

Friend or Foe: India as Perceived by Beijing's Foreign Policy Analysts in the 1950s

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Abstract

During the Cold War years, one of Beijing's vital moves was to switch sides between Moscow and Washington. The act not only negated one aspect of the People's Republic of China's international identity, or its association with the "socialist camp," but also changed another aspect, China's situation in what Mao Zedong categorized as the "intermediate zone" between the two superpowers. Yet, as far as the question about "friends" and "enemies" was concerned, even before Moscow and Washington swapped their roles as Beijing's ally and adversary, the Chinese Communist leadership already began to reconceptualize India, arguably the most important fellow state of China's in the "intermediate zone." During the 1950s, the PRC–Indian relationship transformed from a partnership for promoting peaceful coexistence among countries of different social systems to an armed confrontation along their borders. Actually, this was the first development in the Cold War period that significantly altered Beijing's perception about its international environment. Based on newly declassified archival information from China, this article traces the trajectory of Beijing's view about India and India's relationship with the United States during the 1950s.

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