

India-China Strategic Relations: The Evolving Arc of Competition in a Multiplex World

Sandeep Kumar Singh, Dr. Vijay Pratap Singh

1Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, CSJM University, 15/64, Green Park, Civil Lines, Kanpur 208001, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Email: sandeepsingh1ko@gmail.com

2Professor, Department of Political Science, Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, CSJM University, 15/64, Green Park, Civil Lines, Kanpur 208001, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Email: vpsingh10000@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

The India-China relationship has emerged as the most significant factor in the emerging world order, particularly in Asian geopolitics. As the bipolar world order is transitioning into a multipolar world, both India and China have become prime actors in the international system. Although both nations have troubled relations over their border, their strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region has become a primary source of friction in their overall relationship. The geopolitics of the new world order has reshaped India-China relations as it has transformed their border rivalry into a multi-theater security competition. This paper argues that boundary dispute between both nations is not the cause of their bitter rivalry, but it is merely an effect of their broad geopolitical rivalry arising from the structural constraints of the anarchic international system. This paper examines the changing geopolitics of India-China relationship from the framework of neorealism, especially the theories and ideas of Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer. The concept of offensive and defensive realism, security dilemma, balance of power and regional hegemon would be employed to analyze this relationship. This study examines some main research questions:

First, to what extent does border conflict influence Indian balancing strategies and maritime engagements in the Indo-Pacific region. Second, how both India and China are competing and asserting leadership across the global South in the new world order. In exploring these questions this paper analyzes how both countries attract nations of the global South through their economic cooperation and infrastructural projects like BRI and DPI in order to enhance their institutional agenda-setting power across key multilateral forums like G-20, BRICS and SCO.

This paper concludes that due to economic interdependence and nuclear deterrence, India-China security competition would be managed by both nations but possibility of limited warfare on borders and confrontation at oceans can happen in future.

Keywords: India-China Relations, New World Order, Multipolarism, Indo-Pacific, Global South

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Introduction

India China relations are the most significant bilateral relations in the new emerging world order apart from US-China relations. Since Indian Independence, China was completely dismissive of India's status as a leading member

of the Third World due to her closeness with the Western world, particularly, Britain and the Commonwealth.

After the 1962 border war, both nations took three decades to normalize their relationship when Rajeev Gandhi paid a visit to China in 1988

which prepared ground for the confidence building measures and border negotiations of the post- Cold War era (Menon, 2016). In spite of many efforts, the border remains the main bone of contention between both countries. Special Representatives of both nations have met many times but the operational framework for border resolution remains elusive. The Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (1993) , agreement on the Confidence Building Measures (1996) and agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles (2005), and Border Defense Cooperation (2013) are some significant agreements signed by both nations to settle their border dispute (Menon, 2016). However, after the advent of nationalist governments in both India and China under Modi and Xi, border skirmishes have risen significantly in areas like Dapsang Valley, Chumar, Pangong Lake, Damchok and Hot Springs. The Doklam crisis in 2017 at Bhutan -Sikkim- China tri-junction and Galwan clashes in June 2020 marked a significant watershed movement in India- China relations (Krishnan, 2020). For the first time in five decades, violence occurred at the border in which twenty brave Indian soldiers were killed by the Chinese military.

India China relations after Galwan clashes entered a difficult phase where India made it clear to the Chinese that unless the border issue is not resolved, India China relations cannot be normalized. China, however, maintained in the post Cold- War era that border problems should not become an obstacle for fruitful India-China relationship (Mohan, 2025; Verma, 2024). The process of LAC (Line of Actual Control) clarification has been stalled by China since the early 2000s which has increased skirmishes along the disputed boundary. What is peculiar about India -China relations is that their strained relationship continues despite changes in the world order. They were not friends either in the Cold War era or in the post Cold War world due to their mutual mistrust and asymmetry in size and material capabilities (Bajpai, 2021). However, India- China relations in the new emerging world order are a paradoxical mix of conflict and cooperation as seen in their partnership in

BRICS, G-20 and SCO on the one hand and conflict and confrontations on borders and Indo-Pacific on the other hand.

After the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of China has been spectacular as it has doubled its economy in eight years. The decline of the West, particularly, the United States has altered the balance of power in the new world order in favour of China. The retreat of the United States from its role as global policeman and subsequent abandonment of multilateralism by the Trump Administration has eroded US primacy and prestige in the emerging world order (Larson, 2024). Tariff war perpetrated by the Trump administration along with post-Covid genomics have alienated US allies and accelerated the process of de-dollarization in the new world order (Petry, 2023).

The Ukraine war along with the West Asian crisis involving Iran-Israel-US has pushed energy, food and fertilizers prices to a great level contributing instability in the world market. Covid pandemic and Gaza crisis showed the double standards of the liberal world on human rights whereas the Ukraine war along with the Iran war showed us the realities of economic warfare where dollars and gasoline were weaponized by the US and Russia (Taylor, 2025). We are living in a "Multiplex World" where multiple centers of power and diverse actors are operating in interconnected and overlapping institutions. Power is multi- dimensional and diffused and the erosion of the liberal order is clearly visible (Acharya, 2017; Acharya et al., 2023). Wealth is being shifted from West to East and global South is emerging strong as seen in powers of grouping like BRICS and SCO where local currency trade is on the rise to bypass the power of dollar and the western financial institutions (Chan, 2017).

BRICS + commands roughly 35% of global GDP on purchasing power parity basis compared to 30% of G7 and covers 45% of world population which controls 40% of global crude oil production. What is interesting about BRICS is that it has diverse actors with their own values and political systems who prefer "shared utility" over "shared values" thus becoming a part of the

true multiplex world (Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025).

The world is certainly going through multipolarization both at the level of power and ideas. The multiplex world has multiple world orders and many analysts point out the leadership void at the global level to manage inter-order peaceful coexistence. The transition from unipolarism to multipolarism can be destabilizing for world politics as great powers would engage in power politics of survival and due to strategic uncertainties, hegemonic wars among rising powers and established powers can be fought in the coming future (Allison, 2017; Mearshimer, 2021). However due to nuclear deterrence and deep integration and interdependence of major economies of the United States and China, an all-out military crisis is less likely.

In view of the prevailing world order where US and China are competing for domination and hegemony in Asia, India has adopted its foreign policy tools of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy so that it can play a role of balancer in the new emerging world order (Jaishankar, 2020). Both China and India have different notions of Asian order but both support multipolarization of world politics. India does not want China to become regional hegemon of Asia and therefore it has joined QUAD with the US and its allies. But India at the same time remains committed to the non-western institutions like SCO and BRICS where China is a superior force and a major actor (Verma & Papa, 2021). However, tensions between India and China on Himalayan border and Indian Ocean could be a stress factor in the emerging world order. India, therefore, has to find a way where it can successfully manage the rise of China in Asia while pursuing its own ascendancy in Asian affairs (Jaishankar, 2021).

Existing research mainly focuses on border conflicts but there is not much work done on how these conflicts are related to the broader geopolitical competition between India and China which in turn is shaping the emerging world order. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How does border conflict along the LAC influence the Indian role in the Indo-Pacific region?
2. In what ways India and China are competing for leadership roles within the global South and multilateral institutions?

This study maintains that India China would continuously engage in strategic rivalry due to their unresolved border conflict and regional geopolitical ambitions. However, economic interdependence, nuclear deterrence and their shared interest in a multipolar world order would encourage both nations to avoid full scale military confrontation.

Review Of Literature

Scholarship on India-China relations is divided between two prominent schools of thought of international relations theory; that is Realism and Liberalism, though some scholars like Acharya (2017) argues that in a complex multiplex world both these theories are outdated to explain various changes in world politics. Xie (2019) employs social status theory to explain cooperation between two status seeking states like India and China and rejects realist game theory of zero sum logic. Realist scholars often argue that India and China are destined to rivalry as both nations have the same sphere of influence in Asia. China is an established power or a regional hegemon and India is a rising power. They view this relationship from the standpoint of security dilemma and balance of power politics. Many scholars, particularly, Mearshimer (2001) views the rise of China as non-peaceful and a threat to the liberal world order.

Jaishankar (2020) like a structural realist maintains that Indian policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment will deter China and believe that border problems have to be solved first to improve overall relationship. Raja Mohan (2012) as an offensive leaning realist advocates Indian strategic alignment with the West particularly, US to counter China's regional hegemony. Menon (2021) like a defensive realist prefers Indian policy of multi-alignment and wants to manage China's rise through diplomacy

and institutional cooperation within multilateral settings like BRICS, SCO and G-20. Saran (2022) like a strategic realist draws over our attention towards power and psychological asymmetries between India and China and prefers balanced hedging strategy for India in the new world order. Mahbubani (2022) views emerging world order as multipolar and thinks on liberal framework. He advocates close economic interdependence between India and China and calls the 21st century as the “Asian Century.” He advocates greater institutional cooperation between India and China on issues of climate change, global health and financial reform of IMF and World Bank, and warns India of over alignment with the West as a strategic trap. Other scholars have identified Galwan clash of 2020 as a significant moment in both nations border management process, where India has made it clear to China to expedite LAC clarification process in order to improve entire relationship (Kewalramanis, 2026)

Gong and Balazs (2025) highlights competitive dynamics between both nations in Southeast Asia. China's “String Of Pearls” and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to contain India is much discussed in contemporary literature. Bajpayee and Jie (2025) highlights differing aspects of multipolarism shared by India and China as seen in their working in BRICS and SCO as well as in G-20. While China's multipolarism is anti -West, India prefers non- western aspects of multipolarism.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses structural realism as its basic paradigm where Waltz's defensive realism and Mearsheimer offensive realism would be employed to view Indian and Chinese foreign policy behavior. Realism maintains the importance of anarchy and rationality of the actors but differs on the aspect of power accumulation by a State (Mearsheimer, 2009; Waltz, 2000) China is on the way to become a regional Asian hegemon by maximizing its relative power and is going to establish a Sino-centric hierarchy in Asia. However, Indian policy of multi- alignment and strategic autonomy is seen as an extension of defensive realism by

which India is maximizing its security through participation in QUAD and strategic partnership with the US, Russia and other great powers. The study employs a qualitative and analytical research design grounded in structural realist logic. It would use secondary data from sources like research papers and newspaper articles and reports of think tanks and primary analytical text like official strategic doctrines and MEA documents. The research would be comparative and employs content analysis of newspaper articles to study various aspects of international relations.

Two Theatres, One Rivalry: Continental and Maritime Domains

Since the 1962 border conflict, relations between India and China have been strained due to the unresolved line of actual control .After the advent of Modi and Xi, border has become unstable particularly in the western sector of Ladakh and Aksai Chin which China has illegally occupied after the border war. China does not recognize Arunachal Pradesh as part of India but claims it as South Tibet (Linter, 2018). China is suspicious of the Indian design of using Tibet card in future as India has given political asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959 (Menon, 2021). Tibet as a buffer state between India and China occupied crucial place in the geopolitics of both nations after independence though India under Vajpayee in 2003 maintained that the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is part of People's Republic of China. China also recognized Sikkim as part of India and opened Nathu La Pass for border trade. China didn't recognize the McMahon Line with India but it acknowledged this same line as the border with Myanmar and has successfully negotiated with all neighboring nations except Bhutan and India (Bajpai, 2021). In order to thwart Indian influence and power on border nations, China since the times of Mao claimed Tibet as the palm and Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh as its five fingers. China claims these territories as a natural extension of Tibet and wants its control directly or indirectly on these regions. The Doklam crisis in 2017 reflects this Chinese territorial ambition

in Bhutan when China claimed a part of Bhutan near the tri-junction of India– Bhutan- Sikkim. As India's duty was bound to defend Bhutan, Indian armed forces crossed Sikkim and blocked Chinese movement. It was the first incident where Indian troops faced the Chinese military in a foreign land for 73 days. However, both nations after diplomatic negotiations agreed to disengage in August 2017 (Krishnan, 2020). India crossing the border took the risk of escalating the situation but it was vital for the security of the “chicken’s neck” which links northeast India with mainland. India made it clear that it would restore the status quo at any cost at the borders and simultaneously thwart every Chinese move of “Salami slicing” of contested areas. However, China as a regional hegemon bullied Indian forces at Galwan Valley in June 2020 and killed 20 Indian soldiers. This was the watershed movement for both nations' relationship as this ended the three decade old consensus on border management and diluted four major border agreements and confidence building measures since the 1990s (Westcott, 2021).

Many analysts argued that the Galwan crisis happened due to the abrogation of article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir which changed the status of Ladakh from being a part of Jammu Kashmir to a newly created Union Territory governed directly by the central government (Kaura, 2020). Another reason was massive upgradation of military infrastructure, particularly construction of DSDBO road, which opened in 2019 (Krishnan, 2020). The impact of Galwan could be seen in the deterioration of ties between India and China. Both nations built up a massive military on the borders and India took strong measures to block access to Chinese companies in critical sectors and has banned hundreds of Chinese applications such as Tiktok. India has made it very clear to China that unless the border problem is not resolved, the bilateral relationship can't be fully normalized (Jaishankar, 2022). China, on the other hand, maintains that border problems should not become a bottleneck for India China partnership in other areas (Deb, 2025).

Modi met Chinese president Xi after a gap of five years at the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia after both nations concluded a border deal in October 2024. Both nations resumed border talks at the level of Special Representatives in December 2024 and revived many people- centric initiatives like resumption of direct flights between two countries (The Hindu Bureau, 2024). However, this agreement does not mitigate basic mutual mistrust on the borders as there is no timeline for the demarcation and clarification of the LAC. Both leaders also met at SCO Summit at Tianjin and maintained that cooperation between both nations is critical for the “Asian Century” and differences between both nations should not be converted into disputes (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). India has changed its foreign and security policy after the Galwan incident by employing balancing principle vis-a-vis China as evident in its QUAD membership and growing role in Indian Ocean region since 2020. As it is evident that China is in advantageous position on the border area with massive military infrastructure, India, therefore, has diverted its power projection towards Indian Ocean to counter the Chinese threat. The Indian Navy is the strongest navy in the Indian Ocean region and the bulk of China's energy resources pass through what Chinese experts call the “Malacca Dilemma” (Prakash, 2021). In any crisis situation, India can block the sea lanes of communication in this region causing heavy losses for China. Recently, India has started the “Great Nicobar Project” to transform the island into a maritime and military hub which is just 40 nautical miles away from shipping lanes of Strait of Malacca. It is a critical maritime choke point just as Hormuz Strait which can be very decisive during any conflict with China. India can deny China access to the Indian Ocean with the help of its QUAD partners, particularly the US which is trying to contain Chinese power both in the Indo- Pacific and Indian Ocean region (Paszak, 2021). India is a strategic partner of the US and both nations aspire to counter Chinese power in this region. India is attempting external balancing through its maritime endeavors like Malabar joint naval exercises with its QUAD member states.

India is also interested in the Indo-Pacific area as it is within our “extended neighborhood” horizon (Narvenkar, 2025). The South China sea is between the East Indian Ocean and West Pacific which is important for geopolitical as well as genomic terms. India can effectively balance China's BRI and “String of Pearls” strategy in South Asia through its active role in the Indo-Pacific region with the help from nations like Vietnam, Philippines and Singapore as they are friendly nations of the ASEAN region (Gong & Balazs, 2026). Indo-Pacific region is important for Indian energy security and coastal connectivity. India and China are major Asian powers having the same sphere of influence like the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean where the US is also a major security provider to its allies. Analysts often see the dynamics of Indo-Pacific through the lens of a strategic triangular relationship among the US, India and China where India and US being democratic strategic partners supports free and open Indo-Pacific (Malik, 2016).

If we analyze India-China relations from the lens of neorealism, particularly structural realism's notion of anarchy and state survival, few things become clear about the India-China security dilemma and their competitive security relationship. Kenneth Waltz, pioneer of neorealism maintains that anarchy or lack of central government in world politics forces nations to think and strategize their security on the premise of “self-help” as the prime motivation of every major power in the system is survival (Waltz, 1979). India-China relations are strained not because of their ideological differences or leadership issues but due to the structural constraints of anarchy and uneven distribution of capabilities which produces security dilemmas. Both India and China are major powers of Asia but there is power asymmetry between the two nations. China's rise in Asia and its projects like BRI and its navy modernization in Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean region and CPEC project in Pakistan are threatening to Indian security. Waltz maintains that states often seek balancing when faced with such types of survival threats to their security

(Elman & Jensen, 2014). He argues that balancing behavior is natural in an anarchic system as unbalanced power makes the system unstable (Waltz, 2000). Thus, Indian policy of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy fits with the policies of neorealism, especially that of Kenneth Waltz. Indian strategic partnerships with the US and its participation in institutions like QUAD are key features of its external balancing behavior against the threat of a rising China.

When we analyze India-China relationship from the neorealist point of view of John Mearsheimer, an offensive realist, China is seen behaving as a regional hegemon and a clear threat to Indian security both on the Himalayan borders and in the oceans. He believes that states are rational actors and possess offensive capabilities in an anarchic system where no country can be certain of other countries' intentions and behavior (Mearsheimer, 2001). He maintains that China's sudden rise in Asia would not be peaceful as for him, every major power's aim is to maximize its power and become a regional hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2010). He argues that China's BRI project is more than an economic program but a project to demonstrate Chinese power and dominance in Asia and Eurasia (Mearsheimer, 2019). Hence India has no choice but to balance the rising power of China with the help of the US as there is no certainty of other nation's intentions in future. Chinese forays into the Indian Ocean and its “String of Pearls” containment of India is a natural response to its “Malacca Dilemma” where India through its QUAD partners can block the supply chain movement of China's energy products coming from West Asia. Mearsheimer argues that the security dilemma faced by India is structurally unavoidable and inevitable due to zero sum power competition between two nations (Mearsheimer, 2021).

The Battle For Leadership

India and China are both great civilizational powers of Asia who always try to lead global South Nations right from the beginning of the Cold War. India led the way by organizing the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 and Bandung

Conference in 1955 apart from being the main organizer of the Non- Aligned Movement during the Cold War (Menon, 2021). However after losing the border war with China most of the Third World Nations looked at China for leadership. However in the emerging world order, both nations are still vying for their leadership role. India has facilitated African Union (AU) membership in the G-20 Summit held in 2023 in New Delhi and has also hosted Voice of the Global South summits in 2023 and 2024 where a large number of Afro- Asian and Latin American countries participated (Bajpae & Yu, 2025). In the Covid pandemic when Western nations denied vaccines to the developing world, India took the initiative and started a “Vaccine Maitri” programme to distribute vaccines in developing nations (MEA, 2021). India promotes its democratic model and vision for multipolar world order to the Third World and projects itself as a natural leader of developing nations as it shares their colonial past and experiences. China is the second largest economy of the world and a competitor of the US in global affairs but prefers to call herself a developing nation. It has promoted a Global Development Initiative which prefers State led modernization and right to development for Third world nations (Singh, 2025). It has pursued a regional order that is anti-West in their orientation as seen in Beijing led organizations like SCO and BRICS where India is also an important member (Baig, 2022; Larson, 2024). Indian priority is to make these organizations work in a non- western way instead of anti- western by promoting issues like climate change, poverty reduction and issues of global governance like reforms in international financial institutions (Jaishankar, 2023).

India prefers a multipolar world with a multipolar Asia while China wants to become a regional hegemon in Asia (Verma, 2024). China does not recognize India as a great power and always view Indian policies through the prism of the containment strategy of the United States. China always blocks Indian bids for permanent seat at the UN Security Council. India on its part has rejected Chinese BRI as well as RCEP as a threat to its national and economic security (Kumar,

2020). India and China are both civilizational States having their own visions for the coming world order. Both nations often cooperate in breaking the western and especially US hegemony in Asia and the world at large but disagree in their vision for a multipolar Asian regional order. They both have mutually exclusive visions for Asian Order as China seeks Sino-centric regional order which India sees as a threat for its security. China has always seen itself as the center of the world community, a “Middle Kingdom” of the world. China wants to become a new type of power in the post Cold War era with a vision of “Chinese Dream” which entails a central concept of “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” which espouses a new world order based on multipolarism (Saran, 2022).

China has promoted new institutions like BRICS and SCO for achieving her dream of even distribution for power and launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in last decade for expanding her trade and connectivity both on land and oceans all over the world, particularly with the nations of the Third World by giving them loans and credit lines (Petry, 2023). India, on the other hand, espouses a multipolar world with the philosophy of “Vasudev Kutumbkum” in which her role would be of Vishwaguru. Indian foreign policy is rooted around the concepts of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment where it would act as a voice for the global South. The pivot around which Indian multipolarism revolves is the reform of political and financial institutions of the post- 1945 world like the United Nations, IMF and WTO, where on many occasions both India and China have cooperated on many issues (Bajpae & Yu, 2025; Cooper, 2023).

India has successfully projected her image through her normative leadership as the bridge between developed North and developing South by espousing many important issues like energy and food security, health diplomacy in the post-Covid era as seen in G-20 and BRICS presidency of India in 2023 and 2026 respectively. One of the prominent features of the emerging new world order is the strategic rivalry between India and China as well as the competitive institutionalism

seen in the working of SCO, BRICS and G20 where both India and China want to lead Third World nations in the new world order (Bajpae & Yu, 2025; Panda, 2017). Many scholars view India's DPI (Digital Public Infrastructure) as a response to the China's BRI project to woo developing nations of Africa and Latin America through her human centric developmental model of globalization (Cooper, 2023; Panda, 2017). This is an open access platform for delivery of payment and services related to data on both public and private enterprises. The Indian system of Aadhaar and UPI that is Unified Payment Interface enables real time instant banking payments and paperless authentication for various E- services like Digilocker (Narvenkar, 2025). DPI is being promoted by India as an open source public good that can be of immense help for the developing nations of South to share their financial data securely to any cloud based applications. India advocated DPI both in G20 and UN forums for including it into the global economic agenda (National e-Governance Division & Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, 2023). Indian UPI is being used by many countries for digital transactions. In short India projects DPI as an inclusive model of development that can be of immense help for achieving sustainable development goals (SDG) of the United Nations (Chodor & Hameiri, 2026).

India during her G-20 presidency announced the launch of IMEC; India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor that would be an alternative to the BRI project of China backed by US, EU and nations of Middle East like Saudi Arabia and U.A.E (MEA, 2023). It is a rival vision for infrastructural financing and supply chain connectivity that would cut half transit time between Europe and South Asia (Shafer & Hussain, 2025). In contrast to BRI that is financed by Chinese state owned banks, IMEC would be co- financed by both public and private funds, as well as sovereign wealth funds (Ghosh, 2026). As Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar (2020) stated "the commodity that is perhaps most valued in international relations today is that of trust". In the post- covid world

order, supply chains have been disrupted both by the Ukraine and Iran war in addition to the Covid pandemic. In this context, Indian democratic alternatives like DPI and IMEC to the developing nations of the South are significant in growing India's stature as a major power of Asia.

However, in the new emerging world order, cooperation between India and China is seen on many issues both in multilateral institutions like UN, WTO, BRICS, RIC and SCO as well as in their bilateral agreements on border issues. Even after the Galwan clash, India participated in the SCO forum that is very much Sino-centric and dominated by China (Hall, 2025). Interestingly, India is the largest beneficiary of AIIB loans and the only nation of SCO that has not endorsed the BRI project of China. Many analysts and scholars have maintained that India and China's economic interdependence would mitigate any risk of major war among the two nuclear powered nations.

Conclusion

India- China have had a strange relationship since their independence due to many reasons. They fought a border war in 1962 and still the border is not properly demarcated between them. The question is whether the border problem is the main cause of their troubled relationship or is it the effect of mutual mistrust and differing perceptions about each other. Both nations are civilizational states and have different worldviews regarding each other as well as about the world order. China and India differ in their political systems and ideology and also have different strategic cultures. Both are nuclear powered nations and have a big military and navy to project their power. Even if the border problem is resolved, the mistrust between them cannot be mitigated due to structural factors of the geopolitics of the emerging world order. The power asymmetry between India and China often fuels the "security dilemma" for both nations. Many analysts have predicted that the rise of China would not be peaceful as it seeks regional hegemony and India as a rising power will have to contain China through external balancing as seen in the Indian participation in

QUAD and its strategic partnership with the United States.

However, today's globalised world is much integrated and interdependent and various non-state actors, particularly, multinational companies wield much power. In addition, nuclear deterrence would restrict both nations to escalate military conflict. As both nations are members of SCO and BRICS, they can resolve their differences diplomatically and work collectively to reform western institutions of governance. India can judiciously use these forums to prevent them from becoming pro- China and anti-

western and can use them for temporary crisis management as seen in Indian participation in SCO meetings even after the Galwan crisis. The growing economic interdependence and nuclear deterrence between India and China cannot prevent future military conflicts in totality but they can certainly help in stabilizing their mutual mistrust and security competition. As both nations are dominant and rising powers of Asia, their overall relationship can be seen in the framework of “competitive co- existence” where both nations have to manage each other's rise peacefully in order to maintain Asian stability.

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