



# China Rises and India's Response

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## ABSTRACT

The topic "China Rises and India's Response" explores the significant geopolitical, economic, and security implications of China's rapid emergence as a global superpower and India's multi-dimensional response to this ascent. Over the past few decades, China's rise has been marked by unprecedented economic growth, military modernization, and a proactive foreign policy, most notably demonstrated through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and assertive posturing in regional conflicts. As China strengthens its influence across Asia and extends its reach into Africa, West Asia, and beyond, its ambitions have prompted responses from neighbouring states, especially India, which shares a long and complex border with China and has competing interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.

India's response to China's rise has been strategic and comprehensive, involving a recalibration of its foreign policy, economic reforms, and military advancements to safeguard its national interests. Diplomatically, India has deepened ties with countries that share its concerns about China's growing influence, most notably the United States, Japan, and Australia. This alignment has led to the strengthening of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), an informal strategic forum that seeks to maintain a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. Economically, India has introduced initiatives to increase self-reliance in critical industries, improve infrastructure, and reduce dependency on Chinese imports through the "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) programs. Militarily, India has modernized its forces, enhanced its defense capabilities, and increased its presence along the contested Himalayan border following incidents such as the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which highlighted the immediate security risks posed by China. This dynamic rivalry also impacts broader regional stability and economic connectivity. China's influence in India's neighbouring

countries, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka, through strategic investments and military cooperation, poses a direct challenge to India's traditional sphere of influence. In response, India has enhanced its diplomatic and economic ties within South Asia and with the ASEAN countries to counterbalance Chinese influence.

This abstract examines the nuances of India's response to China's ascent, addressing the interconnected economic, strategic, and security dimensions of this relationship. The analysis highlights how India's strategies reflect an adaptive, multi-pronged approach aimed at preserving its sovereignty, enhancing regional influence, and balancing China's rise. By studying these elements, this paper contributes to the broader understanding of Asia's evolving power dynamics and the future trajectories of Sino-Indian relations in a multipolar world.

**Keywords-** BRI, QUAD, China's rise, South Asia, etc

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## 1. Introduction

The geopolitical dynamics of Asia have been irrevocably altered by China's rise in the 21st century, a phenomenon that has significantly reshaped global power structures. China's rapid economic growth, military modernization, and assertive foreign policy strategies have led to its emergence as a global superpower, challenging the existing international order dominated by Western powers. The economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s laid the groundwork for China's transformation into the world's second-largest economy, a status it achieved through substantial investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, and technology. At the same time, China has expanded its military capabilities, asserting itself in regional disputes, particularly in the South China Sea and along its border with India, while also playing an increasingly prominent role in international diplomacy, multilateral institutions, and global trade networks.<sup>i</sup>

This rise of China has not only redefined the balance of power in Asia but also presented a series of strategic challenges to its neighbour's, particularly India. As China has sought to extend its influence in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, India, as China's immediate neighbour and the only other major power in South Asia, has had to recalibrate its foreign policy, economic strategies, and security priorities. India's response to China's rise is shaped by both competition and cooperation. While the two countries share deep historical, cultural, and economic ties, their rivalry has become increasingly pronounced due to overlapping strategic interests, territorial disputes, and military competition. The long-standing border issues between China and India, notably over the territories of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, continue to fuel tensions, as evidenced by the 1962 war and more recent skirmishes, such as the 2020 Galwan Valley clash.

The rise of China presents India with complex challenges. On one hand, China's economic ascent offers opportunities for trade and investment, as China has become India's largest trading partner. However, the dominance of Chinese goods in the Indian market, particularly in the manufacturing and technology sectors, has raised concerns regarding economic dependence. On the other hand, China's growing military capabilities and increasing assertiveness, especially its actions in the South China Sea and its infrastructure investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are seen as direct challenges to India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

In response to China's rise, India has adopted a multi-dimensional approach, balancing cooperation with China in certain areas such as trade and investment with strategies aimed at countering China's growing influence in the region. Diplomatically, India has engaged in regional multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while also forging deeper strategic ties with countries like the United States, Japan, and Australia through the Quad grouping. Militarily, India has focused on modernizing its defense capabilities, particularly its border infrastructure and naval power, to safeguard its territorial integrity and assert its dominance in the IOR. Additionally, India has pursued economic policies aimed at reducing dependence on Chinese imports and boosting its domestic manufacturing base through initiatives like "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India).

India's response to China's rise is not only critical for its own national security and economic future but also for the broader geopolitical stability of Asia. As both nations continue to rise on the global stage, the dynamic between China and India will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of regional security, trade, and global governance. Understanding the complexities of this relationship, including both areas of competition and collaboration, is crucial for analyzing the evolving geopolitics of the 21st century.

## 2. The Rise of China: A Geopolitical and Economic Overview

China's rise has been one of the most remarkable transformations in modern history. From a nation scarred by war and poverty in the mid-20th century, China has emerged as an economic powerhouse and a major geopolitical actor. Its rapid ascent has reshaped not only the balance of power in Asia but also global economic, political, and security dynamics. This transformation, driven by a blend of strategic planning, economic reform, and military modernization, has catapulted China to the forefront of the international stage, challenging the dominance of Western powers and shifting the trajectory of global governance. The rise of China is not just an economic phenomenon but a geopolitical reordering that carries profound implications for regional and global stability.<sup>ii</sup>

### *Economic Transformation: From Isolation to Global Integration*

China's economic ascent began in earnest with the reforms of the late 1970s under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Before this, China was a largely agrarian society with an inefficient command economy. The introduction of market reforms allowed for rapid industrialization, foreign direct investment, and a substantial increase in the export sector. These reforms laid the foundation for China's economic transformation, turning

the country into a global manufacturing hub. By opening up its economy, China effectively became the "world's factory," leveraging its large, low-cost labour force to produce goods for the global market. This not only boosted China's economic growth but also increased its integration into the global economic system.

China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 marked a significant milestone in its economic journey. By joining the WTO, China committed itself to abide by international trade norms and further opening its markets. This move integrated China into the global trade system, allowing it to attract foreign investments, expand its export markets, and access advanced technology. Over the 21st century, China experienced unprecedented growth, with its GDP expanding at double-digit rates for nearly three decades. By 2010, China overtook Japan to become the second-largest economy in the world, trailing only the United States. The country's economic policies, such as the "Made in China 2025" initiative, have increasingly focused on moving up the value chain from low-end manufacturing to high-tech industries, including telecommunications, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy.

Furthermore, China has become a key player in global trade and finance. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, is an ambitious effort to build infrastructure and create trade networks across Asia, Africa, and Europe. Through BRI, China has extended its economic influence to various regions, creating new partnerships and increasing its control over critical global trade routes. The rise of the Chinese currency, the Renminbi (RMB), is another indicator of China's growing economic power, as it has become more widely used in international trade, and Beijing has made moves to make the RMB a global reserve currency. China's economic footprint is vast, with the country being a major lender to developing nations, fuelling infrastructure projects in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.<sup>iii</sup>

### ***Military Modernization: Power Projection and Regional Dominance***

While China's economic rise has been spectacular, its military transformation has been equally striking. Historically, China's military capabilities were constrained by outdated equipment, strategic isolation, and a lack of modern military doctrine. However, with the resources generated from its economic growth, China has invested heavily in modernizing its military. Over the past few decades, China has expanded its defense budget at an unprecedented rate, focusing on upgrading its military capabilities in both conventional and strategic domains.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has undergone a significant transformation, with a focus on modernizing its forces and developing advanced technologies such as cyber warfare capabilities, anti-satellite missiles, and stealth aircraft. The PLA Navy, once a relatively small force, has become one of the largest and most advanced naval fleets in the world, capable of projecting power in the Indo-Pacific region. China's military buildup has been accompanied by its assertive territorial claims, particularly in the South China Sea, where Beijing has created artificial islands and established military outposts. These actions, along with its claims to Taiwan, are central to China's growing ambitions to control vital trade routes and expand its strategic influence.

The rise of China's military power has raised concerns among neighbouring countries and global powers, particularly the United States. China's military modernization is often framed in the context of its broader geopolitical aspirations. Beijing views its military strength as essential to safeguarding its national interests, securing its regional dominance, and countering U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Chinese military's growing capabilities, especially its missile systems and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategies, are seen as a direct challenge to U.S. military superiority in Asia. As China asserts its territorial claims, particularly in the South China Sea, its military presence has become a key factor in regional security dynamics, with neighbouring countries such as Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines responding by strengthening their defense postures.<sup>iv</sup>

### ***Geopolitical Influence: Shaping the Global Order***

China's rise has also been characterized by an increasing assertiveness in its foreign policy and a desire to reshape the global geopolitical order. Traditionally, China followed a relatively cautious foreign policy, focusing on economic development and maintaining a low profile in international affairs. However, in recent years, China has increasingly taken a more active role in shaping global governance, both regionally and internationally. This shift has been especially apparent in its efforts to challenge U.S. dominance and create alternative institutions that reflect China's interests.

China's leadership in multilateral organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is part of a broader strategy to assert its influence in global governance. These platforms allow China to challenge the existing U.S.-led order by offering alternatives in terms of infrastructure development, security cooperation, and financial assistance. Through initiatives like the BRI, China seeks to expand its influence in key regions such as Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, providing countries with investments in infrastructure in exchange for increased political and economic ties.

China's growing diplomatic presence is also evident in its increasing involvement in the United Nations (UN) and other international forums, where it seeks to shape global norms and rules. China's leadership on issues such as climate change, global trade, and international development, as well as its growing role in peacekeeping missions, reflects its ambition to be a global leader in shaping the future world order. However, China's actions, especially its assertiveness in the South China Sea and its stance on human rights issues such as those in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, have sparked criticism from Western powers and human rights organizations, challenging the legitimacy of its rise.

### ***Challenges to China's Rise***

While China's rise has been impressive, it is not without its challenges. Domestically, China faces significant economic and social issues. The country is grappling with an aging population, labour shortages, and environmental degradation. Additionally, despite its rapid economic growth, there is a significant wealth gap

between urban and rural areas, as well as between different regions within China. These domestic challenges have the potential to hinder China's long-term growth and stability.

Geopolitically, China's rise has provoked a strategic response from the United States and its allies, who view China as a threat to the established international order. The trade war between China and the U.S., as well as disputes over technological dominance, such as the issue of 5G technology and intellectual property theft, have created tensions that may slow China's growth. Furthermore, China's territorial claims, particularly in the South China Sea, have led to confrontations with neighbouring countries and the U.S., creating the potential for conflict.

The rise of China has transformed the global geopolitical and economic landscape in profound ways. Its rapid economic growth has made it a central player in the global economy, while its military modernization and assertive foreign policy have reshaped the balance of power in Asia. However, this rise has also generated significant challenges, both domestically and internationally. As China continues to expand its influence, the world will have to navigate the complexities of engaging with a rising superpower that seeks to reshape the global order while also confronting the internal and external pressures that come with such a transformation. The trajectory of China's rise will ultimately determine the future of global geopolitics and economics in the 21st century.<sup>v</sup>

### 3. Research questions

- i) How does China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) affect India's geopolitical interests, and what steps has India taken to counter it?
- ii) To what extent has India's military modernization been influenced by China's rising military capabilities?
- iii) How has China's growing presence in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, impacted India's security concerns and regional strategy?
- iv) In what ways have the U.S.-China and U.S.-India relations influenced India's approach to China's rise?
- v) How do public perceptions of China in India influence India's policy responses to China's rise?
- vi) What impact does China's economic and military rise have on India's aspirations for regional leadership in South Asia?

### 4. Applying theoretical aspects

Through theoretical lenses, we can apply key International Relations theories: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. These theories offer distinct frameworks to understand the evolving power dynamics between China and India, and the broader implications for regional and global geopolitics.

### ***Realism: Security Dilemma and Balance of Power***

Realism, which focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system and the inherent competition for power and security, is a useful framework for understanding the China-India relationship. According to Realism, the international system lacks a central authority, compelling states to focus on their security and survival. As China rises both economically and militarily, India views this shift in the balance of power as a direct security threat. The growing Chinese military capabilities, particularly its expanding naval presence in the Indian Ocean and technological advancements trigger India's security concerns. This leads to a security dilemma, where India perceives China's military buildup as a threat to its security, prompting India to increase its defense spending, modernize its military, and form strategic alliances, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the U.S., Japan, and Australia.

From a balance of power perspective, Realists argue that the rise of China threatens India's position as the dominant regional power. China's growing influence in Asia challenges India's interests in the South Asian and Indian Ocean regions. To counterbalance China's expanding influence, India seeks to align itself with like-minded regional powers and global players. This alignment can be seen in India's increasing defense and security cooperation with the United States, Japan, and Australia, as well as its strategic focus on maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>vi</sup>

### ***Liberalism: Economic Interdependence and Multilateralism***

Liberalism offers an alternative lens through which to view India's response to China. Unlike Realism, which focuses on power politics, Liberalism emphasizes cooperation, economic interdependence, and the importance of international institutions in shaping state behaviour. Despite their strategic rivalry, China and India have strong economic ties. China is India's largest trading partner, and their economic interdependence serves as a stabilizing factor in their bilateral relationship. Through trade, investments, and infrastructure projects, both countries benefit from growing commercial ties. India's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and efforts to deepen economic cooperation indicate a Liberalist focus on the economic benefits of engagement.

However, economic competition also plays a significant role in their relationship. India seeks to leverage its growing economy to counterbalance China's rising power, especially in terms of trade and global influence. From a Liberal perspective, India may also seek to strengthen its position within regional and global institutions, such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the United Nations, to counter China's regional dominance and push for a more multipolar world order. Furthermore, India's growing participation in multilateral forums reflects its belief in institutionalism that collaboration and adherence to international rules and norms can help mitigate the security concerns posed by China's rise.

### ***Constructivism: Identity, Norms, and Strategic Culture***

Constructivism, which focuses on the role of ideas, identities, and social norms in shaping state behaviour, provides another layer of understanding of India's response to China. Constructivists argue that states act based not just on material power or economic interests, but also on their identities and perceptions of other states.

India's national identity has been shaped by its history of colonialism, its position as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and its commitment to democratic principles. This identity influences India's approach to China's rise, especially in terms of its desire to maintain regional stability and protect its sovereignty.

India views China's growing assertiveness especially in territorial disputes in the South China Sea and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a challenge to the regional order and its role as a leader in Asia. From a Constructivist perspective, India's response to China's rise is also shaped by its historical mistrust of Chinese intentions, particularly regarding border disputes. India's identity as a democratic state and its emphasis on human rights, rule of law, and multilateralism are often at odds with China's more authoritarian governance and its approach to regional issues. As such, India seeks to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region by strengthening alliances with other like-minded countries, fostering democratic norms, and advocating for a rules-based international order.<sup>vii</sup>

## 5. India's strategic response to China's rise

India's strategic response to China's rise is shaped by a multifaceted approach that integrates military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions. As China emerges as a global power, its growing military strength, economic influence, and assertiveness in regional matters have prompted India to reassess its security, economic policies, and foreign relations. India's response is not simply reactive; it involves a carefully calculated strategy to safeguard its national interests, maintain regional stability, and assert its position as a rising power in Asia.

### *Military and Security Responses*

India's security strategy vis-à-vis China is heavily influenced by its military modernization and its response to perceived threats in the region. A central aspect of India's response is deterrence through military preparedness. As China's military capabilities grow, particularly in the Indian Ocean and the Himalayan border areas, India has worked to bolster its defense capabilities. The ongoing modernization of India's armed forces, including upgrading its air force, naval power, and missile defense systems, is a direct response to China's growing military presence, especially its increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea and its strategic alliances, such as with Pakistan and other countries in the region.

The border dispute between India and China remains a critical issue. Tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) have led to frequent confrontations, as evidenced by the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which underscored the strategic vulnerability India faces on its northern frontier. In response, India has strengthened its infrastructure and military presence along the LAC, focusing on rapid mobilization and improved logistics to ensure effective deterrence against any potential Chinese aggression.

India's strategic responses also include deepening defense cooperation with other countries, particularly the United States, Japan, and Australia, through frameworks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). These

partnerships aim to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, especially in maritime security, which India views as vital for its own strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>viii</sup>

### *Economic Strategies*

Economically, India has sought to diversify its engagement with China while also curbing its dependence on Beijing. While India's trade relations with China have grown substantially China being one of India's largest trading partners India faces significant trade imbalances. To address this, India has pursued a strategy of economic diversification, focusing on expanding its trade ties with other countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Africa. The economic rise of China poses challenges to India's own ambitions of economic leadership in Asia, but India has worked to leverage its own market potential, skilled workforce, and growing tech sector to position itself as a counterbalance to China's dominance in global supply chains.

At the same time, India has increasingly prioritized self-reliance in key sectors like defense manufacturing, electronics, and energy to reduce reliance on Chinese imports. India's Make in India initiative is a direct response to China's growing industrial and technological dominance. India also has sought to build new trading partnerships with countries like the European Union, United States, and ASEAN nations, enhancing its global economic footprint while reducing over-reliance on China.

India has also reacted to China's growing influence in regional economic initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has strategic ramifications for the region. India's reluctance to participate in the BRI stems from concerns over sovereignty and strategic encirclement, particularly due to China's investments in Pakistan and its growing footprint in the Indian Ocean. Instead, India has pursued alternative projects, such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) and Chabahar Port in Iran, to ensure connectivity and strengthen its regional influence.

### *Diplomatic and Strategic Alliances*

India's diplomatic strategy towards China's rise is multifaceted, aimed at maintaining a balance between engagement and containment. On the one hand, India recognizes China as a key economic partner, and both nations are members of forums like BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the United Nations. India has maintained a stance of engagement in global platforms, emphasizing multilateralism, trade, and regional cooperation. However, India is also wary of China's growing political and military influence and is determined to assert its strategic autonomy. To this end, India has sought to strengthen its ties with countries that share concerns about China's assertiveness. India's participation in the Quad with the United States, Japan, and Australia is one of the most notable diplomatic responses to China's rise. The Quad is a platform that seeks to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, ensuring that China does not dominate regional affairs. India's strategic cooperation with these countries is framed by a shared interest in maintaining maritime security, countering China's Belt and Road Initiative, and ensuring the continued open access to the global commons in Asia.<sup>ix</sup>

India's foreign policy also focuses on cultivating stronger ties with key regional players, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore, all of which are important players in the Indo-Pacific and share concerns about Chinese expansionism. By fostering these relationships, India aims to promote a multipolar regional order in which no single power, particularly China, can dominate.

### *Balancing the Strategic Partnership with the United States*

One of India's significant strategic moves in response to China's rise has been its strengthening of ties with the United States. Over the past two decades, India has transitioned from a non-aligned foreign policy to one of strategic partnership with the U.S. This shift is partly due to China's growing military and economic influence, which India views as a challenge to regional stability. As a result, India has deepened its defense and security cooperation with the U.S., including joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and technology transfers. The Lemon Law and Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) are examples of efforts to improve military collaboration.

Despite the growing partnership, India has been careful to maintain its strategic autonomy, avoiding alignment with the U.S. in ways that would undermine its independent foreign policy. India remains cautious about being drawn into any China-U.S. rivalry, as it seeks to balance its relations with both powers while ensuring its interests are not compromised.

India's strategic response to China's rise is a complex, multifaceted approach that includes military preparedness, economic diversification, diplomatic balancing, and strengthening alliances with key global players. The rise of China has forced India to reassess its national security priorities, regional positioning, and global aspirations. While India seeks to manage its relationship with China through engagement and cooperation, it is equally determined to assert its role as a regional power and ensure that China's growing influence does not undermine India's sovereignty, security, or strategic interests.

India's response to China's rise will likely continue to evolve as both countries engage in a delicate balancing act, leveraging their economic ties while navigating their security concerns. As China asserts its power on the global stage, India must find ways to manage competition, collaborate with strategic partners, and maintain regional stability, all while safeguarding its own interests in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.<sup>x</sup>

## **6. Sino-Indian Competition in the Indian Ocean Region**

The competition between China and India in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has evolved into a significant strategic rivalry, with both nations vying for influence over crucial sea lanes, strategic ports, and access to resources. The IOR is essential for energy security and economic stability for both India and China, which rely heavily on its maritime routes for trade and energy imports. China's growing presence in the region, largely through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has raised concerns in India regarding potential encirclement and the establishment of Chinese military footholds near its borders. Key projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor (CPEC) and port developments in Gwadar, Pakistan, and Hambantota, Sri Lanka, signify China's strategic intent to deepen its reach into the IOR. While officially commercial, these projects provide China with potential "dual-use" facilities that could serve military purposes, potentially shifting the regional power balance and heightening India's strategic concerns.<sup>xi</sup>

India has responded by strengthening its maritime capabilities and bolstering its presence in the Indian Ocean, viewing the region as a vital sphere of influence. India's Naval modernization efforts reflect its commitment to a blue-water navy capable of extended operations across the Indian Ocean. The Andaman and Nicobar Command, India's only tri-service command, underscores its strategic advantage over key maritime chokepoints, providing surveillance and control over crucial sea routes. Moreover, India has forged agreements to access port facilities in the Seychelles, Oman, and Iran, most notably with Duqm and Chabahar ports, enhancing its operational reach. These initiatives underscore India's resolve to counter China's encroachment and maintain its traditional dominance in the IOR.

Strategic partnerships play a pivotal role in India's response to China's growing influence. India has increasingly aligned with like-minded regional and global powers, particularly the United States, Japan, and Australia, as part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). The Quad emphasizes the importance of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, supporting principles of sovereignty and countering unilateral attempts at regional dominance. Joint exercises like Malabar strengthen interoperability among Quad members and signal a collective resolve to ensure security in the IOR. By collaborating with these partners, India reinforces its position in the region and aims to deter further Chinese militarization.<sup>xii</sup>

Economic competition between India and China further shapes the dynamics in the IOR, with each country seeking to establish itself as a preferred partner for infrastructure development and investment. While China's BRI has made significant inroads, India, with Japan, has launched the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) to offer alternative infrastructure projects based on transparency and local benefits. Additionally, India's Project Mausam aims to strengthen cultural and historical ties with Indian Ocean states, reinforcing soft power and regional ties. Chabahar Port in Iran, a joint effort by India, provides direct access to Central Asia, offering a strategic alternative to the Chinese-dominated Gwadar port in Pakistan.

The Sino-Indian competition in the IOR has broader geopolitical implications, particularly as global powers like the United States increasingly view India as a counterbalance to China's rising influence in Asia. As both countries expand their interests in the IOR, the potential for friction increases, impacting stability in the region. The Indian Ocean has become a critical theatre of 21st-century strategic competition, with control over energy routes, trade corridors, and military access at stake. How China and India navigate this rivalry will be pivotal in shaping not only the regional power dynamics but also the broader balance of power across Asia. This unfolding competition suggests that the IOR will continue to play a central role in the geopolitical landscape, with both countries actively seeking to secure their interests while responding to the strategic moves of the other.<sup>xiii</sup>

## 7. Arguments and Analysis

***ij) How does China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) affect India's geopolitical interests, and what steps has India taken to counter it?***

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has significant implications for India's geopolitical interests, as it aims to connect Asia with Europe and Africa through infrastructure and trade networks. Launched in 2013, the BRI spans over 60 countries and includes a range of investments in roads, railways, ports, and energy projects. While China portrays the BRI as a framework for global connectivity, India perceives it as a strategic tool for expanding Chinese influence in regions critical to its own security and economic interests, particularly in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The BRI encircles India geographically by involving neighbouring countries, like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh, in infrastructure projects that potentially increase their dependence on China.

A major point of contention for India is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship BRI project that runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), a territory India claims as its own. CPEC not only challenges India's sovereignty but also establishes Pakistan as a critical ally for China in South Asia, enabling deeper strategic and economic ties between the two countries. The port of Gwadar, developed under CPEC, provides China with direct access to the Arabian Sea, allowing it to bypass the Strait of Malacca for energy imports. From India's perspective, this port can also serve as a potential naval base, amplifying China's military reach in a region India considers within its traditional sphere of influence.<sup>xiv</sup>

In response to the BRI, India has taken multiple countermeasures to protect its strategic interests. It has outrightly rejected the BRI, citing concerns over sovereignty and lack of transparency in project financing, which often leads participating countries into debt dependence on China. To counterbalance the BRI, India has sought to strengthen regional partnerships and expand its own economic influence. For instance, India has collaborated with Japan to launch the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), an alternative connectivity initiative emphasizing inclusive and sustainable development. Through this partnership, India aims to offer transparent and locally beneficial infrastructure projects to countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, providing them with an alternative to China's model.

Furthermore, India has focused on developing its own infrastructure projects, such as the Chabahar Port in Iran, which offers a direct trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Chabahar provides India with a strategic foothold in the region and serves as a counterpoint to Gwadar, supporting both India's trade interests and its regional security objectives. India has also strengthened bilateral ties with other Indian Ocean states, such as Seychelles and Mauritius, by investing in port facilities and securing defense agreements, enhancing its strategic depth in the IOR.

India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the United States, Japan, and Australia is another pillar of its response to the BRI. The Quad aims to uphold a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, countering China's growing influence in the region. Regular joint military exercises, such as Malabar, increase interoperability among Quad nations and serve as a deterrent to potential Chinese militarization in the IOR. By

collaborating with like-minded countries, India seeks to balance China's influence and maintain regional stability.<sup>xv</sup>

***ii) To what extent has India's military modernization been influenced by China's rising military capabilities?***

India's military modernization efforts have been significantly influenced by the rapid growth of China's military capabilities, reflecting an increased sense of urgency in New Delhi to close the capability gap and ensure security across contested borders and in strategic maritime regions. As China has emerged as a major military power with advanced weaponry, growing technological prowess, and expanded global reach, India has intensified its defense investments and reoriented its military strategy to address both conventional and asymmetric threats posed by its northern neighbours.

One of the primary motivations for India's military modernization is China's buildup along their shared Himalayan border, particularly in the context of recent standoffs in areas such as Doklam and Ladakh. These confrontations have underscored China's readiness to use its military power to assert territorial claims, prompting India to bolster its own border defences. As a result, India has enhanced its capabilities in mountain warfare, deployed additional troops and advanced weaponry to the border, and invested in infrastructure development in these challenging terrains. India's recent acquisition of advanced fighter jets, such as the French Dassault Rafale, alongside indigenous fighter programs, reflects its focus on maintaining air superiority along its northern and eastern borders. These efforts are crucial for securing India's sovereignty in regions vulnerable to Chinese incursions.<sup>xvi</sup>

China's advanced technological capabilities in cyber, space, and missile systems have also spurred India to prioritize modernization in these areas. Recognizing the potential vulnerability of its cyber networks and the strategic importance of space, India has established specialized agencies like the Defense Cyber Agency and the Defense Space Agency. These initiatives aim to strengthen India's defense posture against cyber-attacks and to secure its satellite assets, which are increasingly crucial for military communications, surveillance, and intelligence gathering. Additionally, China's advancements in hypersonic and ballistic missile technology have driven India to expand its missile defense systems, as well as develop its own long-range missiles, such as the Agni-V, which can serve as a credible deterrent against potential Chinese aggression.

In the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), China's increasing naval presence, including the establishment of overseas bases such as the one in Djibouti and extensive port development projects through the Belt and Road Initiative, has prompted India to prioritize its naval modernization. India's maritime strategy has shifted to emphasize power projection and the protection of key sea lanes, crucial for trade and energy imports. India has focused on enhancing its blue-water navy capabilities by building or acquiring aircraft carriers, submarines, and advanced warships. Collaboration with countries like the United States, Japan, and Australia through joint naval exercises has also been instrumental in developing a counterbalance to China's assertive naval strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

India's pursuit of a comprehensive modernization program highlights the profound impact of China's military rise on its defense planning and policy. With China investing heavily in technologies that span traditional and

non-traditional warfare, India's modernization efforts seek to safeguard its strategic autonomy and maintain a balance of power in the region. The rivalry between these two nuclear-armed states continues to shape India's defense priorities, pushing it towards self-reliance in defense production and stronger alliances with countries that share concerns over China's growing influence. As India advances in its military capabilities, the regional security dynamics evolve, underscoring the broader implications of China's rise for stability in Asia.<sup>xvii</sup>

***iii) How has China's growing presence in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, impacted India's security concerns and regional strategy?***

China's expanding influence in South Asia, especially through its deepening partnership with Pakistan, has significantly heightened India's security concerns and reshaped its regional strategy. The China-Pakistan alliance presents India with a unique strategic challenge, as it amplifies the conventional and asymmetric security threats on multiple fronts. China's support for Pakistan, including military assistance, economic investments, and infrastructure projects, strengthens Pakistan's position in relation to India, creating a formidable two-front security dilemma for New Delhi. Consequently, India's regional strategy increasingly focuses on countering this alliance through military preparedness, diplomatic engagements, and closer ties with other regional and global powers.

The cornerstone of China's engagement in Pakistan is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC entails massive infrastructure investments, including road networks, energy projects, and the strategic Gwadar port on Pakistan's southwestern coast. For India, the development of Gwadar port raises significant security concerns as it provides China with a potential naval outpost in the Arabian Sea, close to India's western coastline and vital sea lanes. The presence of Chinese assets and personnel in Pakistan poses a direct strategic threat, as it increases China's ability to project power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and monitor Indian naval movements. In response, India has ramped up its naval capabilities, focusing on strengthening its presence in the IOR and forming partnerships with key regional players such as the United States, Japan, and Australia to counterbalance China's influence.<sup>xviii</sup>

Additionally, China's continued military and technological support to Pakistan has a profound impact on India's security environment. China is one of Pakistan's largest suppliers of advanced military hardware, including fighter jets, submarines, and missile technology. This support enhances Pakistan's conventional military capabilities, creating a credible threat along India's western border and forcing India to allocate significant resources to maintain a robust defense posture in the region. China's provision of nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan has also complicated India's security calculus, as it gives Pakistan a strategic edge and intensifies the nuclear dimension of South Asian security. India has responded by upgrading its own defense capabilities, focusing on advanced missile systems, air defense, and the development of indigenous defense technologies.

The China-Pakistan alliance has also pushed India to reconsider its broader diplomatic strategy in South Asia. Recognizing the need to counterbalance China's influence, India has increased its outreach to neighbouring countries, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. India aims to strengthen economic and security ties with these nations to prevent them from drifting into China's orbit. Additionally, India has become

more proactive in multilateral forums such as the Quad (comprising India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia) to counteract China's assertiveness in the region. By participating in joint military exercises, enhancing intelligence sharing, and coordinating on issues of maritime security, India seeks to create a coalition of like-minded nations to maintain a stable regional order.

Furthermore, China's activities in Pakistan have driven India to prioritize internal security measures and border infrastructure development. The construction of roads, railways, and advanced surveillance systems along the India-China border is part of India's effort to improve mobility and response times in case of cross-border tensions. India's focus on strengthening intelligence and counterterrorism measures is also tied to the belief that China's influence in Pakistan could embolden Pakistan-based militant groups, exacerbating security challenges within India.<sup>xix</sup>

***iv) In what ways have the U.S.-China and U.S.-India relations influenced India's approach to China's rise?***

The dynamics of U.S.-China and U.S.-India relations have substantially shaped India's approach to China's rise, impacting India's strategic calculations and influencing its foreign policy. The U.S.-China relationship, marked by growing rivalry, has seen the United States pivot its focus to the Indo-Pacific, a region where China's assertive actions in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects have raised concerns about Beijing's strategic intentions. This competition has aligned the United States more closely with India, which shares apprehensions about China's rising influence in Asia. Consequently, India has found an opportunity to strengthen its partnership with the U.S. and other democratic allies to counterbalance China's assertiveness, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region and along India's northern borders.<sup>xx</sup>

The strengthening of U.S.-India relations has provided India with enhanced diplomatic and military leverage. Since 2016, the U.S. has designated India as a "Major Defense Partner," enabling greater access to defense technology and facilitating joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing initiatives. These developments have emboldened India's stance on China, allowing it to adopt a more assertive posture in response to China's increasing border provocations and expanding regional influence. The U.S.-India partnership, which extends into domains like defense, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism, has enabled India to modernize its military and improve its strategic infrastructure, creating a counterweight to China's military capabilities. Furthermore, U.S. support on multilateral platforms like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) has enabled India to position itself as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region, enhancing its security posture in relation to China.

On the diplomatic front, the U.S.-China rivalry has pushed India to recalibrate its "strategic autonomy" approach. Traditionally, India has sought to avoid strict alignment with any single power bloc; however, China's aggressive posturing, particularly in the Himalayan region, has led India to pursue closer ties with the U.S. and its allies. This shift does not imply abandoning India's autonomy but rather reflects a pragmatic alignment of interests in response to China's rise. By engaging more deeply with the U.S., Japan, and Australia in initiatives like the Quad, India seeks to balance China's influence while maintaining flexibility in its international relations.

The evolving U.S.-China tensions have also intensified U.S. economic and technological engagement with India, particularly in sectors where China previously held substantial sway. For instance, the U.S. has increasingly supported India's bid to reduce its economic dependence on China, encouraging the development of India's technology and manufacturing sectors. Initiatives like the U.S.-India Strategic Energy Partnership, aimed at strengthening energy security and reducing reliance on Chinese supply chains, demonstrate the economic alignment between the U.S. and India. This collaboration enables India to expand its economy and reduce vulnerabilities to Chinese economic pressures, while also supporting the broader U.S. goal of countering Chinese dominance in critical technology and supply chains.

The U.S.-India partnership, however, remains complex, as India must balance its ties with the U.S. with the need to avoid overtly antagonizing China. While India values U.S. support, it remains cautious about being drawn into a full-fledged alliance that might restrict its diplomatic flexibility in the region. India's cautious approach is evident in its stance on issues like Taiwan and the South China Sea, where it refrains from taking an overly confrontational position against China. Nonetheless, the U.S.-China rivalry has undeniably expanded India's strategic options and shaped its policies to address the challenges posed by China's rise, including through cooperative security frameworks like the Quad and economic resilience measures aimed at reducing dependence on China.<sup>xxi</sup>

#### ***v) How do public perceptions of China in India influence India's policy responses to China's rise?***

Public perceptions of China in India play a significant role in shaping India's policy responses to China's rise. Over recent years, public sentiment in India towards China has largely turned negative, influenced by recurring border tensions, economic competition, and concerns over China's close relationship with Pakistan. Incidents like the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which resulted in casualties on both sides, deeply impacted Indian public opinion, leading to widespread distrust and frustration toward China. Such sentiment has created domestic pressure on the Indian government to adopt a firmer stance in dealing with China, prompting policies that prioritize national security and assert India's strategic autonomy.

The increasing skepticism toward China among the Indian public is also evident in the economic domain, where calls to reduce dependency on Chinese products have grown louder. Following the Galwan incident, there was a surge in public campaigns to boycott Chinese goods and promote domestic alternatives, amplifying the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) initiative launched by the Indian government. Responding to this sentiment, the government enacted a series of economic measures aimed at reducing China's foothold in the Indian market, including restrictions on Chinese investment, especially in sensitive sectors like technology and telecommunications. India's ban on numerous Chinese apps, including popular ones like TikTok, reflects both a strategic and symbolic response to public concerns over Chinese influence and data security.<sup>xxii</sup>

Public opinion has also influenced India's diplomatic strategies in regional and international forums. Growing mistrust toward China among the Indian population has strengthened India's resolve to build alliances with like-minded countries, enhancing cooperation with the United States, Japan, and Australia through platforms such as the Quad. By aligning more closely with other democracies concerned about China's assertive behaviour,

India not only addresses its own security needs but also signals to its domestic audience that it is actively countering China's influence. The government's engagement in multilateral forums focused on Indo-Pacific security and its emphasis on freedom of navigation are, in part, responses to a domestic mandate that views China's expansionist policies with suspicion.

Furthermore, the Indian public's increasing awareness of China's actions, such as its assertiveness in the South China Sea and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects across South Asia, has fuelled concerns about China's long-term intentions in the region. Indian media frequently highlights China's strategic projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, which heightens public sensitivity to the perceived encirclement of India. This perception has pushed the government to prioritize infrastructure and security developments along India's borders with China and to strengthen diplomatic outreach with neighbouring countries to counter China's influence.

In essence, the public's negative perception of China has provided the Indian government with both a mandate and pressure to adopt a more assertive approach in managing its relations with Beijing. As public sentiment continues to be wary of China's intentions, the Indian government is likely to sustain policies that reinforce national security, economic self-reliance, and strategic partnerships that help balance China's rise. This alignment between public opinion and policy responses underscores the significant impact of domestic attitudes on India's foreign policy strategy concerning China.<sup>xxiii</sup>

#### ***vi) What impact does China's economic and military rise have on India's aspirations for regional leadership in South Asia?***

China's economic and military rise presents significant challenges to India's aspirations for regional leadership in South Asia, reshaping the balance of power and testing India's influence in its immediate neighbourhood. Traditionally, India has seen itself as the primary power in South Asia, maintaining close ties and exerting influence over countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. However, China's expanding economic engagement and strategic initiatives, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have allowed it to gain considerable influence in these same countries, offering an alternative to Indian hegemony in the region. This shift forces India to contend with an increasingly multipolar South Asia, where its traditional role as the dominant regional actor is being contested.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Economically, China's deep pockets and extensive investments in infrastructure across South Asia have made it a preferred partner for many countries in the region. China's BRI projects, including ports, highways, and railways, are seen as transformative for local economies, providing capital and resources that India, due to its own economic constraints, struggles to match. For instance, China's investments in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have not only bolstered Pakistan's infrastructure but also given China a strategic foothold near India's borders. Similarly, China's investment in Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka and Gwadar Port in Pakistan offers it a presence in the Indian Ocean, directly challenging India's strategic reach in its own maritime neighbourhood. This influence through economic means diminishes India's traditional role as the leading development partner and security provider for these nations, creating a more complex regional landscape.

Militarily, China's growing capabilities have shifted the strategic calculations in South Asia. With a modernized and increasingly capable military, China's presence along India's northern borders has intensified, marked by periodic standoffs and skirmishes, as seen in Doklam in 2017 and the Galwan Valley in 2020. The military build-up on both sides has drawn India's attention and resources away from its broader regional ambitions, necessitating a greater focus on countering China's influence at the border and bolstering defense capacities. Additionally, China's role as a key defense supplier for Pakistan, combined with its military assistance to smaller South Asian states, has bolstered its image as an alternative security partner in the region, reducing India's centrality in regional security.

India's diplomatic efforts to assert regional leadership are also affected by China's increasing influence. South Asian countries now have more leverage when negotiating with India, using China as a counterweight to press for better terms in trade, security, and political agreements. This erodes India's traditional role as the "big brother" in South Asia, making its leadership contingent on addressing regional demands and maintaining competitive advantages. India has responded with initiatives like "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" policies, aiming to strengthen ties and offer alternatives to China's investments. However, these initiatives face limitations, as India's economic capacities are dwarfed by China's, and it struggles to keep pace with China's high-volume investment commitments.

In sum, China's economic and military rise directly challenges India's aspirations for regional leadership in South Asia by offering alternative partnerships, strategic investments, and defense support to countries within India's sphere of influence. The result is a competitive regional environment in which India must continually adapt its policies and expand its capabilities to retain influence. For India, balancing its regional leadership ambitions with the need to counter China's growing presence remains a complex and ongoing task that shapes its foreign and defense policies across South Asia.<sup>xxv</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, China's rise as a formidable economic and military power has reshaped the geopolitical dynamics of Asia, prompting India to recalibrate its strategic approach in response. China's expanding influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its deepening partnerships with South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan, have tested India's regional influence and security calculus. For India, this has meant strengthening diplomatic ties with key global players, accelerating military modernization, and fostering regional alliances to counterbalance China's expanding footprint.

India's response has been multi-faceted, encompassing strategic partnerships with the United States, Japan, and other countries that share concerns over China's regional ambitions. In parallel, India has also sought to reinforce its influence in South Asia through initiatives such as "Neighborhood First" and "Act East," aimed at enhancing connectivity, development, and defense cooperation with neighbouring states. In essence, China's rise has compelled India to adopt a more assertive, globally engaged posture, pushing it to strengthen alliances, enhance military readiness, and deepen its influence within South Asia and beyond. While challenges remain, India's evolving response underscores its resolve to uphold regional stability and protect its strategic interests. The

future of Sino-Indian relations will likely be shaped by this strategic competition, as both nations continue to pursue their aspirations in an increasingly interconnected and contested geopolitical landscape.

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