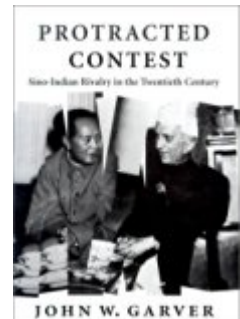


**John W. Garver.** *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001. xiv + 447 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-98073-7.



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## Assessing the South Asian Balance of Power

John W. Garver, professor of International Relations at the Georgia Institute of Technology's Sam Nunn School of International Affairs and long-time specialist in Chinese and East Asian foreign affairs, has written an outstanding, if lengthy, book. Garver's *Protracted Contest*, which offers a detailed history of the Sino-Indian rivalry and an extensive discussion of how this rivalry might be managed, deserves the attention of both specialists in the field and generalists interested in the topic. Garver focuses exclusively on the Sino-Indian dynamic, but manages to draw out the challenges and opportunities for the United States, more clearly, perhaps, than if he had focused on Sino-U.S. or Indo-U.S. relations.

Garver organizes *Protracted Contest* according to the main themes that have caused conflict between China and India. He begins by examining the "Tibetan factor" in Sino-Indian relations and the tensions over the Aksai Chin plateau (Ladakh) in the Himalayas that led to war between China and India in 1962. He moves to the Sino-Indian competition for influence and status among the

developing countries of South Asia, especially Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Burma, and then discusses the rivalry for dominance in the Indian Ocean. Garver devotes a significant portion of the book to considering the Sino-Indo-Pakistani triangle that dominates South Asian politics, and, in particular, to assessing the role of nuclear weapons in the region. Garver concludes his book with a thoughtful and largely convincing evaluation of the prospects for qualitative change in relations between China and India.

The most provocative portions of *Protracted Contest* are devoted to considering how to resolve the Sino-Indian rivalry. Arguing that the protracted contest has been carried on largely over territorial issues rather than ideology or principle, Garver contends that the rivalry must be managed by considerations of "realpolitik." Stature in the region and similar histories should have brought China and India together, but, according to Garver, "shared Chinese and Indian anti-Westernism has not, however, proven to be a very viable basis for cooperation, mainly because rivalries between China and India have been too

great" (p. 16). Instead of joining together as leaders in a partnership of non-aligned or post-colonial states, China and India have struggled for half a century over territory and influence in South Asia.

India tended to regard South Asia as its particular sphere of influence, but China was unwilling to grant India fiat in the region. Guarding its interests with some jealousy, China has resisted Indian assertions of power, particularly in 1962, when China decisively defeated India in a war. In addition, China has successfully and repeatedly countered Indian diplomatic power. First, China balanced the Indo-Soviet "special relationship," by entering into an "entente cordiale," a special relationship of its own, with Pakistan, despite that country's formal alliance with the United States. Second, China has effectively positioned itself as the "big brother" to the smaller states of South Asia such as Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Burma. Although creating a ring around India, China has preferred to view itself as a stop to India's ambitions. Meanwhile, India regards China not merely as a brake on its aspirations, but as a threat, especially because of its support for Pakistan.

Garver argues that there are two ways the conflict might play itself out: "China could agree that South Asia is India's security zone and sphere of influence and [thus] desist from actions there which are objectionable to New Delhi," or "India could accommodate itself to a seemingly inexorable growth of China's political-military role in South Asia" (p. 368). Garver admits that there are certainly alternatives to these extremes, but the realm of possibility is set by these antipodes.

Rejecting the first option, Garver maintains that China is only biding its time. He sees no likelihood that China will acquiesce to an India security zone, because of its "sustained disregard for Indian sensitivities and [its own] claims to a special status in South Asia" (p. 370). Some analysts have contended that reductions in Chinese aid over the last ten years to the smaller countries of South

Asia demonstrate a willingness on the part of the Chinese to recognize Indian interests. Garver counters that China's reduction of aid to India's neighbors indicates, not an appreciation of India's South Asian sphere of influence, but rather the economic limitations of Chinese power. If China were to accept India's South Asian security zone, it would recede as a key player in South Asian affairs.

Garver concludes that the second option, namely the prospect of Indian accommodation to a growing Chinese role in South Asia, is the more likely. The Indians will probably be quite resentful, but they must "recognize that it was their own country's weakness and fear of China's superior power which required them to abandon long-cherished dreams of Indian regional preeminence and a global role" (p. 375). India suffers from serious disadvantages relative to China: it has an inferior military, it is burdened by constant conflict with Pakistan, and, following the fall of the Soviet Union, it lacks supporters among the major powers. Indeed, the differential capabilities of China and India necessitate Indian accommodation of Chinese power in South Asia. Furthermore, Garver implicitly shows that there is little that a third party such as the United States can do to influence the region unless it makes a clear choice favoring one country at the expense of the other.

Though quite convincing in his discussion of grand strategy, Garver is less persuasive when assessing decision-making or the cultural reasons for China's advantage over India. He argues that, while India seems "handicapped by a dearth of strategic thinking," China "has a tradition of strategic thought that is second to none in the world," and that "it is arguably the major power best able to think strategically for long periods of time and mobilize the national resources and will needed to attain its postulated objectives" (p. 377). Garver intimates that culture plays a significant role in explaining Sino-Indian differences, but one could just as easily suggest that differences in

their respective political systems explain these nearly opposite approaches to strategy. Garver is right to observe that China has mastered the art of great-power politics while India's insouciant leadership of the non-aligned movement has yielded few benefits. However, his analysis of the differences between decision-making in democratic India and non-democratic China seems a little thin. Indian governments might have behaved ham-handedly (especially during the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty), but they have remained significantly more susceptible to public pressures than even the most "progressive" Chinese regime.

*Protracted Contest* is an extensively researched work with a balanced view of both India and China. Garver has mined primary-source archives in both India and China that include government documents, reports from various think tanks, speeches, and interviews with government officials and foreign policy specialists. The book has no distinct bibliography, which makes easy reference to Garver's numerous sources slightly challenging, but its forty pages of notes provide ample support for this blend of synthesis and research. Garver also seems more familiar with the secondary sources on China than he is with India and, despite his familiarity with the work of political scientists such as Leo Rose and Stephen P. Cohen, he would have improved his already strong work had he engaged works of history written by such scholars as Kenton Clymer, Ayesha Jalal, Robert J. McMahon, Andrew Rotter, and George Perkovich. This is admittedly a minor criticism when weighed against the overall quality of Garver's work. *Protracted Contest* ought to prove useful to any reader hoping to gain a deeper understanding of relations between China and India in specific and international relations in general.

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