.

Thinking How to Measure Potential for Cooperation and Conflict

Having mapped out the interests held by both China and India in their presence in Myanmar, outright conflict between China and India seems unlikely- especially since this would directly undermine their interests. However, scarce energy resources relative to the growing demands of India, China and Thailand, even with new fields opening up, will mean that the competitive jockeying for influence with the regime will continue. There may be an incentive to

⁴⁹ Mohan Malik, "Eyeing the Dragon: India's China Debate," *Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies*, December 2003. Accessed December 13, 2010. Available at http://www.apcss.org/Publications/SAS/ChinaDebate/ChinaDebate_Malik.pdf.

⁵⁰ Li Hongmei, "India's 'Look East Policy' means 'Look to encircle China'?", *People's Daily Online*, October 27, 2010.

cooperate, if only as a means of defusing tensions that will undercut access to essential energy supplies or influencing the regime.

Given the number of factors that push China and India towards both conflict and cooperation – which outcome is more likely? How can we distinguish between the balance tipping one way or the other? One way of assessing whether China and India are more likely to cooperate or come into conflict would be to examine their interests in Myanmar and whether they have more to lose by cooperating or by competing.

Common Interests

From the previous analysis, China and India share three common interests from their investment in Sittwe.

The first interest is to maintain the stability of Myanmar and the regime. Instability threatens the construction and continued operation of their ports and pipelines, and could stem from attacks by displaced civilians or tribal militants. A change in the regime could spell a halt to previous contracts, agreements and carefully-built diplomatic relations with power brokers – none of which are in India or China's interest.

The second interest is to limit the reputational costs of dealing with the military junta. Both China and India have faced severe international criticism for supporting the junta, and India suffers from domestic criticism as well. If there is an option, both parties will seek to avoid receiving castigation, though perhaps in a world of *realpolitik*, such criticism might be shouldered.

The third interest is to reduce exploitation by the Myanmar regime. The bargaining dynamic in the India-China-Myanmar triangle is that the junta sells access and rights to two countries that compete with one another, giving it the upper hand in negotiations. Such a bargaining configuration renders promises from the regime unstable and undercuts Chinese and Indian efforts. A case in point is the failed India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline. Despite lengthy negotiations with India, the Myanmar regime finally awarded the rights to the gas in the Shwe gasfields to China.

Competitive Zones

India and China face each other in two zero-sum arenas. They compete for scarce resources in the form of natural gas in the Myanmar gas fields, bidding for stakes and attempting to secure a line for natural gas back to their country. They also jockey for political influence in Myanmar, particularly over the setting up of transport infrastructure such as ports that can be used to expand their increasingly overlapping military and economic spheres of influence.

Likely Behavior vs. Empirical Behavior

Given these interests, what would China and India do to protect their interests? Naturally, China and India would cooperate to stabilize the regime, attempt to pressure the regime to reform (in the interests of long term stability and reputation), and bargain collectively in order to reduce Myanmar's power in negotiations. In the competitive arenas, India and China would attempt to outbid one another for the right to gas and for port project locations.

Given that we've extrapolated what would a 'best' course of action look like for both India and China, are India and China really acting according to this plan? Understanding where

they deviate from expected behavior sheds light on how they weigh economic or security factors in the conduct of Sino-Indian relations.

Both India and China give support to the regime, through diplomatic relations and through arms sales. The arming of the military junta helps stabilize the country in the short term by quashing dissent. However, there has been little joint effort in engaging the junta.

On the question of reputation, India and China have not done much to push for long-term change, most likely because this would weaken the regime and undercut their diplomatic efforts. When faced with criticism for dealing with the regime, China has appealed to its policy of ‘non-interference’, while India has used the rhetoric of ‘being pragmatic’.

Neither has a collective bargaining mechanism emerged. The presence of Thailand as a country also hungry for its share in Myanmar’s natural resources means that the regime has an alternative buyer should China and India attempt to bargain collectively. Moreover, the competitive aspects dilute the interest that China and India have in engaging the regime jointly on security, diplomatic and economic fronts.

Considerations

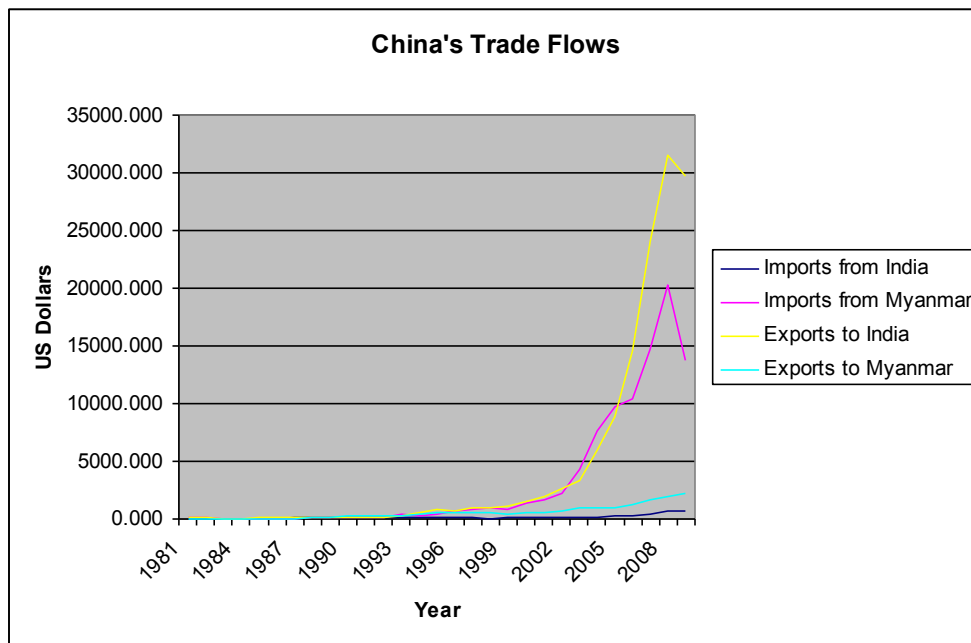
The analysis of the situation at Sittwe is not perfect. There are two considerations that should be made, and may prove fruitful grounds for improving the sophistication of the assessment. The first is that China and India do not make decisions as monolithic entities. The second is that conflict over scarce resources, which is driven by economic interest, is limited by the sheer size of bilateral trade between India and China.

A Fragmented Approach to Policy-Making

The analysis within this paper assumes that the policy-making mechanism within India and China are monolithic. However, in India, there are a multiplicity of stakeholders, from the military and security thinktank community who take a more hawkish view of Chinese relations to more moderate members of the government. In China, there is a distinction between the central and the provincial governments. The Sino-Myanmar Pipeline, as a project that would bring great economic opportunity to Yunnan Province, was strongly championed by the provincial government there. Each stakeholder exerts a varying degree of influence over the policy decisions that India and China make – therefore, it may not be possible to determine a clear prioritization of security, economic or reputational concerns.

Sino-Indian Trade: A Buffer to Conflict

As the chart demonstrate, the trade relationship between China and India far outstrips the trade relationship either party has with Myanmar.



This strong bilateral trade relationship means that there is a constraint on open conflict, and both parties are unlikely to jeopardize existing trade relations over grabbing a larger slice of the pie in Myanmar.

Conclusions

Even after accepting these considerations, a hierarchy nonetheless emerges between reputational, political and economic goals pursued by India and China in their engagement over the Sittwe projects though this conclusion is rendered problematic by the relative newness of the projects, as well as Thailand as a third player in the regional competition for gas.

The reputational costs of castigation from domestic and international communities are beneath security and economic considerations. Both India and China maintain their support to stabilize the regime's hold on power in order to pursue their security and economic goals in Myanmar.

However, it is unclear whether security or economic considerations are prioritized. If economic considerations were paramount, one would expect to see the emergence of collective bargaining or a port-sharing agreement forged between China and India despite the security concerns. India buying of a stake in the Sino-Myanmar pipeline is one such indicator. If security aspects were paramount, then China and India would attempt to gain privileges that would allow them to expand their naval power in Myanmar's space, at the risk of shaking economic collaboration. The current trend of relatively little joint engagement with Myanmar and the economic nature of the Sittwe projects reflects that these considerations are balanced against one another.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Examining the Sittwe projects through security, economic and media lenses is a manageable way of taking the pulse on Sino-Indian relations and possible trends in the relationship as it plays out in the Indian Ocean.

While Myanmar is a unique case because of the nature of the ruling regime and because they have a preponderance of desirable resources, one can gain insights as to Indian and Chinese policy vis-à-vis each other in a third, less powerful country. Thus, the findings as to the relationship that India and China have over Sittwe has a broader relevance to India and China invest in a wide range of development projects through many of the smaller South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives.

For example, lessons from Sittwe on how China and India react are applicable to the case of Sri Lanka. Like the Myanmar junta, the Sri Lanka government received military assistance from China in their bloody war against the LTTE, and China is now building a deep-water port in Hambantota. Taking insights from the case of Sittwe, one might be able to sketch out China's diplomatic strategy in Sri Lanka.

Moreover, there remains much for analysis even when discussing Sino-Indian relations from the vantage point of the specific projects at Sittwe. Many further avenues for exploration exist, such as more analysis on how political change in Myanmar could affect the projects, the broader implications of these projects for regional and international organizations such as ASEAN and the UN, or even opportunities for the private sector.

Methodologically, there could be a broadening in thinking about possible triggers for cooperation and conflict or an attempt to quantify these factors in an effort to come to a more numerical conclusion.

Finally, a number of important stakeholders could be included in the analysis, such as the presence of the US in the region, as well as the inclusion of Thailand in thinking about the rivalry for oil and gas in Myanmar.

This project does not pretend to be exhaustive or all inclusive, but my hope is that it demonstrates how insight can be drawn from a particular location where India and China meet, and what the implications are for the direction of Sino-Indian relations as they build their projects and compete for influence across a global theater.

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