



Nuclear India & China and Strategic Implications on South Asia

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Abstract

India and China are the two major countries of South Asia; they share more than one third of the total world population as well one fourth of the fertile land of the globe.

There are immense possibilities of economic and trade benefits if they work together with mutual cooperation and friendship. But unfortunately they have a legacy of complex border disputes and a tense relationship that includes a war in 1962.

Now both the countries are equipped with heavy military power as well as nuclear and missile capabilities, the present study investigates various aspects of Sino Indian strategic rivalry and its implications on the strategic environment of the world in general and South Asia in particular. It also reveals the area of mutual assistance and cooperation vital for a huge part of the globe.

Key Words: India, China, South Asia, Nuclear Strategic Implications.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India and China are two of Asia's largest and most influential states and they share a complex and ambivalent relation. As two of the world's most populous and nuclear-armed states, the interplays between them have significant regional and global security implications. The Sino-Indian relationship is marked by a complex interplay of competitiveness and cooperation and is shaped by historical events, strategic interests, and regional dynamics. The convolutions between China and India are dynamic as well as multidimensional and there is competition and rivalry in their relationship. The two countries are engaged in territorial disputes which can evolve into military strife.

Though the overall relationship has been marked by rivalry, mistrust and competition, there are areas of cooperation like climate change and world trade talks. The strategic scenario of the Indian Ocean Region became even more complicated due to the fact that both the countries are nuclear-powered.

The strategic presentiments have been increasing at the bilateral, regional and global levels due to the multi-dimensional nature of Sino-India rivalry which has now expanded to land as well as sea. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as a major point of contention between the two countries which led to India's growing strategic cooperation with the USA, Australia and Japan.

This complicated situation could have a big impact on peace in Asia and the world. To effectively address the India-China strategic problems, to prevent any future disharmony, the understanding of the intricate coaction of factors that forms the relationship between the two countries is a must. The aim of the article is to provide a compendium of the multi-faceted and complex relationship between India and China, to explore India's threat perception of a nuclear China, considering historical contexts, ongoing border disputes, military capabilities, strategic partnerships, current geopolitical realities, future strategic implications and broader regional influences. By acknowledging these multifaceted aspects, we can apprehend the strategic calculations that affect India's foreign and defense policy decisions. This article will focus on examining the seeds of the Sino-India strategic challenge and their implications for regional and global stability and security.

2. HISTORICAL ASPECT

After the Chinese revolution in 1949, China, under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung, became the People's Republic of China (PRC). For a brief period (1949-1957) there was cooperation, it was during this period that diplomatic ties were established (1 April 1950) and high-level visits were held. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, believed that China and India were sister nations from the dawn of history, he emphasized on the shared ancient civilization and cultural ties between the two nations. The notion of "Hindi-Cheeni Bhai Bhai" (India-China brotherhood) was an eminent theme that signified the hope for a strong friendship. Both Nehru and Gandhi viewed China and India as pivotal for maintaining peace in Asia.

In 1950 Nehru's policy on China received its first setback, when China occupied Tibet. Despite facing domestic criticism, Nehru continued to publicly advocate for India-China friendship, even after the invasion.

In April 1954, India and China signed a trade agreement concerning the Tibet region, establishing relations based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, or Panchsheel. However, the agreement could not mask the emerging perception of China as expansionist and aggressive. Leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel foresaw the threat from China's communist ideology and expansionist tendencies, warning Nehru about the potential dangers to India's frontiers.¹

3. BORDER DISPUTES

By the late 1950s, Sovereignty of various small separated pieces and two large territories had become a moot point between India and China. Serious polarities between the two states became apparent, particularly over the un-demarcated border, particularly in the Eastern Sector (North Eastern Frontier Agency) and the Western Sector (Aksai Chin). The territorial disputes over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh are critical to understanding India's threat perception. These regions hold strategic importance, and ongoing skirmishes have heightened tensions.²



Figure: 1

3.1 Aksai Chin

- It is currently under the control and administration of China as a segment of the autonomous region of Xinjiang. India claims this region to be a part of Ladakh.
- In 1842, the Sikhs and the Chinese signed a treaty regarding the boundary, which rendered Aksai Chin as a part of Ladakh under the Sikhs. In 1846 after British victory in Anglo-Sikh wars, Ladakh came under British control.
- In 1865, "Johnson Line" was named after W.H. Johnson, a British civil servant who worked at the Survey of India, which shows Aksai Chin as a part of India. This line was not presented to the Chinese as they didn't control Xinjiang at that time. This is the line that India follows and claims Aksai Chin.

- In 1899, the British presented the 'Macartney-MacDonald Line' to the Chinese. According to this border the natural boundary was formed by the Karakoram Mountains, and the area up to the Indus River watershed was under British rule. Tarim River watershed is put under Chinese administration, which also barred Russian advancement in Central Asia. The British believed that the Chinese agreed as the Qing dynasty didn't respond.
- By the end of World War-I, the British were using the Johnson Line officially. The 'Peking University Atlas' which was published in 1925 put Aksai Chin in India.
- But no efforts to certify the control over Aksai Chin were made by the British, no discussions were done with governments of China or Tibet to avoid any misunderstanding.
- During the 1950s, PRC built a 1200 km road connecting Xinjiang to Western Tibet, of which 179 km ran through Aksai Chin. Aksai Chin was difficult to access for the Indians because of the Karakorams but was on-hand to the Chinese.

3.2 Arunachal Pradesh and McMahon Line

- The rise of the dispute can be attributed to Chinese denial of acceptance to McMahon Line, which was established in 1913 by the negotiations between British administrator Sir Henry McMahon and Tibetan representatives.
- In Simla Conference (1913-14) McMahon Line, a 550 miles long border between British India and Tibet was proposed by Sir Henry McMahon. The border ceded Tawang and other Tibetan areas to British India.
- China rejected the McMahon line stating that the Tibetan government had no authority to sign a treaty as it was a local government.

4. 1962 SINO-INDIA WAR

By 1951, Chinese military posts were extended in Aksai Chin. To curb the growing tensions both countries signed the Panchsheel Agreement in 1954 and a frontier map was presented to China that included McMahon Line and they did not object.

The Indians were infuriated when they learned about the part of the Chinese highway that passes through Aksai Chin in 1958. A few days later a withdrawal of 20 kms from the "Line of Actual Control" which was the McMahon Line in the East and the line up to which each side exercised actual control in the West was proposed by the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Nehru wanted to turn the disputed region into a no man's land.

In 1961, Chinese intruded the area administered by India and began to set up their outposts. In response Indians adopted 'Forward Policy' under which they created outposts behind the Chinese troops to cut off their supplies. There were military clashes in many areas like Dehra Compass, Chip Chap River, Galwan Valley, Dhola-Thang La, Yumtso La, etc. before China launched a full fledged attack in October 1962.

The PLA attacked India, on 20 October 1962, on two frontiers, 1000 kms apart. In the eastern theatre (NEFA), the PLA wanted to capture the banks of the Namka Chu River and in the western theatre (Aksai Chin), they wanted to retract the Indian army from the valley of the Chip Chap River. By 24th October, PLA had intruded into territory which was under Indian control. Due to

this China held a tough position against India. After four days of fighting, the war was halted, there was a three week lull.

Zhou sent a proposal to Nehru for settlement of the border and 20 km withdrawal of both sides and complete retraction of the Chinese from NEFA.

After Nehru's rejection, the struggle began on 14 November in the eastern theater. Both sides suffered heavy casualties and Indians withdrew to limit the number of dead soldiers. A unilateral ceasefire was declared by China in November 1962.

5. CHINA'S NUCLEAR TESTS 1964

In 1955, the Chinese Nuclear weapons program was initiated under Mao Zedong as a result of the tangles with the United States in the 1950s.⁴

Though China wanted to self-reliant they needed USSR to develop nuclear weapons.⁵ A New Defence Technical Accord was established as they signed six agreements⁶ in 1957. USSR had to provide China with technical data & assistance for which they exchanged hundreds of scientists,⁷ they initiated a joint search in China for uranium. A prototype nuclear device was also given to China by the USSR.

But the assistance provided by the USSR was transient and was over in just 2 years which was a result of many factors combined.

- Sino-Soviet relations dried up during 1958 to 1959 due to the bombing of Kinmen,⁸ and this eventually resulted in termination of the agreement in 1960 and USSR didn't provide the prototype to China.
- The USSR was also pursuing test ban treaties with the USA in late 1950s.

Now the production of adequate quantities of fissile material (especially plutonium) became challenging for the Chinese.⁹ Mao shifted toward an overall policy of self-reliance 'Project 596' and it was named after the month of June 1959 in which it was initiated as an independent nuclear project, after Nikita Khrushchev stopped assisting the Chinese with their nuclear program. The Second Ministry of Machine Building Industry, was responsible for continuing the Chinese Nuclear Program.¹⁰ and China had enriched enough fissionable U₂₃₅ by 14 January 1964. China conducted its 1st nuclear test, Project 596, on 16 October 1964, at the Lop Nur test site¹¹, yielding 22 kilotons. Weapons-grade uranium (U₂₃₅) for this implosion fission bomb was enriched in Lanzhou in a gaseous diffusion plant.¹² The atomic bomb was a part of China's "Two Bombs, One Satellite" program.

6. CHINA'S NUCLEAR POLICY

No-First-Use (NFU) Doctrine: this stresses the use for deterrence rather than aggression.

Minimum Deterrence: China intends to maintain a credible second-strike capability without engaging in an arms race.

Survivability and Second-Strike Capability: This strategy ensures that China can retaliate even after a nuclear strike, this is done by ensuring the survivability of the nuclear forces through the development of mobile missile systems, submarines, and hardened silos.

7. INDIA'S REACTION TO THE CHINESE NUCLEAR TESTS

Shastri was a staunch Gandhain, who was against nuclear weapons development. But after the Chinese Nuclear Tests he opted for the 'Nuclear Option' strategy and said that India's Nuclear Policy would involve 'peaceful nuclear explosive' (PNE) due to domestic pressure.

Shastri was succeeded by Indira Gandhi at a time when China-Pakistan ties started unfurling. But what pushed India over the edge to conduct Nuclear Tests was the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968. Furthermore India's national security came under serious threat during 1971 Indo-Pak war or Bangladesh War of Liberation, in which we saw the 'Pakistan-China-USA Nexus' against us. This brought India and the USSR closer and on 9th August 1971, Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was signed with the USSR. But we realised the importance of self-reliance and the decision to conduct Nuclear Test was made.

India conducted its 1st nuclear test, code-named Smiling Buddha, in 1974 in Pokhran and it was described as a "peaceful nuclear explosion" (PNE). Therefore, it was an act of weapon option which was based on proven technology. It was described as a technological and political symbol of capability and intentions.

8. CHINA'S NUCLEAR MODERNISATION

China has continued to modernise its nuclear arsenal, but it is difficult to estimate the exact strength due to the secrecy of its strategic program. China's nuclear capabilities, including its missile technology and modernization efforts, present a significant threat to India. The development of MIRVs and advancements in missile defense systems are of particular concern¹³. The Nuclear Information Project released by The Federation of American Scientists, in January 2024, published 'The 2024 Nuclear Notebook on China's Nuclear Forces' in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. It states "China's nuclear expansion is among the largest and most rapid modernization campaigns of the nine nuclear-armed states"¹⁴ The report also stated that China has continued the development of silos for DF-5, its liquid fuel ICBMs besides the contrivance of 3 new missile silo fields for solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missiles and is also advancing its advanced strategic delivery systems.¹⁴

China has initiated expansion of the replacement of the medium-ranged DF-21 which will be the dual-capable DF-26 IRBMs.¹⁴

China has been loading its JL-3 SLBMs on the Type 094 ballistic missile submarines (Jin-Class). These SLBMs have an estimated range of 10,000 kms. (Previously JL-2 SLBMs were used which had a range of 8000 kms.)¹⁴ The Type 096 SSBNs will enter in service by the next decade according to the USA's Pentagon's China Military Power Report (CMPR) of 2023.¹⁵ They will be a trouble not just for India but also for USA and allies as they are extremely hard to detect. China's maritime fleet has 370 warships and they are expected to increase to 435 by 2030.

China has started an operational nuclear mission and is trying to develop an air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) that might have nuclear capability.¹⁴

SIPRI estimated the size of China's nuclear arms grew to 500 in January 2024 from 410 warheads in just one year, and the expansion will continue. China undoubtedly will have as many ICBMs as either Russia or the USA by the 2030s, though the stock will still be much smaller than that of Russia and USA.¹⁶

9. INDIA'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

The best response India could give to China was the Nuclear Tests that were conducted on 11th and 13th May 1999, codenamed- Operation Shakti (Pokhran II).

India's Nuclear Policy was brought to public domain in 2003 by the Cabinet Committee on Security. Its features can be abridged as follows-

- **Credible Minimum Deterrent:** India maintains a nuclear arsenal that is sufficient to deter adversaries from launching a nuclear attack. The goal is not to seek dominance over other countries but to have enough nuclear weapons to ensure that nuclear aggression against India would result in unacceptable damage to the attacker.
- **No First Use (NFU) Policy:** India will not use nuclear weapons unless it is first attacked by an adversary using nuclear weapons. This policy shows that India is a responsible nuclear weapons state and has intentions to use them solely for defensive purposes.
- **Massive Retaliation:** In case of a nuclear strike on India, the country will have a massive retaliatory strike aimed at causing unacceptable damage to the aggressor. This principle of massive retaliation or Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) will deter any potential nuclear aggression by ensuring that the costs of such an attack would be unbearably high.
- **Civilian Control:** Nuclear weapons are under the control of civilian political leadership. The governing body for India's nuclear weapons is The Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) and the Prime Minister chairs the Political Council, which is the only body authorized to approve the use of nuclear weapons. National Security Advisor chairs the Executive Council, it provides inputs and executes directives from the Political Council.
- **No-Use Against Non-Nuclear States:** India will abstain from using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon countries. This negative security assurance demonstrates India's responsible nuclear posture and also reduces the risk of nuclear escalation.
- **Response to Chemical or Biological Attacks:** India will respond with nuclear weapons to any major chemical or biological attack against it.
- **Non-Proliferation Efforts:** India firmly supports global non-proliferation efforts and maintains stern supervision on the export of nuclear and missile-related materials as well as technologies. India actively participates in international negotiations, like the 'Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty' which aims to reduce the production of weapons-grade fissile materials.
- **Commitment to Disarmament:** India has always advocated for global disarmament and a halt to the arms race. India has a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** India's nuclear policy ensures that its security and sovereignty are not compromised by international pressures or treaties that it perceives as discriminatory.
- **Development of Nuclear Triad:** India aims to develop a nuclear triad capability, which ensures the capabilities to deliver nuclear weapons from land, sea, as well as air.

10. NUCLEAR TRIAD

It consists of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and strategic bombers with nuclear bombs and missiles. Therefore, it is a three-pronged military force structure.

10.1 Land-Based Ballistic Missiles

- Strategic Forces Command have the jurisdiction over the land-based nuclear warheads. Their delivery systems consists of various missiles and silos, which are six ballistic missiles of Agni Missile Family- the Agni-I, II, III, IV, V, P, and the Army adapted Prithvi missile family- the Prithvi-I, II,III, Dhanush.
- Agni-VI, which is under development, has the latest features that includes Multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRVs) or Maneuverable reentry vehicle (MARVs).¹⁷ and an estimated range of 10,000-12,000 km.
- The Prahaar Missile system is being developed by DRDO to replace the Prithvi Missile System. It includes Prahaar, Pragati, Pranash Missiles.

10.2 Sea-Based Ballistic Missiles

- The Indian Navy has developed two sea-based delivery systems for nuclear warheads. 1st is the *submarine-launched system*, which consists of 4 6,000-tonne ballistic missile submarines of the Arihant class which are nuclear-powered. The submarines will be loaded with the nuclear warheads on the 12 K-15 (Sagarika) missiles, which have a range of 700 km.
 - DRDO is also working on an SLBM version of the Agni-III which will be known as the Agni-III SL, with a range of 3,500 kms.
- Second is the *ship-launched system*, based around the short-range ship-launched Dhanush (a variant of Prithvi ballistic missile) ballistic missile, which has a range of 350 km.
- Other sea based ballistic missiles includes-
 - K-4- SLBM (3500 km)
 - K-5 and K-6 SLBMs with the ranges of 5,000 km and 6,000 km respectively are under development.
- INS Vikrant, commissioned in 2022, is India's first indigenous aircraft carrier.

10.3 Air-Launched Nuclear Weapons

- IAF's Mirage 2000 is capable of carrying a 20 kiloton nuclear bomb, but Mirage 2000s are approaching retirement in 2035 and Rafale is the most appropriate candidate to inherit the nuclear delivery mantle. Rafale possesses superior capabilities as compared to Mirage 2000.
- The auxiliary nuclear-strike role is given to SEPECAT Jaguars.¹⁸

No official statement has been given on the amount of nuclear arsenal that India holds, but recent estimates suggest that India has 172 nuclear weapons¹⁹, increased from 163 in 2023²² and has enriched enough weapons-grade plutonium for acquiring up to 200 nuclear warheads.²⁰ Now India added the production of a neutron bomb in the bucket list.²¹

India's nuclear weapons are made from the plutonium that is produced at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). India stored its nuclear warheads disintegrated and separated from the launchers during peacetime but now India is planning to improve its readiness and is keeping the warheads in a ready-to-be-deployed state even during peacetimes.²²

11. SINO-INDIA STRATEGIC PARADOX

As the fastest developing states, both India and China have a fierce competition when it comes to regional as well as global influence, which is influenced by the strategic partnerships, economic influence, diplomatic as well as military might.

Both nations seek to access markets, secure resources and establish global influence.²³ Main points of contention between the two countries are China's BRI and Debt Trap policy and India's growing cooperation with the US, Japan, Australia, etc.

12. REGIONAL INFLUENCE

The Indian Ocean region is significant because of its maritime routes which connect Europe, Middle East, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Americas; they are known as Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOCs). They are crucial for international trade and global economic security as well. Many international players seek influence over the Indian Ocean Region, but India and China due to their geographical location are the main competitors.

China has been spreading its influence through the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), which was started by Xi Jinping in 2013 as the global infrastructure development strategy. It is referred to as the 'New Silk Route'. "Belt" is the network of overland road and rail routes, oil and natural gas pipelines, and other infrastructure projects and "Road" is its maritime equivalent, network of ports and other infrastructure. 'Belt and Road' runs through Asia, Africa & Europe. China provides the loans for the infrastructure projects on high interest and these loans are backed by collateral such as rights to the ports, mines, etc. Five of India's neighbours are already a member of BRI- the Maldives, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka. CPEC, which passes through Gilgit-Baltistan and Gwadar Port in Pakistan is a part of BRI.²⁴

A military base in Djibouti i.e on the Horn of Africa was established by China in 2017. China also invested to develop the Kyaukpyu Port in Myanmar.

China has built a network of naval bases and commercial facilities to bridge Port Sudan to its mainland. This was called the 'string of pearls' by the report of the U.S. Department of Defense, it encircles India in the maritime domain.

Beijing has heightened its diplomatic gestures in the IOR and it is the only major power which has strategic missions in all of the six island nations in IOR- Mauritius, the Comoros, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Maldives & Seychelles.

The inability to repay the loans by the recipient states result in the transfer of the collateral to China. In 2017, China got a lease of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port for 99-years when the govt could not make the debt payments to Beijing. This is an example of Chinese 'debt trap diplomacy'. These infrastructures can be used for commercial as well as military purposes.

On the other hand India is also intensifying its regional influence by 'neighbourhood first' policy. In 2015, PM Modi inaugurated the 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) doctrine,

which advocates the 'Indo-Pacific' to be "open, free, inclusive, peaceful". 'Look East' policy was modified to 'Act East' in November, 2014.

New Delhi is actively engaging in regional forums to counter China's increasing influence. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) was created in 1997 with the objective of betterment of the economy of the region, and has emerged as a podium for maritime governance and security in the IOR. India is one of its founding members. China and Pakistan, both are not its members so the efforts of IORA to contain Chinese influence run smoothly.

India participates in exercises of the armed forces in the Indian Ocean and improves relations with the states that have the same strategic objectives i.e. deterring Chinese aggression and ensuring freedom of navigation. The Australia-Indonesia-India Trilateral Dialogue, India-U.S.A.-Japan Dialogue, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), are the prominent examples. The India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime exercises- known as IBSAMAR in short, the Malabar Naval Exercise of India, Australia, Japan, and the USA, and the Milan exercises are examples of naval exercises.²⁵ Canada participated in Milan 2024 which is the indicator of cooperation between Canada and India in the Indo-Pacific.

India engage in global events through the UN, BRICS, BIMSTEC, SCO, ASEAN, G-20, IORA, QUAD, etc and has a foreign policy which balances its relations with major powers like Russia and U.S.A. at the same time the engagement with the neighbors to promote peace, stability, and cooperation is deduced by China as India's aim is to contrariwise its influence in the region.²⁶

New Delhi gave more than \$4 US billion to Sri Lanka in 2022 when the nation was going through its worst economic crisis. Adani Group became part of a consortium that is working on the deepwater in the New Colombo West International Container Terminal in 2023. Matabari Port of Bangladesh is capturing India's attention. Also India is investing in Chabahar Port of Iran to make Afghanistan and Central Asia accessible to us without being dependent on Pakistan.

India hosted a virtual "Voice of Global South Summit" in 2023 to assert its position as the leader of the Global South. And in September 2023 during the G20 meeting in New Delhi, India was able to achieve the accession of The African Union into the G20.

India has begun to influence the western IOR. In the Agalega Island of Mauritius, PM Modi inaugurated a jetty, an airstrip, and six developmental projects in February 2024, this was a challenge to China as they were facing intrusions of Chinese warships. In April 2024, the External Affairs Ministry approved the proposal by an Indian state-owned company, India Ports Global, to initiate work at Sittwe Port in Myanmar which was built with New Delhi's help. INS Jatayu, navy's new naval base is established in the Minicoy Islands of Lakshadweep.

This support for small states such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Mauritius, can help India gather the confidence of other small states in which it can invest to ensure their security and promote their growth, for example Seychelles. India wants to establish a base in Assumption Island to counter the Chinese base in Djibouti, but due to change of government in 2022, this could not proceed. India wishes to establish powerful influence in the western IOR where China is at a geographical disadvantage.



Figure: 2

13. ECONOMIC COMPETITION

IOR is economically very significant. Major trade routes (SLOCs) that connect Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas makes it the busiest of all the oceans. Even though China and India are the fastest growing economies in the world, there is some economic asymmetry present. China's GDP is \$18,536 billion US whereas, India's is \$3,942 billion US.²⁸ The China's economy mainly depends upon manufacturing, exports, and investment whereas India's Economy depends mainly on information technology, services, and agriculture. The nation capitalises on its broad domestic market, an expanding middle class, and a youthful and technologically adept labour force.²⁸

India's trade with China increased by 1.2% in 2023-24 which made China the largest trading partner of India with \$118.4 billion US, (surpassing USA which had the bilateral trade of \$118.28 Billion US) and the trade deficit grew to \$85 Billion US.

To control this expanding trade deficit, India put investment restrictions on Chinese companies. It also banned TikTok, Shein and other Chinese smartphone apps stating security concerns. India's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' scheme, which was launched in 2020 with the goal to increase domestic output and lessen the lean on imports to boost self-sustenance was seen antagonistic by China.²⁹ This economic asymmetry is inimical to India's national interests as China can use its economic potential to shape the regional and world order.

14. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

As both China and India, the key players in the Indo-Pacific Region, are nuclear powered countries, if the complications between the two countries develop into conflicts that would have catastrophic consequences. This leads to the heightened militarisation in the region, which causes the lack of human development and hampers the betterment of the way of living of the people in the region.

Not only this but small states are pressured to choose between the two countries, which impact their economy, foreign policy and regional diplomacy. The conflicts also have detrimental effects on the functioning and effectiveness of regional organizations, e.g.- SAARC.

IOR is the busiest region of the world and more than 50% of the trade happens through this region. Any conflict in the region will have counterproductive effects of world trade which will impact the economy of many states. Both the countries play influential roles in global governance structures and their rivalry can have baleful effects on global trade regulations, global security, etc.

15. CONCLUSION

India's security perceptions of Nuclear China are shaped by amalgamation of many factors like historical experiences, geostrategic calculations and geopolitical dynamics. Both the countries wish to intensify their influence over the IOR and beyond, for which they use both soft-power diplomacy and hard-power military might.

Major areas of disputation are China's BRI, debt-trap diplomacy and China-Pakistan alliance. India's growing military and diplomatic strength as well as strategic cooperation with major actors in the world is perceived by China as oppugnant. China tries to disenfranchise India by making capital out of border strife and by forming a politico-military counter.³⁰

The relationship is characterised by competition and rivalry but there is also cooperation when it comes to trade and certain global issues like climate change, etc. Both the countries want to achieve their national interest and manage differences without escalating into conflicts.

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