

**CHINA'S STRATEGIC CONTAINMENT OF INDIA  
AND EMERGING REGIONAL IMPERATIVES: A  
MARITIME SECURITY ANALYSIS**

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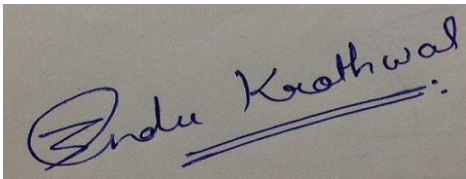


**LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB**

**2024**

## DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled “China’s Strategic Containment of India and Emerging Regional Imperatives: A Maritime Security Analysis” in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Neha Kumar, working as Assistant Professor, in the Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Languages of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

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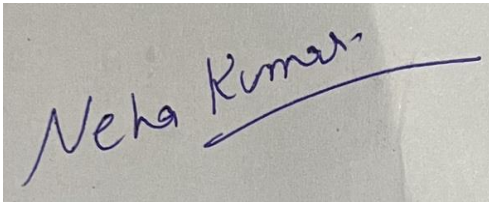
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled “China’s Strategic Containment of India and Emerging Regional Imperatives: A Maritime Security Analysis” submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the reward of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** in the Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Languages, is a research work carried out by Indu Krothwal, 41800756, is bonafide record of her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.



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## **Abstract**

It was not long time ago that China was primarily seen as a regional actor with focus on events in its immediate neighbourhood. China has established itself as a global player in short span of time. It has established itself as one of small group of countries with global interests and the ability to act on them. China's presence can be felt in every country and region of the world, from Pacific to Atlantic and the places in between. Over the past two decades, China's role on the global stage has expanded, particularly due to country's growing economic, political, and military power. China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has grown at an average rate of 10% annually since China's opening of its economy and policy reforms, which is now declining. China has emerged as the largest global economy, surpassing the USA in 2014 in GDP in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms. China is also the largest trading partner of the ASEAN, United States, South Korea, European Union, India, and Japan. Its economic growth has enhanced its military capabilities. Militarily, China has transformed itself from fighting and winning protracted conflict on its territory to beyond its territory (in terms of short duration and high intensity conflicts). Diplomatically, China has expanded its activities and role in international institutions, thus, increasing its geopolitical influence globally. For instance, China has significantly contributed in stimulating the global economy and its major role in resolving nuclear disputes in the Persian Gulf- the case of Iran and the Korean Peninsula- the case of North Korea. China has also emerged as a responsible stakeholder in the international political system, addressing issues like terrorism, climate change, energy security, environment degradation, international peace-keeping, combating international crime, to name a few.

It is this expansion that most nations view China as a strategic competitor. For US, China is a challenge to its power and leadership as they view China as one which seeks to alternate the post- World War II liberal world order. A critical pillar of this strategic competition is the contest for global influence. Thus, China to sustain its peaceful rise, it is increasing its influence globally and the South Asian Region (SAR) is no exception. China has expanded its diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural influence in South Asian Nations. China's influence is viewed by many research analysts as containment

strategy, whereby China is increasing its own influence, thereby reducing or limiting India's influence in SAR which India considers as its own region of influence.

To explore the impact of China's rise, its increasing footprints in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its efforts to expand its influence across the SAR, as well as the implications of these efforts for India and for Indian Ocean regional order, qualitative research methodology and deductive approach is adopted. Interviews are conducted with academicians to obtain inputs with regards to vital policy making of India and China.

For the deep analysis, this work has framed four objectives keeping in mind Chinese increasing influence mechanism. The first objective deals with the overview of India and China in South Asia, their respective relations with SAR in the historical as well as present context. The second objective analyses China's maritime strategy, its evolution, its motivations, and emerging security challenges for South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) in general and India on particular. The China's maritime strategy highlights the strategic calculations guiding China's ambitions, including its efforts to protect its SLOCs for transport of energy resources, to establish military facilities to protect its expanding global interests, to develop force projection capabilities in the IOR. The third objective assess China's rising influence in South Asian Region. To this end, two island countries of SAR- Maldives and Sri Lanka are selected to examine China's influence mechanism. This objective draws preliminary findings about what tools China is using to advance its interests and demonstrates the diversity of tools China is employing to achieve its goals. The overall objective shows the cost benefit analyses that South Asian countries are navigating as they have entered into partnership with either India or China. The fourth objective analyses the consequences of China's growing presence in SAR and India. This objective also proposed what counter policies exist for those actors as well as for India to respond. It is then followed by conclusion and bibliography.

Lastly, the document also highlights the uncertainties about China's capabilities to translate lofty goals into reality. The work illustrates that China is relying heavy on economic statecraft as a primary tool for pressing gains and imposing sanctions when failed to do so. The coercive nature of China's economic assistance could foster

political and security challenges for China. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) linked infrastructure assistance translate into major Chinese influence in developing countries desperate for infrastructure. However, there is increasing debate on the credibility of China's increasing investments through BRI projects. The opaqueness and the nature of Chinese investment practices have had a considerable impact on developing countries economic and political institutions. China's approach to provide infrastructure assistance creates strategic dependencies by burdening borrowing countries with massive debt, a tactic famously known as 'debt-trap'. In the case of Sri Lanka, unsustainable debt burdens as a consequence of Chinese infrastructure financial assistance, resulting into loss of sovereignty over Hambantota port. Taken as whole, it concludes that China's influence mechanism is flexible and is according to the need of state actors.

China has expanded its economic, political, and military footprint so rapidly that even nations with relative strong state and civil society structures and institutions have had difficulty coping with its implications. The SAR showcase the diversity of Chinese engagement strategies. Unusual expansion has implications as countries lack deep expert analysis of the domestic implications of China's expanded profile to match it with policy recommendations, reflecting domestic political and economic ground reality. But smaller developing countries became vulnerable as there occurs great gap between the scope and intensity of Chinese influence activism. They face challenges because their capacity to manage and mitigate risks of Chinese activism is low.

These interactions shows that China is not merely trying to win over its South Asian neighbours. Instead, China has developed a geo-strategic approach in the SAR that assiduously seeks to protect its national interests. Therefore, South Asian nations will need to carefully assess the long term implications of China's expanding influence and activism in their countries.

There has been growing concern to China's increasing influence among the Indian policymakers too. The South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) has been part of India's sphere of influence since the British left this region in 1947. It is on the account that India is being centrally located in the region and has close economic, political,

cultural, and diplomatic ties with its neighbours. But over the past decade, the region experience geographical shift because of increased China's footprints, threatening India's stature, position, and security in the region. China's steadily growing influence has made the South Asian countries to recalibrate their relationship with India.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
EU	European Union
US	United States
SAR	South Asian Region
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
SLOCs	Sea lines of Communications
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
SA-IOR	South Asia-Indian Ocean Region
BOT	Balance of Trade
CMT	Chosenness-Myths-Trauma Syndrome
EXIM Bank	Export- Import Bank
AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
LAC	Line of Actual Control
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
CSSAs	Chinese Students and Scholars Associations
PRC	People's Republic of China
ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
CIPS	Cross Border Interbank Payment System

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
HADR	Humanitarian Relief and Disaster Assistance
UFWD	United Front Work Department
WHO	World Health Organisation
FBIC	Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity Index
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Air Defense
PLA	People's Liberation Army
TPP	Trans Pacific Partnership
SCS	South China Sea
CCG	China Coast Guard
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
SADC	South African Development Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nation
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
APTA	Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement
FTA	Free trade area
SAFTA	South Asian Free trade Area
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic corridor
CPC	Communist Party of China

SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group
EAS	East Asia Summit
QSD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
IPMDA	Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness
LEP	Look East Policy
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
P2P	People-to-People engagement
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
NPP	National Perspective Plan
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WTO	World Trade Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ODA	Official Development Assistance
CIUC	Confucius Institute University of Colombo
CAEDA	China-Asia Economic Development Association
CLEC	Center for Language Education and Cooperation

CCSP	The Confucius China Studies Program
NPC	National People's Congress
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MSRI	Maritime Silk Road Initiative
CUP	China Union Pay
CMEC	China Machinery Engineering Corporation
TMSC	Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation

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## **Chapter-1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the problem**

It is rightly said that the twenty first century belongs to Asia and especially to China. This is majorly on the account that China is a fast growing economy and its active diplomacy is transforming the Asian region (Ikenbury, 2008). Since the opening of its economy and enacting free market reforms in 1979, it is one of the fastest growing and sustained economy<sup>1</sup>. The rise of China has likely enabled it to influence various key developments in global politics, planetary ecosystem, and economy. Also, the Beijing assertiveness and ambition for prominence in regional and world affairs have undoubtedly heightened the perception of 'China threat' and increased the concern over how China's rise will affect the global affairs. In this context, China's entry into Indian Ocean has increased the perception of China's strategy to contain India in its own region of influence. China's assertion of power projection in the Pacific Ocean is well known and now China has spread its wings towards Indian Ocean Region which is of great concern to India.

Over the past few years, China's actions in asserting and protecting its maritime territory and exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in the South and East China Sea have raised concerns about China's potential intentions to dominate or control its neighbouring sea regions. Its increased connections with Russia and North Korea have also contributed a significant threat to regional stability. On the other hand, China has been actively developing its soft power to expand influence and build relationship with other countries. Its participation in various regional organizations like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), ASEAN+3 (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), gives the impression that China is gearing up for something significant or that these are all small components of its grand strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> According to IMF research team, China saw average real growth of more than 9% with few ups and downs. In peak years, it has even reached more than 13%. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/EXTERNAL/PUBS/FT/ISSUES8/INDEX.HTM> (Accessed on 2 September 2022)

After consolidating its control and hold over the South China Sea (SCS) by militarizing artificial islands, China has now set its path towards the Indian Ocean. China's recent assertion over LAC and its actions in the India Ocean of constructing forward bases which analysts call as 'String of Pearls' and its increasing economic, military, cultural, and diplomatic influence in India's immediate neighbourhood through its ambitious project-Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have raised concern among Indian policy makers of China's intentions. "Beijing's stance that the South China Sea is China's sea, but the Indian Ocean cannot be treated as India's Ocean, draws New Delhi's ire and derision" (Malik, 2018: 70). It is in this background that this research work is analyzing China's intentions and strategy in South Asia- Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) and reflecting the implications of China's influence in India's immediate neighbourhood.

### **Background of the Study**

The South Asia- Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) has remained a vital maritime space since ages, filling in as a significant link among different areas of the globe like trade, and socio-cultural contacts and exchanges (Kaul, 2021). The territorial space was generally peaceful during the pre- Vasco da Gama period (Panikkar, K.M. 1959), but with the advent of Europeans, the region was characterized mostly by loot, plunder, conflicts and even wars. This tense environment persisted till the end of the World War second. Following the collapse of its rival, the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States emerged as the only superpower, changing the regional dynamics. Another development that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century was the emergence of the two Asian giants- India and China. Both appeared on the global stage with rapidly expanding economies, progression in scientific knowledge, military might, skilled workforce and technological know-how.

Karl Gunnar Myrdal (1971), a renowned economist and sociologist in his landmark work "*Asian Drama: An inquiry into the poverty of Nations*" analysed the problems of the "development in South Asia and the expanding gap between rich and poor countries". The book is well framed within the lines of reality of economically stagnant Asia. He stated that the economic and social environment of South Asian countries at that time was not much different from the times of colonial power. The author concluded that in South Asia, the drama will unfold and could well be conceived as a

tragedy. The work primarily focused on South Asian Region. China, India and other Asian nations were often put on the same page.

Myrdal along with others could not foresee that within half a century, a new Asian Drama would unfold. Few could have imagined that the economies of India and China would compete with the United States economy. Both the nations are emerging engines of economy and are perceived as great powers in their respective regions. China's economy is the largest economy surpassing United States while India stands at third position according to GDP in PPP terms (as shown in table 1). Although both India and China do not share the same administration system but both have abandoned central state planning and incorporated reforms and accept market forces (Xu, 2011 and Panagariya, 2004). New Asian Drama has unfolded before us where both India and China have enjoyed considerable high rates of economic growth and that in turn have contributed to reduce mass poverty in their respective countries and their expansion of influence and capabilities.

**Table 1- Top 10 economies on the basis of PPP (Power purchasing parity)**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>GDP (PPP) (US\$)</b>
1	China	\$22,526,502,000,000
2	United States	\$20,524,945,000,000
3	India	\$9,155,083,000,000
4	Japan	\$5,231,066,000,000
5	Germany	\$4,482,448,000,000
6	Russia	\$3,968,180,000,000
7	Indonesia	\$3,196,682,000,000
8	United Kingdom	\$3,118,396,000,000
9	France	\$3,097,061, 000,000
10	Brazil	\$3,092,216,000,000

*Note: Figures are 2019 estimated*

*Source: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), World Factbook*

With the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>- century, the SA-IOR witnessed the growing tendencies of India and China. There occurs an increasing competition between the two because of the growing geo-political and geo-economic importance of the South Asian and Indian Ocean region. While India and China are currently undergoing through social and economic transformation, and in order to smoothly run the transformation and to sustain their economic growth, they have left their territorial space and come out in open oceanic waters. Due to the fact that both nations' economies substantially rely on energy imports from Middle East and Africa which are mostly transported via Sea Lines of communications (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean (Insights Global; Long, Yen, Hien, Hiep, 2023). Both China and India are extremely concerned about the security of these

SLOCs. Additionally, the Indian Ocean carries huge reserves of natural resources that have further attracted their attention towards the region (Michel, Fuller, and Dolan, 2012). This resulted in increase in involvement of these forces in the region. China's geographical constraints to easily access the Indian Ocean have lead China to wean India's neighbors to make its place strong in the region. China has facilitated the way of achieving increased collaboration with the littoral and island nations of the Indian Ocean region and secured a benevolent place by employing various tools like trade ties, investment for infrastructure, political and diplomatic engagements, foreign aid, loan assistance and military exchanges (Baruah, 2023). China is developing its maritime capabilities around Indian peninsula to catch up to India's influence within the subcontinent (Long, Yen, Hien, Hiep, 2023; Suri, 2017), while expanding its own zone of influence and footprint in SA-IOR. The China has clearly set out "an action plan to contain and reduce India's growing aspiration of developing into a global power, by capitalizing on its political and diplomatic oversight with its neighbours" (Arjun, 2020).

China venturing into SA-IOR and its determination to exert control in South Asia and Indian Ocean Region lies in its geographical location and its growing economic needs. South Asian Region on the other hand remains the economically fragmented zone in the world due to protectionist policies, expansive transport charges and regional political instability (Falak, 2017), leading to increased involvement of China in the region. Consequently, China has been the region's leading exporter by employing export-led development strategy, whereby there is an ascent in import of goods from China (Jain, 2018).

China's another concern is its oceanic trade routes that pass through the SA-IOR. Thus, Sea lanes of communication become vital for smooth flow of resources. 80% of China's oil resources shipped through the region (Odhiambo, 2020), hence, making SA-IOR a critical point for its energy supply needs. China has openly discussed its vulnerability of Malacca Dilemma in Indian Ocean<sup>2</sup>. China's leadership recognizes the importance of controlling these trade channels and understands that whosoever controls the Malacca strait, will gain a strategic advantage and thereby potentially disrupting

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<sup>2</sup> In November 2003, the then Chinese President Hu Jintao coined the term "Malacca Dilemma"

China's supply channels. According to SQN Ldr Mohit Choudhary (2023:99) of Indian Air Force, China's portrayal of the Malacca Dilemma "appears to be bluffing its vulnerability to assert its domination on these straits. In doing so, China intends to project power into the wider Indian Ocean Region (IOR)". Consequently, China has shifted its focus from land to sea and updated its national strategy to prioritize the SA-IOR as most of its critical energy supply lines passes through the Indian Ocean and its economic interests are tied to maritime routes.

As part of this strategy, China has been actively building up its naval presence and establishing partnerships with South Asian countries to ports and naval bases around the Indian Continent. China's String of Pearls and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) illustrates its vision of interlinked naval bases and ports across the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean to protect its maritime, economic, and trade interests (Karim, 2020; Miller, 2022). In the past decade, China has developed its maritime infrastructure that includes ports, military and naval bases across the Indian Ocean. It has directed all its efforts towards building a chain of ports and bases right across the Pacific and Indian Ocean (Lt General Chand, 2014). China has signed agreements with various nations around the Indian subcontinent to develop maritime infrastructure. These countries include Myanmar, Pakistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles (OECD, 2018). If one connects all dots on a map, one can find that China has created "a chain that cordons off and lays a noose around the Indian subcontinent" (Arjun, 2020). This defensive posture of China has drawn attention from Indian strategists as this maritime infrastructure expansion appears to encircle India geopolitically and geographically. China denies any offensive intentions but its actions on ground raise concerns.

China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean has raised alarms in India's strategic community, with analysts believing that it limits India's operational manoeuvrability and increases China's strategic stakes in the region. In addition to making inroads into India's traditional circle of influence in South Asia Region but China has also increased its anti-piracy naval deployments by advancing partnerships with regional states (Singh, 2018). What concerns more is that China has increased its strategic stakes in the SA-IOR. Over the past two decade, Beijing's role on the global stage has grown, particularly due to country's expanding economic and military power.

Most nations, particularly United States view China as a strategic competitor as they view China as one which seeks to alternate the post- World War II liberal world order (Doshi, 2021). China has been constructing and operating various ports in Indian Ocean – Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantotat in Sri Lanka, Various islands in Maldives, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Coco islands in Myanmar (Gupta, 2023). Economic projects facilitate China to develop naval military facilities (as in countries of Sri Lanka and Pakistan) in the Indian Ocean (Kahandawaarachchi, 2015) and that Smaller South Asian countries could risk falling into a debt trap (Chaudhury, 2017). It is this expanding maritime presence of China where India finds herself oddly in some security perspectives. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to analyse the dynamics of China’s maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, the potential consequences for India and India’s counter moves to respond to China’s strategy.

This study aims to examine China’s drive for influence in the world system with specific focus on South Asia and assess whether the interdependence between China and South Asia is a win-win cooperation or if China is attempting to assert dominance or contain India in the region. More specifically, the work assess China’s ability to influence the policies and behavior of the selected case studies in the South Asia. The objective of this analysis is to provide a comprehensive framework and tools for assessing bilateral influence and contribute to the discussion on China’s rise and its implications in the SA-IOR.

### **The “Great Game” and “New Great Game” of Power Politics: Historical Context**

The “Great Game<sup>3</sup>” was a political and diplomatic rivalry that persisted for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century between the British and Russian empire over Afghanistan and neighboring regions in central and South Asia (Sergeev, 2013; Stone, 2015). It also had major direct consequences in Persia and British India (Ingram, 1980). Britain was afraid of Russia’s invasion of India to add to the huge realm that Russia was building.

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Great Game* was coined in 1840 by a British intelligence officer Captain Arthur Conolly (1807–1842). Rudyard\_Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim* popularized the term, increasing its association with great power rivalry. It became even more popular after the 1979 advent of the Soviet–Afghan\_War. The phrase "the Great Game" was used well before the 19th century and was associated with games of risk, such as cards and dice. The French equivalent *Le grand jeu* dates back to at least 1585 and is associated with meanings of risk, chance and deception.



As a consequence, there was a profound climate of doubt and possibility of war between the two significant European empires (Rouland, 2014).

Another expression that was popularized by journalists in 1990s was “The New Great Game”. The expression was referred to the renewed geopolitical interest in Central Asia, a region with huge untapped mineral wealth (Cooley, 2012). The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought the “New Great Game” to the forefront of discussions, focusing on the political, military, and economic dynamics of Caucasus which involves countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and Central Asia which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The expression of “New Great Game” was used to describe the competition for influence, authority, power, hegemony, and access to oil and gas reserves in the region of Central Asia and Caucasus (Edwards, 2003). The *New York Times* (1996) published an article titled “The New Great Game in Asia”, which states that,

“Central Asia has again emerged as a murky battleground among big powers engaged in an old and rough geopolitical game. Western experts believe that the largely untapped oil and natural gas riches of the Caspian Sea countries could make that region the Persian Gulf of the next century. The object of the revived game is to befriend leaders of the former Soviet republics controlling the oil, while neutralizing Russian suspicions and devising secure alternative pipeline routes to world markets”.

Mathew Edwards (2003: 88-89) did a comparison between Great Game and New Great Game which is explained as under:

**Table 2- Comparison between Great Game and New Great Game**

	<b>“The Great Game”</b>	<b>“The New Great Game”</b>
<b>Origin</b>	This term was coined by Arthur Conolly, British agent serving in the East India company. Later it was Rudyard Kipling, a novelist	

	who brings it to the attention of public.	
<b>Location</b>	Central Asia	Central Asia
<b>Actors</b>	Britain and Russia	Five countries of Central Asia and three states of Caucasus. Other actors involve China, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, Turkey, and the U.S. Not only global competitors are involved but regional states and non-state bodies which include supra-states (NATO, UN, and the OSCE) and sub-states (MNCs, pressure groups, political factions, etc.) are also involved.
<b>Type of game</b>	It was a game of high politics- a game of colonization and military contest between the two empires.	It has nothing to do with high politics. It is limited to low politics. Moreover, it is about creating influences in Central Asia by neighboring countries.
<b>Aims and Objectives</b>	Imperialism, Geopolitical dominance (Zero-sum game), direct rule, hegemonic influence or alliances that are ideological favourable.	Neo-imperialist hegemony at state-actor level, and maximization of profit, expanding local influence, securing shares, contracts at non-state level.
<b>Means and Scope</b>	It was more of a game of struggle behind the scenes where war of operatives were either working alone or in small groups. Military	Numerous ways have been used to create political influence, that ranges from forming corporate alliances, business negotiations,

	force was used on occasions to establish hegemony and control.	press manipulation to diplomatic negotiations.
<b>Cost-benefit analysis</b>	Benefit: Enhanced security, Prestige from territorial gains  Cost: Overall cost analysis shows that costs are much higher than the benefits.	Benefit: Monetary gains, energy security, national economic growth, enhanced politico-military status.  Cost: Billions of dollars along with immeasurable security concerns.

*Source: Derived from Mathew Edwards (2003) work 'The New Great Game and the new great gamers: disciples of Kipling and Mackinder'*

### **China and India: The New Great Game**

There is new Asian great game going on between China and India. The significant factor for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to understand and analyse the rise of China and India. As both nations rise, their differences also rise. The term “the rise of China” has been used frequently in recently years, so as “the rise of India”. “For the first time in more than half a millennium, both India and China are on the march upward simultaneously on their relative power trajectories” (Malik, 2004: 1).

India and China are world’s ancient civilizations and populous nations with nuclear capabilities, are now striving for preeminence in Asia and the world. They both share a long history of contention and an unresolved territorial disputes that once erupted in major war in 1962. Their simultaneous rise has sparked debates over their power status and the potential restructuring of Asian geopolitics. There is expanding interest in Asia, reflecting that Asia can fuel the engine for global economic development which is a cause of concern for instability in the region.

The experts of Indo-China relations maintain that their relation remains delicate and vulnerable because of misperceptions, unrealistic expectation, and various unresolved issues (Pratibha, 2017). The relationship between these two Asian powers can be described as one of competition rather than collaboration, given the growth of their economies and widening of geopolitical perspectives. Mohan Malik (2004:5-1)

provides answer to this competition and argues that “their bilateral relationship will be characterized more by competition than cooperation because the issues that bind them are also the issues that divide them. Neither power is comfortable with the rise of the other. Each perceives the other as pursuing hegemony and entertaining imperial ambitions”. “China is highly ambitious about achieving its regional power status in the Indian Ocean Region. To do so Beijing wants to contain India which is the only threat before China in the region” (as cited in the Hindu, 2023).

The security structure in Asia-Pacific is characterized by the existence of American hegemony- its bilateral and multilateral alliance system and regional frameworks. That structure is now changing. There has been an extensive debate among academicians on the rise of China and its implications on world order. There occurs collaboration between India and China on political, economic and cultural grounds, despite that the gap between the two is widening due to their misperceptions, unresolved issues, attitudes, and different expectations. As argued by Malik Mohan (2004: 2) “the Chinese do not want to see India play a role beyond South Asia or emerge as a peer competitor” and hence engaged in containment policy towards India. “These powerful neighboring states seek to continue rising, and constrain the other where necessary through mutual encirclement and alliances/proxies. This type of ‘Great Game’ is evident in the military-security, diplomatic and economic areas” (Scott, 2008: 1).

China is expanding its military, economic, cultural and diplomatic engagement with India’s immediate neighbourhood. China’s deepening ties with India’s immediate neighbours has made New Delhi increasingly worried over Chinese activism. Malik Mohan (2004: 5-1) has identified various forms that China has taken to contain India and that includes “unresolved territorial disputes, arms sales and military alliances with Countries of India’s immediate and troubled neighbors or in other terms India wary countries, indirect help and support for separatist movement, nuclear proliferation in India’s immediate neighbourhood and resistance to India’s membership in United Nation’s Security Council and Nuclear Five”. “Just like the original great game, this is a battle on many fronts, being fought with aid, investment, politics and culture- from Pakistan (a long-time Chinese ally) to Nepal, and across South East Asia” (North, 2011).

The 4,057 Kilometer border line between India and China is one of the main reason for creating misinterpretation and perception towards each other (BBC, 2014). The border dispute has resulted in a war between the two in 1962. Since then their relations has been marred with mutual suspicion and distrust. The border between India and China is one of the longest international borders in the world, although it has neither been delineated on ground nor demarcated on map resulting in bringing soldiers face to face leading into numerous confrontations (Bhonsale, 2018). The incident of gunfire between the two on border occurred in 1975 at Tulung La, Arunachal Pradesh (Krishnan, 2020). The two month military standoff between India and China in 2017 in Doklam trijunction was one among the first major military confrontation since a long time (Chengappa and Krishnan, 2017). Since early May 2020, the two Asian giants have been engaged in military confrontation at multi points on the border. It has been considered one of the violent border clash between the two in decades. The deadly clash took lives of 20 Indian soldiers and unknown fatalities from the China's side (The Economic Times, 2022). While analyzing the Chinese territorial aggression against India, Happymon Jacob stated that "While there are around 400 transgressions/faceoffs each year on an average along the LAC, the recent spate of territorial transgressions by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is unprecedented in its scope and manner". He further pointed that it "signals the end of Beijing's Peaceful rise and its traditional desire to maintain regional status quo with India" (Jacob, 2020). Analysts have even pointed out that the territorial aggression between the two aspirational Asian giants "echoes episodes of Great Game" in which "Ladakh has become an important spur in this grand imperial rivalry" and both are following "this trail of rivalry at strategic pivots along their contested mountainous borders" (Aneja, 2020).

The most important material component of a country's political power in international politics is its military might. Morgenthau defines Political Power "as a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised. It allows the former to control over certain actions of the later through influencing the former's mind" (Morgenthau, 1948: 14). The objective behind any military preparation is to deter other nations from attacking. The political aim of military preparations is "to make actual application of military force unnecessary by inducing the prospective enemy to

desist from the use of military force” (Morgenthau, 1948: 14-15). The objective is not to conquest the territory but to change the mind of the enemy to bow before the will of the victor. Morgenthau further avers that when it is found that these objectives serve the purpose of the nation pursuing it, these policies must be judged and analyzed from the perspective of its contribution to their national power.

It is crucial to distinguish between the economic policy carried out for their own sake and those that are part of the political policy whose aim is to control the policies of other nations, otherwise it leads to confusion in policy and public opinion. While analyzing Chinese inroads in Maldives, Mohan Malik has come to the conclusion that china’s economic engagement with smaller south Asian states has strategic consequences. In real sense, china’s investment in the Indian region is less about development and it is more about “China’s desire to establish itself as a Resident power in the Indian Ocean”, in same fashion like United Kingdom and France (Malik, 2018).

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Interpretation of Containment**

‘Containment’ as a term is interpreted in different ways in various disciplines. In general sense, it denotes the action of keeping something dangerous or harmful under control. Containment is a policy that ceases the expansion of an enemy, or the ideals of the hostile nation. The strategy of containment seeks to prevent the expansion of rising power. Containment is a policy of limiting hostile country’s territorial growth or ideological influence.

#### **➤ Psychology**

In psychology, concept of containment has become popular but often misunderstood. It has been understood in the sense of expression that “She/he was so containing”, which explains the capacity of someone to bear something. But in actual sense, it refers to the emotional relationship between two people and is usually an active process (Bion, 1978).

In Psychology, this concept was developed within the psychoanalytic tradition by Wilfred Bion. “Bion derived the concepts of ‘container’ and ‘contained’ from the

analysis on his studies of psychotic patients, their behavior, their mental functioning and their peculiar thinking. During the sessions, Bion saw the patients expressing something that they could not understand themselves. It was then all left to analyst to try to convey what was happening via interpretation in such a way that it could be felt and thought by the patient” (Riesenberg-Malcom :168).

“Bion’s way of thinking about problems that can be managed in therapeutic relationships is based on his understanding of an unconscious process of communication that goes on between caregiver and infant. He calls the process ‘containment’ and his theory originated in his view that a particular kind of maternal attention, which he called ‘maternal reverie’<sup>4</sup>, is a necessary condition of psychic development in the infant” (Brookes, 1991: 133). Bion’s concept of containment presents us with the understanding that “how the environment (which for the baby is at first just the mother) works through maternal reverie in helping or hindering the baby’s development” (Riesenberg-Malcom: 169).

Riesenberg-Malcolm define the theory of containment in his work as:

“.....the capacity of one individual (or object) to receive in himself projections from another individual, which he then can sense and use as communications (from him), transform them, and finally give them back (or convey back) to the subject in a modified form. Eventually, this can enable the person (an infant at first) to sense and tolerate his own feelings and develop a capacity to think.” (No year: 166)

### ➤ **Criminology**

In Criminology, “Containment theory is considered as one of the earliest control theories because it is focused on what stops people from engaging in crimes-or rather, what ‘contains’ people” (Cullen and Wilcox, 2010: 4).

Containment theory in criminology assumes that people are very prone to get or involve themselves in trouble. The idea is to prevent or contain them from “committing delinquent and criminal acts. The core of the theory is containment, that is, personal

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<sup>4</sup> Reverie is an unconscious activity of the mother or the emotional experience in which the mother does something for her baby which the baby itself cannot do. In other words the mother becomes ‘a container’ for the baby’s experience.

and social safeguards that shield the individual from committing deviancy. It rests on the principle of control” (Cullen and Wilcox, 2010: 7).

➤ **Biology**

Containment in biology is termed as Biocontainment which is a component of biorisk management. The idea is to prevent toxic or dangerous organism, thereby reducing the risk to workers in the laboratory and people working outside the laboratory and also to prevent it from releasing in the environment (Public Health Emergency, 2019). Containment thus refers to all parts of the actions to be taken to prevent something dangerous from spreading. The recent outbreak of an epidemic called coronavirus (COVID-19) makes clear the meaning of containment. According to World Health Organisation (WHO), coronavirus is a new strain of virus that was discovered in 2019. It has not been identified previously in humans and is transmitted between animals and humans, allows it to come under the category of zoonotic. The novel coronavirus has impacted the lives of people and even cost high to their life. Its worldwide spread and worldwide impact allows it to be entitled a global health emergency and a pandemic by WHO. It has put economy to halt. Governments have adopted various measures to contain the virus that includes shutting of businesses, factories, shutting markets, travel bans and started work from home. People avoided shaking hands and instead used the gesture of Namaste, Indian way of greeting. Infact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 19 March 2020 has called the nation to observe ‘Janta Curfew’ on 22 March 2020 and appealed to the citizens of India to stay indoors. He has placed onus on the citizens to play their part in dealing with the virus (The Hindu Business Line, 2020).

➤ **Indian Political Thought: Kautilya’s Arthashastra**

Indian Political thinkers have written extensively in detail about containment strategies. Though, they never mention the term containment directly, but an elaborate study has been conducted on this concept. One such prominent scholar in Indian Political thought is Kautilya<sup>5</sup>. Containment strategy find inspiration in the works of Kautilya, although

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<sup>5</sup> Kautilya’s ideas can be found in Arthashastra, a treatise on statecraft, war and foreign policy. It is a science of politics which intended to teach a wise king how to rule.



he never mentions the term containment. His work contains many chapters regarding the formulation of national strategy.

Kautilya belongs to realist school of thought<sup>6</sup> and as a realist it is natural for him to believe that every nation acts to increase their power and self-interest. Therefore, moral principles or obligations find no place or little impact on actions among nations.

### **The King's dharma**

Since time immemorial, the great pursuit of human endeavours in India has been categorized into four aspects: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. Of these, dharma in particular holds a significant place. "Dharma not only signifies an absolute and immutable concept of righteousness but also includes the idea of duty which every human being owes to oneself, to one's ancestors, to society as a whole and to universal order" (Rangarajan, 1992: 13). Dharma finds a very significant and central place in Indian Political thought and holds the highest position in Indian philosophy, determining the rights and duties of rulers, ministers, and people alike. Every individual, whether the ruler or the ruled is governed by the dharma. It is believed that one who observes his dharma leads to heaven and feel eternal bliss. World often leads to its extermination when goes opposite to it (Rao, 2007).

The dharma of the king according to Hindu political thinkers is to safeguard state's interest and to protect its citizens. Welfare of the people placed a great importance in Kautilya's work and he advised king to facilitate the happiness of the people. In Kautilya's words, "In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare

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<sup>6</sup> Kautilya wrote Arthashastra to guide Chandragupta Maurya whose empire has same resemblance as that of the Westphalian Europe. Under his guidance, Chandragupta Maurya has established a kingdom by defeating Nandas. The Empire of the Mauryas stretched to the northern natural boundaries of the Himalaya Mountains, and to the east into Assam. To the west, it reached beyond modern Pakistan and significant portions of Afghanistan, including the modern Herat and Kandahar provinces and Balochistan. In contemporary context, that region now encompasses of the South Asian countries. His dominions included the country now called Afghanistan, the ancient Ariana as far as the Hindu Kush range, the Punjab, the territories now known as the United Provinces of Agra, Oudh and Behar, and the peninsula of the Kathiawar in the far west, and probably also comprised Bengal. Arthashastra was written as a solution to this anarchical situation and played a key role in establishing and administering the empire of Ashoka which was considered the largest in the Indian subcontinent. For more, read, (Bonnerjea, 1934; Maurya Empire, 2018)

his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good” (Shamasastri, 1956:52). According to Kautilya, an ideal king should behave like a rajarishi. A rajarishi is one who promotes yogakshema for the people. It is the dharma of the King to treat his subjects like a father treats his children. “The welfare of the people holds as much importance as observance as dharma. The king should not only observe his rajadharma, but should ensure that others (his subjects) obey their own dharma according to their varnas. Kautilya views that when adharma overwhelms dharma, the king himself will be destroyed” (Rangarajan, 1992: 90).

Therefore, Kautilya has elaborated the duties of all officials, short of which they will be entitled to pay fines and hence through this order was restored in state. Kautilya has advised king to coordinate order and laws of different sections of society. The King has both the duties of destroyer as well as that of rewarder.

Welfare of the people is directly linked to the peace, prosperity, stability and security of the state. It is the dharma or political morality of the king to think about strategies or policies in order “to minimize the harm to one’s own citizens and Kautilya was very categorical in stating that the interest of the state or the population or subjects in general should be prioritized” (Bisht, 2020:156).

Kautilya’s Arthashastra is a great treatise on economy and economic policies To Kautilya, artha encompasses more than just wealth. It includes the territory of a state and its citizens. Therefore, the state or government plays a vital role in ensuring the material well- being of both the nation and its citizens. The state’s aim is to pursue economic policies that increase state revenue and surpluses. Therefore, “a balance has to be maintained between the welfare of the people and augmenting the resources of the state” (Rangarajan, 1992: 14).

### **Internal Engagement of State**

#### **➤ Maintaining and Sustaining Order**

Each person has to follow his/her dharma. Punishment for adharma and variety of offenses can be found throughout the treatise in detail under the appropriate subjects.

In order to uphold dharma in society Kautilya advised King to use danda through extensive set of fines and punishments. Kautilya emphasized that by following the principles written in Arthashastra, “One can not only preserve dharma, artah and kama but can destroy and defeat their enemy. It is a guide not only for the acquisition of this world but also for the next” (Rangarajan, 1992: 94, 100).

This involves two crucial preconditions- maintaining law and order and having efficient state administration machinery. Kautilya emphasizes that “maintaining law and order not only involves the detection and punishment of criminals but also upholding the fabric of society” (Rangarajan, 1992: 14). It is the duty of the state for ensuring that the law has been observed and therefore dandaniti, the science of law enforcement forms an integral part of Arthashastra and upholds an immense degree of importance. Kautilya has also provided a comprehensive set of fines and punishments in order to maintain state order.

## **External Engagement of State**

### **➤ Six Methods of Foreign Policy**

The six methods of foreign policy are important “as they are indicative of an arrangement, which was directed towards ordering the relationships between states, thus constraining and disciplining state behavior” (Bisht, 2020: 156). According to Kautilya six methods of foreign policy are: agreement involving pledge of peace (sandhi); offensive operation i.e. war (vigraha); being indifferent i.e. neutrality (asana); marching (yana), seeking the protection of another i.e. alliance (samsraya); and making peace with one while at war with another i.e. dual policy (dvaidibhava) (Vittal, 2016: 61). Kautilya explained the aspects of six methods as:

“Whoever is inferior to another shall make peace with him; whoever is superior in power shall wage war; whoever thinks "no enemy can hurt me, nor am I strong enough to destroy my enemy," shall observe neutrality; whoever is possessed of necessary means shall march against his enemy; whoever is devoid of necessary strength to defend himself shall seek the protection of another;

whoever thinks that help is necessary to work out an end shall make peace with one and wage war with another.”

(Shamasastry, 1956: 370-71)

The purpose behind the methods adopted in foreign policy is to counter balance once position with others. These methods were adopted to avoid the state of anarchy or matsyanyaya as mentioned in Arthashastra. The primary aim was to upgrade one's success and power, where power is explained as augmenting one's strength and success as pursuing happiness.

### ➤ **Saptanga Theory**

By Saptanga, are meant the seven pillars that constitute the state. The seven pillars are: King, Minister, Country, Fort, Treasury<sup>7</sup>, Army and the Friend. The idea behind this concept is to provide the base for expansion. These elements are essential to contain the power of the enemy (Kaur, 2010).

“But a wise king, trained in politics, will, though he possesses a small territory, conquer the whole earth with the help of the best-fitted elements of his sovereignty, and will never be defeated.”

(Kautilya's Arthashastra, 1956: 365)

Before planning for any war or an expedition, the king must ensure that that all elements of the state are in better shape. Thus steps have to be taken to guard these elements from any danger that might weaken them. Otherwise the result would be devastating. State holds a special place in Arthashastra. These elements of sovereignty determine the strength of the state to carry out laws and implement its decisions.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthashastra is considered as the oldest treatise on economy. Economic administration is its main aspect. The main aim of the economy is to generate resources which then are used by the king to obtain an army and a treasury, which are both essential elements to control the people of the state and also to contain enemy. Kautilya is of the opinion that wealth only leads to generation of more wealth. For detailed explanation, see Rangarajan, 1992

By structure, is meant the capacity of the state. The state that is more proximate with the saptanga theory, the more it is closer to success. Elements of sovereignty are important to measure the success of diplomacy.

His ideas of strategy and tactics of war have helped Chandragupta Maurya to shape its administrative and military strategy. Kautilya's work is extremely famous among military academia not to say even every contemporary military strategist has memorized his whole work.

### ➤ **Mandala Theory**

Mandala theory is based on the theme of geopolitics and the balance of power that are used in contemporary times in International Relations. Mandala theory is a strategic approach for the king who is aspiring for victory in war. It helps king to understand his relative strength as well as the strength of the enemy. In mandala theory, he gave circle of 12 kings with *vijigishu* (the most powerful king) in the centre. The mandala literally means nucleus. The theory is based on the assumption that the *vijigishu*'s immediate neighbors are his *Ari* (Enemy) and the next to *Ari* are *Mitra* (friend) and after *Mitra* are *Ari's Mitra* (Enemy's friend). In front, there are five circles, Same in the rear, immediate neighbors are *pārshnigrāha* (Enemy in the back), next to immediate neighbors are *ākṛanda* (Friend in the back). In the back, there are four circles. There are two additional states, *Udasina* (Neutral state) and *Madhyama* (Buffer state) (Mishra, 2012).

For eg: Pakistan and China are India's immediate neighbors and have been our enemy. Afghanistan and Russia have been our friends. Not only this theory is found in India's foreign policy, US too has adopted this to keep a check upon the power of its enemies. China was formed as an ally to restrain Soviet Union's expansionism. To keep India under Check during cold war, US formed alliance with China and Pakistan.

The mandala theory of Kautilya emphasized on making alliances to counter the enemies and to protect country's national interest. Even in contemporary times, Kautilya's mandala theory and six methods of foreign policy remain relevant. India's diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and Japan can be seen as natural alliances, while with Pakistan and China, they fall into different ambit. India's various policies such as look

east policy, participation in BRICS, and involvement in the Shanghai circle demonstrate its interest in fostering mutual beneficial alliances (Jindal, 2018: 26). India's efforts to enhance its influence in the ASEAN region through initiative like India- Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway which spans from Manipur to Mae Mot in Thailand via Myanmar (Ariffin, 2018) reflects India's approach of establishing multi alliances with various countries to strengthen its position and to counter balance potential adversaries such as China. "The common national interest of countries of Pacific Asia and India to counter balance China's hegemonic designs in Indian Ocean, China Sea and Pacific Ocean build the foundation for their alliance" (Jindal, 2018: 26).

It is important to note that Kautilya's notion of Realism differs from the western theory of realism. In the western perspective, war holds significant importance in international politics while Kautilya believes that states should primarily resort to diplomatic means and only consider war as a last resort in extreme situations. This approach is particularly suited for the countries in global South facing governance and development challenges (Jindal, 2019: 20).

Hence, the text is full of measures and ways to be adopted by the king to contain both internal and external rebellion.

#### ➤ **Western Political Thought: Niccolo Machiavelli**

Machiavelli belongs to the time when medieval age was coming to an end in Europe and modern age was to start. His ideas show the impact of the historical conditions of his times. It is said that every political thinker is a child of his times but it is most suited to the thoughts of Machiavelli. Laski calls Machiavelli the 'Child of Renaissance'.

Machiavelli is known as the father of realism in western political thinking. He told what the reality of politics is. '*The Prince*' is known as the best book ever written in the field of statecraft. If Plato's Republic is on the philosophy of governance, Prince is on the art of governance. According to Machiavelli, statecraft is nothing but management of power. Thus, The Prince is a manual for anyone who wants to come to power, to remain in power. In The Prince, Machiavelli suggests the ways how a state can defend its territories and attack others. He advice the Prince to well laid his foundations, otherwise

he will be ruined. He is of the view that sound laws and strong military strength are two chief foundations for any state, whether the state being new or old. An independent ruler is one who can meet any foe on the battlefield. The Prince should be armed with his own forces as he believes that without having its own arms, no principality is secure. Machiavelli stands strong against auxiliaries and mercenaries. He believes that they are useless and dangerous to a ruler because they are disunited, undisciplined, coward and unfaithful (Dietz, 1986).

Machiavelli advises the prince to study war as it is a force that not only upholds the power of prince but it also enables ordinary men to reach to that rank. He believes that without understanding the art of war, prince cannot gain loyalty from his soldiers. The two ways Machiavelli recommends the prince to prepare for the subject of war are actions and study. For actions, the ruler should be aware of the nature of the landscape. For study, Machiavelli encouraged to read history of military events (Cosans and Reina, 2018).

Machiavelli asserted that if a prince is over generous to his subjects, he will not be appreciated. He further added that if prince is over generous and in order to keep the same status in the eyes of his subjects, he will end up with all his resources being exhausted. This will result into higher taxes and ultimately his respect will be lost. Thus Machiavelli summarizes that despite building reputation based on generosity, the prince should guard himself from being hated (The Prince, translated by W.K. Marriott, 2000).

According to Machiavelli, politics is management of power. It is characterized by political activity and hence, it is essential for any ruler to know how force is to be utilized. Prince must know how to use power. He must know the use of force, when and in what amount he should use force. Only through appropriate use of power subjects can be brought to obey and ruler can keep the state in wellbeing and security (Lamus, 2016). He believes that “it is better to be feared than to be loved”. He further writes that people love at their own will but fear at the will of the Prince. Wise prince acts on his own will rather than the will of others. His suggestion with respect to the use of policy of love and fear is based on his analysis of human nature. According to Machiavelli, man is by nature “ungrateful, fickle, false, coward, covetous”. He further

avers that “men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony” (Marriott, 1984: 79-80). The policy of love symbolises soft power that is the power of attraction and policy of fear depicts hard power which is the power of coercion. Both soft and hard power is to be used in politics but Machiavelli’s preference is hard power. Soft power is useful but dependable. Human beings are selfish and ungrateful by nature. Hence, they will easily forget the favours. They have to be compelled to be good and faithful. Here, comes the role of hard power. They will continue to be faithful so long they fear the prince. Hence, hard power is dependable than soft power. Soft power may create force of attraction but it is never enough to ensure that person will perform actions that are desirable by the Prince. Machiavelli’s advice has lot of relevance not only in domestic politics but also in international politics. In the words of Machiavelli:

“men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by dread of punishment which never fails” (Marriott, 1984: 80).

Prince has to have both the qualities of fox and lion. According to Machiavelli, Prince should have cleverness of fox to understand the trap and should have strength of lion to defend himself against the wolves. Reason and courage are the two qualities of a ruler (Abe, 2013). Every modern state should have intelligence and military preparedness. Without intelligence and adequate military strength, it would not be possible for a state to protect its national interest. Machiavelli warns the prince to protect himself from internal and external threat. Internal threat emerges from his subjects. Machiavelli observes that the best remedy against internal rebellion is that the prince should command respect and avoid being hated by his subjects.

Machiavelli is the most criticized political scholar because he told the reality of politics. However the paradox is that he is the most practiced in the real world of politics but no one acknowledges himself to be Machiavellian.



## **Strategic Containment in International Relations**

The containment strategy has become a topic of increased attention in the international relations in the contemporary times. China sees any criticism of its actions as containment (Hemmings, 2018; Jianxue, 2023) while India views China's presence in the Indian Ocean Region as a component of China's containment policy (Rehman, 2009). Thus, it becomes necessary to understand the containment strategy conceptually.

Since the end of World War II, the primary goal of United States foreign policy has been to prevent the spread of communism. In fact, this objective was directly manifested in the strategy of containment- a global approach towards the fulfillment of United States national interests. This strategy was first outlined by George F. Kennan in 1947 but later it became the important component of US foreign policy (Office of the Historian, US Department of State). Containment strategy is an instrument of foreign policy whose aim is to limit the growth of adversary nation.

On the global stage, the time period from approximately 1945 up until 1991 was characterised by increased tension, competition, and global influence between the US and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic). The cold war was played out on the diplomatic front rather on the battlefield. Both United States and erstwhile USSR formulated their foreign policies in such a way as to limit the growth of each other. In case of United States, such policy is termed as containment.

According to John Lewis Gaddis (1981: 80), there are two styles of containment: Symmetric and Asymmetric. "Symmetrical response simply means reacting to threats to the balance of power at the same location, time, and level of the original provocation". It implies that enemy's provocations to be countered when it is occurred so as not to face the risk of suffering, humiliation or surrender. It includes the manner in which United States fought the Korean War and Vietnam war. "Asymmetrical response involves shifting the location or nature of one's reaction onto terrain better suited to the application of one's strengths against adversary weaknesses". It entails the risk of suffering. Asymmetrical response includes George F. Kennan's original containment strategy.

In the first stance, the United States implemented the concept of containment primarily to Europe. Containment in international politics was used as a foreign policy and was pursued by the US in the late 1940s, to prevent the spread of communism. As a component of the Cold War, the US adopted this policy to prevent the expansionist tendency of Soviet Union. It was this incident that for the first time United States perceives threat to its interests from communism emerged from Soviet Union. The threat was constituted in the form of Soviet's attempt to dominate the nations of East Europe and to increase its influence in the East Mediterranean and Middle East (Mayers, 1986).

According to David Rees (1967) cold war that emerged in 1947 between communist countries and western powers traced its origin back in 1848 nearly hundred years before. The intellectual origin of the cold war was taken back to the time of Communist Manifesto where Karl Marx throws a challenge to the capitalist world view. He views that the conflict which the whole world knows stems its root from the event of November 7, 1917.

After the overthrow of Russia's (earlier USSR) century old monarchy in 1917, the conflict arose between the provisional government, led by Alexander Kerensky and the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin. This conflict spread around the country and on November 7, 1917, the Bolshevik Red Guard forces successfully storm and captured the government buildings including the Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg) winter palace. The revolution did not stop the struggle as it was not universally recognized leading to five years long civil war. In 1923 it ultimately leads to the formation of the Soviet Union. As cited in Rees (1967:1), Lenin uttered a speech to second All Russian Congress of Soviets, "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order".

Since World War II, rivalry and conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union have significantly influenced international politics. During Franklin D. Roosevelt's tenure, there was belief that the Soviet Union could be convinced to take on the duties, burden and responsibilities of a great power for maintaining the world order. Roosevelt envisioned the post-war world order based on peace where all regional great powers including the United States, Britain, the USSR and China would trust each other and collaborate to enforce peace. Roosevelt sought to build post war peaceful world in

collaboration with Britain, Soviet Union and China is based on the fact that Soviet Union's help is desired to defeat Germany and Japan. As quoted in Gaddis (1982:3), Roosevelt's proverb to Joseph Davies, one of his old friend that, "I can't take communism nor can you, but to cross this bridge I would hold hands with the devil".

The optimization of Roosevelt's grand design for the post war world also infused state department officials with enthusiasm for his vision, whom otherwise had doubt about the coordination and collaboration with a revolutionary regime. Due to his, the joint chiefs decided to not establish a permanent base in Europe. Also, state department officials decided the policy of non-involvement in the Britain- USSR rivalry in the region (Larson, 1985).

Things changed when in April 1945, Harry S. Truman assumed the office of presidency. Despite taking pledge that he would continue with Roosevelt's policies. Truman made radical change in American foreign policy. His administration decided to contain the expansion of the USSR. This would also require US to replace Britain as a great sea power in the Mediterranean. What led America to adopt the policy of containment towards Soviet Union? The country once viewed as trustworthy was immediately superseded as the spearhead of totalitarianism and was thought of engaged in expansionism through subversion and conquest.

### **Containment by exhaustion**

Russians could be contained by devising military operations and at the same time they could be used to subdue the Germans. Harry S. Truman and William C. Bullitt suggested the same strategy. The same has been advocated by Winston Churchill whereas Roosevelt had other reasons in his mind than single concentration only on victory by holding hands with the Russians.

While analyzing Roosevelt's strategy, Gaddis (1982) mentions that one cannot ignore Roosevelt's idea of balance of power. Coming together of potentially hostile powers are not in favour of America's interest. To maintain United States security, it is essential to keep adversaries divided. The second reason lies in the nature of United States power. Roosevelt was a firm believer in the idea that America could serve exponentially towards maintenance of world order by expanding technology and not manpower. The

third consideration that was taken into account was the need to minimize human loss. Lastly, America had to wage another war in Pacific in order to defeat Japan.

### **Containment by integration**

Roosevelt make Moscow a member of the club in shaping the peace in the world and to ensure stable postwar order. Roosevelt expected that granting Soviet Union the position it always desired would gradually drop Stalin's suspicions. Ideological orientation of Soviet never prevents Roosevelt to have cooperative relation at interstate level.

### **Criticism of Roosevelt grand design**

By the end of 1944, some officials with direct experience in the Soviet Union expressed dissatisfaction with Roosevelt's strategy. They argue that generosity and goodwill would not work to win Stalin's trust as he compares these qualities with weakness. W. Averell Harriman, the United States Ambassador in Moscow since 1943 and General John R. Deane, head of the American military mission in the Soviet Union, were among the most vocal critics. While writing to Harry L. Hopkins, the special assistant to President Roosevelt, Harriman warns that "Time has come when we must make clear what we expect of them as the price of our goodwill. Unless we take issue with the present policy there is every indication the Soviet Union will become a world bully wherever their interests are involved". In a letter written by John R. Deane to General George C. Marshall, he added that "Gratitude cannot be banked in the Soviet Union. Each transaction is complete in itself without regard to past favors. The party of the second part is either a shrewd trader to be admired or a sucker to be despised". In contrast, George F. Kennan, the minister counselor of the embassy in Soviet Union disagreed with Harriman and Deane and believed that attempts to win post-war cooperation with the USSR should not be abandoned. Kennan on the other hand see little possibility of resolving the issues with the Soviet Union on any basis except for the recognition of respective sphere of influence. As cited in Bohlen (1973) Kennan emphasizes that Europe should be divided into two spheres of influence and each one should not interfere in other sphere. Harriman on the other hand emphasized on "firm but friendly quid pro quo attitude". Roosevelt has not outrightly rejected the approach but he was unwilling to implement it while the war was underway.

### **Roosevelt's death and Truman coming to power**

Roosevelt died in April 1945. The death paved the way for revision of his policy. Truman joined the office without having any hint to Roosevelt's strategy. He was soon briefed by Roosevelt's advisors. Upon assuming office as president, Truman, eager to appear decisive, adopted a quid pro quo approach, thinking it was in line with Roosevelt's strategy. Truman appointed James. F. Byrnes as the Secretary of State who has extensive experience in domestic affairs but lacked experience. Both Byrnes and Truman naturally embraced the quid pro quo approach.

### **Why agree to quid pro quo strategy?**

The new administration under Truman believed that America had leverage over Soviet Union in several ways. The significance of post war reconstruction assistance through Lend-Lease, post war loan, reparations was not denied by Roosevelt and Harriman. Roosevelt was actually leaning towards using this leverage. Truman on the other hand denied this unconditional aid (Gaddis, 1972). Publicity was another instrument which could be used for calling attention to Russian unilateralism. Another was the ultimate threat of atomic bomb.

### **Failure of quid pro quo strategy**

'Carrots' and 'Sticks' were not implemented appropriately to receive concessions from the other side. The strategy of publicity and the sanction of atomic bomb used as 'sticks' were neither impressive nor usable. The major 'carrot' in the form of economic aid was significant for Russia but not so much for justifying the concessions. The major reason for the failure of this strategy was Soviet Union not being affected by external influences.

### **Truman doctrine**

However, the quid pro quo strategy proved unsuccessful, leading to George F. Kennan's alternative approach outlined in the "Long Telegram" of February 1946. Kennan's telegram argued that America's approach towards the Soviet Union during and after World War II was mistaken. Roosevelt's containment by integration and Harriman's emphasis on bargaining assumed that the existence of normal relations within the Soviet Union had no structural barriers, while Stalin's hostility towards the west was driven

by external threats. Truman believed that these hostilities could be overcome either by gaining Stalin's trust or by implementing a quid pro quo approach to earn his respect.

The new strategy, famously known as the containment strategy, differed from the past policies in several ways, as described by Gaddis:

- 1) Disagreements with the Russians would not be openly and firmly aired, but without provocation.
- 2) The Soviet Union would not be granted concessions and America would defend against Soviet expansion but not intervene in areas already under Soviet's control.
- 3) To achieve this goal, America would rebuild its military and allies would be asked to provide military and economic aid.
- 4) Negotiations would only go as far as registering Soviet's acceptance of United States' position or highlighting Moscow's inflexibility to gain allies trust and support at home.

The Truman doctrine of 1947, with its assurance of providing military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey, was an initial application of the policy of containment. While delivering a speech before the congress on March 12, 1947, Harry S. Truman asked to support the Greece and Turkish governments in their fight against communists. As proclaimed in his speech, "The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms". He stated further that "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures". With this doctrine, US established that it would provide political, military and financial support to all democratic nations under threat from totalitarian forces.

### **Strategies of containment**

Gaddis wrote that by the end of 1948, Kennan had developed three steps to contain Soviet Union. First, it involves restoring the balance of power by infusing self confidence in nations threatened by the Soviet Union's expansionism. To achieve this objective, Kennan argued that economic aid and military forces would primarily produce the desired result. The second step is reduction- reduction of Soviet's ability

to project its influence beyond its territorial borders. Moscow is extending its influence in two ways: a) First, primarily through installing communist government in Eastern Europe subservient to Soviet Union. b) Second, through exploiting the use of communist parties around the world. In order to counter this expansionism, Kennan argued that by exploiting struggle between the Soviet Union and the global communist movement should be the basis of United States policy. The third step in Kennan strategy was modification in Soviet Union's concept of security from universalism- where they believe that the world needs to be restricted along Soviet lines to particularism-tolerance and acceptance of diversity. The most effective means to modify behavior according to Kennan lies in the right use of deterrent and inducement.

### **Strategic Containment and Regional Power Game: India- China scenario**

Mutual suspicion between India and China has become strife, deep and wide over past few years which have propelled their bilateral relations into strategic rivalry. "The two sides are poised for rivalry for regional dominance and influence in the multipolar world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Malik, 1995: 317). A new power game or 'Great Game' is shaping up in South Asia as China is quickly replacing India by commanding greater say in Smaller South Asian states which have felt impeded by Indian Machinations (Manuel, 2016). The Developing Impact of China in South Asia is driven by financial, strategic and security objectives. A hegemonic China seeks to take away India's interest in South Asia, causing a major concern in India (Rajagopalan, 2017). China's close affinity with Pakistan is well known. Nepal is heading towards China for monetary benefits (Gupta, 2023). China has offered tariff exemption of 97% to Bangladesh on its products in order to woo Bangladesh (The Economic Times, 2020). Huge investments have been made by China in Sri Lanka. India being in close geographical proximity to most South Asian nations, despite that they are moving closer to China. China is making deep inroads in these regions. Both India and China have an ambition to attain great power status which led to an implicit break out of competition in neighboring areas and Indian Ocean.

South Asia and China have so much to gain from each other. Emergence of China as an economic power has become a world phenomenon but it has not been welcomed by all. Some see it as a threat and some view it as beneficial. For various developing nations, they have much to gain from it (Silver, Devlin, and Huang, 2019). South Asian

Region is effected by China's rise in both direct and indirect ways. Shahnawaz (2011) elaborates that direct impact can be visible through China's emerging role in SAARC, its efforts to stabilize the critical situation in Afghanistan and its potential role to bring SAARC and ASEAN together and more closer. He further outlines indirect benefits which arise from China's desire to eradicate terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism. These issues align with South Asian interest. The South Asian region is struggling with many endemic problems such as violent conflict, immense human development challenges, nuclear-armed brinkmanship, challenges of democratic governance, and climate change. The dynamicity of the region presents enticing opportunities for countries looking for market and influence. The South Asian region is "one of the least economically integrated regions in the world" and "relies heavily on developed nations, and increasingly import from China" (Khan, 2018). China on the other hand is a growing economy. So as to fuel its developing economy, there is a need for the requirement of oil and natural resources. Moreover, it requires new market. Smaller South Asian nations place importance on economic development and China offers a tempting alternative. The ascent of China's power, market, influence, wealth and infrastructure development capacity in the region implies the elimination of past bottlenecks in economic development. China is providing not only viable economic development opportunities to the countries of South Asian region but has become a powerful and alternate ally for these fragile and weak countries (Grossman, 2020). China's extending presence in the South Asian region is now reshaping it.

China's financial investments to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral countries is not all about fetching profits or to alter geography in its favour. It is also to improve its stakes in the region for strategic gains. This would not only help China to improve its economic growth but also to enhance its stake as a significant partner in the IOR. Therefore, China has been expanding its influence in the region and increasing its engagement in regional s multilateral security organizations and thereby legitimizing its military presence (Khurana, 2016). China's economic influence in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Maldives is growing. Its naval footprints is expanding in the Indian Ocean. "India fears being contained, even though New Delhi does not express this publicly" (Michael, 2020).



China's increased engagement with the South Asian countries is evident and its mechanism has been a work in progress. China views the South Asian Region as integral and strategically significant for India's security and foreign policy. China's expanding presence and engagement in the region have presented a challenge to India's neighborhood policy and has exposed its natural pre-eminence as each of India's neighbors are eager to play the China card against India (Sahoo and Taneja, 2010; Pratibha, 2018).

Today, China has risen as a significant force in Asia with a dynamic and powerful economy. Its regional impact has extended exponentially. Meanwhile, the United States has been tilting nearer and nearer to India, as US and Pakistan ties become frayed. This setting has opened the entryway for more stronger and grounded Pakistan-China relations (Notezai, 2018). China has made multiple inroads in South Asia. Over the past decade, "China has become a significant economic partner of the smaller countries of the region, forging stronger ties through aid, investment, exchange, trade and diplomacy" (Anderson and Ayres, 2015). China's financial commitment with the IOR countries is not about monetary profits and "Altering geography". It is also to upgrade its stakes in the area for geopolitical and strategic reasons. This would help China's economic development, yet in addition improve its profile as a significant partner in IOR. China is expanding its impact in these countries along these lines, upgrading its role in the area's multilateral security organizations and "legitimizing its military presence in the region" (Khurana, 2016: 3). India views China's increasing trade ties and commitment of advanced infrastructure development in the South Asian-Indian Ocean Region with suspicion about Beijing's motivations. "Many Indians are very suspicious of the steady expansion of Chinese presence and influence in the South Asian-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR), viewing it as a kind of 'creeping encirclement'- whether intended or unintended-by Beijing" (Garver, 2012: 392).

China's increased presence in South Asian countries has drawn attention of policymakers, strategists and analysts. They are concerned with the implication that China's rise would have on existing regional order. Thorough examination of China's growing involvement with the South Asian countries indicate that the relationship is far from simple. China's diplomatic and economic engagement aims to secure its market,

to develop trade ties, access raw materials and energy resources and to enhance its international stature. As a result, China has utilized its diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military strength to bolster its influence in the South Asia region. “As China rises in power and influence, the course of China’s development will be determined by its decision either to join fully the community of nations as a responsible stakeholder or, alternatively, a decision to play by its own rules” (Pehrson, 2006: 10).

### **Rise of China: International Paradigms**

The rise of China as a new force in the international system has been one of the most important developments in recent decades. Recent phenomenon in the international sphere is all about rising China and it is undoubtedly the most important phenomenon in the world system. Napoleon once warned the world that “let the dragon sleep, for when she awakes, she will astonish the world” (as cited in Ochab, 2021). The dragon has fully awakened by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Lee (2007: 1) has rightly remarked that “the world is witnessing a shift of the centre of political and economic power from the United States to China”. Since 1978 when China has decided to open up its economy there is no looking back. China’s has experienced impressive economic growth, averaging around 10% annually, propelling it to become the world’s second largest economy (The World Bank).

Power transitions are never easy. Unless it is slow and steady, it is better, but when it happens within snapping of fingers, it is viewed with suspicion. Schweller (1999) has explained various dimensions to the fear that gripped the world when there is rise of power. The first being that it is the nature of power to expand. The second comes from the first that in order to expand power there is need for resources which compels the rising power to come out of its state’s domestic resource endowments and to reach beyond its borders for resources and market. In order to meet the domestic deficiency, states adopt expansionist policy which in turn generally leads to power conflict. Collision of interests often increases the likelihood of war. China’s rise is no such exception, where its rise is viewed with awe and suspicion. The rise of China has raised debates in strategic circles about whether it will lead to regional and global stability or create tensions. Various international paradigms have been explored like realism, constructivism, power transition, and liberalism to understand the rise of China.

## **Rising powers and transformation in force**

### **➤ Realist approach**

The theory of Realism or political realism in international relations have a long history and is frequently referenced. Key figures in the realism school involves Hans J. Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, George Kennan, E.H. Carr, and John Mearsheimer, who draw inspiration from the works of Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Thucydides.

Power can rightly be viewed as one of the main component within the international framework. As concisely put by Morgenthau (1948), “whenever nations endeavor to realize their aims and objectives through international politics, they strive to do so by making progress towards power”. The realist approach takes its starting point where a nation’s power and threat perception governs the means and motivation to nations to gather material abilities in an effort to defend their position in the international framework.

The theory of realism is concerned with the fact that international politics is anarchical. It means that there is no world government to administer or govern the behavior of states. Realists have no faith in international organizations and international law. Since, there is no supra national authority, nations have to depend on power for protection of their vital interests (Krasner, 2002). Therefore, the suitable way to survive in a world where there is no night watchman is to gain more power than your possible potential rival. The more powerful the state is, the less likely it is to be attacked by others. Hence, states have to depend on self-help for survival (Powell, 1994). States are the key actors in world politics. It means international politics is politics among states. Realism is known as state-centric view of international politics where every state is concerned with the protection of its national interest and survival i.e. protection of territorial integrity is the most important aim (Algozaibi, 1965). Survival is very important as state cannot accomplish its other goals if it does not survive. Hence, claims that “international politics is nothing but struggle for power”. As Morgenthau (1948:13) remarks that “International Politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim”. When we use the

term power in international politics, it is not about muscle strength of man or his control over self, over nature, over means of production and consumption. According to Morgenthau (1948:13-14), it denotes “man’s control over the minds and actions of other men”. To fulfill the objective of foreign policy, which every state has its own, be it control of sea lanes, acquisition of territory, acquisition of raw material among others, “states always entail control of the actions of others through influence over their minds”. The Zero sum game and struggle for power are the constant features of international politics.

Classical Realists emphasise on the role of human nature in international politics. They believe that laws that govern politics are made by men, hence they control the power. Classical realists argue that humans are greedy, selfish, insecure and aggressive as man is power seeking by nature. This makes them fight against each other for the satisfaction of their needs as the resources are scarce (Donnelly, 2000). Since man is power seeker, then international politics is struggle for power. The only means through which states can secure their national interest is by means of power. Power in the hands of others is seen as a threat. Quest of security by one give rise to insecurity in others. Hence, nations end up in the vicious cycle of insecurity. In order to reduce insecurities, they continuously go for acquiring power.

Analyzing Sino-Indian relations, Rehman (2009: 115) aptly puts it that despite increase in cooperation between the two nations, India-China relations are “characterized by strong undercurrents of mistrust”. He further argues that “liberal theories on the effects of economic interdependence and institutionalization do not provide the best framework for analysis of Sino-Indian relations”. The reasons stated by him include inequality in bilateral trade between the two. He further stated that high rate of interdependence often leads to either peace or conflict. In case of India and China, both are highly dependent on foreign market, raw material and foreign investment. China’s preference is security of sea lanes through which its energy needs are met. Being an expansionist state, it has continued to spread its wings and now has reached to Asia, where India’s security could be threatened by its presence and has the potential to provoke armed conflict between the two. Despite surge in their trade relations, their military budgets have grown exponentially. In spite of signing various agreements on

border peace and tranquility, both India and China are modernizing the infrastructure on their border. Institutionalism on the other hand has sparked competition, in which both nations make an attempt to raise their stature and influence (Jain, 2021). In reality, India-China engagement over past few years is not more than surface improvement. The border dispute between the two has yet to be resolved and border incursion from Chinese side has increased as claimed by Indian military. According to Happymon Jacob (2020) “there are around 400 transgressions/faceoffs each year on an average along the line of actual control”.

Since the primary objective of all the actors is survival, there are two strands in realism to explain the ability of states to protect itself. One strand is concerned with ‘security maximization’ (Schweller, 2004) and the other deals with ‘power maximization’ (Shameer M, 2017). Defensive realists like Kenneth Waltz (1990) suggest that nations are security maximizers. They want power for the purpose of their security. According to defensive realists, there will be status-quo as states seek power to ensure their survival and therefore, would not seek to attain great power status in a situation where their own security would jeopardize. Offensive realists on the other hand like John Mearsheimer (1995) argues that nations are not just security maximizers but power maximizers. The search for power is not just limited for the security or survival. States seek opportunities to advance their power at the expense of others. Since, states can never be certain about the intention of others, they will continue to acquire more and more power. They will be willing to take risk. They are revisionist by nature. States will seek to change the balance or existing power structure. For any state the ideal situation is its hegemony. However, hegemony is not stable. It is because of power seeking nature, states will continue to struggle and war will be the recurrent feature (Toft, 2005; Snyder, 2002). The important difference in offensive and defensive realism is the amount of power states seek. For Kenneth Waltz, states want power which is sufficient for the security. Power maximization is sub optimal as it will trigger counter coalition of states but for Mearsheimer power maximization is natural as states want to enlarge their opportunities<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> For more details, read Kenneth N. Waltz. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*. Philippines: Addison-Wesley; Hans J. Morgenthau. (1978). *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and*

The other important feature of Realism is security dilemma. Security Dilemma emerges out of the Anarchic idea of the state system (Buzan, Jones, and Little, 1993). Each state has the responsibility for ensuring its own security in the absence of super power to protect it. The individual state is responsible for its own survival. Confronted with this obligation, states endeavor to expand their capacity, power and influence either economically, diplomatically or militarily. By extending their capacity in this fashion, they make neighboring states feel insecure, compelling these states to prepare for the worst and to make plans accordingly which include counter measures to upgrade their own capacity. The search for the security by both sides ultimately results in a situation where both the powers are less secure.

Realism seems to offer an appropriate explanation to the threat arising from China's rise. Threat emanating from the rise of China has been met with mixed responses. The Application of Mearsheimer's (2006) view on China's rise has clearly shown that "China's rise will not be peaceful". China will not be satisfied with power which is sufficient for the security. China would try to change the power structure in Asia-Pacific. "China is likely to try to dominate Asia the way the United States dominates the western hemisphere. China will want to make sure that it is so powerful that no state in Asia has the wherewithal to threaten it". He further argues that "it is highly certain that China's neighbours would fear from its rise and they will do something to prevent China from achieving regional hegemony" (Mearsheimer, 2006: 162). Another important aspect of realism is self-help. For realists, "there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies". The only thing that is permanent is the national interest. National interest is the motivation of all foreign policies. States have to take care of themselves and that coexistence is maintained through balance of power. In this regard Mearsheimer (2006: 162) argues that China's neighbours, be it small like Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines or big countries like India, Japan, are vary of

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*Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf; E.H. Carr. (2016). *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: Reissued with a new preface from Michael Cox*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan; John J. Mearsheimer. (1990). Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold war. *International Security*, 15(1), 5-56; Eric J. Labs. (1997). Beyond Victory: Offensive realism and the expansion of war aims. *Security Studies*, 6(4), 1-49; Robert Gilpin. (2010). *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press; Fareed Zakaria. (1999). *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*. Princeton University Press

China's rise and are looking for ways to contain it. "In the end, they will join an American-led balancing coalition to check China's rise, much the way Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and even China joined forces with the United States to contain the Soviet Union during the cold war".

Mearsheimer (2006) explains that great powers ultimately aim for hegemony but achieving global hegemony is difficult due to the challenge of maintain power worldwide. Instead, states often seek to become regional hegemons, dominating their geographical area and preventing other powers from achieving the same status. Regional hegemons do not seek competitors. In order to maintain their regional hegemony, the contender state would divide other regions among other great powers so that their attention would be divided in competing with each other.

However, this approach falls short in explaining the motivations behind China's foreign policy choices to expand its influence around the world.

#### ➤ **Constructivism**

Social constructivism is a recent perspective in international theory. The term constructivism was used for the first time by Nicholas Onuf in his work '*The World of our making*'. There is significance of the year when this work is published. The year 1989 marks the fall of communism and the rise of globalization. The developments in 1989 challenge some of power established notions about the world and the rivalry between the two super powers. Our construction was that the world is bi-polar and the rivalry is never ending. However things changed. USSR did not oppose US led war against Iraq. Such developments led to the conclusion that we are living in the world of our own imaginations. Realists have constructed a picture and presented it as objective law. For constructivists, international relations like all political relations are socially constructed. The nature of relationship between two states is not just the product of material elements, objective, such as the balance of trade (BoT), or the balance of military force or the structure of domestic organizations. Interstate relations are likewise molded to an impressive degree by subjective elements, by the convictions, beliefs, ideas and thoughts that individuals carry around in their minds and that cause them to decipher events and information in particular ways (Checkel, 1998). Alexander

Wendt (1992: 395) argues that anarchy is not reality but has been constructed by realists. “Anarchy is what states make of it”. For social constructivists such construction has not been helpful rather dangerous. Hence, there is a need to change these constructions. For social constructivists all is in mind. If we change our construction we can change our way of life. Thus, anarchy is not natural but cultural. It is not created by god. It is created by realists. It is a product of realist culture. Social constructivists help us to know as what we consider as real may be our imagination.

Power and Perception seems to be very evident factors in India-China relations. Power, in political realism denotes the capacity of the state to make another country do what it would not do otherwise. How much a state can influence others is what defines its power. The capability to influence can be both tangible and intangible. Tangible features include state’s size, demography, resources, military power, its economy and technological development. Intangible characteristics include will power, ambition, ideology, leadership and organizational efficiency. Classical realism is of great relevance for analyzing the current China-India relations. “Realism assumes that there exists anarchy in international system. States therefore tries to accumulate power in order to survive and gave priority to national interest over collective interest. Such thinking drives states to attain a favorable balance of power and compete for influence” (Chong, 2016: 8). This leads to power balancing mechanisms, including explicit containment alliances (hard balancing) and implicit understanding (soft balancing) among nations. Analyzing India-China relations, Scott agrees to soft balancing between the two but for hard balancing he is of the view that “India and China have avoided such explicit hard balancing alliances toward each other” (Scott, 2008: 247). He agrees to internal balancing also where both the Asian giants have been engaged in. “Both India and China have balanced internally by strengthening their military, and also externally by building relations with each other’s neighbours” (Chong, 2016: 9). Such moves by each other can be further studied through convergence of IR realism and constructivism. “Power and perceptions are very evident factors in Sino-Indian relations, reflecting classical realism as well as elements of constructivism. Perceptions may be generated from power situation “(Scott, 2008: 244).



From the Indian perspective, the legacy of the Indo-China border conflict in 1962 continues to hamper their relations. For constructivists, “early disputes that marred the Sino-Indian relations with mutual suspicion, distrust and hostility will continue to be reinforced by their many unresolved disputes”. He further infers that “mutual suspicion continues to permeate the Sino-Indian relationship, fuelled by their unresolved territorial dispute, military modernization, resource competition and rivalry for regional and global influence” (Bajpae, 2007: 106-107). This situation is further exacerbated by rising China’s influence in the Indian Ocean region and their closed geographical proximity that has generated a feeling of threat to which India needs to respond.

“Combining the elements of realism and constructivism, it can be inferred that competition between India and China will be inevitable because of their aspiration for great power status that would force them to compete for influence, resources, power and markets” (Chong, 2016). “Another way that IR realism and constructivism converge is with regard to how moves by one side may trigger further responses from the other, the classic IR security dilemma action-reaction downward spiral generated by mistrust of intentions” (Scott, 2008: 247).

#### ➤ **Liberalism**

Liberals view humans as rational being. It focuses on the autonomy of the individual. It gives freedom of choice to pursue one’s goal. Unlike realists who believe in struggle for war and argues that war is inevitable. Liberals on the other hand argues that war can be eliminated. Liberals believe that peace is a natural state of affairs. They have faith in human reason and are convinced that people have the ability to realize their inner potential. Liberals argue that free trade and globalization would draw states into web of complex economic interdependence where economic cost would prevent states from pursuing war and conflict (Moravcsik, 1997). For Scott Burchill (2005: 63) “artificial barriers to commerce distorted perceptions and relations between individuals, thereby causing international tension. Free trade would expand the range of contacts and levels of understanding between the peoples of the world and encourage international friendship and understanding”. To sum it up, liberals contend that there is inversely proportion relation between economics and conflict. The more the dependence of economy, the less likely political conflicts would occur.

➤ **Power transition Theory**

There have been numerous reports determining continuing economic growth for China, India and other new rising powers. In the times of globalization and interdependence, what response can be anticipated from established powers and small and medium sized powers to China's rise? When considering how established or great powers will react, Power transition theory may provide some insights. Organski (1968) has formulated the theory of power transition in his work '*World Politics*'. Organski foresaw that China's rise would pose a threat to American global domination long before

“Given the huge Chinese population, the power of China ought eventually to become greater than that of the Soviet Union simply through internal development. If China is successful, control of the communist order will pass to her, and the western powers will find that the most serious threat to their supremacy comes from China.”

(Organski, 1968: 361)

Organski (1968) argues that the distribution of power among countries does not adjust itself. Nor can a country guarantee the distribution of power as per its choice merely by holding conferences and by arming self. The key factors influencing national power are its population, political efficiency, and economic growth. Changes in these aspects leads to shifts in the distribution of power globally. The current instability of the global order is primarily driven by the rapid changes in population growth, political alignments, and economic developments among nations. Constantly emerging new players challenge the established distribution of power, and if any newcomer's challenge proves successful, it can result in a significant transfer of power from one group of countries to another, ultimately shaping a new international order.

It would not be wrong to say from the above statement that industrialization brings change in population and political structure. The result is not same for all. It depends on the size of the state, its populations. One for sure gain from the industrialization even if it is a small nation but they cannot compete with the giants. Nation with large population with modernization efforts can find their power and influence to increase enough to compete with the established powerful nations in international politics.

Degree of power and degree of satisfaction is a major concept in power transition theory. Abramo Fimo Kenneth Organski (1968: 364), an influential theorist, has classified all the nations of the world into four major categories on the basis of these two characteristics.

1. “The powerful and satisfied
2. The powerful and dissatisfied
3. The weak and satisfied
4. The weak and dissatisfied”

He has explained the power transition concept with the help of a diagram, where the international order is depicted by a pyramid. The apex of the pyramid constitutes the dominant powers. Dominant nations are the most powerful in the world because they are in charge of the existing international system and get the majority of its rewards. Below them are the great powers. Great powers, as their name suggest, are powerful nations, but not as powerful as dominant nations. Great powers too receive enormous benefits from the international order, though not as strong as dominant nations. The power to influence the behavior of others also differs between dominant and great powers. Then there is another category called the middle and small powers, lying below great powers in hierarchy. This category includes small but wealthy nations. The last and final classification is composed of dependencies. They are virtually powerless nations and are tied to the current international order. Satisfaction here denotes the satisfaction of nations with the existing international order.

### **Response of great powers**

The powerful group of nations is formed by the combination of dominant states and the great powers.

<b>The powerful and satisfied</b>	<b>The powerful and dissatisfied</b>
Here, the great powers are satisfied with the existing international order and its working rules as the current order offers them the best opportunity to fulfill the	Here, the great powers are not satisfied with the current international order. This group is identified as challengers as they aim to bring change to the existing order

goals they have as a top priority. The great powers are allies of dominant powers, sharing in leadership and benefits.	and seeks to establish a new order in its place. Trouble can be expected as they are unwilling to accept a subordinate place in international order. With their rapid increase in power comes more dissatisfaction. The concern is that this situation can start great wars.
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### **Response of small and medium sized states**

<b>The weak and satisfied</b>	<b>The weak and dissatisfied</b>
These nations have accepted the current international order and found a spot in it that guarantees them certain advantages.	These nations are dissatisfied with the current international order and their position in it but they are not threat to world peace as they lack the power to do so. Although, they can posses danger collectively.

With the rise of China and the changing regional security architecture in South Asia and Indian Ocean Region or China-South Asia relations, Power transition theory do provide answers. The small and medium sized nations are relatively playing smart. In areas where China has supremacy, they tend to move towards China and choose to bandwagon with it. On the other hand, if they find that by cooperation with India or any other nation they would benefit, they choose to go with the other. It does not seem that smaller countries in the South Asian region are sacrificing their ties to one nation and allying themselves with another. They are not aligning with one or other great power but they are consciously balancing the influence. They are trying to resist on choosing sides as forming an alliance with one great power means loss of autonomy. Also, these countries are reliant on India and China both economically and politically, and if they see an advantage in maintaining those ties that provides a stronger argument, they will

act to gain maximum at minimal cost. Sahashi (2011: 5) while analyzing the consequences of rise of china on regional security architecture argues that small and medium sized nations are employing the options of soft balancing, integration and efforts to strengthen the response capabilities to maintain their autonomy. This allows them to choose a path which lies in between an all out option of balancing and bandwagoning.

Small states experience the impact in the first place of major geopolitical shifts. Historically, major crisis trigger because of the minor players on the periphery of emerging powers and that prove to be a turning point during power transition. Small South Asian nations fit the bill.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Out of all approaches and theories, this work uses the lens of constructivism<sup>9</sup> to explore existing strategic narrations about China. Constructivism is a theoretical approach that seeks to comprehend the development of norms in international relations. In this context, human societies develop suitable behaviour based on the narrations that they accept and propagate. These narrations or stories give rise to concept of power and influence, forming a common knowledge shared among people. However, such commonly shared knowledge is not egalitarian as more powerful states possess constitutive power within the system, allowing them to shape international stories and norms according to their own standards. As a result, “in the international political system, the dominant states influence how states perceive themselves, how states perceive each other, and how states perceive other states to see themselves” (Wendt, 1992). For instance, if a state perceives other state as revisionist power and responds through offensive realist strategy, the confrontation between the two is nearly guaranteed. Likewise, if countries perceive other’s open to talks or communicate through diplomatic channel, then it is highly possible for them to reach a consensus.

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<sup>9</sup> Social constructivism is a recent perspective in international theory. The term constructivism was used for the first time by Nicholas Onuf in his work ‘The World of our making’. There is significance of the year when this work is published. The year 1989 marks the fall of communism and the rise of globalization.

Hence, the key feature of constructivist framework is that states create a favoured identity that promotes an idealised view of themselves not only domestically, but also globally. States form strong beliefs of their legitimate and rightful position in the international arena. When a state's internal conception does not match other state's impression of it, and especially when the international community rejects a state's vision, this created tremendous tension in international community which can eventually be manifested into real conflict (Maj Jamison, 2021).

China as an ancient civilization with an extensive history that predates any other modern state. Xi Jinping (2017) during his speech at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China stated that, "with a history of more than 5000 years, our nation created a splendid civilization, made remarkable contributions to mankind, and became one of the greatest nations". "The China do not view itself as a rising power, rather, the China identify itself as great power which is simply regaining what is rightfully theirs" (Mearsheimer, 2014). China's constructive identity is crucial to India for two major reasons: first, China's rising material capabilities is allowing it to create formidable military power; and second, as China's economic power rises, so does its constitutive power.

The constructivist theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the expanding Chinese global influence. "According to the theory of constructivism, international relations are not solely shaped by material capabilities, rather, norms, interactions, and perceptions impact international relations" (Acharya, 2018). "The constructivists emphasizes the role of narrations, ideas, norms, and identity in shaping the state's behaviour" (Katzenstein, 1996). With respect to China, several fundamental aspect of constructivism shed light on China's expanding influence in the world.

### **Historical Memory and Identity Formation**

With the advent of sociological constructivism in the 1990s, historical memory and identity have drawn increasing attention. Vast amount of literature on the politics of memory is focused on the role of historical memory in the creation of group membership and identity. Collective memory forms and binds a group of people, and the key building block for constructing ethnicity is history (Halbwachs, 1992: Eller,

1999). Anthony D. Smith asserts that ethnic, national, and religious identities are based on historical myths that describe the characteristics of group members as well as the enemies of the group (Smith, 1987). These myths are typically based on reality, but they present the history in selected and exaggerated way. Norwegian Scholar Johan Galtung asserts that the identity of a group and how that group responds are determined by major historical events. He identifies the categories of “Chosennes”, trauma, and myths as the syndrome called the Chosenness<sup>10</sup>-Myths-Trauma Syndrome (CMT) or megalomania syndrome (Johan, 2001). Similarly, Vamik D. Volkan (1997) asserts that certain hardships and struggles that a group has gone through also play a significant role in shaping collective identity. These struggles are divided into two categories: “Chosen traumas<sup>11</sup>” and “chosen glories<sup>12</sup>”. The story of these struggles pass on to following generations. A group internalizes the memories of traumatic event into its identity, resulting in transmission of hostility to the next generation. In other words, even though they were not present to witness the traumatic event themselves, the future generation nonetheless share the suffering of the past. This is due to the fact that they have tendency to create links between group members with their broader group which raises members’ self-esteem by being associated with such glories (Volkan, 1997).

### **Constructivism and Historical Memory in Identity Formation**

Constructivism gave importance to identity and how it shapes states behavior. Constructivists view identity as manufactured rather than given. They emphasise that ethnicity and identity are socially constructed. States choose a history and narrate it with differences. David Lowenthal (2015) in his work *‘The Past is a Foreign Country’* argues that we, the contemporaries, selectively construct our past for a variety of reasons. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) in his path breaking work *‘On Collective Memory’* argues that the past is reconstructed with regards to the concerns and needs of the present. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), Print languages provided the groundwork for national consciousness by providing uniform fields of exchange and

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of being chosen or selected by transcendental forces.

<sup>11</sup> The horrors of the past that cast shadows onto the future.

<sup>12</sup> Myths about a glorious future, often seen as a reenactment of a glorious past.

communication. Anderson asserts that group's history is transferred not only from parents and grandparents but from print media and formal schooling as well.

### **China: History and Identity**

From a broader perspective, to understand China and its rise, it is important to unlock its history. History is the prime raw material to construct China's national identity. As national interests are constructed by national identity, and national identity in turn dictates foreign policy and state's response. Therefore, an understanding of Chinese historical consciousness is vital to understand Chinese politics and foreign policy behaviour.

Key historical events- both traumas and glory induces feeling of defeat, humiliation, mental trauma, and feeling of success and triumph respectively. This is applicable to China and effect its psyche today. Zheng Wang in his work "*Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*" provides exemplary analysis of how historical memory, history education, and the state's ideological education drive were used to reconstruct and recreate a new Chinese identity. The author analyses the China's CMT complex, wherein, the Chinese language provides insight into their notion of chosenness. It is evident through the names given to China. China is called *Zhongguo* which means central or middle kingdom. Chinese people lived in the notion they were part of central kingdom of *tianxia*- the "realm under heaven". China is also called by the name *Zhonghua*. In ancient Chinese language, *hua* means splendid or prosperous. Another name for China is *Shenzhou*, which translates to sacred land or divine land. China call themselves as *Tianchao*, which means Celestial Empire or Heavenly Dynasty (Wang, 2012). The Chinese also use *Long de chuanren*- descendants of the dragon. This reference is often depicted through the use of Chinese dragon<sup>13</sup>. Myths about past and present glories are depicted through idioms: "*Wenming guguo*- a civilized ancient nation; *Liyizhibang*- a nation of ritual and etiquette; *Didawubo*- the vast land and bountiful goods; *Sidafaming*- the four great inventions of ancient China; *Canlanwenming*- a splendid civilization". China's chosen myths and

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<sup>13</sup> It is a symbol of imperial power. In contrast to European dragons, which are considered evil, Chinese dragons traditionally symbolize potent and auspicious powers, with control over water, rainfall, and floods.



glories are also displayed through Silk Road and Zheng He's voyages (Wang, 2012). In Chinese historical narrative, 'a century of humiliation'<sup>14</sup> is the key component of China's chosen trauma<sup>15</sup>.

A Century of humiliation portrays that 'unequal treaties'<sup>16</sup> imposed on China by foreign powers limit the growth of China in the international arena. The term persists till today. National Humiliation as a trauma in China's history dates back to 1915 on the account of 'The Japanese Twenty-One Demands'<sup>17</sup> towards the Chinese government, whereby China insisted its people to swear to never forget this day. Peking Chamber of Commerce pleaded in an open telegram to all of its province counterparts on May 9, 1915 in a publication addressed to all 400 million Chinese, "do not ever forget this extreme national humiliation on May 7" (as cited in Luo, 1993: 309).

### **Defining the current scenario in China**

The narrative of century of humiliation has become a key justification for CCP rule as the CCP is represented as the only modern Chinese political party that was able to successfully end foreign aggression. National Humiliation is a frequent and repeating subject in China's identity making, which is being invoked in diverse ways. Upon which, Callahan (2004: 199) commented that "I was fascinated by what seemed to be a unique feature of Communist Chinese historiography and identity: the very deliberate celebration of a national insecurity."

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<sup>14</sup> The century of humiliation is also referred to as the "treaty century", because many foreign powers forcibly required China to sign a series of devastating agreements following military defeats. Ceding territory, paying indemnities, and surrendering sovereign rights were all related to the unequal treaties. For example, the Boxer Protocol of 1901 in which China was required to pay a huge indemnity of about twice the annual income of the entire Qing government.

<sup>15</sup> The major foreign invasion that China faced during its century of humiliation include the First Opium War (1839-1842), the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the invasion of the allied forces of eight countries (1900), the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931), and the Anti-Japanese war (1937-1945).

<sup>16</sup> For more details, read, Wang, D. (2003). The Discourse of Unequal Treaties in Modern China. *Pacific Affairs*, 76 (3), pp. 399-425

<sup>17</sup> On January 18, 1915, Japan, lead by Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu, presented a secret ultimatum to China consisting of 21 demands which were designed to give Japan regional ascendancy over China. The demands were grouped into five major categories and required, among other demands, that China immediately stop leasing its territory to foreign nations and to ascent to Japanese control over Shandong (one of many Chinese coastal provinces located on the Eastern shore), Manchuria (located on the Northeastern side of the People's Republic of China, bordering Russia), and Mongolia. To read more, visit [http://aits.utexas.edu/~mr56267/HIST\\_341\\_materials/Pages/Twenty\\_One\\_Demands.html](http://aits.utexas.edu/~mr56267/HIST_341_materials/Pages/Twenty_One_Demands.html)

This identity driven narration has been resonated through China's foreign policy. The persistent feeling of insecurity is channelled by Chinese leaders to define China's current national concerns and framing future national aspirations. This is visible in the comments of Mao Zedong, "Making the past serve the present and foreign things serve China". Mao once pointed out that the "Contemporary China has grown out of the China of the past. We are Marxist in our historical approach and must not lop off past history. We should sum up our history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and inherit this valuable legacy. This is important for guiding the great movement of today" (as cited in Shu, 1978: 43).

The discourse of national humiliation demonstrates that China's insecurities go beyond just material concern of catching up with the west militarily and economically, but symbolic. "Indeed one of the goals of Chinese foreign policy has been to 'cleanse National Humiliation.'" (Callahan, 2004: 202). In many depictions of the Century of Humiliation, China is seen having lost three major things: its territory; its ability to govern its internal and external environments; and its respect and status in the world. These are all examples of injustices that needs to be rectified.

On the loss of territory, it is clear that China is not satisfied with its current territory. Kaufman (2011) argued that from the period of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) to 1920s, China has lost over one-third of its territory. This process later became famous as a metaphor 'cutting up like a melon' (*guafen*) (Rudolf G. Wagner). China's assertive and active foreign policy in territorial disputes, including maritime claims in South China Sea, border disputes along LAC with India are encompassed in this narrative. Till now, China has been able to reassert its claim over Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang but not Taiwan. Reunification of China became the core policy of China. Return of Taiwan to the mainland China is considered a non-negotiable policy. While delivering a speech at 20<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress Xi Jinping asserts that "Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China's complete reunification is, for the Party, a historic mission and unshakable commitment. It is also a shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation and a natural requirement for realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Public statements, documents, and leaders remarks in China frequently take cues on Taiwan affairs (Blanchette, Boland, and McElwee, 2023).

On the issue of exerting control over its internal and external environment, China is actively working to promote its own vision of governance and development by proposing alternative to western models through various initiative like BRI (Jones and Zeng, 2019; Cai, 2017), EXIM Bank, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). China has advocated for a multipolar world order, challenging unipolarity of United States. China is well utilizing its economic growth and military might to shape and redefine its standing in international space by expanding its influence around the globe.

Hence, China's increasing influence in the SAR and its increasing maritime footprints in the IOR can be assessed through constructivist approach as it is a component of China's initiative to shape international norms, its national identity and historical aspirations. Exerting influence over states and regions have significantly contributed to its expanding influence on global stage.

### **Research topic and Purpose**

The rapid expansion of China's economic and diplomatic engagement has posed significant challenges for many small countries, who find it difficult to cope with its consequences. This has raised concern among regional and global powers to this issue. But smaller countries face special challenges. This is notable in South Asian Region, a space traditionally considered by India as its own sphere of influence.

This study aims to investigate China's rising influence in the South Asian Region, particularly in the context of China's containment strategy towards India. More specifically, the research delves into China's political, economic, cultural, and military influence in the SAR. To generate a comprehensive picture of China's influence mechanism, this work dug deeply in two case studies in SAR. The two case studies are island countries in South Asia Region- Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The thesis is primarily concerned with containment strategy of China, which involves the expansion of its own influence to limit India's strategic space. The work explores the evolution of this strategy in light of China's maritime expansion and its implications for SAR in general as well as India's national security in particular.

The study draws on Constructivism theory of International relations to explain China's rise and its expanding influence vis-à-vis South Asian Region.

### **Research Objectives**

In order to address the research topic, the study will seek to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To examine China's political, economic and strategic agendas to attain great power status in the South Asian region.
2. To analyse China's maritime strategies and emerging security challenges for India.
3. To assess the emerging China's political influence and its strategic repercussions on India.
4. To analyze China's presence in India's immediate neighborhood and its implications on India's national security.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to investigate the following key questions:

1. Is China seeking to emerge as a Sole Asian super power by containing India in the regional sphere?
2. What security challenges does India face due to China's increasing maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region?
3. Is China's rising political influence in the Indian Ocean Region posing a challenge to India's economic and political dominance?
4. How are the regional security dynamics changing during the current times?

### **Hypothesis**

In order to find answers to research questions, hypotheses has been framed and later tested in this study.

- China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region, including the establishment of naval bases and its expanding economic, political, cultural, and

military influence in the South Asian Region has significantly altered the dynamics in South Asia–Indian Ocean Region. This has the potential to undermine India’s national security and its regional dominance.

### **Research Methodology**

The study seeks to analyse China’s maritime strategies and its increasing presence in the South Asia and Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR), exploring how China has embraced its rise and how it is emerging as a regional power in the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR). What are the regional imperatives with China coming to the Indian Ocean and what policies India should pursue to counter the influence of China in its immediate neighborhood. Therefore, it tries to find out the core reasons that the Chinese government strive to expand its presence in India’s sphere of Influence. The research employs qualitative research methodology to explore and understand these strategies in-depth.

The researcher has adopted qualitative research methodology as a key tool to interpret the data available in the form of literature as this work aims to give an analytical view towards China’s presence and its increasing maritime footprints in SA-IOR. The research work will be an attempt to find whether China’s actions aim at containing India by increasing its own influence in the SAR, which India long perceived as its own backyard or China is just protecting its maritime trade interests in SA-IOR. As qualitative methodology is usually based on actions, historical reflections, events and processes, it suits the purpose of this research work well.

### **Approach/Framework**

Acknowledging the theoretical demand of the study, the research adopts an analytical approach, utilizing existing facts and information to critically evaluate the material and explain the complex phenomenon.

The study is primarily based on deductive reasoning which draws inferences (particular) from a broad set of data (general) and from literature available.

## **Area of Study**

The island countries of Sri Lanka and Maldives from the sub-region of South Asia within the Indian Ocean.

## **Timeline**

China's influence mechanism is examined in selected case studies since 2009. This year is taken into consideration as China's navy first appeared in Indian Ocean on the account of its anti-piracy mission in Gulf of Aden. According to China Daily, "On Dec 26, 2008, the PLA navy's first escort fleet set sail from Sanya in Hainan province, signaling the Chinese navy's largest-ever overseas deployment" (Lei, 2015). After sailing for 8,150 km in 10 days, Chinese naval ships arrived in the Gulf of Aden.

Since then Chinese naval presence is permanent in the Indian Ocean. As expressed by Defense Analyst Prakash Paneerselvam, "When piracy and hijacking ships for ransom in the Gulf of Aden were disturbing global energy and trade routes, China joined the international effort to police the regional waters. Even today, a major justification for the PLAN presence is to ensure the security of their commercial engagements and maritime trade" (ANI Report, 2022).

## **Method**

To comprehensively understand China's influence and its impact, the research work delves deep into Chinese activism in two South Asian island countries as case studies- Sri Lanka and Maldives, selected on the basis of their significance to China's strategy.

- **Strategic Location:** The island countries of Sri Lanka and Maldives are located strategically in the midway between the Persian Gulf, Middle East and the South East Asia. This location provides China an additional alternative for gaining direct access to the Indian Ocean critical maritime Sea lanes which would improve trade safety. It will enhance China's access to export markets.
- **Rich in Resources:** Sri Lanka is rich in natural resources, providing opportunities for trade. For instance, Sri Lanka has unexplored resources like coal, iron ore, hydro-carbons, natural gas, and oil. Maldives has rich natural beauty which is the potential source of tourist attraction. Maldives has rich and

distinctive tourism resources. Sri Lanka provides enormous potential for trade while Maldives provides market for tourism.

- **Act as Buffer in the Indian Ocean:** The Indian Ocean presents both opportunities and challenges to China. The non-traditional threats that China faces in the Indian Ocean includes Piracy, terrorism, arms smuggling, human and drugs trafficking, illegal and unregulated fishing, environmental concerns. In this context, the island nations can act as a buffer against these non-traditional threats.
- **Strategic advantages:** It will enhance China's power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean through strategic access to ports. It will increase its intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities across a wider geographic range.
- **Both have formally supported China's BRI:** Sri Lanka and Maldives have positively responded to China's BRI.

### **Data Collection/Sources**

Both primary and secondary sources are taken into account. The researcher has engaged herself in both primary and secondary literature reviews. A significant number of available literary materials are studied, analyzed and incorporated within the boundaries of the present study in a careful manner.

The secondary sources include books, articles in various journals, and already conducted interviews of the political and defense leaders, magazines, periodicals, web sources, and newspapers.

The primary sources include China's Defense white papers, National security strategy documents, embassy reports of both countries published online, annual defense reports, joint statements, joint communiqués and other official reports of the external and defense affairs ministries.

### **Tools of Data Collection**

For primary sources, foreign policy elite insights are chosen. It is essential to academically engage with them and obtain inputs with regards to vital policy making of the country. The topic also requires a certain degree of insider knowledge and this

becomes essential to get some insider perspective. The method used is Interview. Interviews are conducted with experts on India-China relations or those who are currently working on the area similar to this research. The researcher will personally contact them through mail, phone, fax and will meet them personally too.

The field work for this research work is carried out in India. The scholar has visited Delhi University's North campus library, New Delhi, The Nehru Memorial and Museum and Library, New Delhi, Library of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and Manohar Parrikar-Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi. The field work has helped in locating and collecting relevant secondary sources.

### **Variables**

The independent variable is China's Maritime Strategy and the dependent variables are: Indian Ocean Region; Political, Economic, cultural, and Military influence in South Asian countries; India's National Security; India's Regional dominance in SAR.

### **Chapter Scheme**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters.

### **Chapter-1: Introduction**

The first chapter highlights the topic in its context. It systematically outlines the study's core problem-how China is containing India by increasing its economic, political, cultural, and military influence in the South Asian Region to give clear understanding of research problem. The chapter comprises of the statement of the problem, rationale and significance of the study in the backdrop of China's strategic containment of India in South Asian Region.

It includes conceptual framework, whereby explaining the concept of containment as per the Indian Political thought. Kautilya's work has been examined in this context. In the next section Western Political thought on containment has been analysed. In this regard, works of Machiavelli has been discussed. Next section discusses some theories of containment in International Relations. The United States official containment strategy towards the Soviet Union and China during cold war has been examined. The chapter then discusses the application of containment theory on India. The chapter also



deals with various theories regarding China's containment strategy towards India. The three main contending theories- Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism along with their strands have been discussed and it is found that constructivism theory fits the case. Power game between two Asian giants in South Asia has been examined. Regional imperatives emerging from this power tussle has also been discussed. The chapter also contains research objectives, research questions, chapter scheme, and research methodology.

### **Chapter-2: Literature Review**

In this chapter the researcher has engaged self in reviewing existing literature related to China's containment strategy, India-China relations, maritime security, and regional dynamics. Various books, policy papers, thesis work, research papers, reports and other secondary sources along with primary sources have been analysed, highlighting various existing viewpoints of the subject while acknowledging research gaps that needs to be addressed. Further, it puts hypothesis to address the research problem.

### **Chapter-3: The Dragon's Ascent: Unraveling China's Political, Economic, and Strategic Pursuits in the South Asian Region**

This chapter examines the growing competition of influence between India and China in the South Asian Region. The chapter begins by highlighting the importance of South Asian Region. The following section will take into account the study of South Asian region in terms of political, economic, cultural and strategic significance. The region is home to eight sovereign nations, politically and culturally very diverse, least economically integrated but it promises to assume a prominent place in the global economy. Further, it surveys foreign policy of both India and China in South Asia and will highlight the significant changes in their South Asia's policy in recent years. In order to expand the argument, the researcher will examine the influence of China vis-a-vis South Asian nations in political, economic and strategic areas. It will also analyse the repercussion on India's security with the rise of China's influence in its own backyard.

#### **Chapter-4: Navigating the Waves: Analysing China's Maritime Strategies and Emerging Security Challenges for India**

This chapter sheds light on China's maritime strategies and emerging security challenges for India. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the nature of China's evolving maritime power, analyze the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) and 'String of Pearls' in the background of Beijing's larger grand strategy and its imperatives on India's national security. Specific area of concern includes competition for regional influence in South Asian countries. It begins with some historical reflections and a review of previous maritime strategic efforts by China. The next section will be looking into China's maritime strategy and how India became a threat to it. China's defense white papers will be studied to find the result. The final section will take into consideration the motivations behind China's maritime strategy and how it has created security challenges for India.

#### **Chapter-5: Dragon's Shadow: Assessing China's Rising Political Influence**

This chapter presents the conceptual framework to assess Chinese influence mechanism. The framework is developed on the basis of review of related literature on influence including various models. The chapter is followed by review of status of China's variables across all four dimensions in two selected countries- Sri Lanka and Maldives. The chapter will also present the impact of China's increased influence on selected case studies and India's national security.

#### **Chapter-6: China's Influence in the South Asian Region: The Case Study of Maldives**

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of China's influence mechanism in Maldives, with broader implications for the South Asian Region. This chapter first delves into the historical overview of China-Maldives relations. Then it focuses on China's economic influence by examining Chinese investments through infrastructure development projects, trade relations, and tourism and the implications they have on Maldives. It also addresses concerns and debate surrounding China's debt-trap diplomacy. Next, the chapter explores China's diplomatic influence by analyzing

diplomatic relations and political engagement. It then investigates military and cultural influence. Finally, the chapter evaluates the challenges and opportunities posed by Chinese influence and its regional implications, especially its impact on the South Asian security architecture.

#### **Chapter-7: China's Influence in South Asian Region: The Case Study of Sri Lanka**

This chapter provides an overview of China-Sri Lanka relations. It examines China's economic, political, military, and diplomatic influence in Sri Lanka. Lastly, the chapter explores the domestic dynamics and Sri Lankan perspectives, debate on potential debt-trap, the perception of Chinese influence within Sri Lanka. The chapter also assess implications of China's influence and its regional implications.

#### **Chapter-8: Neighborly Intricacies: Unpacking China's Presence in India's Vicinity and its Impact on National Security**

This chapter has summarized the major findings of research work and provides an analysis of the outcome to test and validate proposed hypotheses. The research finds that there is no major difference between China's behavior as a rising power and other great powers. It has been found that China's economic, political, and military strategy have significantly increased its influence in SAR and has posed security challenge to India. China dwarfs India politically, militarily, economically, and technologically. China is increasing its foothold in India's sphere of influence. China is well on its path to be a global player while India is lagging behind making an effort to be a regional power. Given the current findings, it is suggested that India's short term goal should be to engage China diplomatically and economically while its long term policy should be to strengthen its strategic hold. It is required that India should first put its house in order. It must attain a certain level of strategic and economic strength before projecting itself on global stage.

#### **Chapter-9: Conclusion**

The final chapter is the concluding chapter. It summarizes the key findings of the study.

The conclusion is followed by Bibliography.

### **Significance of the study**

- This study presents a conceptual framework designed to analyze the extent of influence in key countries. It measures influence to assess the relative power of China in SAR. The thesis establishes a systematic and objective framework for evaluating the strategic behavior of China in the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region. The work covers data from the year 2009, making it the most comprehensive evaluation of the evolving power dynamics in SAR. The objective of this research is to increase the local awareness regarding the scope and nature of Chinese activism in South Asian countries. It deeply examines Chinese influence in SAR to gain comprehensive understanding of its impact.
- Academic discourse on pairing India and China together will be crucial in understanding a globalized world, given that India and China are among the world's largest economies, major centre for international trade and consequently major drivers of future global trends in everything from global politics to climate change. The two Asian giants are now exerting high levels of economic and geopolitical influence on global stage. Their current prominence in discourses on international relations necessitates academic focus on studying their national strategies and foreign policies. The work will figure out various aspects of strategic competition in SA-IOR between India and China. The work also presents a comprehensive understanding of emerging trends between China and South Asia relations.
- This work aims to explain the China's maritime behavior especially concerning its substantial strategic advancements in the South Asian Region and its increasing influence mechanism using constructivism theory.
- Also, there is little literature that analyzes China's strategic thought from a strategic perspective. This will help the strategists to identify China's moves and will guide them about the choices to be made and decisions to be taken. This work can assist academicians and policy makers in understanding the China's behavior in South Asian Region and its approach in the region. It will also enhance the understanding of its implication on India's security.
- The research aims to broaden the global understanding and discourse on China's role in the world, while also formulating innovative policy ideas. It provides

opportunities for countries to strategically engage with China in ways that align with their own interest. This research let other countries around the world to see how China approaches and they could learn from each other's experiences how to counter China's influence as the study significantly enhance the awareness surrounding the scope and nature of Chinese activism in South Asian Region (SAR).

- The advantage of studying influence suggests how wide the discrepancy is between the 'supposed' and 'real' things. For example: Legal-Formal arrangement between how the state is 'supposed' to work v/s the way it really runs. It might be the case that Governors, Prime Minister, President or other officials are mere puppets whose strings are pulled by private persons or others from behind the scenes.
- The research will assist academicians, policymakers, civil society, media, and diplomats in analyzing and understanding the evolving nature of China's influence and its global impact.
- This work will be of interest and benefit to Scholars, academicians, diplomats, and researchers specializing in international relations, China's studies, South Asia studies, maritime studies, foreign policy, geopolitics, international politics, military and strategic studies, defence and security studies, and politics will benefit from this research work. This work holds value for academicians and policy makers in understanding the China's behavior in South Asian Region and its approach in the region. It will also enhance their understanding of its implication on India's security.

### **Limitation of the Study**

Through the findings, the work determines the level of Chinese influence in each selected island country as well as broader and general conclusions of the development of China's influence efforts. The findings from the analysis are clearly subjective and give inferential lessons- understanding of the underlying written information derived from qualitative data. The nature of the outcome of the extent of influence is dependent on the context, objective, and nature that one country seeks to achieve. Despite that,

this work offers major contributions which is discussed separately in section mentioning significance of work.

This research is primarily based on English language sources, including Indian, American, and Chinese official sources, academic publications, and news articles about recent relevant events. However, accessing Chinese sources proved challenging due to their secrecy and opaqueness cultivated by the Chinese government, which in result has hindered the understanding of China's real strategy. Thus, I acknowledge that some of the assumptions made here may be subject to bias, as majority of sources are being American and Indian.

Despite the complexities and challenges involved in addressing the question of China's influence in target countries, the outlined framework is believed to be accurate and realistic. A quantitative approach would have limitations and serious flaws, as influence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Recognizing that this is not a simple zero-sum game, this research emphasizes the need for a nuanced and comprehensive analysis.

## **Chapter-2: Literature Review**

Many scholars and academicians from India, China, and the western world have written extensively on various aspects of China's rise, India-China relations, and China's BRI. China's rise and its expanding influence has garnered significant attention in past years. The literature review will analyse the available work on India-China relations to chart out direction of the problem. By assessing a range of academic and policy papers, this literature review aims to provide an overview of the scholarly debate surrounding China's expanding influence in South Asia and seeks to shed light on the multi dynamics of China's engagement in the SAR and the emerging regional imperatives that have been the result of this trend. The review identifies major themes, perspectives, and arguments surrounding China's containment strategy by increasing its influence in the region, which India holds as its traditional zone of influence. It is argued that China's role in the geopolitical landscape has expanded as a result of its economic rise. S. it becomes utmost important to thoroughly review China's rise, its causes and consequences as well. The strategic rivalry between India and China is historical. In recent years. It has gained significant attention as China is expanding its presence in SA-IOR. Literature review is divided under various themes which are as follows:

### **➤ China's interest in SA-IOR**

The South Asia- Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) has remained a vital maritime space since ages, filling in as a significant link among different areas of the globe like trade, and socio-cultural contacts and exchanges. The territorial space was generally peaceful but the tense environment continued to thrive till the end of the 2nd World War. From there the scenario of the region changed with the emergence of the United States as a sole superpower after the breakdown of its opponent in 1991- the Soviet Union. Another event that showed up at the end of the twentieth century was the emergence of the two Asian giants- India and China. Both appeared on the global stage with rapidly expanding economies, progression in scientific knowledge, military might, skilled workforce and technological know-how.

With the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>- century, the SA-IOR witnessed the growing tendencies of India and China. There occurs an increasing competition between the two because of the growing geo-political and geo-economic importance of the region. While India and China are now undergoing through social and economic transformation and in order to smoothly run the transformation and to maintain their current rate of economic growth, they have come out of their territorial space.

**Jan Hornat (2015)** argued that the Indian Ocean is increasingly becoming the focal point. The interaction between India, China, and US in the IOR represents a model showcasing China's stakes (protecting its maritime trade), India's aspiration (being the regional power), and United States established role in the region. It is argued that a new balance of power will likely to emerge in the IOR and East Asia and demonstrate that it might not be peaceful but would have negative repercussions for the wider stability in the region.

**Ashlyn Anderson and Alyssa Ayres (2015)** argues that over the past decade, there has been surge in Chinese economic, political and diplomatic presence in South Asia and its involvement in smaller states through "trade, diplomacy, aid and investment" that poses a serious threat to India's influence in its neighborhood and has the potential to displace India regionally.

**David Brewster (2016)** seeks to analyze the impact of physical geography of the Indian Ocean on strategic relations between India and China. The author argues that Indian Ocean is a relatively enclosed strategic space which is now changing with the construction of China's String of Pearls and One Belt One Road initiative. China's development of maritime linkages across the Indian Ocean may have major impact on strategic nature of this space.

**Toshi Yoshihara (2012)** made critical assessment of the Chinese strategic community's views of geo strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. The author has tapped China's vast literature in order to understand their pattern of thinking about India and the Indian Ocean. Chinese scholars have conscripted Alfred Thayer Mahan's description of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. These intellectuals form two major propositions. The author pointed out that these assumptions are by no means



reflects the official policy of China's strategic elites. First, competition is bound to occur in the Indian Ocean on the basis of geopolitical calculations among great powers. Intense competition is bound to happen between India and China as both turn seawards. Beijing's enduring interests in the Indian Ocean are energy security, trade, resources, and investment among others. India, on the other hand is likely to respond vigorously to Beijing's entry into its nautical neighbourhood. Second, India considers Indian Ocean as its own sphere of dominance and it is very likely that it will dictate the entry of great powers in its own self guarded geographical region. The article concludes by saying that if by any means this school of thought indicates China's world view, then there is greater anticipation of China's assertion in the Indian Ocean to secure its place.

**Talat Shabbir (2017)** argued that China's enormous economic growth has turned the global attention to South Asian region as China has increased its engagement with regional neighbors to expand its economic and strategic relations. The surge in such collaborations has highlighted the perception of China towards its regional stature and shows how China perceives it for its global position. The author argues that South Asian states except for Bhutan have increasingly moved towards China as a more reliable and dependable option for economic partnership. As such, these states are attempting to break free themselves of India's influence.

**C. Raja Mohan (2011)** is of the opinion that Indian Ocean is in power transition mode with rise of China and India. The author has taken five themes in this changing space: First, India and China's rise is different from Soviet Union, where India and China are dependent on economic globalization and regional integration. Second, with their rise there comes the changing dynamics in littoral states in Asia-Pacific. Third, the strategic importance of seas as the major trade routes passes through it. Fourth, the expansion of their naval forces. Fifth, their historical strategic expansion. Historically, both India and China assumes to have greatness in equal sense. The paper concluded with the remarks that this is the high time for India to bring new maritime strategy and diplomacy.

**Joshua T. White (2020)** attempts to consider how China might be able to transform its regional activities like investment, infrastructure development like port facilities, increased naval presence, and its so called debt-trap diplomacy in the Indian Ocean

Region into meaningful military advantage. The paper begins with reviewing Chinese activities in the IOR with particular focus on military engagement and capabilities and economic infrastructure that might have dual use or provide strategic military advantage. The broad conclusion of this work is that there is enough material for US and India to be concerned about China's growing presence in IOR. China's military deployment has increased in the region. China's leadership has formalized publicly the requirements for PLA to protect its overseas interest. Many of Chinese investment like commercial ports in the IOR that have sparked debate, are politically and strategically disturbing but are not easily convertible for higher-order missions.

**Robert D. Kaplan (2009)** argues that Indian Ocean has become the centre of attraction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It attracted the quest for global energy politics by India and China and compelling them to move out of their land to seas. With their focus on sea power, Indian Ocean is bound to be exposed by the contours of power politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The competition is likely to emerge between the two and Indian Ocean is where the global struggle will play out. The peaceful rise of India and China will fall on US to a great extent.

**Arjun (2020)** noted that the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) is of great significance because of its resources, maritime trade, and connectivity. Keeping in mind the shift of strategic influence from land to sea, India's strategic community reoriented its shift to maritime domain. India's control over the Indian Ocean would enable it to counter balance China's 'String of Pearls' and to interdict China's efforts to have influence on regional states. In the conclusion, it is argued that in order to maintain continued influence in SA-IOR, India has to coordinate between its political and military policies as adopted by China. However, India needs to take a leaf out of China's strategies to counter its expansionist policies while maintaining its own sphere of influence in SA-IOR.

**Swaran Singh (2011)** through his work explores the China's new assets in the Indian Ocean to project its power. It is building new maritime infrastructure to explore its ocean reach and to claim its capabilities. China's control over these vast stretches of seas and oceans is to protect its trade routes from Indian Ocean to South China Sea as

China's communist regime survival is based on development which is ultimately premised on continued trade. All this triggers China's far more assertiveness in the Indian Ocean which could have significant implications for India as India is wary of growing China's presence in the Indian Ocean.

**Jonathan H. Ping (2013)** pointed out that China's contemporary relation with South Asia is changing with its coming to international podium. With its growing power and the requirement of domestic needs, its foreign policy for Asia- Pacific remains distinctly important. This paper argues that China's relation with South Asian countries have changed from threat avoidance to an alternative development opportunity. Development is the most pressing need for South Asian countries and India is the most visible practical option. However, historical divisions between India and its neighbors have limited this role which is why leaving China as the only viable option. China's development model resulting in its economic growth is a suitable model and an obvious alternative to India's and western world models.

**Francine R. Frankel (2011)** analysed that India-China relations over the past few years have been fuelled with mutual suspicion and distrust, prompting them towards strategic rivalry. Their great power ambition and overlapping interest has propelled both at the crossroads of open competition in their neighboring areas and the Indian Ocean. New Delhi sees China's policy of String of pearls and its increasing economic presence in PoK as an element of strategic encirclement of India and Beijing's assessment of India-US nuclear deal and regular joint navy exercises as aimed towards containing China have overpowered their shared interest towards strengthening the multipolar world order. The new rivalry can be evident through the escalation of conflict at the India-China border, strategic China-Pakistan alliance that aimed at containing India in the sub- continent, China-India rivalry in the Indian Ocean for influence in the IOR. China's strategic threat to India is far reaching and has serious consequences and could risk India's position as the primary influential force in neighboring countries.

**Kumar, S. (2019)** examines the rise of China in South Asia especially under the leadership of Xi Jinping. The author has examined both international and domestic factors to understand China's policy towards South Asia. The article has pointed out

three domestic challenges: Economic rise of China; Minority regions of Xinjiang and Tibet; instability and conflict in neighbourhood like Pakistan and Afghanistan. While international factors include: territorial disputes; trade and investment; Belt and Road Initiative and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The article concluded that India should play pro active diplomacy in order to maintain its influence in the region.

**J. Mohan Malik (2001)** examines the key features in China's policy towards South Asia and studied China's relation with South Asian Nations during 1990s. It is argued that China is tied to South Asian Region due to security concerns. Both India and China are in competition to increase their leverage over the region. It is concluded that their rivalry will be a dominant feature defining Asian geo politics in future.

**Kaura, V (2018)** examines various factors underlying China's growing influence in South Asian Region. It has been argued that China's long lasting interest in region's geopolitics are based on territorial disputes, trade relations, security concerns, containing India's rise and resisting USA's influence. It has also been argued that China's policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping is a combination of strategic objectives with economic incentives. India's threat perception in South Asian region has been increased with increase in China's indulgence with India's neighbours. It has been concluded that India needs to be prepared to balance China's disruptive behavior in South Asian Region.

**Gurpreet S. Khurana (2016)** takes into account the comprehensive assessment behind the trends that follows China's political, economic and diplomatic relations with Indian Ocean littoral states and increasing its naval operations in the region. According to this paper, this has been quite evident that China's objectives are driven by economics and geopolitics. Economics objectives mentioned in the paper are that China is a continental country and its major stakes lies beyond its maritime boundary mainly in the Indian Ocean through which most of its transit passes across choke points, Africa and West Asia which are source of its hydrocarbons and other natural resources. There is perception in China that US is aimed at its containment which is detrimental to China's national interest. China's "March West" policy is response to this strategy that includes altering geography in its favor, enhancing stakes and engagement with the IOR

countries, exporting defense hardware to IOR countries, seeking representation in Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to shape policies in its own favor, increasing naval operations in the IOR and sustaining its presence. The author concludes with the view that the region is likely to witness shift in regional balance of power. China's presence in India's sphere of influence would have serious geopolitical ramifications for India.

**Christian Bouchard and William Crumplin (2010)** analysed that Indian Ocean is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest ocean in the world-an area of great diversity in terms of population, politics, culture, economy and environment. Despite its geostrategic importance, this region has been neglected for over a long period of time but since 1960s this region has attained its strategic importance and has reached to the forefront of geo politics. The contributors to this development are choke points, Sea lanes of communications in the Indian Ocean, oil and natural resources from Persian Gulf, US military intervention, fragile socio-economic environment in the region, China's arrival to the power politics and India's rise as great power in the Indian Ocean.

**Syed Sabreena Bukhari (2020)** provides a comprehensive understanding of China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project. It is argued that since post cold war period, China has increased its political, economic, and military engagement in South Asia. China has expanded its wings in the region thereby threatening India's interest. OBOR project is one such huge initiative and if implemented successfully, this project is bound to produce geo-economic and geo-political impact and have the capacity to alter the existing security structure in Asia and beyond.

**C Raja Mohan and Chan Jia Hao (2020)** reviews the sensitivity of South Asia states with respect to complexity of relations between India and China. This edition helps in understanding the changing nature of South Asia's international relations in the wake of sharpening rivalry between India which is at the core of the subcontinent and China that has risen to be a great power. It is argued that China has historical connections in South Asian Region. Politics has been the dominant force of engagement between China and South Asia in 20<sup>th</sup> century whereas economics dominate 21<sup>st</sup> century. With China's rise as an economic power, it has become a major commercial partner in South

Asian Region. The essays in this volume bring together the dynamism of the response of South Asian Nations to the ongoing rivalry between India and China and it has been found that not all responded in identical fashion. This edition captures the approaches to the rivalry between India and China through seven essays on Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Together, these essays provide insights into possible structural change in South Asian geopolitics.

**S Y Surendra Kumar (2016)** presents an exploratory study of the relationship that China has developed with Maldives and its strategic concern for India. It is argued that China in the recent years has increased its footprints in the South Asian Region and Maldives is no different. China has intensified its relations with Maldives using political and military ties, economic and technological cooperation, and tourism infrastructure. In recent times, the maritime dimension has gained increased importance in their bilateral ties.

**Niclas D. Weimar (2013)** has formulated Sino-Indian relations through the framework of rivalry for regional hegemony. Fierce competition has occurred between India and China since the late 1950s. The author has identified three rounds of rivalry. First round was escalated into war of 1962 due to complex border disputes. Second round occurred during cold war when India sided with erstwhile Soviet Union and China sided with Pakistan and later with United States. Third round of rivalry emerged in Indian Ocean and South China Sea. The author has analysed Sino-Indian rivalry through the theoretical framework of Lateral Pressure Theory proposed by Nazli Choucri and Robert C. North. The theory argues that there is reciprocal relationship between state's domestic growth and its foreign policy. Based on this argument, the author proposed that in order to run the engines of their economies, both India and China seeks to tap resources beyond their territorial arenas. Indian Ocean and South China Sea would emerge as an arena of contention as these regions are rich in hydrocarbon resources and are key transit routes. With increase in interference in each other's maritime domain, these arenas will witness military escalations.

**Abhijit Singh (2018)** analysed that over the past few years, China has made significant inroads into India's nautical neighbourhood. Beijing's rapidly increasing naval

presence in the Indian Ocean has generated irk in India's strategic community. China has expanded its strategic stakes by leveraging its anti-piracy missions in the Indian Ocean. For India's security analysts, the challenge arises from the presence of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean as they are involved in gathering critical information about Indian Ocean's strategic sea lanes, choke points and its operating environment. The author has concluded with the recommendation that New Delhi has to maintain balance of naval power in the Indian Ocean. In order to manage Sino-Indian conflict in the Indian Ocean, India has to expand the scope of Malabar exercises in addition to more combat drills.

**Christian Wagner (2016)** examines the Sino-Indian relationship with South Asian countries through regional power perspective as both have been seeking an advantage over each other in South Asia to gain political and economic influence. India has adopted bilateral and multilateral arrangements whereas China goes for only bilateral strategies. It has been argued that India perceived to be a regional power in South Asia but on a closer look it seems that china has gained strategic advantage over India. The reason being that China has offered attractive economic packages and has emerged as a more reliable political partner for most South Asian countries. India's relation on the other hand has been marred by historical baggage.

**Aashish (2017)** tries to understand China's encirclement (Chakravyuh) of India through "direct and indirect investment of money, power, politics, and military aid". The chapter introduces with explaining One Belt, One Belt and the economic corridors proposed under this project. Later, the chapter explains string of pearls policy and summed up geopolitical concerns for India. The next section provides a deep insight on China's encirclement by drawing parallel between the east side (South China Sea) of String of Pearls with the future west side (Indian Ocean Region). In the conclusion, the author suggested remedial measures to break the chakravyuh.

**Rahul Roy-Chaudhury (2018)** seeks to analyze the view of India towards South Asia's largest Neighbor rise on world stage- China. The author views that India is a regional hegemon in South Asia and seeks to be a leading power in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean plays a pivotal role in India's economic growth and development.

China on the other hand seeks the same regional and global influence. In this scenario, India has sought to engage China with a mix of cooperation and competition. Cooperation is visible through expansion of trade ties whereas this is challenged by competition between the two over Doklam issue, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and China's presence and influence in South Asia and Indian Ocean.

➤ **China's Rise and its implications on World Order**

**Wayne M. Morrison (2019)** presents the background of China's economic rise, explains its current economic structure, points out challenges it faces to sustain economic growth, and discusses the implications of China's economic rise for the US. It is argued that China's rise as an economic power has been spectacular. However, China's emergence as an economic power has raised speculation among United States policymakers. Some argue that China adopts unfair trade practices to flood US markets with low priced goods threatening US people's job, wages, and living standard, while other contends that China has failed to take necessary actions against infringement and theft of United States Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in China.

**Colonel PK Vasudeva (Retd) (2008)** analyzes China's growing military power and its economic growth. It has been assumed that it is nations economic might that translates itself into eminent influence on world stage. China's military strategy has been shaped by largely three events: the end of cold war, the vitality of its economic growth both of which gives China an opportunity to pursue its own policy of 'peaceful rise' and 'peaceful development' and revolution in military affairs (RMA) which is a military modernization programme of People's Liberation Army (PLA) to met challenges in achieving strategic objectives. China's stunning economic growth has been the result of 'Four Modernisations' strategy and it is the second largest economy after US on PPP basis. This will result into instability in international space as rising Asian powers have been reviewing their strategic choices and China's economic and military might becomes a critical factor in making these choices.

**Harsh V. Pant (2012)** attempts to explore the multidimensional course of rise of China and its implication on India. The book is divided into three parts. The first part deals



with domestic developments in China. This section focuses on the political, economic and military developments in the state of China. Bibek Debroy points out that although the economic relations between the two have grown but China remains to the fore whereas India face trade deficit with China. Also, the base of Indian export to China is narrow. In the third chapter, Varaprasad S. Dolla argues that domestic politics in China goes through political transformation from Socialism that was central during Mao's regime to "nationalism, national minorities, regionalism, and legalization." Despite the fact the political institutions have evolved, they tend to remain "rigid and authoritarian". Srikanth Kondapalli in the fourth chapter explores the China's enormous military modernisation programme and its implication on India and also underscores the asymmetry between the two in terms of military power.

The second part of the book dwells into China's foreign policy agenda. Ashok Kapur argues in the fifth chapter that China has grown its profile in Asia-Pacific. China's influence of power is so much that it has shaped the strategic sphere of Asia-Pacific. China has made significant inroads into the region using strategic triangles and united fronts. In the sixth chapter, Arthur Waldron points out the power transition between US and China, where on one hand China is trying to assert its position in the region while US is trying to maintain its status quo. D.S Rajan in the seventh chapter examines the China's quest for resources in order to run its economic engines. China appetite for resources has forced it to grow its engagement with African, Latin American and Middle East countries and that has drawn consequences for India's own foreign policy in those regions.

Third part of the book focuses on China's India policy and examines three main aspects- Disputed territory with special focus on Tibet, China's increasing influence in India's neighborhood. In the Eighth chapter, David Scott provides the detailed picture of territorial disputes between the two nations and underlines that trade off could be the potential measure to resolve the issue but each side continue to argue their claim from history. The final chapter of this section examines the increased role of China in South Asia. Harsh V. Pant has examined the footprints of China in India's neighborhood and the implications it has for India. China is preventing/containing India from asserting its regional supremacy.

**B. M. Jain (2017)** studied the remarkable shift of China's foreign policy from low profile to assertive diplomacy and power projections in global and regional sphere. Two remarkable developments have elevated China's stature, position, and image in the international sphere. These were- permanent seat in United Nations Security Council, 1971 and membership of World Trade Organization, 2001. These events allowed China to build its economic might and adopted two pronged strategy. First, asserting its power worldwide and secondly, to promote its culture and language as an instrument of soft power. According to B. M. Jain, China's soft power discourse began in around 2004-05 as a tool to replace the western notion of international system with Chinese alternative model. The other reason that has worked as a stamp on paper is publication of book *Charm Offensive* by Joshua Kurlantzick's that drives China to acknowledge the value of soft power in the context of Asia-Pacific. The book further dwells into India- China unresolved territory disputes which make it harder for China to persuade India through soft power, China's successful soft power diplomacy in Pakistan despite the fact that both are culturally, socially and politically apart, China's soft power tools like aid, grant and investment to induce Nepal and Bhutan, provision of soft loans and military assistance to Bangladesh, China's soft power projection in island nations of Maldives and Sri Lanka through trade and development of infrastructure. The author concluded it by proposing that China's soft power diplomacy may not have same appeal worldwide as it has in South Asia mainly because of the attractive and alluring incentives that have been provided.

**Sudhir T. Devare; Swaran Singh; Reena Marwah (2012)** seeks to analyze the evolving profile of *Pan-Asianism* through the prism of relations of Asian countries with rising China. This volume has been divided into three parts. First part deals with the "ASEAN multilateralism" where the author argues that Asia has witnessed various shades of multilateral arrangements that includes Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building across Asia (CICA), Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Boao Forum to name a few. The first section focuses on ASEAN and traces the role of this forum in Asia regionalism and through the following sections has tried to examine some

questions of emergence like will Asia become economic centre or region of power struggle? Part two “Engaging China” provides wide account on China centrism in Asian countries through economic, political and diplomatic domain. The section presents the wide range of expert views on China’s engagement with Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal. China’ involvement among Southeast Asian countries foreign relations has been based on clear cut strategic calculations with engaging its neighbors through the balance of hard and soft power. Part three “China-India Equations” examines the relation between the two emergent Asian giant powers. In Chapter 17, Tansen Sen argues that there is sense of distrust and insecurity between the two nations and both are wary of each other’s actions. Christian Wagner in chapter 18 underlines the importance of balance of soft and hard power in order to achieve smart power for the pursuance of national interest in this dynamic world. In the opinion of Zhang Guihong, the balance of power has tilted toward China and it will be more so in the future with China’s recent rise in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Chapter 20 outlines the Negative and positive prospects of India- china partnership and forays for strategic partnership in multiple sectors. This volume makes profound efforts to examine the changing contours of Asian relations in the light of rising China.

**Yan, X (2014)** wrote in the background that China has shifted its from keeping a low profile (KLP) to striving for achievement (SFA) and writes in opposite to those who argues that Beijing’s assertive foreign policy will going to fail. The paper examines China’s foreign policy and finds that the new approach in China’s foreign policy has improved its relations with other nations. The author has applied moral realism to explain the role of SFA and argues that morality helps in establishing strategic credibility of a rising power. The SFA strategy has so far helped to improve relations between China and other nations.

**Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao and Cheng-Yi Lin (2009)** examines the challenges and opportunities that have been posed to the world from China’s rise. This book is divided into five parts. Part I assess the overall rise of China in the Asia-Pacific region. There is imminent presence of China in the region both economically and politically. Beijing’s financial advances are solidifying the political ties that help oil the wheels to make sure of the significant political help to attain the resources that are required to fuel its

resources. Part II discusses the China's grand strategy of peaceful rise through multilateralism, economic diplomacy and good neighborhood. It also examines the role of government in the economy. It is characterized by monopoly functions and autocratic regime as there is lack of transparency in the existing framework of economic and political realm. Part III argues that despite China's impressive growth there is social unrest and fragile economic system. The reasons that are being pointed out are: the privatization of state owned enterprise, forced relocation, agrarian turbulence, less than minimum wages in FDI firms. This section also summarizes the challenges faced by Chinese economy that includes unemployment, corruption in society due to economic reforms not fully realized and autocratic party system, bad loans turning into fiscal debts, management of state owned enterprises with heavy debt, income gap in society, prohibition of Chinese goods in European Union countries with EU regulations. Part IV assesses the Beijing's strategies towards Asia-Pacific and argues that China intends to build itself as a responsible great power therefore its regional strategy is based on mutual trust and assertiveness with neighboring states to realize its domestic needs and its purpose to reduce the influence of US in the region. This section also discusses the china's effort in maintaining territorial integrity and an effort has been made to keep negative connotation away with its "rise". Part V presents the analytical interpretation of the reactions of US, Japan, India, Philippines, Hong Kong, and Taiwan to China's rise.

**Charles Glaser (2011)** attempts to explore the likely impact of the rise of China on international relations. There is a debate between liberals and realists, whereby liberals argue that international order will accommodate China's rise peacefully while realists views that China's assertiveness will prompt US to balance it and even can generate a cold war or hegemonic war between them. The author in this paper has shrugged off security dilemma between China and US to arise as both are able to secure their vital national interests in addition to nuclear power deterrence that both nations maintain and lastly both are separated by the Pacific Ocean.

**Lukas K. Danner and Felix E. Martin. (2019)** examines China's rise and its strategic intentions and what kind of hegemon China would become. This work presents three cases of China's possible transition into a hegemon with suitable examples:

**Table 3- Kinds of Hegemon**

Type	Transition into	Similar to	Evident cases
Benevolent hegemon	“free trade encouraging and free trade sustaining hegemon”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Britain</li> <li>• America</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China’s efforts in reducing global warming and environmental pollution.</li> <li>• China’s participation in UN peace keeping forces.</li> </ul>
Coercive hegemon	“aggressive, coercive, and dominating hegemon”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Napoleonic France</li> <li>• Imperial Japan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China’s territorial claims and island building in the South China Sea.</li> <li>• China’s closeness with Russia.</li> </ul>
Dutch style hegemon (hegemon interested in trade and finance but disinterested in internal affairs of its trade partners)	“self controlled and status quo driven hegemon”	Netherland in the 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)</li> <li>• China’s presence in the Arctic. The reason being that ice caps are receding paving way for new sea lanes.</li> </ul>

In the conclusion, the authors argued that the Dutch style hegemon is the most viable way for China to fulfill its global hegemony aspirations.

**Shivshankar Menon (2016)** pointed out that China's economic endeavors are well known to all. As China rises, it is certain that China would assert its own military, economic, political, and security order in the world. The author argues that the rise of China is bound to bring instability in Asia-Pacific region, which in turn would trigger intense security competition between United States and China. In addition, security dilemma between China and its neighbours will intensify. This paper presents the implications of China's rise on India's security. For India, China's assertiveness will be visible through its unlikely intention to resolve ongoing border dispute. Meanwhile, China would increase its commitment and presence in Pakistan to keep India in check.

**John J. Mearsheimer (2006)** outrightly remarks that China's rise cannot be peaceful. If it continues its economic growth, there is high potential that it will trigger conflict with US with possibility of war. Mearsheimer views international politics as politics for survival and gaining power over one's potential rival is the best possible way to secure national interest. With rise in China's power, there is high possibility that China would try to dominate Asia in the same way as US dominates the western hemisphere. The author has further analysed the implications of China's rise. First, it will trigger conflict between US and China as United States would not tolerate peer competition and would go to any lengths to contain China. Second, it will trigger fear in China's neighbour's and they will try to prevent China from achieving regional hegemony, which would bring them more closer to United States and a coalition will be formed to check China's rise. Lastly, United States and Japan would not allow China to control South China Sea which is certain to fuel security competition between China and United States.

#### ➤ **India-China Relations**

**C. Raja Mohan (2013)** in his work '*Samudra Manthan*' has reiterated the relations between India and China as that of "Security Dilemma" and this dilemma has arisen because of their growing power, wealth and ambition that forces them to move beyond

their territorial borders and to explore the seas. Both are vary of each other's presence in their territorial waters and the projection of India-China power in South China Sea and Indian Ocean respectively. Here in this book, Mohan has explained the maritime competition between the two Asian powers and their interest of contest lies in the Indo-Pacific region. In order to realize their national interests, both are coming out in the sea. As most of the trade is carried through seas, it becomes of utmost importance to protect the sea lines of communications and to augment their naval capacities and this is resulting into clash of interests as both are foraying into each other's territory. China's "String of Pearls" strategy is seen as that of insecurity and is suspicious to India whereas Indian naval presence in South China Sea is China's concern. Raja Mohan has asserted a key role of United States in mitigating the outcome of Sino-Indian rivalry. The Indo-Pacific region could see strong strategic partnership of India and US in order to tackle the Beijing's growing assertiveness.

**David M. Malone and Rohan Mukherjee (2010)** defines India China relation as largely reactive relationship. None of them have grand strategy with regard to each other. The author has found some asymmetric tendencies between the two. It has been argued that China does not show any threat from India while India on some occasions have been wary and insecure of China's economic growth and military expansion. There are striking similarities too. Both are ancient civilization, both are rising powers, have nuclear power, expanding economies among others. The author has traced their relationship through four phases- friendship (from 1950, Hindi Chini Bhai- Bhai), border conflict followed by cold war (1962), normalization (after 1976), and uncertainty (from 1998).

**Amardeep Athwal (2008)** attempts to explore the contemporary relation between India and China with key focus on the areas of trade, energy and maritime security. The author in this work has tried to analyze the Indo-China relations from the perspective of neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism and argued that most of the strategists and analysts who have studied India-China relations have done it through neorealist lens which focuses on conflictual and competing variables in their overall relationship. There is the issue of unsettled boundary which gave way to Sino-Indian war of 1962, there is growing energy concerns in both the countries and the geostrategic significance

of Indian Ocean has provided the way for naval modernization and protection of SLOCs, there is mistrust in India with respect to China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean region through economic, military cooperation with the littoral states and China is wary of India's Look East Policy. Speaking in general terms, the relationship gives off an impression of being suspicion ridden.

The author further asserted that seeing India-China relations exclusively through neorealist lens is impoverished. He has explored various positive elements between the two which is transforming their relation from competition to cooperation. Trade between the two countries has surged over the past few years and both have entered into various strategic partnerships. Obviously, realist approach is inadequate to address this conundrum sufficiently. It cannot be denied that there are irritants in their relation but it also cannot be denied that current state of their relation is changing. Merely depicting their relation as a regional struggle for power is too simplistic and it overlooks other important dimensions of India-China relations.

**John W. Garver (2001)** presents the picture of conflicts between India-China during the first half of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The conflict as argued over in this book means "clash of foreign policies pursued by the national governments of the two states". Garver argues that there are two roots to this conflict. First, conflicting nationalist narratives stories that are shared by the people. Both India and China's narrative postulates that they were a great nation and that their influence had been exerted over to the large space of Asia which is resulting in overlapping of their shared notion of interest. This overlapping in restoring lost enormity has driven their desire into conflict. The second root cause of conflict is national security resembling security dilemma wherein action of one in order to enhance its security is postulated as a threat by the other. To India, its national security is best realized with keeping China away from South Asia- Indian Ocean Region whereas for China this poses a great security challenge. China's interest would be best served in fragmented South Asia than the South Asia guided by powerful India. This book is an attempt to provide clear description of conflictual issues in India-China relations- the Tibetan factor, rivalry for influence among developing countries (Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Pakistan, Burma), conflict in Indian Ocean (Overlapping of Sea lanes



of communication, naval power) and their nuclear relationship which is asymmetrical, indirection and status enhancement.

**Peter Robertson, Jingdong Yuan, Harsha Konara Mudiyanse (2020)** argued that India and China shares a long history of political and cultural exchanges. But the two differ extensively in their political organization. Their relations have been of conflict and distrust. There is mutual suspicion over regional objectives. Regional diplomatic strategies of India (Act East policy) and China (Maritime Silk Road Initiative) represents that Indo-Pacific region holds significant place in securing their regional interests. These strategies pit India and China against each other in competition for economic and political aspirations. This paper analyses the extent to which this distrust, competition, conflict are being reflected in their military expenditure and it is found that China has undertaken intense military modernization. The finding of this work is that there is little evidence of traditional arms race and both India and China are aligning their military spending to emerging security risks.

**Jonathan Holslag (2009)** examines the military threat perceptions between India and China that instigate security dilemma among the two. Military competition arises out of border conflict between the two over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, China's close proximity with Pakistan, race between the two for regional influence in terms of economics and geopolitics, to gain access to overseas market and role of nuclear deterrence. The security dilemma will prevent the two regional powers to move from confidence building to military cooperation. Therefore, in the near future, security dilemma won't realize harmony, however, it will prompt greater steadiness as the expenses of war rise exponentially on both sides of the Himalayas.

#### ➤ **Sri Lanka-China and Maldives-China Relations**

**Deep Pal (2021)** investigates the growing involvement of China in the politics, economies, and societies of South Asian countries, focusing on four states- Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, aiming to explore the impact of China's engagement on these states. Methodologically, the paper employs focus groups and extensive interviews to understand how China exploits the vulnerabilities of these states to serve

its interests, how these vulnerabilities can be mitigated, and how these states can learn from each other's experiences.

**Athaula A Rasheed (2018)** in his research paper delves into the relationship between China and the Maldives, arguing that it is shaped by their shared perspectives on development cooperation. It suggests that the interaction between the two countries has an impact on the power dynamics in South Asia. The Maldives-China relationship is seen as a result of mutual understanding and economic collaboration for mutual development goals. Essentially, the article offers an alternative perspective, emphasizing the positive aspects of this regional alliance system, which may not necessarily pose a threat to regional power dynamics.

**Arya Roy Bardhan and Soumya Bhowmick (2024)** elaborates on the strategic importance of Maldives to China as Maldives is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, facilitating sea lanes of communication to China. China considers Maldives as a crucial element to limit India's presence in the region. The paper further argues that with Pro-Chinese government under Mohammed Muizzu, there is strong possibility that the Free Trade Agreement could be approved, potentially pile up the government debt which may drive the Maldives economy to contraction.

**Michael Kugelman (2021)** argues that Maldives being strategically located in the Indian Ocean has become an area of contestation between India and China for influence. The paper makes the case that Maldives has deeper historical ties with India than with China and India seeks to enhance its influence over Maldives by leveraging on current pro-India government in Maldives and employing coronavirus vaccine diplomacy while China is expanding its influence through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The paper concludes that India is facing challenges in matching China's investment momentum in South Asia.

**Palitha Kohona (2024)** The Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the People's Republic of China writes that Sri Lanka and China have developed a close bond despite of distance and physical obstacles. The paper elaborated the historical ties between the two that dates back to 207 BC till their ties strengthened through BRI. Palitha Kohona highlights China's investments made under BRI. He

justified China's debt trap by arguing "it was Sri Lanka that sought funding from China for its infrastructure projects after it was denied by traditional sources. Sri Lanka needed the funding and China responded to its needs".

**Chulanee Attanayake (2023)** examines the bilateral relations between China and Sri Lanka by focusing on infrastructure finance in four key areas: ports, energy, transportation, water and sanitation. It investigates Sri Lanka's role in relation to China, considering how its agency influences the planning, negotiations, and implementation of infrastructure projects. The analysis suggests that Sri Lanka's agency is interconnected and influenced by various economic, political, bureaucratic, and international factors. The paper presents a different perspective to the present one that the power dynamics between China and Sri Lanka is limited, whereas this paper indicates that the relationship between the two is much more complex and layered. It suggests that Sri Lanka has possessed the ability to assert its own will and purpose in its engagement with China.

**Sithara N. Fernando (2011)** explains the China's contemporary bilateral relations with Sri Lanka and Maldives and analyses these dynamic relations in South Asian context using Strategic triangle theory as India hold preeminent position in various ways in South Asia. The paper concludes that China's contemporary ties with both Sri Lanka and Maldives have been hailed as exemplary instances of positive relationships between nations of varying sizes.

**Kithmina Hewage (2023)** explains the foreign policy initiatives followed by subsequent governments in Sri Lanka and argues that during the reign of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's (2015-19), Sri Lanka followed "strategic promiscuity", defined by efforts to solicit development funding and investments from both India and China without alienating either regional power. While Mahinda Rajapaksa's (2005-15) policies are tilted heavily towards China.

➤ **Domestic and International factors behind Change in China's foreign Policy**

**Y.M. Wei, Q.M. Liang, G. Wu, & H. Liao. (2019)** have analysed the factors that led China to adopt the 'Walking Out' energy policy and to strengthen its overseas energy exploration. According to them, China's energy diplomacy has evolved continuously over time. In the beginning of its independence in 1949, its energy demand was met by imports. Since 1970s, China's energy role has transformed from oil poor country to net exporter. The authors have cited war of Middle East as a major factor contributed to this growth. When the world was grappled with oil crises, China was exploiting the basic balance of demand and supply. International oil prices increased and China have gained from energy supply. Party and state leaders decided to adopt the policy of oil for foreign exchange. During first and second oil crises, china created huge foreign reserves from oil export. China's rapid economic growth resulted into increase in demand for domestic energy needs. In order to smoothly run the engines of its economy, China needs to meet with its soaring appetite for oil. China used to be an independent oil producer, but since 1993, China became net importer of fossil energy. This has led to serious concerns about the country's energy security, since approximately three-quarters of China's oil imports pass a single chokepoint, the Strait of Malacca (**Zhnag, 2011**). China's economy has expanded exponentially but it was not able to meet its domestic demand. In order to guarantee its national energy security and meet its domestic market demand, China implemented its overseas energy exploration policy. China's energy diplomacy is active in five regions- Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia (**Wei, et al., 2019**). China become energy importer in 1993 and since then Chinese government has taken measures to fulfill its energy demand. China took both internal (increasing domestic energy capacities) and external (import strategies) measures. It is argued that China's recent project of 'Silk Road' is its attempt to quench its thirst for energy (**Stegen, 2015**). Over the past few years, China has modernized its military and the navy in particular seized the headlines. China' naval strategic missions needs support which will be provided by China as an economic well-being. China's modernizing navy and its search for energy security needs effective foreign policy support combining both hard and soft power elements (**Cole, 2016**).

China's changed foreign policy has resulted into improved relations rather than to be failed. From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement has experienced in shaping more positive environment (**Xuetong, 2014**).

Analysing the geopolitical pattern and the role and characteristics of China's energy diplomacy in Asia-Pacific, **Daniel S. Markey and James West (2016)** provides descriptive analysis of China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and noted that it is China's grand development program that connects regional economic activity. It is an agenda that connects across Asia to Europe and Africa. The CPEC project has been viewed by experts as China's grand expansion of security provider. China-Pakistan relationship has been close but it has been intensified with this project. This investment project have the potential to generate economic revenues and could be beneficial to Pakistan's economy but it also has sparked political and security challenges. India views China's expansion in South Asia as a threat to its security and worries about China's growing assertiveness in the region. While analysing the geopolitics of Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), **Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Colin Flint. (2017)** attempts to use Arrighi's dual expression of power where capital and territory plays an important role. M-T-M' emphasizes that power could be increased by gaining capital and that require construction of some geographical establishment. T-M-T' emphasizes that power may be gained through control of territory but that requires capital to finance that geographical entity. It is argued that MSRI project represents a balance of M-T-M' and T-M-T'. It is concluded that it is a political-economic project that has consequences ranging from peaceful collaboration to global conflagration. **Dean Cheng (2010)** pointed out that China's economic growth is dependent on secured sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean. The region is increasingly becoming important to China for economic, national and security interest. China has developed strings of pearls in the Indian Ocean to not only cultivate friendly relations with India's neighbors but also to balance rising India. US needs to balance the growing Chinese influence in the region and it compelled US to develop greater cooperation and strong ties with India.

**Jinghao Zhou. (2019)** focuses on explaining China's core interests. Since the inception of word 'core interests' in 2004, the scope of it has broadened, showing the world an indication of real Beijing's intention for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to this paper, the author argues that China's core interests would worsen its foreign relations as some of its core interests (like its political and socialist market system) are not in align with post war international order. The paper concluded with the opinion that China needs to revisit the principle of its core interests and modify it in its foreign policy.

**Chengxin Pan (2014)** questions the naturalness of the term 'Indo-Pacific' and showcased how it is largely a result of geopolitical imaginations about the notion of 'rise of China'. The observers involved in this are United States, Australia, Japan, and India. With rise of China and its growing influence in Asia, these nations are fuelled with suspicion and anxieties. In this context, the term 'Indo-Pacific' is not a neutral description but it is a "manufactured super region designed to hedge against a perceived Sino-Centric regional order" which end up with great power rivalries and security dilemmas. In order to arrest this rivalry and dilemma, the article concludes with a call to critically re-examine and re-imagine this new term.

## **Research Gap**

It is found that that little attention is paid to the South Asian Region in the academic discussion on the rise of China. The principal purpose of this thesis is to intervene in the robust academic debate on the rising China within western and Chinese academia and policy community by offering a perspective that has rarely been paid sufficient attention-that is perspective from the South Asian Region. While there is range of opinions in the west, stridently arguing over China's rise and the changing regional security architecture in the Pacific Region, the perspective from South Asia is less visible. A view from South Asian Region will enrich the debate on rising China and its impact. This thesis offers a perspective by drawing insights from two case studies in South Asia- Sri Lanka and Maldives.

The aim of this research is to develop the analytical framework by taking into consideration the views of western, Indian and Chinese scholars. The literature review

shows that there are very few sources which has adopted analytical framework in order to examine comprehensive and emerging trends between China and South Asian Regions. The reason for the same is challenge in collection of data due to presence of divergent viewpoints in South Asia. The other problem is geographical vastness of South Asian region which makes collection of data challenging. This research aims to address these gaps.

### **Chapter-3: The Dragon's Ascent: Unraveling China's Political, Economic, and Strategic Pursuits in the South Asian Region**

#### **Introduction**

Rise of power at any point of history is not a unique phenomenon. History witnesses the rise and fall of end number of powers. In current scenario, the rise of China and no wonder its impact on the region or its dynamic relations with other powers have become a hot issue in contemporary international relations. India too is emerging as a fast developing power. In fact, it appears that the story of rise of China is appended with the sub story of emerging India. The dynamic relations between the two and their future trajectories are increasingly becoming a matter of utmost geopolitical importance.

History is the witness that world has accepted new arrivals in economic scenes and India and China in this respect are no different ones. However, China's role and presence in the South Asian region is an important element of China's growing power and assertiveness. Those who look from distance are of the opinion that China's increasing presence in the South Asian Region is natural and obvious. For onlookers, it appears that China is working to fulfill its national interest. India views such patterns with suspicion and apprehension which is also very natural keeping in mind the history of India-China relations. China's coming to South Asia is of concern to India as the region is India's playfield.

Independent India and Communist China are two ancient civilizations but are new and young in post colonial statehood. India and China have followed different paths for national development within the general international political canvas. The relations between the two are not without interest based interruptions and have evolved an uneasy friendship.

The India and China have a multi-dimensional relationship that spans across increasingly wide range of each other's economic, diplomatic, and security concerns. The relationship between the two Asian giants has been characterized by hybrid of conflictual, competitive, and cooperative aspects. The balance of competition and cooperation is based on factors that vary according to issues and region. Fluctuation



occurs on the basis of elements in the bilateral relationship. The two sides are deeply engaged in global economic order that demands free movement of goods and capital- that provides common shared interest in the stability of international order that ranges from commerce, energy supplies to global finance. However, translating these theoretical concepts into practical policies prove difficulties as nations have ideological and strategic differences. China's regional attention is its immediate neighbourhood in East Asia and countries surrounding Indian Ocean Region. The recent years have seen intensification of rivalry and conflict between India and China. This is likely to deepen in future as China is expanding its political, economic, and military influence in India's immediate neighbourhood and becoming increasingly assertive in its territorial claims. The competition between India and China is more chronic in regions where Beijing's military reach is active. South Asian Region falls under this umbrella.

Conflict between India and China is not something which is new. India and China have a long history of conflict and rivalry. Ever since the elephant and the dragon established as modern states in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, they have been engaged in a complex rivalry over the South Asian Region that ranges from military confrontations, one outright war, disagreements and contradiction over national and international policies, to pervasive suspicion. Regardless of certain examples of cooperation, Sino-Indian relations have been more of conflict than by friendship. The conflict between the two nations started over the Tibet in 1949, where China was preparing itself to occupy it. The conflicting policies of both India and China over Tibet leads to 1962 war and ever since the relations between the two have been plagued. Jain (2004:253) has summarized India China relations over the past 50 years as "ranging from a benign warmth in the 1950s, a deep hostility in the 1960s and 1970s, to a rapprochement in the 1980s, and a readjustment since the demise of the Soviet Union". After the cold war had ended, the two nations started to work on their relation. The pace of their friendship started to accelerate. To begin with, both have started to develop common area of interest-as in the field of bilateral trade, banking and investment, anti-terrorism, and cooperation in security arrangement. Another factor that shaped their relation involves contentious issues like border issues and China's political, economic and military support to its all weather friend Pakistan. These issues have damaged their bilateral relationship. A third

aspect other than cooperation and conflict can also be added to their relation- that is of competition, mostly over natural resources and political and economic influence.

The concept of conflict can be portrayed as a zero-sum game. In the case of India and China conflict as in border rivalry and theatre of competition in third countries doesn't bring about clear winners and losers. While on the other hand, success in competition accounts on various factors. In order to make presence stable and influence stronger, both nations have to make efforts that range from political and economic investment to strategic agendas in third country.

In the twentieth century, India-China relations have been marked by congenial and cordial relations to conflicting one majorly because of conflict over territorial claims and a rivalry over regional supremacy. Siddiqi (2012) and Malik (1995: 317) is also of the view that “the two sides are poised for rivalry for regional dominance and influence in the multi-polar world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. Therefore, the relations between the two have been described by various concepts like ‘Chindia’ (Cheng-Wang, 2011), ‘Strategic rivalry’ (Frankel, 2011; Krothwal and Kumar, 2023) or the ‘new great game’ (Scott, 2008; Malik, 2017).

South Asian Region has become an area of contention between India and China, where both have been trying to acquire political, economic, and strategic advantage over each other in third countries. In this context, it seems appropriate to investigate their relationship with South Asian nations through the perspective of regional power debate. Both India and China have asserted for regional power status which means dominant position and have put resources in various ways to shape their particular region with respect to their political interest. However, while military instruments have not been the fundamental structure where Sino-India struggle has been shown, security seems to have been the essential basis of that contest. According to Garver, “detering the use of military force against oneself and creating conditions for defeating that hostile use of military force in the event that deterrence fails have been central elements of the Chinese-Indian conflict” (Garver, 2001: 4). It means that it is necessary to create conditions that are advantageous at the time of application of military power and this has been done by “building roads, establishing legal regimes, permitting or denying

certain activities and creating political alignments that make up the political context in which military force is used or not used” (Garver, 2001: 4). In order to gain regional leadership role in South Asia, India has used bilateral and multilateral approach, while in contrast, China has focused on bilateral relations rather than on multilateral approach.

This chapter aims to discuss and examine China’s economic, military, and political reach in the South Asian Region and what shall be the regional imperatives of its maneuvering. It explains the status of India and China in South Asia. India is often looked as a regional power in the region but when one looks closer and deeper, it is found that China has an upper hand with respect to India. The study will highlight the reasons for this gap. In the first place, China’s bilateral relations with South Asian nations are not marred by the burden of history and nation-building. In case of India, historical baggage impinges heavily on its relations with its neighbours. Second, China has significant and wide economic attraction for South Asian region that lack economic integration. In order to expand the argument, the researcher will analyse the foreign policies of India and China for South Asia and will highlight the significant changes in their South Asia’s policy in recent years. The following sections will also take into account the study of South Asian region in terms of political, economic, cultural and strategic significance. Further, the researcher will examine the influence of China vis-a-vis South Asian nation in the areas of political, economic and strategic. The study will also analyse the repercussion on India’s security with the rise of China’s influence in its immediate neighbourhood.

Before going into further understanding of India and China’s action to achieve dominant position in South Asian Region, it is necessary to explain the definition and concept of Great Power and Regional power.

### **The Great Power Framework**

The Great Power framework aligns with the fundamental principles of the realist paradigm in global politics but explicitly concentrates on a limited number of primary actors within the system. It posits that in any anarchic international setting, a hierarchy of actors exists, dictated by their power. Over the period since 1500, dynastic/territorial states and nation-states have been the predominant actors, while in ancient Greece and

Renaissance Italy, city-states played a dominant role. The more potent entities, referred to as Great Powers, play a pivotal role in shaping the structure, major processes, and overall evolution of the system (Waltz, 1979).

In this framework, the actions and interactions of Great Powers take precedence, with secondary states and other actors influencing the system primarily through their impact on the behavior of the Great Powers. This hierarchy of actors is closely linked to a hierarchy of issues, predominantly centered around military security. It is assumed that these issues overlap, and the currency of military power is deemed applicable and effective in resolving various challenges. The concept of a Great Power system rests on the enduring assumption, embraced by realists since Thucydides, that global politics is dominated by security concerns and the competition for power<sup>18</sup>.

The emphasis on military security stems from the perception of a high-threat environment, primarily arising from the anarchic structure of the international system<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, the Great Powers, owing to their military capability and projection thereof, are seen as the entities most capable of significantly influencing the national interests of others, thus being perceived as the most serious security threats. As a result, these Powers direct their primary focus toward each other, with a substantial portion of their alliance commitments and war behavior directed at one another. The level of interactions among the Great Powers surpasses that of other states, which often have narrower interests and primarily interact within more confined regional contexts. Thus, the Great Powers collectively form an interdependent system of power and security relations.

### **Defining Great Power**

While there is widespread acknowledgment of the significance of the Great Powers, there is a lack of analytical precision in how the concept is employed. Scholars have

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<sup>18</sup> See the works of Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*; Raymond Aron, *Peace and War*; Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Year's Crisis, 1919-1939*; Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored*

<sup>19</sup> For more details, read, Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The State of War and Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men*; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War*; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*

either refrained from providing a clear definition or failed to translate vague definitions into practical operational criteria. Many historians, pinpoint particular dates or events as indicators of a state's ascent to or descent from Great Power status (Small and Singer, 1982)<sup>20</sup>. This observation extends to contemporary social scientists as well (Levy, 1983)<sup>21</sup>.

Most of the definitions of Great powers revolve around the concept of military power. For instance, Taylor (1971: xxiv), resorts that “the test of a great power is then the test of strength of war”. Modelski (1972: 149), asserts that a Great Power “must be capable of fighting a major war”. Singer and Cusak (1981: 404-22) claims that the major criteria for the identification of great power is the “ability to wage war frequently and to win most of those wars”. The German Historian, Leopold Von Ranke (1833: 86) in his essay “The Great Powers” defined that a Great Power “must be able to maintain itself against all others, even when they are united”. Ranke’s classic definition of Great powers showcase the criteria of self-sufficiency.

Various scholars provide the definitions of great power, making modifications in Ranke’s criteria of Self-sufficiency. Haas (1992), for example, notes that a major power “can be totally defeated in battle by no other single power, but instead by a combination of members (usually including another major power)”. Wight (1946: 18) states that “a Great Power is one that can afford to take on any other Power whatever in single combat”. It should be noted that the general conceptualizations as provided by Ranke and Haas are not suitable in the nuclear era as all states face the potential vulnerability of near complete destruction.

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<sup>20</sup> distinguish among major and minor powers by referring to the following states as major powers: Austria-Hungary from 1816 to 1918; China from 1950 on; France from 1816 to 1940 and from 1944 on; Germany or Prussia from 1816 to 1918, from 1925 to 1945, and from 1990 on; Italy or Sardinia from 1860 to 1943; Japan from 1895 to 1945 and from 1990 on; Russia or the USSR from 1816 to 1917 and from 1922 on; the United Kingdom from 1816 on; the United States from 1899 on. Minor powers are all those states that are not on this list for the given years.

<sup>21</sup> attempts to classify the Great Power status of particular states: France (1495-1975); England/Great Britain (1495-1975); The Hapsburg Dynasty (1495-1519, 1519-1556, 1556-1918); Spain (1495-1519, 1556-1808); Ottoman Empire (1495-1699); The Netherlands (1609-1713); Sweden (1617-1721); Russia/Soviet Union (1721-1975); Prussia/Germany/West Germany (1740-1975); Italy (1861-1943); United States (1898-1975); Japan (1905-1945); China (1949-1975). Excluded states and political entities from the modern Great Power system were: Holy Roman Empire, Venice, Swiss Confederation, Portugal, Poland, and Denmark.

Other definitions are based on the concept of security rather than avoidance of total defeat. Rothstein (1968: 24-29) contends that a Great Power is a nation capable of depending on its own resources to ensure security while Hoffmann (1968: 138) asserts that Great Powers can secure themselves without substantially compromising their independence. Hedley Bull (1973: 27) acknowledges the threat that Great Powers pose to one another. He argues that “Great Powers have been secure against the attacks of small powers; and have had to fear only other Great Powers, and hostile combinations of Powers”.

The definitions provided above face a common limitation. These conceptualizations characterize Great Power interests in negative sense- emphasizing passive security. These formulations minimize the significance of the capabilities and readiness of Great Powers to extend their military power beyond their geography to promote their national interests and shape the environment accordingly. Hoffmann (1968: 135) argues that powers have consistently been focused on not only reducing their losses but also maximising their gains. He further avers that “the main object of a larger power is to maximize gains (defined in a variety of ways) rather than to minimize risks”.

This idea of power projection is further put into conceptualization of Great Power in several works. Howard (1971: 254) argues that “A great Power, almost by definition, is one which has the capacity to control events beyond its own borders; and that is usually based on the ability to use military force”. Haas (1974: 330-31) states that “elite or dominant members of a system whose behaviour is capable of upsetting an existing power distribution or placing a power equilibrium in jeopardy”.

Levy (1983:16) define Great Power “as a state that plays a major role in international politics with respect to security related issues”. He also provides various criteria to determine Great Power: possess superior military capabilities compared to other states; their interests and objectives differ from those of other nations (think in terms of global interests); their general behaviour sets the apart from other states (interest being defended more aggressively, account for number of wars and alliances, other power’s perceptions of them, formal acceptance by other organisations, conferences, treaties,

granting veto power or permanent membership in international organisations) (1983: 16-18).

Various attempts have been made to define and identify great power but several problems arise. Military power might be the primary distinguishing feature of Great Power, while it is not adequate on its own and needs to be complemented by other criteria. Military capability is not sufficient to identify Great Power, although it is a useful indicator but not absolute.

A Great Power is defined here as a state that possesses the capability to influence activities around the world and that power comes not only from military power alone but supplemented by economic might. Wealth allows a state to generate influence on security issues. In contemporary times, economy plays a dominant role in determining the status of a state. A Great Power should possess the capability for global engagement, recognizing itself as an influential state with global interests. It is imperative for such a nation to witness its role and influence acknowledged and reciprocated by its counterparts.

The definition of Great Power outline above is not absolute and still leave a room for discussion as the fundamental criteria for identifying Great Power either on the basis of its military capability, economic might, or its power to influence is hypothetical. Several of the explanations lack precise criteria. What is the appropriate criteria for determining the relative weights of elements of military strength? What economic scale is required to support the status of a great power? To what extent must a state's national interests extend globally, and which form of acknowledgements matter from its peers? Also, there are numerous factors that are resistant to precise quantitative assessment, such as leadership, training, morale, military intelligence, and other intangible aspects.

In the absence of clear criteria, the researcher relies on estimates of the extent of influence. This aspect provides the basis for an analytical study to determine the status of China as Great Power in South Asian Region.

### **Conceptualising Regional Power**

States play an important role in the rule making and especially when the problems are transnational, they are given special importance. Transnational problems can include problems of world trade, climate change, and transnational security risk. States attempt to solve these problems on both regional and global level. In both the levels, some state actors play a significant role than others in the sense of cooperation and negotiation process and this resulted in more influence on the result. The reason that can be put includes greater military power or economic might of these state actors. In the same manner, their legitimacy, diplomatic power, moral authority might influence and could generate benefits in international bargaining.

The difference the leading states made from each other is the geographic reach of their leadership that is their sphere of influence. While there is consensus over the status of United States as the only superpower in international politics, there is different as well as overlapping view on the concept of role of other leading state (regional powers) actors in the international system.

The debate on regional powers, regional leaders, regional great powers or regional hegemons has intensified in recent years. But the question that arises is what constitutes regional power? There is no consensus as to what define the characteristics of regional power in international relations. The debate around regional power shifts, the ascent of regional powers and the future design of the global order has been continuing for a while but there is an overall absence of analytical instruments to recognize and compare regional forces and to differentiate regional leaders from great powers and middle powers. Perhaps a great difficulty in understanding the concept of regional power lies in the fact that it comprises of two terms: region and power. These two terms are conceptualized quite distinctively in International relations theory with extreme variations with respect to their meaning.

Regional powers hold power in their own regions irrespective of the regional relationship they represent- be it of enmity or amity. One of the first efforts to develop and define the concept of regional powers in the international system was made by



Oyvind Osterud (1992: 12). He used the term 'regional great power' to define the state which is:

- "geographically a part of the delineated region,
- able to stand up against any coalition of other states in the region,
- highly influential in regional affairs,
- contrary to a 'middle power', might also be a great power on the world scale in addition to its regional standing".

Schoeman (2003: 353) proposes some preconditions for state to fulfill the role of regional great power. It includes:

Internal dynamics- The internal dynamics of state's political framework should allow it to play a stabilising and leading role in its region.

Willingness and Capacity - The emerging regional power should indicate and demonstrate its willingness and capacity or ability to assume the role of regional leader, stabiliser, if not peacekeeper, at least peacemaker.

Acceptable: The regional power should be acceptable to its neighbours as a leader responsible for regional security. A broader or extra- regional acceptance is perhaps a necessary condition, but not sufficient, even if supported and promoted by big powers.

There are two factors to decide whether a state is defined as regional power or not. These two factors are: Material resources and Ideational resources (Wagner 2016, Flemes 2007). Both these factors are closely interlinked. Neither the mere prevalence of assets, nor the verbal claims allows a state to become regional power. Flemes has further identified four pivotal factors determining the status of state as a regional power. It includes state's claim to leadership; the power resources it hold; acceptance of state's claim to regional leadership; and the employment of foreign policy instruments.

The question of acknowledgement of regional power is hardly contested because of the fact that there is no monopoly of power in international system. Scholars from realist perspective of international relations define power largely in terms of military power.

Neo realist school of thought assumes that more prominent the material assets- that includes economic and military capacity translates naturally into more power with respect to the neighbours.

However, following the Max Weber's classical definition, power is a relational concept and its legitimate order and acceptance stems from different types of authority- charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal. Weber is aware that in reality a blend of these types of authority will be found in legitimacy (Spencer, 1970). The bilateral relations between states does not depend on the basis of academic or political ideas like regional power but it depends on the base of international law where the most significant standard is the rule of sovereign equality and non-interference. This suggests that a neighbouring state's case to power and control is hardly ever acknowledged, regardless of what assets a state may possess. Very often, the case of self proclaimed status of regional power is questioned by neighboring states. Although, the concept of regional power can be characterize in scholarly or academic terms, their appearance in real global political stage is more often contested than accepted.

It should be noted that the label of regional power depends on the context of the topic one is interested in analysing. The same object could be used differently in day to day life. Accordingly, the same state could be marked in different manner as great power, middle power, and regional power. In this manner, these labels are not mutually exclusive. In some way or other, they can be complementary. The term regional power is used for states which are influential and powerful in particular geographic regions or sub regions. The same country could be labeled as middle power or great power in global context.

### **South Asia: Political, Economic, Cultural and Strategic Significance**

Asian continent is the largest of all seven continents of the world. The physical features, political units and ethnicity are wide ranging. The Asian continent comprises of Russia, Southwest Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and East Asia.

The South Asia is a more recent term, about five decades old, which today consisting of 8 diverse sovereign nations of different sizes- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It is a unique sub region of Asian

continent. From political and cultural perspective, the region is both diverse and unified. South Asian region is one of the world's incredible cultural heartland and the region is home to nearly one quarter of the world's population representing a wide range of ethnic and cultural groups. The region is the home of world's two most significant and oldest religion- Hinduism and Buddhism. It has also accepted Islam and now it holds more muslims than found in the Middle East and North Africa together. There is large number of population of other religion as well. South Asia and its people characterize the picture of unity in diversity.

The geographical boundaries of the South Asian region are drawn by the Himalayas mountain ranges in the North, valley of the Indus in the west, hill ranges and plains of Brahmaputra in the east and vast Indian ocean in the South. This vast geographical expanse has become home to nearly 1.8 billion people which accounts for 20% of world's population. Chapman (1992) has used the term 'Greater India' for defining South Asia while analyzing its topography.

Genuine possibilities of peace, democracy, harmony and cooperative development with questions of territorial and border disputes places South Asia at the crossroads in its set of experiences. Prospering electoral democracy coincides with the profound strains of dictatorship often within the same nation. South Asia today is strategically important region of the world which has vital implications for the international order. South Asians make their place in the space of global interconnections in the times of rapid change.

#### ➤ **Early Civilizations and Colonialism in South Asia**

The Indian subcontinent has an ancient history of human civilizations. The earliest known civilization is Indus valley civilization. The Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya was one of the prosperous, extensive and powerful empires established in Indian subcontinent. The Mughal Empire brings fusion in the cultural heartland. The modern history is taken over by the British colonialism followed by freedom movement and ultimately the independence of India. The South Asia holds the weight of not only of its people but also of its ancient history that dates back a long time ago and modern history consisting of the experience of British colonialism

compacted in turbulent turn of events within the past hundreds of years. The historical backdrop of British colonialism in the South Asian region shapes the most noticeable shared legacy. Perhaps nowhere in the world the colonial legacy in regional politics is more visible than in the South Asian region. The colonial past has brought diverse population into various political units. The British administration brought about a common elite culture in undivided India. The reasoning, attitude, and even the language were common among the elites of Indian subcontinent in the immediate post colonial period. The institutions and laws were also same. British colonialism has a significant impact on the region including long term impacts like political divisions and territorial conflicts. Roy (2017: 26) has identified four institutions as a source of stability that were created during British colonialism. These four institutions are: bureaucracy, armed forces, elected legislature, and the central bank. As one, these institutions would not amount to much work, but when they work as one they present a continued influence of administration, military, and intellectual group on economic and developmental framework, which sums for effective and efficient crises management and allows space for check on absolutist rule to develop.

The colonial legacy has darker side too. Lot of what South Asia acquired from British rule, haunts it even today. There has been a darker shadow of colonial past in the development of South Asian region. South Asia on account of British colonialism needed to adopt certain concepts like sovereignty, nation-state, borders, and political organizations which were once alien to South Asia. These concepts in the western world were result of the end of conflict while in South Asia, they were reason for numerous struggles which eventually hindered regional consciousness and integrity. South Asia today is one of the least integrated and unstable region in the world. The reason lies in unstable borders created by British rule and partly due to the failure of governance in many regional nations. The interstate and intrastate boundaries drawn during British rule have resulted in restricted and full scale form of wars between the nations of South Asia and beyond. There are issues with respect to the outline of border which still have a significant impact on the issue of regional integration. India-Pakistan rivalry over territorial disputes which precipitated into face off thrice, India-China border disputes and same is the case with India and Nepal are some of the legacies British colonialism

has left for us. The issue of Kashmir between India and Pakistan remains unsolved till date. British Imperialism has been the root cause of territorial disputes in South Asian region and this continue to haunt the region even today. In order to fulfill their parochial interest of deriving maximum profit, the imperialist power deliberately neglected the social, cultural, economic, traditional, linguistic, and religious diversity and complexity of the region. The fundamental issue of South Asian borders is that they are artificial and they isolate local neighbor community who had long history of harmony and integrity.

Ajay Pratap Singh and Vivek Sugandh (2019) have aptly put the negative impact of colonial legacy on the regional integration of South Asia. They argue that colonial legacy has a significant impact in the case of South Asia in terms of absence of trust among states, strong military presence and tremendous investment in defense, instability in political systems, and powerful bureaucracy. Together this has precipitated out as a huge obstacle in the regional integration. They have identified four major colonial legacies that have sabotaged the integration of South Asian region. Cartography was utilized as an instrument by colonial forces to legitimize their expansionist approach and assert their domination. Cartography plays an important role in carving out borders that led to the formation of states. It was required to create a plan in order to reap political and economic benefits out of their colonies. In execution, cartography best served their interest. Mapping and surveying were the underlying instruments to bring more and more area in their control and this thus amounts to increase in revenue. Next is the sovereignty. The legitimacy of the state relied on sovereignty. British colonialism introduced the western concept of sovereignty to South Asia which was earlier not known. It is the constant fear from the neighbours and the practical experience of the intervention of the outsiders in the form of British colonialism that made the South Asian states obsessed with territorial idea of sovereignty. Bureaucratic culture and military forms the other two obstacles. Bureaucratic model that was developed in South Asia resulted into weak political framework and limited political participation which provides space for military dominance and even military rule in various countries.

### ➤ **South Asia's Cultural identity**

Culture is the most critical component of human personality. It is also the prime component of nation's personality. This is considerably more valid in the case of South Asia- a land steeped in customs, culture, and tradition, with religion as the key component in molding the aggregate personality of individuals and administering their day to day lives. South Asia's religion has numerous common components. Buddhism which is an offshoot of Hinduism, dismissed the evils of formal Hindu rituals, and Hindu caste system and yet held its moral and ethical codes, and some of the principal features of its philosophy. The Islamic region that has been practised in South Asia has a remarkable sub continent touch which is very different from what has been practised in Arab world, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Islam has not been able to surpass much of Hindu practices including caste system. This would not be surprising taking into account that majority of the Muslims in the sub continent have been converted from Hinduism. One can find dalits among South Asia's Christians. The caste system has been carried over to Sikhism as well.

The South Asia's unique national character is neither framed by religion, race, nor language. On the other way around, there is commonality of social traditions, marriage, food habits, dress codes, and above all, the way South Asian people think irrespective of diversity. The obsession of South Asian people over cricket reflects a common popular culture. Popular food, movies, music, and dance forms also transcend over national boundaries. One can also find common political culture where the means to protest over their grievances are similar in the form of bandhs, strikes, and gheraos. Other common features include historically formed rules, obligations and principles guiding their political life, political legitimacy of hereditary ruling, political violence, and social movements.

Outsiders too have recognized and regarded India (in the sense of geographical entity of South Asia) as a unique and distinctive identity. There is rich wealth of sources citing tales of India's abundance of wealth, its rich and beautiful culture and tradition, which has excited and fascinated outsiders and aroused their interest. Soldiers, looters, traders, and voyagers endeavored to reach India- Abdur Razzak, Alberuni, Fa-Hien, Huien-Tsang, Ibn Batuta, Francois Bernier, Marco Polo, Megasthenes, Nicolo Conti, or the

Turks and Mongols from Central Asia. When the Spanish and the Portuguese travelers started their journey of exploration in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they were in search of India. Vasco da Gama reached India in 1498, while Christopher Columbus who actually reached to the shores of the American continent has earlier thought that he has arrived at India. In the pre modern era, Europeans mistook other regions which they have reached to be as India, since they knew just about Indian civilization as another flourishing civilization. In this way, the European immigrants to the America called the native people of America as Indians- Red Indian or the Indians of the Mayan, also Inca civilizations in Central and South America. Likewise, in similar fashion, the West Indies and the East Indies got their names. The impact of Indian civilization has spread to nations on Indian Ocean rim, beyond Himalayas to Central Asia (McPherson, 1984).

The subject of cultural identity is not only theoretical but has a significant practical pertinence. It has influenced the political environment of South Asian nations- both within the country itself and between intra-state relations. Cultural differences have hindered the developmental activities in all nations. The formation of Pakistan was the manifestation of cultural differences, the core of its ideology, and its refusal of common cultural links with India (Sahbaz, 2020). Cultural identity reflects clearly in politics of other South Asian nations as well. Bangladesh's War of Independence 1971, was a manifestation of its cultural identity preservation against West Pakistan (Hajjaj, 2020; Oldenburg, 1985). Nepal retained its sense of cultural identity through practices like unique flag shape, official dress, and time zone (Roundtable, 2000). Bhutan's international policy of remaining in isolation is a deliberate attempt to protect its cultural identity (Ministry of foreign Affairs of Bhutan; Upreti, 2004). In Sri Lanka, the attempt of Sinhala community to evolve the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural identity results in conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese (Soherwordi, 2010; Bastian, 1999). Maldives, which is geographically isolated from the sub-continent, has evolved a unique cultural identity, developed out of the influences from continent-India, Sri Lanka, Persia, and the Arab world. Myanmar's ongoing struggle for national identity involves the decision to accommodate its myriad ethnic minorities (Clarke, Myint, and Siwa, 2019).

### ➤ **Economic Integration**

All around the world, most nations generally have a fairly big percentage of their overall trade exchange with neighboring nations, but this is not the case with South Asia. The South Asian region is one of the least economically integrated region in the world and a significant part of its capacity for regional economic integration remains unexplored (Ahmed, 2020). The performance of South Asia in sub regional cooperation is not up to the mark, in fact it is unimpressive. This is an anomaly (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2018). Unwarranted mutual suspicions, distrust and political hesitations have hindered the natural integrated growth and advancement of the nations of the region. Intraregional trade stays well below its potential because of high transportation costs, protectionist policies and political strains.

Regionalism has become a very important element in the global economy in the 1990s with the emergence of vital blocks like the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other regions following them like Mercosur in South America, the South African Development Community (SADC) in Africa, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) in Southeast Asia (Mansfield and Milner, 1999). Although the South Asian region has the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) that came into being in 1985, the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO)<sup>22</sup> which is formed in 1985, and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)<sup>23</sup>, it has been slow in exploiting the capacity of regional economic integration and has generally been depending on rising demand for its produce in the developed nations to support its growth in the last two decades.

The South Asian Region has numerous multilateral frameworks as has been discussed over above for economic integration and cooperation. Despite of above regional arrangements, bilateral preferential trading arrangements have been existed between India-Nepal, India-Bhutan, India-Sri Lanka, Pakistan-Afghanistan, and Pakistan-Sri Lanka that contribute to economic cooperation in the South Asian subregion. These are

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<sup>22</sup> To read more, visit <https://eco.int/>

<sup>23</sup> To read more, visit <https://bimstec.org/>



joined by the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), formerly known as Bangkok Agreement, signed in 1975 with the involvement of few South Asian nations like India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka under which member nations negotiate tariff concessions. Together these groupings form the overlapping sets of multilateral structures for regional cooperation and integration in South Asia. However, all among them, SAARC displays the most comprehensive framework having 8 nations with a functioning free trade area (FTA) that has been under execution since 2006.

Despite having potential areas of cooperation, SAARC has not taken off as a significant arrangement for regional cooperation. Sikri (2013: 26) has defined the platform as mere 'talk-shop' or 'Consultative body' which has no concrete collaborative action or projects to show. The SAARC agreements on mutual trade and economic cooperation, the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) formed in 1995 and the South Asian Free trade Area (SAFTA) which was created in 2004 but implemented in 2006, were not successful in breaking down trade barriers. The profound enmity between India and Pakistan has blocked the way of extensive regional trade. This strife has contributed to regional tension and the failure of SAARC in providing a platform for cooperation. Most South Asian nations depend intensely on developed countries as export destinations and increasingly imports from China. Nagesh Kumar (2015: 160-162) has explored various other reasons for low intra-regional trade in South Asia. He argues that firstly, most of the informal trade goes under-reported. Secondly, poor transportation connectivity between SAARC countries irrespective of them being contiguous neighbours that resulted in high trade cost. Lastly, it is the poor supply capabilities in least developed countries and other SAARC countries that make the trade imbalance between India and the SAARC countries.

Interstate conflicts poses direct threat to the concept of regionalism, and consequently, regional participation and cooperation in its genuine sense cannot be achieved except of all SAARC members to shed their disparities and set clear terms of commitment to engage in order to resolve their differences.

The globalization has compelled the region to set up a trade network and to formulate economic policies. The South Asian is not among the economic core areas, however, it

is arising to compete in the world's marketplace. South Asia promises to assume a prominent place in the global economy on the condition that it sorts out its problems. The region provides a significant reservoir of labour intensive manufacturing ability which could be upgraded by its proximity to huge energy sources- the hydropower of the Himalayas, the abundance of renewable sources like solar, wind, and biomass, and relatively clean gas of the Persian Gulf.

While a number of measures have been taken over the previous decade, the time has come to execute the plans, consolidate progress and proceed onwards with new initiatives taking into account the demand of new globalized world. All South Asian nations need to look beyond existing political biases and consider of what they should collectively do in this fast changing world if they do not want to be left behind.

➤ **South Asia's strategic importance in Global Politics**

The region is significant in global politics because of its population and instability. The region contains most of world's poor and instability arises from terrorism, environmental issues, low literacy rates, Poverty and Instability in the region has multiple global effects, which includes consumption of global resources which could be used for other developmental purposes. Lack of harmony attracts outside influence and feeds from internal instability and leverage regional rivalry into international tension. For instance, China's ability to interfere in India's immediate backyard, various attempts at invading Afghanistan, the region as a breeding ground for global terrorism, the nuclearisation of India-Pakistan contention with the help of outside powers like China and North Korea.

The South Asian region has the potential to play a significant role in global economy with its vast resources yet to be explored. Another reason for region's strategic importance is that it hosts India. India seems to be a regional giant in terms of population, economy, geographical expansion and conventional military strength. Additionally, India holds a box seat in terms of huge energy flows across the Indian Ocean. India's location too has strategic importance and helpful in its rise, allowing it to adopt a continental security profile (Masud, 2023).

### **India's approach towards South Asia: South Asia in India's foreign policy**

The policy towards one's immediate neighbouring countries comprises a significant aspect of country's foreign policy. The logic of geography sometimes does not yield in strength and proximity is the most time testing and difficult component among the diplomatic hurdles a nation faces. Frontiers with neighbours are places where domestic issues intersect with external concerns. This is the place where domestic and foreign strategy becomes inescapable and requires sensitive handling. Therefore, it should come as no surprise in considering a country's neighbourhood policy in characterising its significant national and security interests. The focus of any foreign policy should be on neighbourhood first because a country's ability to focus on its fundamental objectives of socio-economic growth will be restricted until and unless a country does not have a peaceful and prosperous neighborhood. Therefore, a country should prioritise its social, economic, political, and cultural ties with its neighbours and should work on building strong and ever-lasting partnerships.

India's strategy towards its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia has been subjected to investigation mainly through the lens of its foreign policy. In this section, immediate neighbouring countries are taken as a lens to arrange the phases of India's strategic approach since independence towards these nations. Since India's independence in 1947, it has been seen as a regional hegemon in South Asia. It is because of India's territorial expansion, demographic size, military might, and its economic capacity that makes the asymmetry with its neighbours (Fawcett and Jagtiani, 2022). In this sense, India seems to be a regional force by default. However, a more critical look uncovers that India's superior economic and military assets have barely brought outcomes of success in the accomplishment of its foreign policy objectives (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2002; Shaw, 2019).

For quite few years, India views its neighbouring states as a major goal of its national security and its significant strategic sphere of influence (Kumar, 2016). India's policy with respect to Himalayan states has consistently been dictated by its relations with China. The focus of policy has continuously aimed to reduce China's influence in India's immediate neighboring Himalayan states (Kapur, 2007). The friendship agreements signed with Himalayan states like 'Treaty of Perpetual Peace and

Friendship' with Bhutan in 1949 (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 1949), 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship' with Nepal in 1950 (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 1950), Treaty of friendship with Sikkim in 1950 provide India a great involvement in the internal issues of its neighbours. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru is often perceived and blamed as being idealist in international affairs. For Wagner (2016), Nehru seems to have a significantly more realistic approach with respect to India's neighbours in the Himalayas.

According to Devin T. Hagerty (1991), Prime Minister Indira Gandhi viewed South Asian Region as a strategic part of India's national security and the policies have been adopted in India's foreign policy accordingly. Bhabani Sen Gupta (1983) argues that the outbreak of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka in 1983 gave rise to 'Indian doctrine of regional security'. The essence of this doctrine is that India strongly opposes external intervention in the domestic issues of other South Asian countries, particularly by outside forces whose goals and objectives seems to be detrimental to India's interests. Therefore, it is required that South Asian countries should not seek external assistance from any other nation. However, if a South Asian country really needs outside assistance, they should ask for it from India. The failure to do so will be viewed as anti-Indian (Hilali, 2001). This doctrine reflects two things: First, India's concerns are predominant in South Asian Region, particularly over those of outside forces who should not be allowed a chance to exploit crises in order to improve their own position or status in the region. By implication, any endeavor by South Asian country to allow such external intervention will be considered anti-Indian and a reason for Indian retaliation. Second, it reflects South Asian consensus that there should be no involvement of any other country in their domestic affairs. This further involves two steps: It asserts India's right to be involved in any regional help looked for by a South Asian nation to manage serious domestic issues. It focuses that assistance in such situations should be regional instead of by individual countries. In short, the overall motive of India's foreign policy for South Asia is based on denying outer forces a regional hold, with military power if required.

Indira Gandhi's South Asian doctrine became the reason for various political and military interventions during 1970s and 1980s. But many of these involvements didn't

bring about the much success for India. The military success over Pakistan in 1971 did not result in giving permanent solution of Kashmir issue. India holds support to Bangladesh after its independence in 1971 but could not forestall Bangladesh's political and monetary realignment after 1975 military coup. India's endeavors to end the Sri Lankan civil war in the late 1980s bring military and political disaster (Kapur, 1987).

The foreign policy under Rajiv Gandhi's tenure is described more as a period of transition (Raghavan, 2015). India's foreign policy during his tenure was significantly reoriented. His regional policy was undertaken in response to what was happening at global level. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Soviet Union and he was willing to pull Soviet troops from Afghanistan, which in turn would give space for Pakistan to increase its influence. Another concern was the critical situation in Sri Lanka. Rajiv Gandhi took personal initiative to sign a peace pact with Sri Lankan president in 1987. In the same year, he invited Pakistan's president General Zia-ul-Haq to Delhi over phone for talks on Afghan problem. Mr. Gandhi invited Dr. Mohammed Najibullah, Afghan's president soon after the Geneva Agreement was signed and extended economic and political support to his regime. As cited in Tripathi (1988), the goals of foreign policy that he set himself were based on his willingness to improve India's relations with its neighbour countries as well as with superpowers.

To cope with the China's challenge, the policy he adopted was that of rapprochement<sup>24</sup>. Mr Gandhi realized that continuous tension with China would halt India's growth. The Sumdorong<sup>25</sup> episode brings attention to the importance of stable border with China and most importantly to have a new and broader relationship with China. It resulted into Gandhi's visit to Beijing, first after Nehru in 34 years. The visit was more successful than what was anticipated.

Overall, Rajiv Gandhi's regional policies were based on two goals. First, India required stability around its neighbourhood for its own modernization and economic

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<sup>24</sup> Re- establishment of harmonious relations between the two nations.

<sup>25</sup> Chinese troops encroached into Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh in late June 1986 and set up a camp. The area of dispute was a grazing ground north of Tawang at Wangdung on the Sumdorong Chu rivulet. To know more, read, Subramaniam, A. (2020). Sumdorong Chu Episode: When India Dared China. *StratNews Global: South Asia and Beyond*. Available at <https://stratnewsglobal.com/china/sumdorong-chu-episode-when-india-dared-china/>

development and to decrease the burden of security preparedness. Second is to forestall further encroachment into its periphery by superpowers and China.

Since economic liberalization in 1991, economic issues took primacy over security issues and that change was very much visible in India's foreign policy both at regional and global level. Commercial links widened and deepened with India's neighbours as its economy expanded. Inder Kumar Gujral proposed a new structure for India's regional policy that would replace Indira's doctrine. Indira Gandhi was affirming India's supremacy in the region while the Gujral doctrine highlighted the concept of non-reciprocity (Murthy, 1999). It emphasizes on India's willingness to move more than half way to bring solution to any bilateral issue with its neighbours. He recognized that India as being the biggest power in the region, it needs to assume greater responsibility for advancing peace and prosperity in the region. And in return, it is expected that the neighbours would not allow their territories to serve as safe heavens for hostile activities against India (Mohan, 2015). South Asia was no longer viewed as component of India's national security but as a part of its economic growth. The new scope on economic has gained more primacy vis-à-vis security issue. It was under the leadership of Manmohan Singh that the Gujral doctrine came into its own. Economic relations became the centre stage for India's foreign policy (Deo, 2016). As India's economic situation improved significantly, Singh offered unilateral tariff reduction for SAARC members and highlighted the importance of connectivity and trade facilitation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his first swearing in ceremony in 2014 invited all SAARC nations and his neighbourhood first policy was aimed at forging stronger ties with the neighbours (Haidar, 2014). The move by the new government was a clear signal that "India will look to play a leadership role in forging greater South Asian unity as a first step to expand economic cooperation within the region" (Anderson and Verma, 2015: 97). High level visits have been paid to Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh within 100 days of him assuming office, signaling strong push towards reviving bilateral relations with neighbours and a clear signal of strengthening India's position in the subcontinent (Press Information Bureau, 2015). During his first year in office, Modi has emerged as a dynamic leader in foreign policy sphere. Economic engagement remains an important element in his foreign policy but he has successfully used soft

power like promotion of Yoga, democratic values and reached out successfully with Indian Diaspora to project India's influence (Pant and Taneja, 2019). He was the first to call for peace, stability, and order in oceans, outer space and cyber space (Press Information Bureau, 2014). The South Asian region witness hardening of alliance system since Modi's coming to office (Riedel, 2015). Although the alliance system remains informal. The US and India come closer to each other. American President Mr. Obama was the chief guest at India's 66<sup>th</sup> Republic day celebrations (Somanader, 2015). China and Pakistan too come closer. The two announced their relations as all weather and taller than the Himalayas (Riedel, 2015).

### **South Asia in China's foreign policy**

Relations between India and China are characterized by conflict and competition. Unresolved territorial disputes have always been an ire in their relation. Another factor that contributes to their fractious relation is China's increased closeness with India's South Asian nations. China has encroached into what India views as its own sphere of influence (Mohan, 2022). It is quite evident in Beijing's increased naval presence in IOR. Their traditional rivalry has acquired a new dimension-maritime. The two Asian rivals are casting new, offensive military alliances supported by expanding economies and increased defense budgets and are looking for new partners in Asia. Both remain locked in contest for political, economic, and strategic dominance and it has the potential to destabilize the existing regional security of the South Asian region.

While examining the key features of China's policy and perceptions towards South Asia, Malik (2001) argues that it is China's military security concern that tied it to South Asia. China has been well aware that if India gets required economic and strategic policies together, it alone has the capacity to match China. There is an old saying in China that "one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers". Malik (2001) argues that the main objective of China's Asian policy has been to forestall the rise of a peer contender, a real Asian opponent to challenge China's status as Asia-Pacific's sole 'Middle Kingdom'.

Traditionally, South Asian region was considered important for China due to security reasons. Recent Chinese works suggests that China is rediscovering the significance of

South Asia and the region's strategic importance has increased in recent China's foreign policy (Masahiro, 2023). It is quite visible in China's new initiatives like One Belt, one Road, and String of Pearls. These initiatives reinforce the strategic importance of South Asian Region in China's foreign policy. Kumar (2019) noted that it is Beijing's internal challenges that shape its South Asian Policy. He cited three factors: First is China's economy. Second comes from western regions like Xinjiang and Tibet as these regions share their borders with South Asian countries. Any kind of instability in these regions has spill-over effect in western regions and China particularly. Third challenge comes from instability in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It has been argued that China's South Asian strategy aims at safeguarding security and development of its western states adjoining South Asia. For Andrew Small (2014) too, the major internal factors that led China to increase its influence in South Asia are China's economy and development of western regions-Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan.

China's relationship with South Asian nations goes back to 1950s. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence or Panchsheel<sup>26</sup> was signed between India and China in 1954 despite the fact that Mao (1949) practiced 'lean to one side' policy. Kumar (2019) insisted that Panchsheel served China's interest as it was able to frame relationship with non-communist nations. Cold war divided the world into two camps and non-communist countries were apprehensive of the emergence of People's Republic of China (PRC). Further, it was widely used by China in Asian politics. Panchsheel served China's purpose and since then has been the core policy towards its neighbours.

China has always been attempting to enlarge its economic, political, and military influence in South Asian Region. Several factors are held responsible for China's long term interests in the region. Kaura (2018: 8) argues that China's relationship with South Asian nations is characterised by unique bilateral relationship combining territorial disputes, economic partnership, security challenges, "containing Indian power", and balancing US influence. Rehman (2008: 122) has provided three reasons for China's engagement with South Asian and Southeast Asian nations- to develop trade and

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<sup>26</sup> Agreement based on the following principles: i. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, ii. Mutual non-aggression, iii. Mutual non-interference, iv. Equality and mutual benefit, and v. Peaceful co-existence.



economic integration, “to contain India in the South Asian subcontinent”, and to fulfill its energy needs by establishing strategic naval presence along important maritime chokepoints.

### **Key features of China’s South Asia Policy**

#### **➤ China’s energy diplomacy**

The history of energy development especially oil is actually a history of conflict, competition, cooperation, and diplomacy among various powers. With globalization, the geopolitics of world energy has changed and its pattern has been evolved. With developing nations too coming in the picture, the pattern has become even more complicated. Rise of China and its geopolitical influence has dominated the study of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Due to the continuous change of energy demand and supply, China’s role in world energy geopolitics is transforming continuously. At the beginning of the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949, its energy consumption was heavily dependent on imports. Since 1970s, China’s energy role has transformed from oil poor country to oil exporting country (Levine, Liu, and Sinton, 1992). In fact, energy export has been the main source of foreign reserves for China and a support to its national income. Both internal and external factors play a huge role in this success. Large oil fields (like Daqing, Shengli, Dagang, Liaohe, Huabei, Zhongyan, and others) were explored successfully during 1950s. With science and technology, these fields were explored and oil production increased (Kong, 2005). Another major event that helped China to assume the title of oil exporter was the war that broke in the Middle East. When the world including western industrialized countries suffered oil crises, China was busy exploiting the profits that generated due to increase in international oil prices and was able to balance its supply and demand. Party and state leaders of China decided to adopt the policy of oil for foreign exchange. During first and second oil crises, China created huge amount of foreign exchange. But again at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, China became the net importer of fossil energy. China’s domestic demand increased constantly but it could not keep pace with its domestic supply. In 1993, China became an energy importer (Sharan, 2011). To meet the domestic demand, Chinese government adopted a dual track energy security that involves both internal and external measures. Internal measures seek to increase domestic energy production

while external measures seek to pursue imports (Stegen, 2015). The domestic exploration became more difficult and domestic reserves decline constantly. In order to balance its market demand and supply, China's energy diplomacy has also changed correspondingly. As cited in YM Wei et al (2019: 69), this dilemma forced China to adopt 'Walking Out' strategy and to strengthen its overseas exploration.

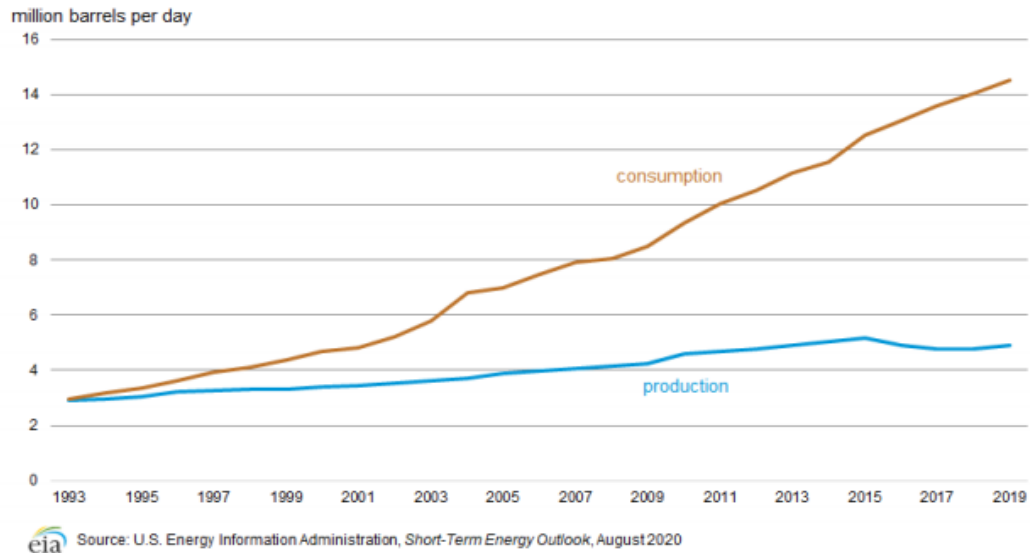
China's geography demands non pipeline imports of energy resources and that too be delivered through tankers to China's Pacific coast (Sharan, 2011). There are three main routes:

1. Route from Southeast Asia and Australia- crossing South China Sea
2. Route from America- crossing Pacific Ocean
3. Route from Middle East and Africa- crossing Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca (Yang and Wang, 2014)

The third route is the most important route as China receives 75% of its energy resources from this route (Wang and Su, 2021; EIA). The Strait of Malacca is the shortest route between Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean to South China Sea. The United States navy controls the regional sea lines of communication.

According to US Energy Information Administration (2020), sources of China's total energy consumption in 2019 includes: Coal (58%), Petroleum and other liquids (20%), hydroelectric sources (8%), Natural Gas (8%), Nuclear Power (2%), and other renewables (nearly 5%). In year 2010, China's share of global energy consumption was 20.3%, surpassing United States to become the world's largest energy consumer. In which, oil consumption constitutes 9.057 million b/d, which makes 10.6% of total oil consumption. Relative to huge consumption of oil, China's oil production in 2010 was 4.071 million b/d, that constitutes 5.2% of world's oil production (BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2011).

**Figure 1- China's petroleum and other liquids- production and consumption (1993-2019)**



In order to run the engines of economy, a country requires continuous supply of energy resources. China's stunning economic growth demands an equivalent energy consumption. By 2010, China surpassed United States and became the world's largest energy consumer (BP, 2011).

With the increasing demand of energy sources, China's energy security cannot be fulfilled with domestic supply alone. China needs to consider overseas cooperation and overseas cooperation is no doubtly affected by geopolitical factors. Traditionally, United States has controlled strategic significant energy regions using political, economic, and military means. But over years various developing nations have formed alliances and policies to secure their own interests. Over the past three decades, world energy consumption shows different growth rate in different regions. Analysing the whole picture, the total consumption rate rises continuously but with unbalanced features. The consumption rate of North America and Europe (regions of developed economy) is decreasing year by year while the proportion of consumption of Middle East, Africa, Asia-Pacific region is rising. The reason for this energy consumption is the change of pattern of international economy brought out by emerging powers (Ritchie, Rosado, and Roser, 2020).

Under such scenario, it is likely that geopolitical situation of regions with energy resources are changeable and it is of utmost importance to study how China participate in this dynamic environment and form alliances and cooperation in these regions.

China has chosen steady energy diplomacy in order to avoid competition with developed nations especially United States and searched for energy resources in third world countries with tough conditions (Wei et al, 2019). At present, China's overseas oil and gas infrastructure and investment mainly concentrate in Central Asia, Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia-Pacific.

The Asia-Pacific region is a place for fierce competition as this region is well connected with Russia in Central Asia, have strategic important maritime channels, and have oil and gas resources. China, United States, Japan, Russia, ASEAN, and India play the leading role in this region. The three powers –China, US, and Japan form the core of political pattern and ensure stability in the region.

China's economic demand remains the significant factor in driving its interest in South Asian Region (Foreign Affairs Committee). China's core national interests have not changed but the pace of its economy and its economic demand ranging from energy resources to transit routes have changed the dynamic of influence and its relationship in South Asia (Brigadier General Rahman, 2014).

China as a leading power in Asia-Pacific region has been able to consolidate and strengthened its relationship with all states of the region through political and economic means to increase its influence (Sullivan and Brands, 2020). Through trade, aid and investment, cooperative development it has been able to fight for abundant oil and gas resources of countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, Burma (Brown et al., 2007). It has well utilized its political, economic, diplomatic, and military means to secure Malacca Strait. Meanwhile, it has been able to strengthen its cooperation with Japan and South Korea to perceive common interest. South China Sea dispute is vital for China's energy diplomacy as it will not only influence the association of resources in South China Sea but also impact China's security in Malacca Strait (Wei et al., 2019).

➤ **Asian Rival/ Peer competitor-India**

There is an old saying in China that ‘One mountain cannot accommodate two tigers’. The major objective of Beijing’s Asia policy is to prevent the rise of India- its Asian competitor and rival (Malik, 2001). China is aware that it is only India in South Asia that could compete with its influence in terms of size, population, and might once it gets its economic and strategic factors together. India centric approach in turn has seen military ties with the objective to keep India under pressure.

Malik (2001) argues that Sino-Indian relations will remain frictional because of their historic rivalries and strategic culture. Both share similar aspirations in terms of status and influence and hence rivalry between them remains long term. He has also pointed that in years to come China’s foreign and defense policies will be designed as such to reduce the status of India to sub regional power by increasing its influence and leverage in SAR.

Pattanaik (2022: 129) analyses China’s growing presence in South Asian Region and concluded that China wants to emerge as a “global hegemon and unchallenging power in Asia” and views India as a major competitor in its race towards hegemony.

➤ **China-Pakistan axis**

India and China has started off their relations on friendly footings. *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* has become the popular hindi slogan marking the relations between the two neighbors. Their relations have been deteriorated by the 1962 border conflict. Since the 1962 war, there relations have been characterized by “mutual antagonism, rivalry, distrust and hostilities” (Malik, 1995: 317). Their relations have been further exacerbated by the Sino-Pakistan alliance. China views its relation with Pakistan as that of “Iron brotherhood” while Pakistan describe it as “higher than the mountains, and deeper than the sea, sweeter than honey, and harder than steel” (Qingyan, 2021). The People Republic of China’s proceed to help Pakistan militarily and economically, which is India’s main opponent and rival, aggravated the Sino-India relations and is one of the main issue which disturbs India in its dealing with China. Rehman (2009: 118) aptly puts it

“China’s shoring up of Pakistan’s military defenses is the only reason Pakistan can stand up to India and prevent it from reigning supreme over the subcontinent. China’s strategy is to divert India’s attention from East Asia and to prevent it from reaching beyond South Asia, by keeping it focused on the western front, and by using Pakistan as a form of ‘Proxy deterrent’ against India in its own backyard”.

Saeed and Saba (2018) argues that there are two groups of opponent against CPEC. The first group opposes CPEC as they think that it is an instrument of exploitation that would steal Pakistani economic resources. Sri Lanka and Maldives are such cases. Territorial sovereignty was a cause of concern before allowing China to invest in their countries. The second group argues that the BRI in general and the CPEC in particular are China’s tools to contain India.

The exchange between China and Pakistan has increased following the announcement of China-Pakistan Economic corridor (CPEC). Even though there exists strong bond that dates back to the formation of Communist China. Pakistani Ambassador to China H.E. Masood Khalid commented on China and CPEC that

“China and South Asia are linked historically and geographically through the Ancient Silk Road, and it is but natural that these two regions continue to be linked even more strongly. We have already taken the first step for greater connectivity by signing agreements on Economic Corridor, and actively pursuing them on-ground. This would benefit China, Pakistan and entire South Asia, and will facilitate the economic integration of whole region. Both countries have embarked on developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which will open up new opportunities for development, enhance connectivity and people to people contacts” (CPEC Portal)

According to Kaura (2018), China is containing India by strengthening Pakistan’s military capability. The two nations enjoy considerable robust ties despite the absence of common culture, tradition or history. The difference between their lifestyle is stark. Irrespective of shared customs or history, their bilateral relations enjoy increasingly

strong bond at least at the official level. Today, China has rise as a significant power in Asia with a dynamic economy. China's regional influence has grown exponentially. Meanwhile, the United States tilt towards India and its friction in relationship with Pakistan has opened the door for more grounded China and Pakistan relations.

China has tried to develop, strengthened, and deepen ties with smaller South Asian nations (Xavier and Jacob, 2023). China is a significant investor in Bangladesh. During Xi Jinping's visit to Dhaka in 2016, the bilateral relations between the two were upgraded to strategic partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2016). China has also been successful in increasing its foothold in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. The relationship is likewise reached out to defense and security areas.

#### ➤ **Territorial Disputes**

In 2017, both nations face each other on a disputed territory- Doklam, claimed both by China and Bhutan. The military standoff lasted for two months (Beena, 2019). Later in 2020, India and China have been involved in number of scuffles. The relation between India and China took a worse turn in 2020. Intrusion by PLA along the contested border resulted into military standoff and skirmishes (Tellis, 2020; Rajeev and Stephenson, 2023). These kind of incidents have not been in display for decades. The two Asian giants were involved in military standoffs at various points in Eastern Ladakh region of India. It has been the worst violence since 1967 as this is the first incident claiming fatalities. The clash claims the lives of 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese soldiers as later clarified by China (Gettleman, Kumar, and Yasir, 2020). China has intensified its case for Arunachal Pradesh, one of the Indian state. Controlling the region allows China to extend its influence down to the lower regions of strategically significant Himalayas and allowing Beijing to hold a commanding position over large part of eastern India's waters (The Economic Times, 2021; Chellaney, 2023).

#### **Recent Chinese Interventions in the South Asian Region and its Implications**

As China rise economically, politically, and militarily, its policies towards its neighbourhood has also seen remarkable changes and South Asian region is no such exception (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023;

Yunling, 2022). India's immediate neighbourhood has increasingly become a hotspot for two Asian giants to display their influence. Over the past decade, China has become top exporters in South Asia (Santander Trade Portal). China has poured its investment in infrastructure projects like railways, communication, highways, ports, economic corridors extended over thousand of kilometres as extended through China's Belt and Road commitment (Huaxia, 2023). China has supported various infrastructure projects in South Asian Region too under its BRI (Ranjan, 2019).

India has enjoyed considerable regional influence in South Asia because of its size, location, comparative economic might and social, historical and cultural importance to the region. China's history of inclusion in South Asia is restricted in comparison, however, its long standing relationship with Pakistan is a notable exception. However, in the past few years, China's involvement in South Asia is remarkable. Over the past decade, China has become a critical economic partner to nations across the region, establishing strong ties particularly with small states through trade ties, aid, loan, military assistance, diplomacy, economic cooperation and investment. China's economic engagement with South Asian nations are expanding through trade in general and investment through infrastructure projects in particular (Zongyi, 2014). China has increased its presence in the SA-IOR through political-diplomatic and economic engagement with the regional nations (Chaudhury, 2023). China's expanding engagement with the smaller nations in South Asia has drawn investigation from analysts and policymakers concerned with the implications of Beijing's ascent for the current regional order.

China's increasing influence in all of its neighbouring nations in terms of power projection and foreign policy is notable and is well under investigation. Be it the assertion in the form of hostilities for unresolved issues, state supported and private economic investments, or attempts to install governments in the countries which are under China's direct or indirect control (Shullman, 2019). In the last decade, there has been an explicit expansion in these activities and China is attempting to hold its control over countries identified as strategically important. These nations are marked as trade routes, sea lanes of communications (SLOCs), oil supply routes, supply and navy base for the military (Venkateswaran, 2020). South Asian nations being neighbours of China



have increasingly come in contact with it on political, economic and security grounds. These interactions show that china is not just interested in development of these regions. Rather, China has secured its geostrategic advantage that seeks to secure its own national interest. A flood of Chinese monetary and political inclusion in South Asia poses a serious threat to India's pre eminence and influence in its immediate neighbourhood. China's increasing presence and involvement in South Asia poses a great challenge to India's regional dominance in the region. China professes to have purely benign benevolent expectation in South Asia. A more critical take at Beijing's activities in the region firmly recommends that it is perseveringly securing its national interest which are likely unfavorable to most if not all South Asian countries. South Asian nations, thus, will have to think about the ramifications of China's increasing presence and exercises in their region. Later on, all South Asian nations needs to be clear-eyed about Beijing's intentions in their region and how precisely it is attempting to achieve it and the possible long term consequences.

During Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao regime, China had adopted low profile (*taoguangyanghui*) and conservative approach to global affairs. According to China's news network, 2010, "The main connotation is that China should remain humble and prudent, not take the lead, not carry the flag, not expand, not seeking hegemony". China's foreign policy behavior under Xi Jinping leadership has been marked as "muscular and assertive" (Kaura, 2018: 10). Xi adheres to the strategy of 'Striving for achievement' (*fenfayouwei*) in shaping a favourable environment for its progress (Yan, 2014:154). Yan further argues that the strategy of striving for achievement will better serve China to realize its goal of great rejuvenation by making more allies as the SFA strategy aims at providing security protection and by letting others benefit from China's economic growth.

Much to India's concern, China's influence is increasing across South Asia. Countries that have prioritized India and stayed inside its strategic circle- including Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are now increasingly turning to China as an alternative hotspot that can help them addressing their requirements. China has smartly adopted economic, political, and military tools to extend participation and deepen cooperation

with a motive to secure its own national interest, which essentially includes providing favours to countries having potential to provide geostrategic advantages.

In order to secure its core interests, China took combination of economic, political, maritime, and military policies. Various measures that China adopted to secure its national interest:

**Political measures:** Planning, coordination, and execution of policies requires centralised control by Communist Party of China (CPC); Shaping international opinion through establishing strategic partnerships, participation in various multilateral forums, replacing western led security mechanism to new Asian security “Concept of Common, Comprehensive, Cooperative, and Sustainable Security”; Execution of grand projects like BRI.

**Economic measures:** Follows ‘cheque book’ diplomacy that employs bilateral trade, investment, construction, development aid, and loans.

**Table 4- Chinese worldwide Investment and Contracts (2005-2012 and 2012-2022)**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>2005-2012 (USD)</b>	<b>2012-2022 (USD)</b>
Bangladesh	2.41 Billion	28.4 Billion
Nepal	320 Million	3.16 Billion
Pakistan	12.42 Billion	54.95 Billion
Sri Lanka	4.87 Billion	9.57 Billion
Maldives	-	1.23 Billion
Bhutan		

*Source: China Global Investment Tracker / American Enterprise Institute - AEI (Accessed on 14 October, 2022)*

**Military measures:** Establishment of overseas bases; Modernisation of People’s Liberation Army (PLA); Enhancement of PLA to protect its overseas interests.

**Table 5- Arms Exports from China (2012-2021)**

**Top five Importers**

<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Amount (in millions USD)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Pakistan	5986	38.91
Bangladesh	2522	16.39
Myanmar	1206	7.84
Algeria	1007	6.54
Thailand	436	2.83
<b>Rest of the world</b>	<b>4224</b>	<b>27.46</b>

*Source: Importer/Exporter TIV Tables (sipri.org) (Accessed on 13 October, 2022)*

**Maritime tools:** Deep Sea ports, naval bases, and other maritime infrastructure

**Will China dominate the world?**

There are two schools of thoughts: One that believes that 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to China and the other school believes that it is unlikely for a country like China to dominate the world.

Rajiv Sikri (2013:8) affirmed that China’s growth is remarkable but its “economic miracle could soon run out of steam”. China’s model of economic growth requires consistent accessibility of raw material and resources that cannot be underestimated. Global resources are soon likely to run out in near future. China’s increasing demand will eventually bring it in conflict with other competing consumers including United States. He further noted that the dilemma for China is that the legitimacy of its political party, Communist Part of China, relies upon its capacity to deliver a high degree of

economic growth. This amounts to an inherently unstable political framework. No country as extensive as China has pulled a combination of high economic growth over a significant long period of time with an authoritarian political framework. It is extremely suspicious if China has developed a superior management method that has surpassed all other nations and figured out how to advance the model of economic development that effectively defeats irreconcilables. There is sufficient evidence of fundamental shortcomings in the Chinese framework that would appear to preclude a linear model of Beijing's economic growth- the unprofitable state possessed endeavors, the feeble financial and banking framework, the stewing discontent in the rural regions, increasing economic and regional inconsistencies and looming natural calamities and environmental catastrophes. If, despite of all odds, China grows consistently, proving skeptics wrong, this would bring headaches to many nations including India.

### **India's Security Conundrums with Rising Chinese Influence**

The China-India rivalry is one of the fundamental and troubling components of the geopolitical design of South Asia. In the Indian Ocean, this rivalry is particularly assuming all the signs of a classic security dilemma. China fears India of interdicting its vital energy flows, potentially in collaboration with the United States. While on the other hand, India is concerned about China's increasing influence throughout the Indian Ocean Region including South Asia. India fears China of building its presence in the Indian Ocean which New Delhi considers as its backyard. Most of this comes from China's activities in the South Asia, which might seem essentially commercial but the strategic hedging element cannot be neglected. India has some grounds for justification of its concern from China's presence in its backyard- China's longstanding friendship with Pakistan, China's hard position on contested borders with India since 2007. Border scuffles between India and China have escalated in the past.

Another major concern with Sino-Indian rivalry is that it offers other South Asian forces some degree to play off India and China against one another. This is a potentially bad game since it sharpens the security dilemma and is dangerous for the region.

In order to flourish, South Asia needs to keep its differences aside so that it can transform itself into the next incredible labour intensive manufacturing hub after China,

utilizing from its huge number of cheap labourers and its closeness to oil and gas rich Persian Gulf. For this to occur, India-Pakistan relations should improve by allowing SAARC to assume its appropriate part in breaking down monetary and security obstructions across the region.

Small states play a significant role in maintaining the balance of power structure. For any major power, its immediate neighbourhood poses considerable challenges. Many nations experience challenges with their neighboring small states, which is a natural phenomenon, as even though they are small in size, they possess the capability to cause harm. The issues encountered with smaller neighboring states are not unique to India but are prevalent among all major powers to differing extents. In recent times, India has been compelled to confront an exceedingly challenging neighbourhood. This situation has been further complicated by the emergence of China as a rising power.

Despite being in close proximity to India, small south Asian nations are critical of India “accuse her of arrogance and interference, seek external balancers and occasionally, even ignore her security concerns” (Prakash, 2022). Happymon Jacob (2024) argues that the current challenge in India’s foreign policy is the discrepancy between its aspirations to become a global power and the diminishing influence it holds regionally. Despite India’s rising global stature, its regional influence in South Asia is declining, primarily due to the growing influence of China. He further asserts that small South Asian nations perceive China as a significant hedge against India. Rajesh Rajagopalan (2024), while analysing the change in equation of India and its neighbors with China’s presence noted that “the primary purpose of these small states is to play India and China off against each other so that they can benefit most from the competition.” China’s remarkable economic expansion has significantly enhanced its capacity to assist developing in their developmental endeavors.

The challenges are enormous. India’s neighbours are suspicious and fearful of its size, power, and influence over individual nations as well as over region as a whole. They do not completely help out India on political and security concerns. It does not help that by and large the behavior of India towards its neighbours has created not a good image of it in these nations, allowing them to look for some countervailing power to adjust its

domination in South Asia. This has taken the form of utilizing influences against India, and by obstructionist, who are often openly hostile, approaches intentionally designed to hurt it economically and politically. India's neighbours have avoided a too close a relationship with it as that could fade their fundamental identity of anticipating themselves as not Indian. But there is a dilemma- almost all of India's neighbours except for Pakistan and to some extent Nepal and Bangladesh, considers India as the ultimate guarantor of security provider.

### **India and South Asia: Concerns and Responses**

For decades, India was a natural trading partner for South Asian nations because of its size and location. India is surrounded by smaller nations, all of which share a common border except the Maldives. India and Nepal have an open border allowing the citizens of both nations to cross the border without passport and visa restrictions. The open border has a favourable impact on the economy of India and Nepal. In addition, the unrestricted flow of people across border has strengthened socio-cultural ties between the two. An open border has permitted numerous Nepali citizens to find work in India and Indians to start business undertakings in Nepal. The trading relations between India and Sri Lanka have marked a historical achievement when India has signed its first bilateral free trade agreement with Sri Lanka on 28 December, 1998. It came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2000. The free trade agreement was signed to strengthen the intra regional economic cooperation, promotion of mutually beneficial bilateral trade, expansion of domestic markets and the development of their national economies. India and Bhutan shares mutually beneficial economic ties which has been an important element in their relationship. India is Bhutan's leading trade partner. India is the biggest trade partner of Bangladesh and bilateral trade between the two has grown steadily over the last decade.

Sandy Gordon (2012) while giving an interview describes the geopolitical dynamics and the inter relationship of each South Asian nation. He views that India experiences the 'Kautilian Dictum' which means that surrounding smaller nations naturally seeks to balance their big neighbour by making close relations with more distant large powers. China has been an important element in this balancing phenomenon, especially its close

enmity with Pakistan, but also in some degree with other South Asian nations except Bhutan.

China's expanding influence in South Asia is a recent development except for its extensive economic engagement with Pakistan. The China-Pakistan axis remains as an exceptional case. In the past few years, China has become top exporter of goods and a major trade partner in the South Asian region. China has entered into South Asian market with its export led development strategy. In 2015, China has become top trading partner of Bangladesh and has surpassed India's exports. According to Anderson and Ayres (2015), "China has not eclipsed India across South Asia, but it is catching up in its trade and investment".

### **India's Foreign Policy in response**

Sikri (2013: 13) insisted that the global positioning of India in the twenty first century depends largely on to what extent India fulfill its promise and potential, sustainability of China's economic growth and the inter relationship between the two Asian giants.

Sikri has analysed the geographical position of India and argues that the India's geographical location puts it at the vortex of 4 arcs as mentioned below. These 4 arcs carries both potential and Peril.

**Table 6- Arcs of the world as proposed by Sikri**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Extension</b>	<b>Arc</b>	<b>Features</b>
<b>Eastwards</b>	The region from the Himalayas to the Pacific	“Arc of Prosperity”	Includes half of the world’s population.  Includes world’s largest and most dynamic economies.  Accounts for significant amount of global trade.  Controls the bulk of global foreign exchange reserves.
<b>Westwards</b>	Starting from Persian Gulf to Caspian Sea to Siberia and Russia’s far east	“ Arc of Energy”	Accounts for 3/4 <sup>th</sup> of the world’s oil and gas reserves.  Key strategic arena, where major global powers interests will intersect, most probably clash
<b>North</b>	Pakistan to the Mediterranean; Central Asia; and South Asia	“Arc of Instability”	Complex traditional geopolitics.  Inter states disputes  Energy geopolitics
<b>South</b>	The north of Indian Ocean	“Arc of Communications	Controls the energy flow from the Persian Gulf



			Controls Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) between Europe and Asia
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*Source: Derived by the author from Sikri, R. (2013:12-13 ). Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India's Foreign Policy*

In this backdrop, he insisted that “India’s foreign policy will need to be imaginative, agile, and flexible” to guarantee its military, economic, and energy security in its strategic space. India’s foreign policy strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century depends primarily on India’s assessment of the likely development of the global order. Forecasts are laden with uncertainty. Even the United States, for all its power, is unpredictable of its future. A single unforeseen occasion or a turn of events in an apparently irrelevant part of the world could trigger off a chain response that attracts the extraordinary powers and leads to unanticipated outcomes.

The world has changed with time and so does India. Till recently, India’s focus was basically on domestic issues, foreign policy strategy was not seen as an issue to which the nation needed to give special consideration or a focus area where India is expected to work out a cautious strategy. In the years following independence, there were debates on domestic policies- whether India should take capitalist or socialist mode of production, debates on industrialization versus agriculture, or whether the emphasis should be on higher education or primary education. Similar discussions were absent in the field of foreign policy. Not that India has various choices. India was relatively not strong, its future unsure, and extensive influence of foreign powers. But now, according to Sikri (2013), India is stronger, confident, ambitious and has progressively globalised. It still is subjected to external pressure, but it is not simply a pawn on the global stage, it is also a player. He further noted that he cannot see India in top notch leaders in the coming decade, but if India aspires to find a spot at top league of players some time later in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it is the following decade that will be most critical to India to set up policies that will help India to reach to its goal. The new generation seeks to watch India as a major player on global stage. This challenges India’s foreign strategy in the coming years.

## **Change in Indian Foreign Policy**

Amb (Retd) Debnath Shaw (2019), during his distinguished lecture at IIT at Varanasi stated that the change in dynamics in foreign policy refers to the need to adapt or modify policies either due to shifts in the domestic political landscape or as a response to changes in the external environment. An illustrative instance of this dynamism is evident in India's actions in 2018 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the inauguration ceremony of Maldives President Mohammad Solih. This marked a departure from the past practice of avoiding such visits to Maldives by Indian Presidents or Prime Ministers, practiced during the tenure of former President Abdulla Yameen, who maintained a pro-China stance. While talking on key events that have shaped or influence India's foreign and external security policies, Shaw noted that the year 2014 marked a major event when Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds power and "infuses new life into Indian F.P. (*Foreign Policy*)- (written by researcher in italics) unabashed about India's 'great power' ambition."

Modi's arrival onto the national stage indeed marked a significant shift in India's political landscape. His leadership style, characterized by decisiveness and confidence, brought a sense of clarity to governance that was perhaps lacking before. Prior to his emergence, there might have been a deception of ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding India's core national interests. With Modi at the helm, there seemed to be a more defined direction and purpose in addressing crucial issues facing the nation. Chaulia (2016) in his book "*Modi Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of India's Prime Minister*" contends that "Modi is slowly correcting decades-long strategic laziness and putting India's priorities on the right track."

## **Conclusion**

India and China have coexisted in peace for centuries. However, as post colonial nation states, the relations between the two Asian giants have been marked by "conflict, mutual suspicion, distrust, estrangement, containment and rivalry" (Malik, 2001: 75). Just as the Indian tectonic plate has the tendency to push towards the Eurasian tectonic plate creating tension and friction in the entire Himalayan region. India and China relations also remain tensed and volatile. A great bonhomie between two Asian giants

was brutally challenged by the border dispute between the two that resulted in war in 1962.

With the spectacular rise of China, the world has witnessed the emergence of a new world order. How come South Asian region would remain uninfluenced!! The changing dynamics also have an impact in Asian continent where increasingly new, complex and multilateral ties are being formed between the countries.

South Asia has gained importance in global politics in the post cold war era. The region is home to intractable disputes between India-China and India-Pakistan. Post cold war, most South Asian nations have adopted economic liberalization that resulted in forming stronger ties with rest of the world. Given its size and population, India is in dominant position with rest of South Asian nations but its relations with them have marred by territorial disputes. On the other hand, China has been able to increase its influence in the region because of its economic power. China's rise has offered great opportunities of trade and connectivity but at the same time it has caused anxiety over China's future intentions with respect to its neighbours. Over the past few years, China's relations with South Asian nations have grown both intensively and extensively. China has been building deeper ties with regional capitals through economic, military, diplomatic, and security domains. The South Asian region has always been perceived as its traditional region of influence by India and China's presence has far reaching consequences for India both economically and strategically.

India is often seen as a regional power but when one looks closer it reveals that India is in a disadvantageous place with respect to China in South Asia. The first and primary reason for this is that India never had the political, economic, and military capability to seek their regional power status with their immediate neighbours in the long run. South Asian nations can anytime play the China card to fade out the influence of India. Another reason is that India's new approach towards South Asia policy in terms of trade and connectivity has improved regional cooperation since 1991. While on the other hand, China remains an attractive and reliable economic and political partner for India's neighbours.

The India-China relationship is broadly appeared as one of the central pivot to global politics. The ties between the two Asian giants could well become an important bilateral relationship in world politics after China and United States. India and China share a long and conflictual and cooperative relationship. The relation between the two will have an impact on China-United States relations, diplomacy in Africa, Middle East, regional and global institutions, world economy, and the new world order.

India's foreign policy towards its immediate neighbourhood over the last seven decades has not bore much sweet fruit. A change in India's policies is called for. India's hard cored national interest itself directs the need for fresh reasoning. It is the ability of India to bring along its small neighbours in its economic growth which will be the key element in India's long term capacity to carry on its current great development story. India cannot expect to remain prosper if its neighbours lags behind.

In order to cultivate more mutual confidence and trust, India needs to dedicate considerably more time and attention to its immediate neighbours. In this regard, Sikri (2013) views that there needs to be more successive high level visits, telephonic discussions, and informal communication, utilizing pegs like private visits, religious tour, and transit stop in order to make personal assessment, exchange ideas, resolve issues and release tension and egos. Conversation should not be purely confined to bilateral problems but should cover regional and world-wide affairs. This would pass on the message that India considers its neighbours essential to have an exchange of ideas on wide range of regional and global issues. On the other hand, if India ignores or look down upon its neighbours, it will only worsen their relations and would create frustration and apprehension among them.

In addition to this, India should be generous and magnanimous in improving the economic development of its neighbor nations. They should be willing partners in India's own growth, development, and prosperity. While completely regarding its neighbour's sovereignty and autonomy, India has no other option except for it to deal with them as India's own states from economic point of view. While delivering a lecture at India International Centre (IIC), Shyam Saran (2005) noted that the nations comprising South Asia, although sharing geographic proximity, exhibit varying

security perceptions, resulting in the absence of common security doctrine within the region. Some countries in South Asia believe that the threat they face originate primarily from within the South Asian region itself. He noted that “keeping in mind this reality, our approach to SAARC was the only one logically sustainable- we set aside our differing political and security perceptions for the time being, and focus attention on economic cooperation.” Although, SAARC’s performance in this regard has been far from encouraging.

The measures taken by India so far can be enhanced by technical know-how, economic assistance, and huge investment in order to develop their infrastructure. The infrastructure development should be highly visible that has impact on and improve the lives of the people in neighbor states and not criticized as projects as paying benefit to India only. The Indian government must support private sector to put resources into these nations in the same way as done in India by giving incentives to advance their modern development, to create job opportunities, and to produce value added products that can be exported to both India and around the world. This would probably reduce the cross border migration- legally and illegally in search for work. Reciprocally India should invite investment by businessmen from adjoining states. This would provide ruling elites in neighbouring states to stay and to have long term stakes in India’s growth, development, stability, and prosperity.

Most important, India needs to set up more liberal and streamlined border trade exchange. Sikri (2013) has rightly noted that the absence of clear cut strategic approach to advance the development of its immediate neighbourhood has allowed other powers like China, United States, Britain as well as other host of nations to fill the gap that has been left vacant by India. These nations economic influence effectively gets convert into political influence.

South Asian nations are multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-ethnic. All South Asian nations have cultural, linguistic, religious, and historical links with India and share borders with India rather than with each other. The post-colonial geo-political landscape has created various ethno religious and linguistic issues in South Asia. For instance: Bengalis live in both India and Bangladesh; Kashmiri, Sindhi,

and Punjabi live in India as well as Pakistan; there are more Tamils in India than Sri Lanka; Nepalese are found in India, Nepal, and Bhutan; Tibetans live in China, Nepal, India, and Bhutan. No doubt, internal security challenges in one state have external security ramifications. In general terms, India's relations with its immediate neighbours have been directed by geopolitical (to ensure that geographical proximity and ethnicity does not prompt instability in and around its borders) and geostrategic (to keep external powers out of the subcontinent) concerns.

India's regional diplomacy has faced various challenges. One perennial challenge has been the question of intervention in the internal affairs of its immediate neighbours. South Asian nations have always been wary of India's hegemonic intentions and always resented its big brother approach. In order to resist India's big brother challenge, these nations build security links with external forces like China and United States.

South Asian Region is fast becoming a hot spot attracting global attention due to its economic and political dynamics. It is one of the fastest growing regions in terms of economics. The region is making efforts to integrate with other Asian regions, which are expected to play an important role on global stage.

South Asia has two alternatives- it could either align its direction with international concern over Beijing's rise or therefore add weight to the Sino phobia or it could act in a way to create environment which is mutually beneficial.

India and China are the two large nations in terms of population in the world. Both are also rising as an economic power in the Asia and world. They are looked as engines of economic growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the world shifting from geopolitics to geo economics, it is as important for both of them to concentrate on economic relations. The two Asian giants can join hands by strengthening their economic ties through cooperation. But both are apprehensive of each other's growth. India is concerned with growing Chinese influence in the SA-IOR while China feels uncomfortable over India's presence in the Pacific Ocean.

The relations between India and China have experienced various ups and downs. However, the relations between the two are pragmatic, which includes cooperation in

some areas while purely competing in cost based analysis in some. Neither of these nations are system challenging and realizes that both draws benefit from the current set up.

The South Asian Region becomes strategically important with rise of China and for increasing China's commercial and energy links with Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa through Indian Ocean. China's continuous intrusion in the region opens up opportunities for smaller South Asian states to derive economic and military benefits and also political support to balance India's dominance. Although the price of such arrangements apparently turns out to be very high. The feeling of being contained by China and the apprehension of being surrounded by unfriendly neighbourhood make India to adopt counter containment moves to protect and promote its interests.

China aims to shape the choices (political, economic, and military) in support of its values and interests.

India may not be fearful of China, per se, but its policymakers certainly recognize the tectonic implications of the rise of China for international relations in the SA-IOR and beyond.

Even if the leaders of two Asian giants develop personal trust from repeated mutual interactions, as President Xi and Prime Minister Modi have sought in their informal summits in Wuhan, China, in April 2018 and Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, in October 2019. It is far more challenging to extend that trust to all those actors responsible for framing national policy. These actors range from political critics, military officials, and public at large. In addition, media of both nations tend to magnify disagreements. This factor is important today as public opinion in both nations exert powerful constraint on the actions of policy makers. Furthermore, even when there is contemporary trust, it is challenging for current leaders to bind the actions of their successors.

## **Chapter-4: Navigating the Waves: Analysing China's Maritime Strategies and Emerging Security Challenges for India**

### **Introduction**

The technological advancement of the world is moving fast forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century leading to the rise of nano-technology, drones, information technology and electrical power. However, what has not been changed is importance of the sea-routes. In fact, sea routes have become so important that it has been mentioned that “Those who are controlling the sea will be dominating the world.” (Jones, 2021). The exercise of power over waves remains vital as it not only provides military might like combat craft, amphibious operations, but also the ability to protect its sea lanes of communications and flow of essential commercial and strategic resources. Thus a powerful navy confers strong and sustained power projection beyond territorial waters.

As a result, the growing powers are trying to dominate the areas of maritime, including the regional powers of India and China. The growing capability and strategy of maritime security of China is a cause of concern for western powers and India as it is seeking to expand their navy. China has started focusing on submarines and destroyers in 1990s and it seeks to modernize its current combat. Over the past thirty years, People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) expands in number and transforms itself into modern and professional navy with expansion in its scope of action. It is the second largest navy in terms of ships, and has huge investment in maritime industry. The continuous rise of China's navy has attracted the attention of policymakers and academicians alike. Holding status as a continental power for a very long time, China is now on the way to become a sea power. Such endeavors are result of China's unrestrained economic growth. China's economic takeoff and its increased involvement within global economy assigned it with both monetary basis and security objective of protecting the maritime trade and thus provide legitimization to its naval expansion.

Over the last few decades, it was noticed that China is extending its area of influence in Indo-Pacific Ocean. In May 2018, United States Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis re-titled (U.S. Indo-Pacific Commandf) U.S. Pacific command to U.S. Indo-



Pacific command (USINDOPACOM)<sup>27</sup>. The decision is a nod in acknowledgement of increased connectivity between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The change in name is noteworthy in current geostrategic environment as it can be noted that China's interests are no longer limited to the Pacific Ocean only but its strategic eyes are also on Indian Ocean as well. China once clearly mentioned "India should not regard Indian Ocean as India's Ocean." (Dasgupta, 2015). In order to expand its horizon, China has built its first overseas base in Africa. China's navy has increased its presence in the Indian Ocean and transit through it routinely. There is a budding list of maritime infrastructure projects initiated by China which indicates the growing importance of Indian Ocean in China's national interests. China has redefined the strategic environment and shifted its focus towards the Indian Ocean. China's entire shift to maritime domain demands a critical review so that we could be able to understand China's preferences and intentions behind its 'peaceful rise' and India's response to China in the region.

China's ascent as a significant economic powerhouse over the last few decades is concomitant with its larger global presence, more so in the maritime arena, where China is actively competing with both global and regional powers for forward bases or greater access, thereby creating what is known as the 'String of Pearls'. While China has repeatedly claimed that its activities are peaceful and intended at securing SLOCs and ensuring the security of its trade, commerce, market, and energy. However, not all the global and regional powers are convinced. The policy makers in the US, India, and their allies in the region have become concerned with China's rise as maritime power and the potential threat that emerged from this development (Dr. Luke, No Year). Over the past two decades, China has been constantly pushing for increased access and presence in the IOR, causing considerable concern and anxiety in the US and India (Sidhu and Rogers, 2015). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to analyse China's

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<sup>27</sup> USINDOPACOM protects and defends, in concert with other U.S. Government agencies, the territory of the United States, its people, and its interests. With allies and partners, USINDOPACOM is committed to enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region by promoting security cooperation, encouraging peaceful development, responding to contingencies, deterring aggression, and, when necessary, fighting to win. This approach is based on partnership, presence, and military readiness. It recognizes the global significance of the Asia-Pacific region and ensures a Free and Open Indo-Pacific alongside a constellation of like-minded Allies and Partners.

maritime strategy and its activities and strategic ambitions in the IOR. While Chinese actions are solely not confined to the IOR alone, this chapter is however examines China's power projection activities in the Pacific Ocean. Further, the chapter will analyse the security challenges that India is facing or will face with increasing Chinese footprints in the SA-IOR, which India has long considered its own backyard.

### **Maritime Strategy Concepts**

Before indulging in the discussion of maritime strategy concepts, it is important to understand the meaning of maritime strategy. According to Sir Julian Corbett, "By maritime strategy we mean the principles which govern a war in which the sea is a substantial factor." (as cited in Kivette, 1951). Simplifying this definition, Kivette (1951:31) views that, "By maritime strategy we mean the course of action which governs when sea is a substantial factor."

Maritime strategies are important in military planning as they provide resources to apply power to spaces of interest along shores and inland. This region is known as the littoral<sup>28</sup>. Defense activities in the littorals require the need for effective joint tasks. In the words of Admiral James D. Watkins (1986), "the goal of overall maritime strategy is to use maritime power, in combination with the efforts of our (U.S.) sister services and forces of our allies, to bring about war termination on favourable terms." In simple terms, maritime strategy helps a nation to think and plan diligently for global use of naval forces- from peacetime environment to global war to war termination. It is a dynamic concept and is in need in current security environment.

The modern definition of maritime strategy includes air, water, and land power working jointly to influence activities in the littoral along with traditional blue water maritime concepts like sea denial and sea control. The important elements of maritime strategy involve sea denial, sea control, and power projection.

- **Sea Denial:** It is a military concept that aims to prevent the adversary's ability to use the sea for certain duration.

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<sup>28</sup> It is defined as the space seaward of the coast which is vulnerable to impact or support from the land and the area inland from the coast which is defenseless to impact from the sea.

- **Sea Control:** It is defined as one's ability to operate in the ocean or sea for one's own purpose for a limited period of time. Archus (2021) define sea control as "acquiring and securing the privilege to utilize the maritime space in the period as expected". In the modern times with new technological advances, sea control aims at preventing the opponents challenge to carry out one's own operational events in terms of time and place.
- **Power Projection:** Power projection refers to the ability of a nation to conduct military operations far away from its shores within a short period of time (Rosen, 2019). According to dictionary of military and associated terms (2009: 426), power projection is "the ability of a nation to apply all or some of its elements of national power- political, economic, informational, or military- to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces in and from multiple dispersed locations to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability".

As this chapter focuses on China's maritime strategy, in the next section China's maritime security strategy is analysed through its Defense white papers and other relevant sources.

### **China's Grand Strategy**

The emergence of China from poor and isolated nation to a prosperous and strong one is one of the remarkable and impactful events in international relations. China's Grand strategy<sup>29</sup> has evolved over time: from tactics of survival under the administration of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping; regaining its power under Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao; to epic vision of making China great again under Xi Jinping. China under Xi is more proactive about establishing China's economic, military, and political power, calling for "*the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*". He is explicit in his policies to make China a global and dominant power in Asia. In order to become global power, it should become a maritime great power. There are various determinants of the China's growing power like different kind of external threats and opportunities and domestic factors.

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<sup>29</sup> It refers to comprehensive, strategic, long term plan of actions determining countries plan to accomplish its objectives.

There are debates on China's intentions, particularly regarding its hegemonic aspirations and military expansion.

### **Why to become Sea Power?**

The term strong maritime power has become a popular slogan in China and has been appeared frequently in official documents in past few years (China's defense white papers of the year 2015 and 2019). Since 2012, this phrase has been widely discussed by media and research scholars.

In the post 1949 period, China has fought 8 land wars only, namely, Korean War (1950-53) in the Korean Peninsula, Invasion of Tibet (1950) in the Tibet Plateau, first Taiwan Strait crisis (1954), Indo-China border war (1962) across the Himalayas, Sino-Soviet border clashes (1969) at the Ussuri river, Sino-Vietnam war (1979) across the mountains in the South, and second Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-96). All these conflicts show very little participation from the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and negligible involvement from the PLAN. The PLA consequently established itself as the key military decision maker.

However, since 1970s, China found the need to focus its attention on maritime military capabilities due to its involvement in the South China Sea (SCS) and its fierce competition for oceanic resources with other regional nations (Chengappas, 2018). This involves clashes with Vietnam over Paracel islands and Spratly islands; with Philippines over Spratly islands; with South Korea over Socotra rock; with Japan over Okinotori islands, and senkaku/Diaoyu islands. This clearly shows that regional security environment of China evolved its military strategy. The maritime disputes of China with other countries in South China Sea is depicted through map below:

**Figure 2- China's Dispute with its neighbours in South China Sea**



Source: South China Sea dispute: China's pursuit of resources 'unlawful', says US. (2020). *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53397673> (Accessed on 6 July, 2023)

There are many reasons for this change. Such as, it is China's vulnerability to various maritime issues- justifying claims to territory, regional waters, maritime space, preventing emergence of new threat from Japan and India and reducing America's military presence throughout East Asia and curtailing access of USA to East Asia's market, raw material, and investment choices (Chan, 2022). Therefore, China needs to attain regional dominance through aggregating sea power.

Development of China as sea power is not only a political rhetoric. China has clearly been confident and proactive in different oceanic security issues. Its presence in regional and international maritime space has been noticeable. There are various events

to justify China's intention of becoming sea power. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has continuously been exploring and directing exercises across Taiwan Strait and SCS. The China Coast Guard (CCG) have been navigating in the nearby waters to show its jurisdiction over the contested sea zone. Reclamation of land and militarization of offshore islands in the SCS has also caused stir among China's neighbor states. China presence is not only limited to Pacific but has now been felt in Indian Ocean too.

### **Constructivism and China's agenda to become a global power**

China is fast progressing on its way to become a global power and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is playing a very important role in achieving this goal. CCP is determined to transform the global order but in a very unique way. China's desire for maritime supremacy both regionally and globally was expressed by Hu Jintao in 2012 and is put to practice by Xi Jinping in 2013, encapsulating in his "Chinese Dream".

China's president Xi Jinping's vision of "Chinese Dream" address the historical anomaly as China sees itself as the heir of a millennium old civilization and Chinese leaders have promised their people to return to the grandeur of past dynasties, where China was the world leader in arts, culture, science and technology, and administration.

The commonly used terms to describe China as "Middle Kingdom" and "Central Kingdom" implies that China believes itself to be at the center of the global stage and has also developed a sense of superiority in the world. These descriptions may well be a factor that influences China's foreign policies.

The Century of humiliation stands more strongly behind "Chinese Dream". The Century of humiliation is referred to as period of intervention and subjugation of the Qing dynasty and the Republic of China by western countries and Japan from period between the start of the first opium war (1839) to the end of Chinese civil war (1949). In that period, China has lost large portion of its territories at the hands of foreign powers. This tale of loss and redemption has become part of China's founding narratives (Wang, 2012; Kaufman, 2011; Platt, 2019; Metcalf, 2020).

Deep seated insecurity lingers still today in China and are stoked by its leaders and its people to frame nation's current national concerns as well as its future national goals. Kaufman (2011) summarized three schools of thought prevalent in China about how it should position itself in the global order. The first school advocates for total non-involvement in the international system as the current system has not changed in its essence since the century of humiliation and therefore China remains vulnerable. This school of thought is probably the dangerous as it presents China as both defensive and dissatisfied rising power. The second school contends that China should use its growing power and influence to adapt to the current international system. This is the most productive school of thought as it paints China as satisfied rising power. The third school derives its elements from both of the above schools and contends that China can and should help transform the current international system into a different system in future that is more equitable, non-conflictual, and non-competitive. This view holds mixed responses. On one hand, it is in the interest of China and others who seeks peaceful transformation of the current international system while on the other this is conflictual with those who have different worldview than of China, thus creating continued suspicion. Also, China discusses its foreign policy in terms of 'core interests', suggesting various limits to this approach.

There is little consensus on China's future global position in the international system. China's grand strategy and the way it presents itself on world stage suggest that China is not satisfied that the current level of power is enough to overcome past humiliation shows and is still figuring what it's rising capabilities and international stature mean for its potential future role in the international system.

China's president Xi Jinping's words and deeds over the past decade suggests their desire to reorder the world order. His assertion for 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' envisions China on the center stage. Regaining of centrality on world stage involves reclamation of contested territories, to hold the position of preeminence in the Asia-Pacific, ensuring that other nations align their political, security, and economic interests with China's interests, and to embed its norms, values, and standards in international institutions (Economy, 2022). To achieve this ambition, Chinese leaders have transformed the way China does business on world stage.

### **Motivations behind China's Maritime Strategy**

Beijing's expanding economy, its increasing global influence, its growing military power, and increasing energy demand presents enormous challenges to Chinese leaders as they face structural, technological, and social changes. From the existing literature, it is found that China has some overarching concerns, which are mentioned below:

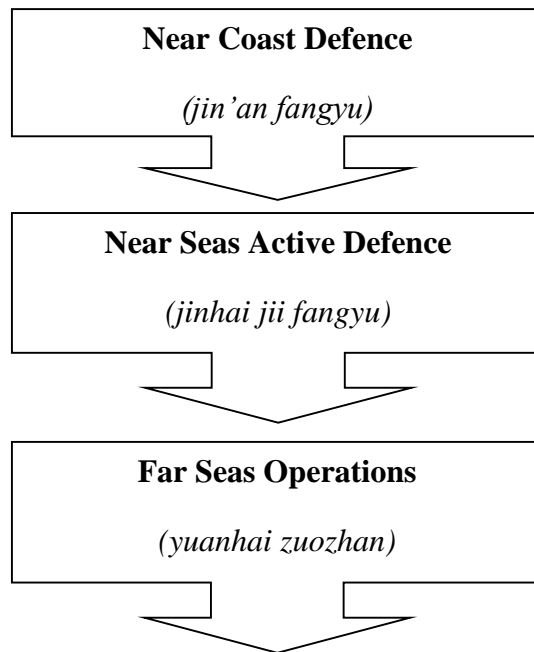
#### **➤ Maritime Supremacy**

The naval force is an important arm of country's armed forces and play a significant role in nation's security and development. Chinese navy in the past 70 years have undergone major changes given the strategic environment. In accordance with the strategic environment, the navy must not only safeguard China's offshore territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests but also protect overseas interest. From the perspective of mission, the navy has to deal with traditional as well as non-traditional maritime security threats. However, the navy must "have the ability to win maritime wars, deter wars, and shape the maritime security environment" (Science of Military Strategy, 2020: 359).



China has adopted three steps approach in its quest for maritime supremacy:

**Figure - Approach for maritime supremacy**



Source: Created by researcher from the China's defense White papers

The strategy of near coast defence was in force from 1949 to 1980s. The strategy of near seas active defence was proposed by Deng Xiaoping and further enforced by Liu Huaqing. The near-seas active defence was proposed to cover the first island chain and the oceanic water adjacent to the outer rim of the first island chain (Parmar, 2021). The strategy of far seas operations was in force since late 1990s.

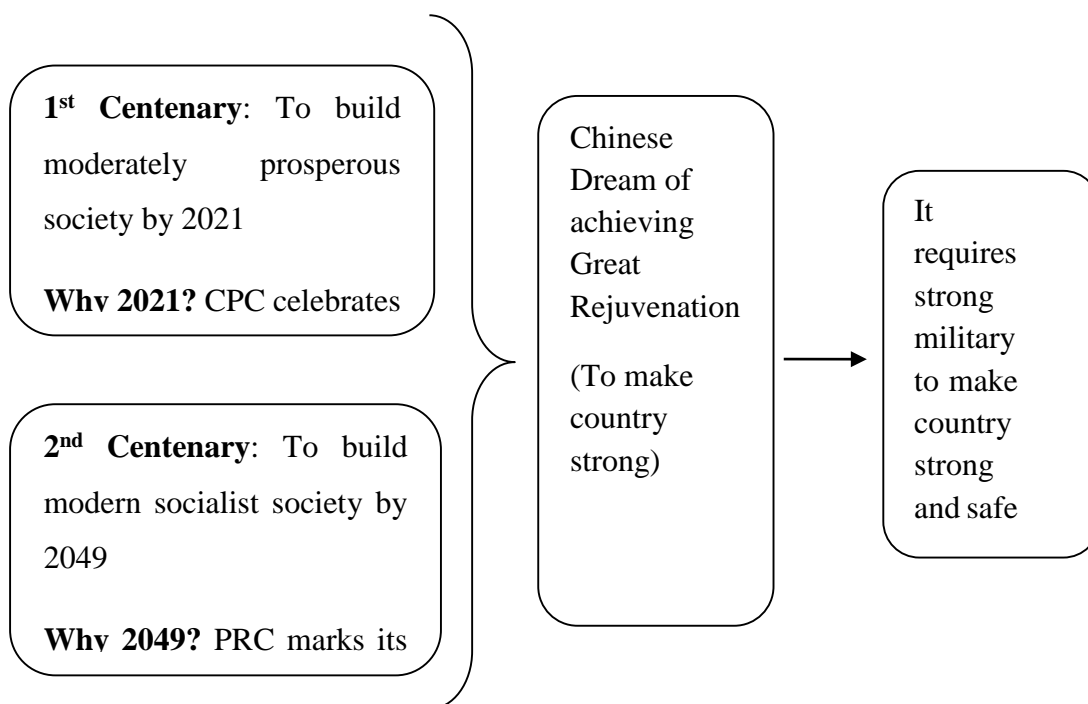
➤ **Protection of National Security**

Despite increasing comprehensive national strength, international stature, influence, core competitiveness, and risk resistance capacity, China still faces complex security threats. The Defense white paper 2015 identifies new threat as hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism. The 2019 China's White paper titled '*China's National Defense in the New Era*' stated that the "international security system and order are undermined by growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism, and constant regional conflicts and wars". The papers points out some pertinent issues and China's risk and challenges that involves: US 'rebalancing' strategy, Japan's military

and security policy, China’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights in the South China Sea, Taiwan reunification, maritime concerns like piracy, natural calamities, security of SLOCs, security of overseas interests like energy and resources, and rampant regional terrorism, separatism, and extremism. All these have created instability and uncertainty and therefore, China has a responsibility to protect its territorial integrity, development interests, and national unification as China is in important phase of strategic opportunity for development.

➤ **Achieving the national strategic goal of “two Centenaries”**

**Figure - National Strategic goal of “two Centenaries”**



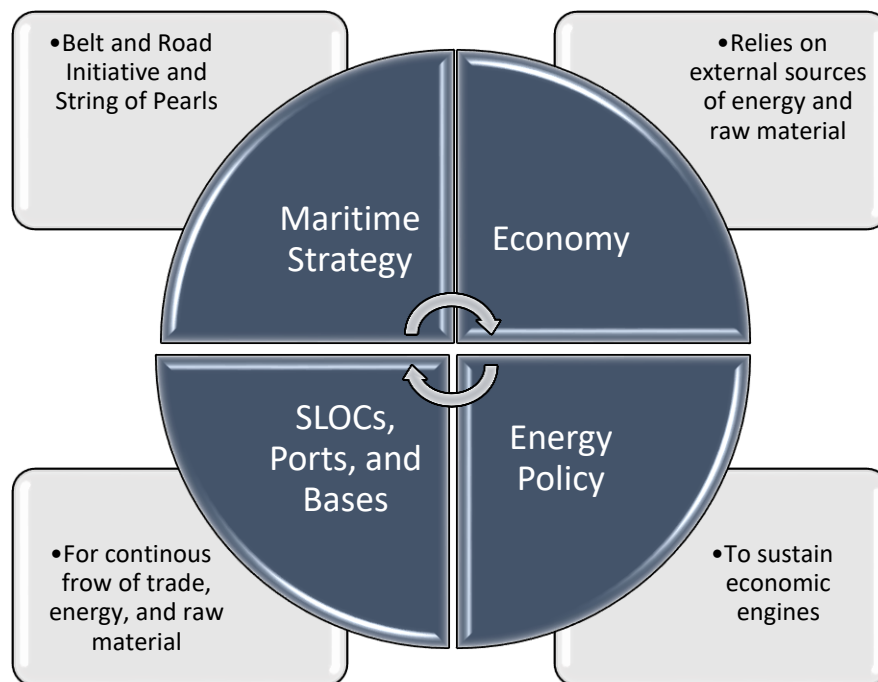
➤ **Regime Survival**

It is the foremost concern of China and party leaders are well aware that their success and survival depends upon the satisfaction of the Chinese people and the party’s ability to protect its national interest. The CCP has maintained authoritarian regime amid huge economic and social reforms and expectation are that the government survival won’t be threatened as long as the economy continues to grow, reforms keep on track, and rising nationalism be kept manageable

➤ **Domestic Stability**

Domestic politics drives China's foreign and economic policies. Economic development is the pre requisite for all major forces. All the China's major strategic concerns are based on one common criteria: Economy. The economy is China's biggest asset as well as its worst weakness, therefore making it crucially important in Chinese policies and strategies. Since energy is the foundation of economy, China's economic policy is reliant on the effectiveness of its energy policy. This is how and why China's BRI and the String of Pearls relates to its Grand National strategy.

**Figure 3- Interdependence of Economy and Maritime Security**

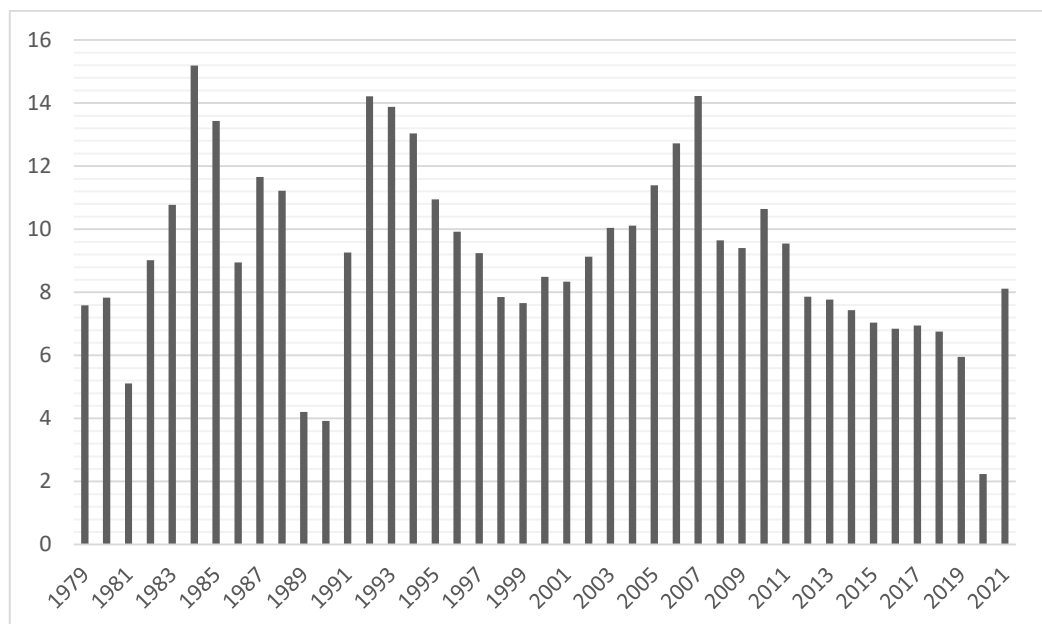


➤ **Energy Security**

Energy security is a factor in formulation and execution of China's maritime strategy. It entails rising demand and need for supplies, many of which are located abroad and the naval capability to protect the SLOCs across which imported energy resources must be transported. Since the introduction of economic reforms in 1978 under Deng

Xiaoping, China has witnessed average GDP growth of 9.5% through 2018. China's economy is fueled by a rising demand of energy.

**Figure 4- China's Annual Real GDP Growth (1979-2021)**



**Source:** IMF, *World Economic Outlook (October 2022) - Real GDP growth (imf.org)* ; *Macrotrends, China Economic Growth 1960-2022 | MacroTrends. Prepared by researcher*

➤ **To mitigate ‘Malacca Dilemma’**

As maritime trade becomes an important element of China's economy, safety of SLOCs becomes crucial. Much of China's consumer goods, raw material, resources are transported through seas and China is heavily dependent on sea trade. Hu Jintao's articulation of “Malacca Dilemma” has bemoaned China's sea lane vulnerability.

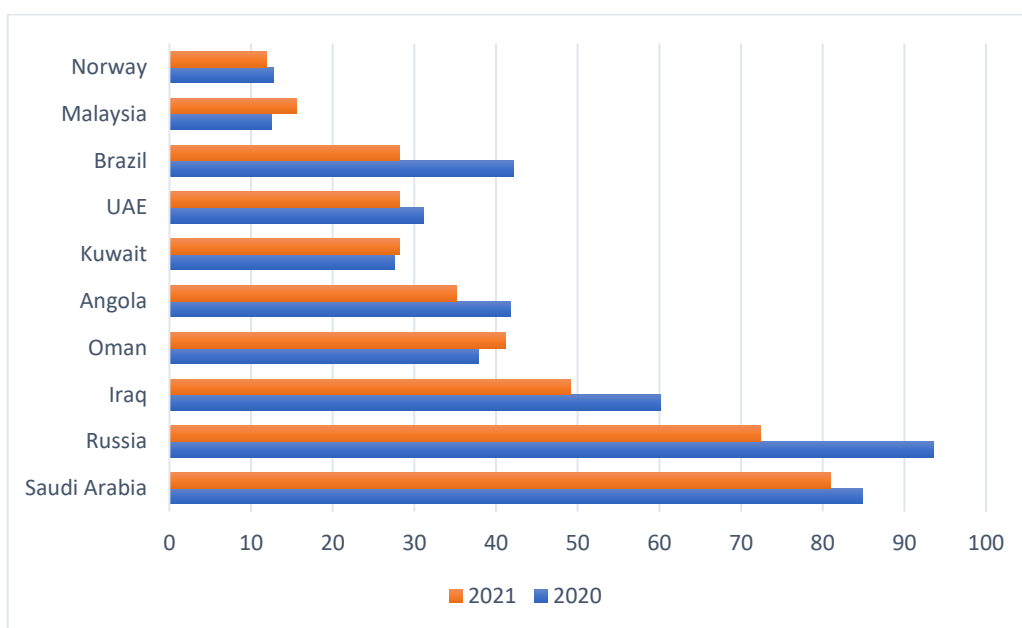
The term Malacca Dilemma” (*Maliujia Kunju*) was originally coined by Hu Jintao in 2003 at Chinese Communist Party (CCP's) economic work conference (Lanteigne, 2008). The phrase was coined in light of China's increasing dependence on narrow strait for oil imports. Trade security has assumed great importance to China in terms of economic policy and strategic thinking. As China continues to immerse itself in global market, concerns about security and stability of its trading routes have assumed high priority.

The Strait of Malacca is very crucial pass linking Indian Ocean with Pacific Ocean. Any attempt of blockage or interference or interdiction would not only cost China but other powers like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea whose trade pass through it. For China, the Strait of Malacca is a lifeline for its international trade and so its safety.

➤ **Securing Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs)**

The transport by sea is the most viable mode of energy supply for China. The geopolitical strategy dubbed as Belt and Road Initiative and String of Pearls arise because China’s dependence on foreign oil is becoming a major concern for its energy needs. In order to sustain economic growth, China relies heavily upon external sources of energy and raw materials. In order to have continuous flow of trade, energy, and raw material requires SLOCs, thus their security becomes vitally important as they support China’s energy policy and is key driving force behind its maritime strategy.

**Figure 5- Top Suppliers of Crude Oil to China (2020-2021, in million metric tons)**



**Source:** Prepared by researcher from the source *Statista*, Retrieved from China: oil imports by country 2021 | Statista (Accessed on 17 October, 2022)

The chart displays China’s top ten crude oil suppliers and it is to be observed that route to most of its suppliers passes through sea lanes, the protection of which is crucial for China.

## **Maritime Strategic Guidelines as per China's Defense White Papers of 2015 and 2019**

China since 1998 has issued nine white papers but it was only in the year 2015 that China's first ever military strategy was unveiled. The China's White Paper of 2015 mentions that the world is going through unprecedented changes and China is at a crucial juncture in its reforms and development. For realizing Chinese *Dream of Great National Rejuvenation*, China will "unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion". The 2019 White paper titled '*China's National Defense in the New Era*' identified nine fundamental goals of China's national defense in the new era, all of which PLAN would be deeply involved in:

- To deter and resist aggression.
- To safeguard national political security, the people's security and social stability.
- To oppose and contain "Taiwan independence"
- To crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as "Tibet independence" and the creation of "East Turkistan"
- To safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security
- To safeguard China's maritime rights and interests
- To safeguard China's security interests in outer space, electromagnetic space and cyberspace
- To safeguard China's overseas interest
- To support the sustainable development of the country

The sixth and eighth goal requires more scrutiny as it gives a passport for the armed forces especially the PLAN to build capacity and capability to cater for maritime rights and interests.

## **How China is achieving its goal to become a dominant Sea Power?**

### **Island Chain Strategy**

The Island Chain is a geographical security strategy used to show a defensive/ offensive outline by connecting islands and other big land masses together. This concept was drafted by United States in the 1940s as a way to enhance its security interest in the Northeast Asia and to deter Soviet Union's and People Republic of China's maritime approaches. The United State's foreign policy statesman John Foster Dulles is attributed with designating the strategy during the Korean war to contain Soviet Union and People's Republic of China. The Pact proposed to surround them with naval bases in the Pacific Ocean. The island chain has grown to three: The first chain stretches from the kurils island, the Japanese home island, Ryuku island, Taiwan, Phillippines, and Malay Peninsula. The second chain comprises of islands of Japan, Guam, Marianas, Micronesia. The third is focused on Hawaii (Vorndick, 2018; Espena and Bomping, 2020; Umetsu, 1996).

**Figure 6- Ports controlled by US, UK, and China along the Island Chains**



Source: Seidel, J. (2019). China's 'island chain' plans: These islands define Beijing's growing ambitions. *The Advertiser*. Retrieved from <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/world/chinas-island-chain-plans-these-islands-define-beijings-growing-ambitions/news-story/1cc81a02eda9761533405ae46df2f469> (Accessed on 6 July, 2023)

The Island chains are not officially demarcated and there is contest regarding its boundaries. This strategy did not become a significant theme in US foreign policy during the Cold war. However, with the growing importance of maritime area in strategic affairs, this policy remains central to US policy makers and military analysts.

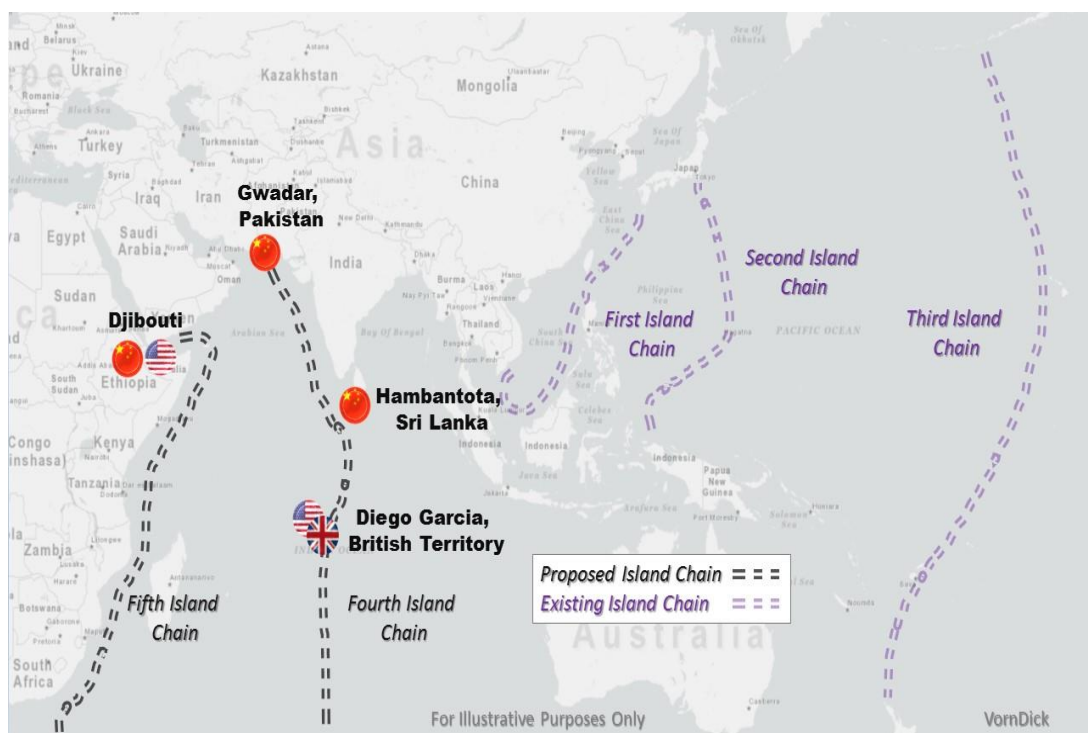
### **China and the Island Chain**

China's presence in the Pacific and Indian Ocean is a cause of concern for analysts around the world. It is argued that a fourth and fifth island chain should be added for overall understanding of China's maritime interests. The fourth and fifth island chains



are located in the Indian Ocean to highlight that China's interests are no longer limited to Pacific but has expanded to the Indian Ocean as well. The fourth island chain starts from the Gwadar port, then running parallel to India's and Sri Lanka's west coast, southwards to Hambantota port, passing Diego Garcia. The fifth chain commences from Gulf of Tadjoura in Djibouti, passes through Gulf of Aden, outlining Horn of Africa, and then southwards to east coast of Africa (Vorndick, 2018).

**Figure 7- The Island Chains**



Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative

### **China in the First Island Chain**

In order to become a dominant power in Asia, China needs to first become the preeminent power within first island chain. This achievement is necessary as China is heavily dependent on strategic waterways for its maritime trade which is the requirement of its economic engines to run smoothly. According to *Annual report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*, China has been setting up communication, island, ports and aviation facilities, and barracks in the Spratly Island since 2018. Securing a solid and permanent

military presence in the first island chain would provide China control of significant maritime transportation routes in Asia, and help in securing itself a dominant position.

China has managed to establish much presence in the first island chain and its naval planners are hoping to deny adversary the ability to operate within the first chain during war or conflict. To take hold of first chain completely, China is required to establish a permanent presence in Taiwan.

### **The Next Target: Second Island Chain**

It has been speculated that once China holds its power in the first island chain, its next frontier would be the second island chain. Solidification of China's power in second island chain would give Beijing control over the central part of the Pacific Ocean, which fills in as strategic military and economic frontier. America's withdrawal from Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 provides vacuum for China to increase its influence in the western Pacific. The case of Soloman Island is one such illustration where Soloman Island switched its recognition from Taiwan to China in Sep 2019. There are six island nations that used to keep official relations with Taiwan. Soloman Island's switch gives a big blow to Taiwan as it is the largest among the six island nations and soon after Soloman Island switch, Kiribati followed the suit. China's fascinating appeal in trade, aid, and investment allows these island nations to achieve their development aspirations (Zhang, 2019).

China promises to offer economic assistance for infrastructure development to Micronesia in Dec 2019. Notably, Micronesia could prove to be a strategic location for Beijing to counter USA's military presence in Guam (Hadano, 2019). In the second island chain, China is contesting for its control. As pointed in a report, China is working to extend its influence in the region surrounding second island chain (Seidel, 2019). Despite the fact that China allures the Pacific islands with guarantee of economic assistance, they are still traditionally linked to the US.

### **Third, Fourth and Fifth Island Chain**

China operates as blue water navy within the third island chain. The third island chain runs through the centre of the Pacific Ocean passing by the Hawaiian Islands American

Samoa, and Fiji before ending at New Zealand. In this circuit, New Zealand, Tonga, and Hawaii are key links. Tonga, a small nation demands special attention as this nation has large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 676,401 sq km and hence forms a fertile ground for Chinese investments and interests (Lt Col Sodhi, 2022).

Originally, there were three island chains that lie in the Pacific Ocean. Later, it has been proposed to include fourth and fifth in the Indian Ocean. The proposed fourth island chain cover Lakshadweep islands, Maldives, Diego Garcia, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Gwadar in Pakistan. China has managed to hold control over Gwadar and Hambantota port.

The fifth island chain proposed to originate in Gulf of Aden and passing around Horn of Africa, along the East African coastline, passing through Mozambique channel towards South Africa, encircling Chinese overseas naval bases in Doraleh and Djibouti.

Although the fourth and fifth island chain are proposal and haven't been implemented yet. The time is right to do so given China's ambitious BRI and security agreements with strategically located Solomon Islands (Kabutaulaka, 2022) and the Vanuato islands (Hurst, 2022).

### **China in the Pacific Ocean**

#### **➤ China's power projection in the Pacific Ocean**

In the past few years, China took various efforts to dig and recover parts of land and sea in South China Sea. China has deployed anti ship and anti aircraft missile system on the Spratly islands, and developed military infrastructure like runways, communication infrastructure, support buildings, and loading piers on various other artificial islands. No doubt, its land development has serious security implications. The potential capability to deploy aircraft and missile system to any of its constructed islands incomprehensively strengthen China's capacity to project power, expanding its functional reach south and east by as much as 1000 Km (620 miles) (Council on Foreign Relations).

➤ **Island Building in the Pacific Ocean**

China's most substantial development is visible in the Pacific Ocean, specifically in South China Sea where China is building island chains. According to U.S. Defense department report 2018, China has reclaimed in excess of 3200 acres of land since late 2015 accounting for land which is more than any other claimant altogether in the last 40 years. China has twenty outposts in the Paracel Islands- Antelope Reef, Bombay Reef, Drummond Island, Duncan Islands, Lincoln Island, Middle Island, Money Island, North Island, North Reef, Observation Bank, Pattle Island, Quanfu Island, Robert Island, South Island, South Sand, Tree Island, Triton Island, West Sand, Woody Island, and Yagong Island and seven in the Spratlys- Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reefs, Hughes Reef, Johnson Reef, Mischief Reef, and Subi Reef. Satellite images has shown tremendous activity of China on Subi Reef, Mischief Reef and Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratlys that involves possible development of helipads, airstrips, docks, radars, and surveillance structures. Experts view such China's expansion of building artificial islands and infrastructure development as potential power projection capabilities in future.

**Figure 8- Fiery Cross Reef (Before July 29, 2009)**



**Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative-CSIS**

**Figure 9- Fiery Cross Reef (After March 27, 2020)**



**Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative-CSIS**

**Figure 10- Subi Reef (Before July 27, 2012)**



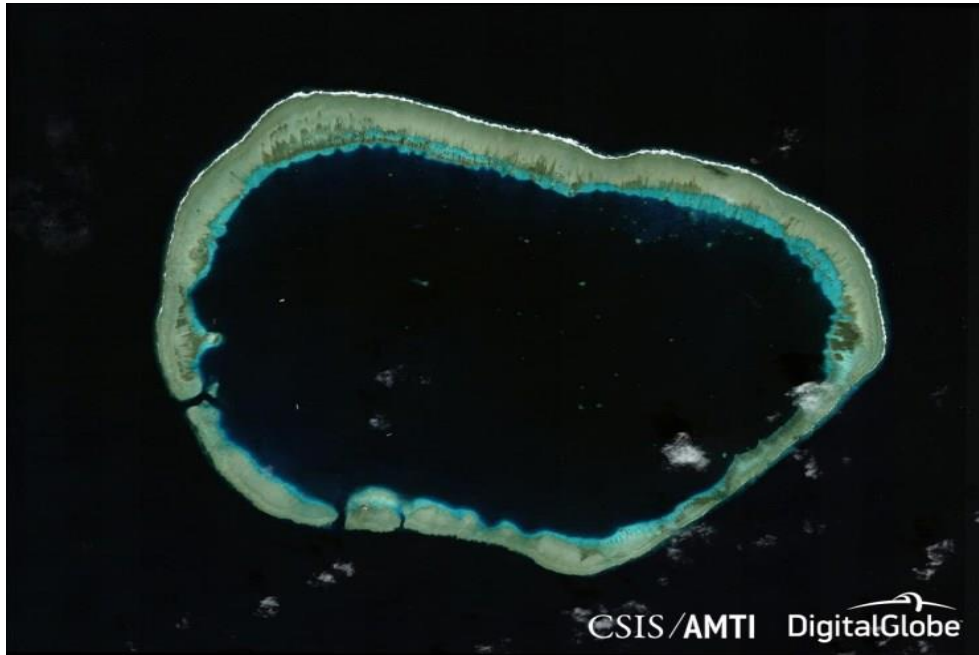
**Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative-CSIS**

**Figure 11- Subi Reef (After March 27, 2020)**



**Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative-CSIS**

**Figure 12- Mischief Reef (Before January 24, 2012)**



**Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative-CSIS**

**Figure 13- Mischief Reef (After April 23, 2020)**



**Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative-CSIS**

➤ **China's military aggression in the Indo-Pacific**

Apart from building artificial islands and reclaiming land and seas, China is actively using military and economic means to bully its neighbors, advancing unlawful maritime claims, threaten maritime route, and destabilizing territory along its territory. According to US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, “[China] [is] increasingly uses its artificial islands as bases for harassment operations- to curtail access of Southeast Asian coastal states to offshore oil, gas, and fisheries” (US Department of State).

As the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) expand its overseas economic and security interests by formulating its policies under One Belt One Road Initiative, it seeks to expand its overseas military reach to protect those interests. In particular, the PRC seeks to build up global logistics and infrastructure development around the world to allow People's Liberation Army (PLA) to project and support military power at more distant places (ANI, 2022). It use commercial development at host countries for its own strategic interests in order to support military activities and conceals the genuine motivation behind its establishment abroad. For instance, for a very long time, Chinese officials stated that they have no intention to seek overseas maritime bases- up until they officially started a base in Djibouti in 2017. According to PRCs officials, Djibouti base is constructed as logistics facility, despite the fact that PLA navy marines are positioned there equipped with armored vehicles and artillery (US Department of State).

By providing access to and control of ports and other infrastructure to China, nations may find that they unconsciously end up in supporting China's military expansion and thus its revisionist geopolitical objectives. Experts' view that Chinese military presence could threaten regional stability. Further, it could impact the possibility for the peaceful settlement of disputes, the advancement of maritime security, and the freedom of navigation.

China's most substantial military expansion is felt in the South China Sea. Its expansion is not limited to this region and has expanded further from Chinese mainland. By safeguarding its presence across the region, China can use these locations as tools of



intimidation and coercion to states lying around and could undermine their sovereignty to exercise their rights as provided in international law.

➤ **Claiming offshore resources**

China has claimed over various islands and their adjacent waters in the South China Sea by building naval patrol and developing the islands (BBC News). China's sovereignty claims is resulting into various disputes in the region, challenging its security environment. China's sweeping claims have generated response from other claimants over the territory- Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei. China's claims to resources across large part of the South China Sea are widely reprimanded as unlawful. China uses intimidation as a tool to sabotage the sovereign rights of navigation of Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea.

China claims more than 90% of the South China Sea and its excessive claims are based on the U-shaped nine-dash line<sup>30</sup> (the graphic representation of which is shown below).

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<sup>30</sup> To read more, visit Zhen, L. (2016). What's China's 'nine-dash line' and why has it created so much tension in the South China Sea? *South China Morning Post*. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1988596/whats-chinas-nine-dash-line-and-why-has-it-created-so> (Accessed on 27 July, 2023)

**Figure 14- China's Nine-dash line**



Source: Pathak, N. (2020). Indonesia and the South China Sea: Between the Nine-Dash Line and an EEZ. *Global politics*, CWA# 353. Retrieved from [https://globalpolitics.in/view\\_cir\\_articles.php?ArticleNo=353&url=Southeast%20Asia&recordNo=438](https://globalpolitics.in/view_cir_articles.php?ArticleNo=353&url=Southeast%20Asia&recordNo=438) (Accessed on 25 July, 2023)

U.S. Department of State conducted a study on PRC's overseas claims in the South China Sea (SCS) and the report of the same is released through series 'Limits in the Seas' on January 12, 2022. The study concluded that the People's Republic of China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea as unlawful and are inconsistent with international law and greatly undermine the UN convention on the Law of the Sea. On this basis, the US and other states have rejected China's claims as they are against "rule-based international maritime order" (Limits in the Seas, U.S. Department of State, 2022).

### **China's Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean over the Years**

Over the years, China was engaged in missions to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia which provided China with the opportunity to engage with the IO littoral

countries and island nations. China's interaction based on anti-piracy mission allows it emerge as a strong partner for IO littorals and islands.

Like many nations, China has been a victim and respondent of piracy attacks off Somalia. Since 2009, China has been actively participating and conducting anti-piracy operations in the waters of Gulf of Aden. Since 2012, there have been no successful Somali pirate attack. Despite this fact, China's naval presence is growing in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it is time to reflect on China's achievements through anti-piracy missions over these years; Has these operations helped China to enlarge its global naval presence. Finally, what are the implications of China's naval presence in the IOR? Erickson and Strange (2015) analyses China's naval presence on the account of anti-piracy missions and views that China has gained both hard and soft naval benefits. Fighting off piracy has helped PLAN to accumulate operational experience and that too Far Seas operations. According to Beijing's Ministry of Defense, till 2015, PLAN had undertaken more than 800 escort convoys with the help of 16,000 sailors, 1,300 marines, 42 helicopters and 30 PLAN ships (Lei, 2015). Soft power has been accumulated by establishing semi-regular access points or bases for logistical antipiracy support. Antipiracy diplomacy composes the important component of China's maritime diplomatic rise. According to Erickson and Strange (2015), PLAN has docked over 120 times in 6 years (from 2009-2015). The port calls are mostly for ship and personnel replenishment, friendly visits, overhaul, and return stops. Also, China has developed ports where Chinese antipiracy warships have been docked ashore during antipiracy operations. Examples include Hambantota and Colombo port in Sri Lanka, Lamu port in Kenya, Karachi and Gwadar port in Pakistan, and Kyaukphyu port in Myanmar.

China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative further provided an additional platform to collaborate with IO littorals on economic, diplomatic, and military issues. This is elaborated in brief in next section.

### **China's Ambitions in the Indian Ocean**

The advent of new geopolitical framework- the Indo-Pacific has pushed the Indian Ocean back into limelight with great power competition. The new framework includes both Indian and Pacific Ocean. There is overlapping of acronyms showcasing great

power interests across the Indian and Pacific Ocean like Asia-Pacific, Indo-Pacific, and Asia-Indo Pacific. Key players involved in this are United States of America, Australia, Japan, India, and China. Each power has invented its own term to give impetus to these terms like India's Mausam, Japan's Confluence of Seas, China's Maritime Silk Road, and USA's 'Two Ocean' doctrine suggesting rapid oceanic convergence. The Pacific Ocean is where the rivalry between the US and China interlocks whereas the regional rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean is the new great game.

The Indian Ocean has strategic significance in China's policy. As a result, China follows 'Two Ocean' strategy<sup>31</sup> to exercise control over the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. The Indian Ocean is the pathway for China's raw material and energy security while the Pacific sustains its export-led economy. According to Sun and Payette (2017:2), the two ocean strategy aims to gain back control of the waters surrounding China as a symbolic end to its 'Century of Humiliation'. Kaplan (2009) views that this idea is not possible because Chinese Navy is neither capable nor adequate to achieve this objective in the mid to late 2000s. The earlier talks were mere projections. However, with the implementation of BRI, the strategy has once again gained relevance. In the sections above, a detailed discussion on Chinese activities in the Pacific Ocean has been done. This section uncovers the underlying China's maritime strategy towards the Indian Ocean.

### **Geostrategic Importance of the Indian Ocean**

Throughout history, sea borne trade routes have always been efficiently chosen over land routes. Mahan writes that "travel and traffic by sea have always been easier and cheaper than land routes". Fernández-Armesto (2006) too believes that sea trade is more economical than by land ones.

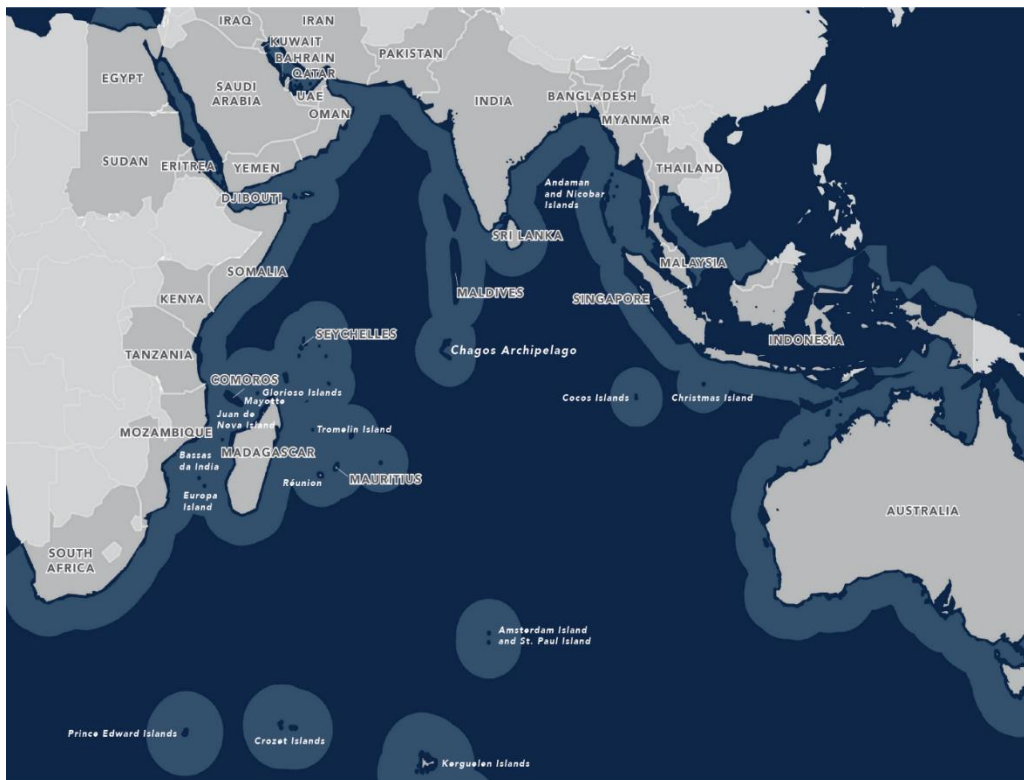
The Indian Ocean encompasses a vast geographical area spanning from the Strait of Malacca and the western coast of Australia in the east to Mozambique in the west. This expansive region includes the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal

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<sup>31</sup> The "Two-Ocean" Strategy (双海战略) began to appear in the literature around 2005 as a pre-conceptualized project set by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and representing a strategic objective to achieve.

as well as sub-regions such as South Asia, South east Asia, Middle East and various islands dotting from Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the east to the Comoros islands in the west.

**Figure 15- The Indian Ocean Strategic Map**

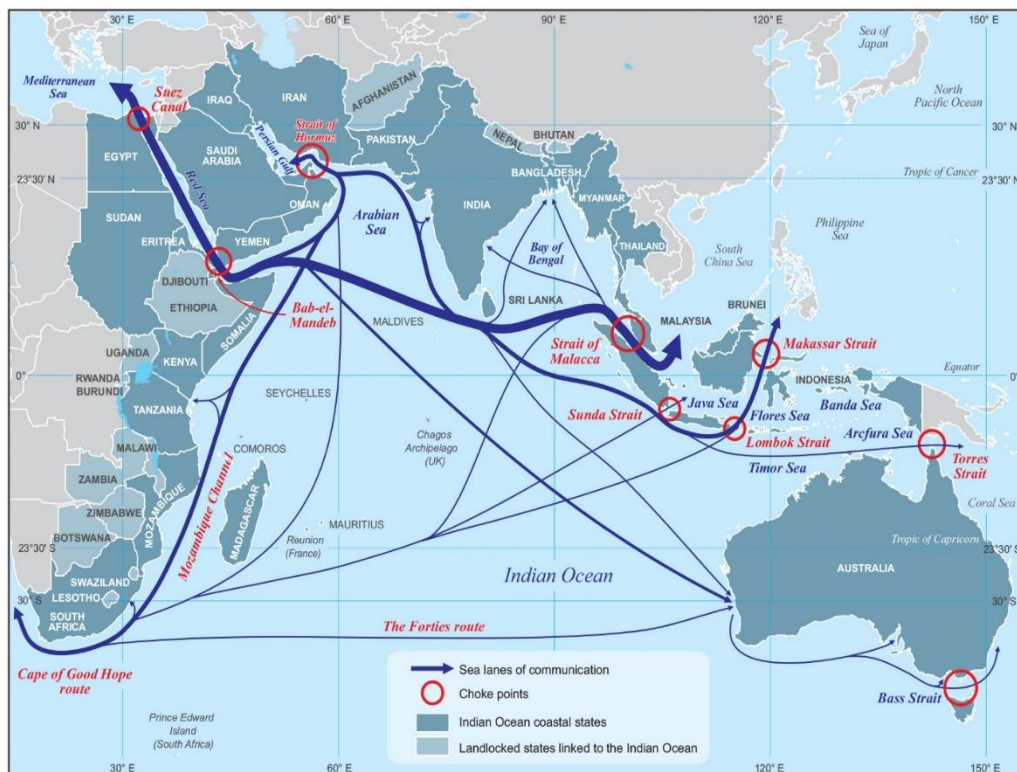


Source: Baruah, D.M.; Labh, N.; Greely, J. (2023). Mapping the Indian Ocean Region. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/15/mapping-indian-ocean-region-pub-89971> (Accessed on 8 July, 2023)

Notably, the region is diverse in topography and culture, the Indian Ocean holds immense global significance in trade, security, energy, container traffic, and geopolitics. The ocean hosts crucial oil shipping lanes and strategic navigational choke points like Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Mozambique channel, and Strait of Babel Mandeb lies in the Indian Ocean. These strategic passages witness a significant percentage of global resources and trade flows, solidifying the Indian Ocean as the world's busiest and most vital maritime region. The most contested part in the IO is its

choke points.<sup>32</sup> Out of world's seven important choke points, four lies in the IO, as depicted in Figure.

**Figure 16- Choke Points, SLOCs, Littorals in the Indian Ocean**



Source: Venter, D. (2017). India and Africa: Maritime Security and India's Strategic Interests in the Western Indian Ocean. In Iain Walker, Manuel Joao Ramos, and Preben Kaarsholm (Eds.), *Fluid Networks and Hegemonic Powers in the Western Indian Ocean* (pp. 131-167). Lisboa: Centro de Estudos Internacionais

The first choke point is the Strait of Malacca which lies between Malaysia, Singapore, and the Indonesian Island of Sumatra. It connects Southeast Asia and western Pacific to the Indian Ocean. The second choke point is the Strait of Hormuz. It is the only passage that connects Persian Gulf to the IO. The third choke point is the Strait of Bab

<sup>32</sup> Choke points means narrow channel of shipping which usually connect one place to other. These points are important for the movement of goods and people mainly for the economic reasons. As a result, they have lot of strategic importance. Hence, spot for shipping traffic jam. If in any situation, these bottlenecks gets choked or become unavailable, countries would suffer huge loss as alternative route is usually long and expensive.

el Mandeb, lying between Eritrea and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula. It connects Red sea to the IO. The fourth chokepoint and another key trading route that lies in the Indian Ocean is the Mozambique channel between Madagascar and Mozambique, connecting Cape of Good hope to Middle east and Asia.

The economic, military, political, and strategic importance of the Indian Ocean is directly linked to its trade and sub-regional significance. Serves as a vital trading hub, it connects Middle East to Southeast Asia to East Asia, Europe, and the US. Disruption along its trade routes would not only impact major economies like India, China, Japan, US, South Korea, but also have far reaching consequences for the global economy and energy security.

The geopolitical struggle in the Indian Ocean revolves around the ability to maintain military presence near the key choke points. Power projection in this region enable countries to safeguard and potentially disrupt the maritime channels known as Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs)<sup>33</sup> during both peacetime and war. Control over these crucial choke points grants a navy the authority to regulate all points of entry and exit into the region. Mahan (1890: 26) also put emphasis on protection of trade routes. Therefore, he warned that “the ships that thus sail to and fro must have secure ports to which to return, and must, as far as possible, be followed by the protection of their country throughout the voyage”. For him, trade routes through sea are the most perfect reason to present sea. Due to these lines of travel, Holland enjoyed commercial greatness.

Beside, controlling the entry and exit points, the proximity to these choke points also helps nations to develop maritime domain awareness as surveillance and reconnaissance are crucial for keeping track of an adversary’s submarine movement. Baruah (2021) points out that “a nation that boasts a strong security profile in the Indian Ocean will be an instrumental partner for the many littoral countries along its coastline, spanning Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia”.

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<sup>33</sup> Sea lines of communication (abbreviated as SLOC) is a term describing the primary maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces. It is generally used in reference to naval operations to ensure that SLOCs are open, or in times of war, to close them.

The Indian Ocean Region is also rich in diversity and its size and diversity has geoeconomic significance. In the East, it has resource rich Africa, in the Middle East, it has energy sources, Labor market and Manufacturing industries in South Asia. The region has all the elements that is required to run the engines of the economy. Thereby, peace and stability in the Indian Ocean is crucially significant for global economy. Another reason for strategic stability in the IOR is because of its nuclearized status.

### **India and China in the Indian Ocean**

India and China are engaged in the strategic competition with each other since long time. The conflict of territories in modern time is moving towards the conflict of energy and natural resources. The reason for this is that aspirations for great power status require economic development and thereby quest for energy security. This particular factor have compelled them “to redirect their gazes from land to the sea” (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2008:41). It can be said therefore, that their maritime interests are natural outgrowth of their impressive economic growth and thirst for energy resources. Furthermore, the simultaneous entry of both into the nautical realm also presents worrisome picture. Throughout history, insecurities intensify naval competition when major powers depend on common nautical space. Kaplan (2010: 9-10) writes that “if we are entering a phase of history in which several nations will share dominance of the high seas, rather than one in the recent past, then the Indian Ocean will play center stage to this more dynamic and unstable configuration”.

### **China’s Indian Ocean Strategy**

China’s Indian Ocean Strategy has been well-documented through its defense white papers, indicating a narrative shift “China does not station troops or set up military bases in foreign country” to “distant power projection” (as indicated through defense white papers from the year 1998 to 2008).

China’s IOR strategy can be viewed through three dimensions: Economic, Military, and Diplomatic



➤ **Economic**

China recognises the significance of its financial strength in a region comprising vulnerable and fragile nation like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. These IO littorals are prone to military coups, possess fragile economies, weak political structures and institutions and have been historically susceptible to external influences. To engage with these countries, China has undertaken massive infrastructure projects as part of its BRI, which Chinese President Xi Jinping has referred to as a “win-win endeavor for all parties involved.” Each of these nations are participant in the initiative, with China investing in infrastructure development and adopting an unsustainable debt policy (Grare and Samaan, 2022). Similarly, China has extended its influence to Indian Ocean littorals like Seychelles and Madagascar through lucrative infrastructure assistance (Brewster, 2018).

The aim of these projects is to addresses China’s concerns over protecting its SLOCs by providing alternative transport routes, normalizing China’s presence in the Indian Ocean, and enhancing its oversight of maritime routes. However, despite these efforts, the economic success of these projects remain uncertain and there is limited evidence of meaningful progress in the host nations. Nevertheless, the initiative presents an opportunity for China to wield substantial influence in the IOR. Furthermore, the debt traps resulting from these infrastructure projects strengthen China’s control over internal politics and policymaking in these countries, offering China a chance to influence the narrative within the Indian Ocean Region.

➤ **Military**

China’s pursuit of regional hegemony is underpinned by its robust military presence in the Indian Ocean Region. This emphasis on the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy has become a central focus of China’s upcoming military strategy. China’s Defense White Paper of 2008 argues that, “Struggles for strategic resources, strategic locations, and strategic domination have intensified”, underscoring the urgent necessity to develop extensive naval capabilities. China’s Defense White Paper of 2015 ambiguously stated that “China will work to seize the strategic initiative in military competition”. Consequently, China’s military footprint in the IOR has witnessed

substantial growth. Notably, in a significant development, China deployed a nuclear submarine in the IOR for the first time for operational patrol from 13 December, 2013 to 12 February, 2014 (Unnithan, 2014). India closely monitors Chinese warship and Indian satellites have observed the presence of 14 Chinese Navy warships in the IOR from the year 2013 to 2017 (Sen, 2017). More recently, China has docked its satellite tracking ship or so called ‘spy ship’ at Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port in 2022( The Economic Times). It clearly shows that China is India’s new maritime neighbor, who has the capacity and capability to conduct near seas operations as well as far off in the IOR.

China’s involvement in evacuation operations in Yemen, its establishment of a naval facility in Djibouti, and agreements for military access to ports in IOR nations of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, accompanied by joint military exercises with host countries, indicate China’s long- term objectives in the IOR (Grare and Samaan, 2022). Moreover, China’s assertion that “*The Indian Ocean is not India’s Ocean*” (The EurAsian Times, 2023) further clarifies China’s position in the IOR. China’s underwater intelligence gathering and surveying activities suggest China’s desire to develop offensive and counteroffensive capabilities, particularly in the event of larger crisis and to avert potential sea-based blockage of its commercial routes (Choudhary, 2023). In summary, a significant naval presence plays a crucial role for China in safeguarding trade and projecting economic strength in the IOR.

#### ➤ **Diplomatic**

China has firmly established its position in the IORs multinational forums using diplomatic maneuvers. It has taken proactive measures to address the increasing economic and security needs of the Indian Ocean littorals and island nations. China has enjoyed “all-weather friendship” with Pakistan (Kumar, 2023; The Hindu, 2015 and updated 2021) due to their share enmity with India, while also becoming Bangladesh’s largest partner for the textiles imports and significant arms supplier (Anwar, 2022). Additionally, China has engaged with Indian Ocean island nations like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius, recognizing their importance in its maritime trade routes. The implementation of China’s Belt and Road Initiative has further strengthened

its partnership with Indian Ocean littorals. China's growing political influence<sup>34</sup> in these nations underscores the significance these littorals hold for China. This support has allowed China to exert greater influence in regional forums like Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Commission (COI). For the first time on 21 November, 2022, China hosted Indian Ocean Region Forum in Kunming under the theme "*Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy*". The event is seen as China's attempt to expand its reach in the region. Pandey (2022) argues that "By organising an IOR Forum, in the garb of shared development, China intends to widen and assert its sphere of influence in this strategic maritime region".

In summary, China is employing its both hard and soft power mechanisms to gain leverage in the Indian Ocean Region. Economic might provide China with diplomatic and military maneuvers. Through the above mentioned initiatives, China is aggressively advancing its strategy to establish its dominance as the regional hegemon.

### **China's Initiatives in the Indian Ocean**

#### **➤ String of Pearls**

The term "String of Pearls" was first introduced by Booz Allen Hamilton in a report titled "*Energy Futures in Asia*", describing China's evolving maritime strategy (Ahmad, 2017). According to Christopher J. Pehrson (2006: 3), Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Air Force, "Each 'Pearl' in the 'String of Pearls' is a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence. An upgraded military facility in Hainan Island is a 'Pearl'. An upgraded airstrip on Woody Island is a 'Pearl'. A container shipping facility in Bangladesh (Chittagong) is a 'Pearl'. A deep water port in Myanmar (Sittwe) is a 'Pearl'. A navy base in Pakistan (Gwadar) is a 'Pearl'".

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<sup>34</sup> For detailed explanation, see chapter 5: China's political influence in South Asian Region.

Figure 17- Chinese Pearls in the Indian Ocean



Source: Jose, N. (2020). String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean: How is India countering China in the Maldives? *South Asia Journal*

China’s String of Pearls strategy is commonly perceived as a military initiative with the objective of establishing a series of ports for the Chinese navy along the routes from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. However, Christopher J. Pehrson (2006:2), contends that” the String of Pearls is more than a military or naval or regional strategy. It is a manifestation of China’s ambition to attain great power status and secure a self-determined, peaceful, and prosperous future.”

Since its inception in 2004, Indian policy makers have been concerned about the increasing presence of China in the Indian Ocean, as the theory posits a hypothesis of China strategically encircling of India. China’s maritime maneuvers in the Indian Ocean and its increased cooperation with Indian neighbors is argued to be its strategy to encircle India, thereby posing serious threats and implications to India’s security. In

the word of Sood (2009: 240), “the Chinese have sought to strategically encircle India by building special relationships with India’s neighbors- Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Nepal. All this is designed to keep India under strategic pressure”.

While China has never officially used this term, its recent activities indicates that this strategy being used from the South China Sea to the Western Indian Ocean, including maritime maneuvers in the Indian Ocean and enhanced cooperation with neighboring countries.

#### ➤ **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**

The discussion on China’s maritime endeavors in India within the strategic community- current and retired civilian and military policymakers, university academicians, analysts in think tanks, has much to offer to the world on how to comprehend and interpret the Chinese project. China’s Belt and Road initiative attempts to converge the continental and maritime space into common political-economic sphere. Xi Jinping’s signature project also falls under the umbrella of Chinese dream.

China’s BRI is a grand regional and global project. India is one such nation where the Chinese project has encountered blatant, persistent and widespread criticism from both official and strategic level. The BRI is not viewed in India as just an economic project, but rather as a “comprehensive Chinese strategy of making its hegemonic foreign policy goals and security policies” (Jacob, 2017: 1).

#### **China’s challenges in achieving maritime supremacy– External and Internal Factors**

Edward Sing Yue Chan (2022) highlights some challenges that China needs to encounter. First he argues that China still lags behind in the race against US. There is a gap in their naval capabilities, and China has not yet achieved the status of a blue water navy. China has enhanced its naval capability by acquiring aircraft carriers, frigates, cruisers, landing platform docks and destroyers, but their quantity still falls short in comparison to US navy. Sweeney (2020) also holds the opinion that despite expanding the program of naval modernisation, China still does not hold means to possess control over East, South, and Yellow Seas. Also, the concept of sea denial- Anti-Access/Area

Denial (A2/AD)<sup>35</sup> remains an untested concept. Quantitatively China has enhanced its maritime capabilities but qualitatively it lacks in aircraft carriers and nuclear attack submarines (SSNs). Another challenge is that China's international maritime security agenda remains narrow, unstructured and underdeveloped. A third challenge is the need for China to expand its maritime reach geographically. So far, China's maritime activities have been limited to the Western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean because the Indo-Pacific region holds strategic importance for China. To become a global power, China must expand its perimeter to the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. China has so far confined itself to its near seas and must extend its reach for overseas humanitarian missions. A fourth challenge is that other countries perceive China's growing maritime power as a threat. They are anxious about China's sea power construction, fearing it disrupts the balance of power in the Indo-pacific zone. The Quad was formed to contain China's maritime power. China needs to improve or manage its relations with other countries if it wants to become a sea power. Lastly, China needs to address emerging security concerns such as nuclear, space, and technology issues. As stated in China's white paper of 2019, the military main objective is to secure maritime rights and interests. China cannot afford to ignore these security concerns, as they will affect its sea power development.

Nolt (2024) argues that China faces geographical challenge in becoming a global maritime power. China may be building its blue water navy capabilities but that is applicable only in peace times. Despite the expansion of China's navy, it remains vulnerable in wartime scenarios. In times of war, Chinese overseas trade comes to halt as its ports will be blockaded and any warship venturing beyond its neighboring waters will be tracked and neutralized. It is argued that China's navy lacks the capability to effectively defend against air power attacks. Chinese submarines are susceptible to aircraft attacks beyond the range of land-based fighter aircraft, which can defend up to a range of 500 km. Additionally, China's amphibious lift capacity is deemed insufficient, limiting its capability to transport forces effectively to various locations. Thus, geographical constraints limit China's capabilities to become a sea power.

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35 Anti-Access/Area Denial (or A2/AD) is a military strategy to control access to and within an operating environment.

### **Challenges posed by China's maritime manoeuvres**

China's maritime strategy presents a complex and multifaceted strategic scenario with several key aspects that warrant attention. Indian policymaker's major concerns are the possibility of India-China rivalry for regional dominance, as is seen in South Asian Region and China's military modernization. Pehrson (2006:10) views that "China's growing regional influence is sparked not only by a strong economy, but also by strategic ambition and a sense of historical grievance." He contends that China can make strategic advancements in the maritime frontier beyond Taiwan particularly along the String of Pearls in order to increase power and influence. The String of Pearls is best understood in its geopolitical context when combined with the above discussed reasons to secure sea trade routes and SLOCs.

#### **➤ Quest for Regional Hegemony**

China's rise as a global power hinges on its actions, either integrating responsibly into the international community or pursuing its own rules. Through diplomatic, military, and economic efforts, China aims to secure markets for exports, access raw materials and energy resources, and bolster its international standing. Simultaneously, China employs political, economic, and military tools to enhance its regional influence in the South Asian Region. This part will be dealt in detail in next chapter.

#### **➤ China's Naval Modernization**

The modernization of People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a tangible reflection of China's growing national power. China's military modernization might result in a significant shift in the power structure of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. China's increased defense expenditure and its growth in power projection capability leads to other great powers questioning China's intention and begin to adjust their military postures accordingly. Other than Taiwan concern, China's maritime prowess, particularly in safeguarding critical sea lanes and choke points for trade and energy transportation, aligns with its Belt and Road Initiative and expansion along the String of Pearls.

People's Liberation Army (PLA) current military capability can pose major problems for Indian security interests when viewed in the geographical context of South Asia. If

China's maritime strategy is an initiative towards hegemony, then China will probably act cautious would have covert approach. India and other powers must remain vigilant for the signs and warnings of such intent. China's behavior has alarmed analysts and policymakers in India as it results in South Asian nations being forced to turn away from India and gravitate towards China.

However, the lack of transparency in China's military buildup, procurement of weapon system, pursuit of a blue water navy, and deployment of a forward military presence raises concerns among other nations, including India, about the underlying motives behind these maritime initiatives.

### **Implications for India**

China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean and increasing engagement with its littorals and island nations has drawn global attention. This presence is altering the security dynamics of the region and triggering concerns among Indian strategists. Cooper (2018) views that China's growing presence in the IOR attracts mixed security implications- "In peacetime, these efforts will certainly expand Chinese regional influence. In wartime, however, China's Indian Ocean presence will likely create more vulnerabilities than opportunities."

Chinese naval facilities in the Indian Ocean such as Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and its first overseas base in the Horn of Africa not only serves its economic interest but also provide strategic leverage to become a major maritime power in the Indo-Pacific. The scope and scale of China's maritime strategic advantages in the region, leading to concerns among Indian security analysts about China's motives. In conclusion, China's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean is a matter of great interest and concern for the international community, particularly in relation to its regional ambitions and implications for the security landscape. The evolution of China's actions will undoubtedly continue to shape the dynamics of the region in the coming years.

### **Conclusion**

The Indian Ocean is gaining significant strategic and economic importance in both regional as well as global context. China's rapid asymmetric rise and its growing influence in the IOR have had a profound on the geopolitics of the region. China's



expanding sea power is evident through its substantial defense expenditure and the rapid development of its navy, indicating a serious commitment to maritime dominance.

The Indian Ocean plays a crucial role in global energy production and maritime trade, housing some of the world's busiest and strategically vital choke points. This geostrategic, geopolitical, and geoeconomic significance has attracted attention from littorals, island nations and extra regional powers. China's increasing influence in the Indian Ocean through initiative like BRI and String of Pearls is primarily driven by its need to secure trade and energy routes. This development has complex implications for China's relationship with India and other regional powers.

It is quite evident that "China's pursuit for maritime domination has been progressive with periods of stagnancy and fast track movement"<sup>36</sup>. Its maritime footprints are notable in the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean. This progression aligns with the goals expressed in the China's defense White papers, which clearly outlined the plan to transition from "near-coast defence" to "near-seas active defence" and to the current "far-seas operations". The 'far-seas operations' will be supported by multiple pillars including "strategic guidance of Active Defence, the development and progress of China's armed forces, preparation for Military Struggle (PMS), and military and security cooperation". The answers to questions regarding China's aspirations for global domination cannot be answered with specificity.

When naval admiral Zheng He set its ocean path to spread China's glory, all he encountered on his journey was wind and waves as he embarked with his treasure fleet across the oceans. The oceans of today are no longer empty and as China endeavors to venture distant seas, it is more likely to encounter United States in the Pacific Ocean and India in the Indian Ocean which would result into far reaching consequences. The question arises of whether China will navigate responsibly within the international system or attempt to alter the existing global and regional order through its maritime endeavors.

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<sup>36</sup> The rate at which China is constructing warships—of different classes to meet various envisaged roles— is the example of the rate of fast track movement.

Given China's aggressive stance in the South China Sea, similar behaviour could manifest in the Indian Ocean when the right conditions are present. Overcoming the challenges posed by China's expanding maritime footprint is crucial for India's future prosperity and security.

## **Chapter-5: Dragon's Shadow: Assessing China's Rising Political Influence**

### **Introduction**

The spectacular rise of China is closely linked with its economic growth. For it to continue its rise, it is required to run its economic engines smoothly. One of the key drivers to ensure that its economic engines run continuously is energy security. The Persian Gulf plays a vital role as a major energy source, making the resolution of the Malacca Dilemma a crucial strategic necessity. To address this challenge, China seeks alternative and one of its initiatives is the Belt and Road Initiative. This project consists of two main components: the 'Belt' known as Silk Road Economic Belt, which connects China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe. The 'Road' known as the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road, focuses on maritime connections. China's involvement in the Indo-Pacific littoral states is part of this initiative to increase its influence in the region. China has been seeking opportunities to build infrastructure in South Asian countries and to expand its footprint in the IOR as part of its BRI initiative. China's huge lending to smaller South Asian countries has raised concerns of the ability of these nations to repay. This has fuelled fear in India that China is actively working to reduce its presence in the Indian Ocean. This study examines China's growing presence which is driven by its rising economic and political power. In this study, the researcher analyses China's ability to employ various mechanisms, tools, dimensions, and measures of political influence on South Asian Countries. Specifically, the study assesses the China's influence in Sri Lanka and Maldives, two South Asian Island nations. The chapter analyses the extent of political influence using various indicators.

In recent years, China has been undermining India's influence in South Asia, evident in its efforts to create "String of Pearls". Chellaney (2018) wrote that String of Pearls is "a chain of military installations and economic projects aimed at projecting Chinese power in the Indian Ocean".

Over the past decade, China has increased its activities to gain control over nations and regional states in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. These nations overtly represent the trade routes, raw material supply, and SLOCs. They also provide PLAN with

replenishment and supply base. The demand for market and resources, protection of trade and SLOCs, and increasing its geopolitical influence are the key factors behind China's maritime strategy. The pretext for these actions further bolstered by pirates attack in the western Indian Ocean.

This chapter focuses on analysing China's presence in India's neighboring countries, with a specific case study of China's political influence in South Asian Region, specifically the island nations of Sri Lanka and Maldives. The chapter will also explore the implications of China's rising influence on India's national security.

### **Concept and Definition of Influence**

Assessing political influence in decision making is a complex and multifaceted process. Though, it is important to study as influence is an elementary aspect of political and social sphere of life. The assessment is highly complex because influence is a contested concept and quite difficult to measure objectively.

Arts and Verschuren (1999) had given various reasons why to assess political influence. First, it test whether the decision making in a particular country is democratic or is dominated by few elites. Second, it provides an efficient feedback mechanism to those who have goals in politics. Third, assessment of political power of an actor is possible through its political influence. One can infer the future prediction of decision making of different actors. Finally, assessing influence is helpful in theory building. Example: one may try to explain why a particular actor is more influential, its factors, conditions, and others.

For Banfield (2017) the advantage of studying political influence suggests how wide the discrepancy is between the 'supposed' and 'real' things. For example: Legal-Formal arrangement between how the state is 'supposed' to work v/s the way it really runs. It might be the case that Governors, Prime Minister, President or other officials are mere puppets whose strings are pulled by private persons or others from behind the scenes.

### **General Definitions of Influence**

While seeking existing definition and conceptual understanding, and interpretation of influence, it becomes evident that it lacks clarity, theoretical grounding, and is often

used vaguely. Zimmerling argues, “Although the unproblematic use of the term influence in ordinary language suggests that there must be some shared understanding of its meaning, this common core is hard to pin down with any degree of precision.”

According to basic dictionary definitions, influence involves having an impact on others. Lexico<sup>37</sup> define influence as the “capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself.” Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary states that influence is the “power to have an effect on people or things, or a person or thing that is able to do this.”<sup>38</sup> Several definitions explicitly emphasize that influence does not require force and often operates indirectly through persuasion. Merriam- Webster defines influence as the “power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways” and “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.”<sup>39</sup>

Aside from these fundamental definitions, it is important to consider the academic discourse surrounding the conceptual understanding of the term. Through exploration, it is found that there are definitions that seeks to distinguish influence from power, while others treat them as practically equivalent. For instance, Banfield (2017) define it as, “ability to get others to act, think, or feel as one intends” while Cox and Jacobson (1973:3) define influence as the “modification of one actor’s behaviour by that of another.” (Symbolic representation A-B), where Actor A (individual or collective group) alters the behaviour of political decision makers, leading to change in decisions.

There are varying perspectives on the relationship between influence and power. Some view influence as a broader concept, with power being a more immediate and coercive subset of influence, often involving the use of threats or sanctions. On the other hand, some argue that influence is the tangible outcome of power being exercise, suggesting that influence is the manifestation and actualization of power (Zimmerling, 2005).

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/influence> (Accessed on 24 February, 2023)

<sup>38</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/influence> (Accessed on 24 February, 2023)

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/influence> (Accessed on 24 February, 2023)

## **Power and Influence**

As interstate relations entail the distribution, development, and destruction of security and economy, governments are frequently eager to exert power and influence and are, in turn, subject to power and influence of other actors. The academic literature on power and influence in international relations is vast and comprises of both agreements and disagreements on the interrelationship between the two.

One intriguing aspect of the ongoing definitional debate is the question of whether influence can exist independently without power. The concept of influence is considered in assessment of power. Baehr (1977: 3) views that “there is connection between power and influence as both are closely related. Influence and power do not exist in vacuum, they are related to actors”. He made distinction between influence and power, referring “influence as a weaker way of achieving something from somebody else; ‘power’ usually includes the availability of certain sanctions”. Sanctions can be both negative (punishment) and positive (reward). Knorr (1973: 3) also finds the relationship between the two when he states that “Power can be used either to establish influence by means of coercion or, without coercive intent to defend or change the status quo between actors”.

Zimmerling (2005) challenges the notion that “there can be no influence without power” seems inappropriate as there are instances where an actor have extraordinary influence without any means of power. Huberts, 1988 (as cited in Arts and Verschuren, 1999: 412-413) suggest that modifications in decision making can be prompted by mere presence, thoughts, and actions of actor A. This implies that actor A does not necessarily needs to actively intervene in the decision making process to bring about modifications. If decision makers are aware of actor A’s presence, thoughts, or actions, it could be sufficient to exert political influence. In the realm of literature on influence, this phenomenon is referred to as “anticipation”, and should be considered within its definition (Bell et. al, 1969). However, it is essential to note that political influence encompasses more than just modifications in decision making. Actor A’s influence involves pursuits valuable to them, such as ethical principles or ideals, the

accomplishment of tangible or intangible objective, material or immaterial goal, or the resolution of problems. These possibilities in simple terms can be referred as goals.

### **China's rising influence: Assessments in Developing Asia**

Recently, China has been utilizing its increasing power to assert control over outcomes and behaviours in the East Asian Region according to its own agenda. It is often observed that China has been successful in its endeavours. This has raised a new concern in academia regarding China's expanding regional influence and its implications. Numerous instances, such as China's declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea in November 2013, illustrates this trend. Under this declaration, any flights entering the zone were required to report their flight plans to China, or else China would take defensive emergency measures (Yansheng, 2013). There have been talks regarding the potential establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea (CSIS, 2013). In the same year, the legislature of Hainan introduced revised measures for the enforcement of fisheries law, stipulating that all foreign fishing vessels must obtain permission from China before entering the waters administered by Hainan, which encompass a significant portion of the South China Sea (Kardon, 2014).

The global gaze is currently fixated on how China's burgeoning power will impact both the region and the world. Consequently, Chinese leaders and foreign policy analysts have commenced a focused examination of China's international influence. In July 2009, during the 11<sup>th</sup> Overseas Diplomatic Envoys meeting, President Hu Jintao articulated the imperative on the status and role of public diplomacy, concerning "China's international image" and views that diplomats must open new horizon "to increase China political influence, economic competitiveness, international appeal and moral support" (Jiechi, 2011).

Scholars argue that the concept of developing Asia is rarely been used within the framework of China's diplomacy. Officially, Great powers are designated as 'key' players, while developing Asia is categorised as 'periphery' and developing countries as 'foundation' (Goh, 2016). To strengthen relations with neighbouring countries, in October 2013, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) convened the first major meeting

on foreign policy since 2006, notable for its attendance by key members. This meeting, orchestrated by the CCP, focused on delineating China's policies towards its neighbors and endorsing peripheral diplomacy (Ranade, 2014). President Xi Jinping provided policy guidance at work conference as to “enhance political goodwill; deepen regional economic integration; increase China's cultural influence; and improve regional security cooperation” (Heath, 2013, as cited in Swaine, 2014).

### **Objectives behind rising China's Influence**

Considering the urgent domestic hurdles China confronts as it endeavors to recalibrate its economic development model while upholding political stability, Chinese leaders must mitigate external pressures. China's objective is to uphold secure and stable political ties with all regional nations, steer clear of confrontational engagements, deter regional states from aligning with others in anti-China containment efforts, and foster economic collaboration. Chinese leaders employ additional concepts to articulate their preferred vision for relations with the Asia region as ‘Harmonious Asian Community of Common Destiny’, ‘New Security Concept’, and win-win cooperation. China's Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin (2014) views that “for China to realize its dream of national rejuvenation, it first needs to acquire identification and support from other Asian countries and to tie the dream of the Chinese people with those of the Asian nations”.

Determining China's specific objectives remains a challenge beyond abstract principles and concepts. However, it is evident that Chinese leaders aspire for their neighboring countries to acknowledge and endorse their ‘core interests’. The current discourse surrounding China's core interests is a distinctly modern phenomenon, emerging prominently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with limited or no precedent in earlier discussions. It was in use during 1980s and 90s only to refer to it as interests of other nations. The term ‘core interest’ (核心利益) was reportedly introduced by People's Daily in June 1980. It was used in reference to the perceived threat posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Soviet backing of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia to the “core interests” of the western nations (Qian and XI, 1980). Another instance of the phrase found pertains to Vice president Al Gore's delineation of America's national interests



into five parts. It elaborates on how Gore emphasized the role of technology policy in advancing the “core interests” of the United States (Yong, 1994).

Only in recent year, particularly, within the last decade, have deliberations on the concept of China’s ‘core interests’ surged in significance. Indeed, it wasn’t until 2003-04 that official Chinese sources started making regular reference to China’s “core interests”. Infact, it was for the first time that China used the term core interests for itself in 2002 and not in reference to the interest to other nation. In February 2002, Wang Jisi, a prominent expert in U.S.-China relations, penned an article featured in *People’s Daily*. In his piece, he proposed that both nations strive to find commonality to avert the escalation of disagreements into potentially harmful crises or conflicts that could jeopardise the “core interest” of either party. The official media of the People’s Republic of China has employed the term “core interests” in conjunction with the term “major concerns”. The two terms were used in a report published in 2007 on High level meeting between Chinese President Hu Jintao and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2007). In fact, the term “major concerns” was actually utilized in official PRC media before “core interest”. It was appeared in a report about a meeting between Jiang Zemin and President Chirac of France in 2000 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2000). Additionally, it has been employed to address the Taiwan issue and uphold the One-China principle. In a policy paper on the European Union, the term “major concerns” is specifically cited in relation to the Taiwan issue within a paragraph discussing the One-China policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2003). However, Taiwan was explicitly mentioned as China’s “core interest” in 2003 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2003; Gang, 2003). It is evident that significant mentions of China’s core interests in both official and unofficial PRC’s media has surged notably from the early 2000s. This increase is apparent, with only one mention in *People’s Daily* article in 2001 to 269 articles in 2009 and further to 325 articles in 2010 (Swaine, 2010). Chinese leaders exhibit no hesitation in emphasizing that there can be no compromise with regards to its core interests. Excerpt from Xi Jinping talk:

“We will stick to the road of peaceful development, but will never give up our legitimate rights and will never sacrifice our national core interests. No country should presume

that we will engage in trade involving our core interests or that we will swallow the ‘bitter fruit’ of harming our sovereignty, security or development interests.”

Despite ongoing deliberations among experts, consensus on the precise definition of China’s core interests remain elusive. In international academic discourse and within China too, there is significant debate regarding the precise nature of China’s core interests. From the references, it is clear that China began to use the term “core interests” to refer to issues of “sovereignty and territorial integrity”. The China’s Peaceful Development policy paper of 2011 added issues such as “national reunification” and “overall social stability” as part of China’s “core interests” (White paper on China’s Peaceful Development, 2011).

Official definitions offer some insights, but further investigation is required to elucidate as to what define China’s core interests. China’s official definition of core interests’ mentions, “state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification, China’s political system established by the constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development” (State Council Information Office, 2011). According to this interpretation, actions that threaten China’s internal stability, such as providing external support to organised movements against the governments or separatist movements in regions like Tibet, Xinjiang, or Taiwan, would be perceived by China as directly challenging its core interest. While Chinese officials have not explicitly labelled the South China Sea as its “core interests” but reports declared that China has claimed South China Sea as a “core interest” (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2011). It is but evident that it deeply involves national sovereignty and any provocations in this area are treated with great seriousness. In the short and medium term, China aims to maintain the current state of affairs and prevent other claimants from furthering contesting its claims, either by bolstering their own claims or by attempting to internationalise these disputes.

China’s goal in developing Asian nations encompass garnering their endorsement for Chinese proposals and initiatives concerning regional cooperation and reforms in global governance. China has hosted various international conferences and cooperation platforms for regional cooperation such as APEC Informal Leadership Meetings;

Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia; Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN); ASEAN+3; East Asia Summit (EAS); Conference on the Diplomatic Work with Neighboring Countries; the Annual Conference of Boao Forum for Asia; Indian Ocean Region Forum; Belt and Road Initiative Conference; China-Central Asia Summit. China has introduced major initiatives like Belt and Road Initiative, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor for the economic development of Asia. Additionally, China seeks to dissuade these countries from supporting actions, regulations, or resolutions that exert pressure on China. China envisions a regional landscape that moves beyond the paradigm of Cold war ideologies and towards a more inclusive order. This envisioned order would prioritize greater representation for Asia, foster more equitable consultation, and uphold respect for diverse political systems and development trajectories. On a global scale, China desires backing from these nations to enhance its representation, uphold territorial sovereignty, advocate for non-intervention policies, and shape international agendas.

### **China's Expectation of Increasing Influence**

Since 2008, various developments have occurred that transformed China's perspective of international order. China had successfully hosted 2008 Olympic Games and Shanghai Expo in 2010 and maintaining economic growth despite the ongoing financial crisis distinguished China, while western economies struggled. By 2010, China has surpassed Japan to become the world's largest economy. China's outer space projects such as space exploration (Acuthan, 2006) and military modernisation (Bommakanti and Amjad, 2023) have boosted China's self-confidence. These developments raised expectations for China to have its interests accommodated and to shape international politics through its policies and growth. According to Lieberthal and Jisi (2012: 8), "many Chinese officials believe that their nation has ascended to be a first-class power in the world and should be treated as such".

In the wake of global financial crises of 2008-09, China experienced a surge of new perspective advocated by nationalist and military personals. According to them, the United States and the West are now in decline and the power gap is narrowing, with China poised to soon catch up with or even surpass the U.S. Wang Jisi, President of the

Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University, argues that “United States should take China’s interests and aspirations more seriously than before, and should change its international behaviour” (Kato, 2012). They also believe that western powers should adjust their policies that adversely affect China’s interests, or else China should use its growing influence to counter them. Since these nationalists held high hopes regarding China’s superiority over the United States, they naturally anticipated that regional states should accommodate the emerging superpower (Zhao, 2013; Callahan, 2013).

There emerged an expectation among Chinese academicians that China’s increasing stature would strengthen respect for its interests and reforms in international order. Zeng et.al (2015: 250) argues that “it is not just China that is now seen as needing to change to fit with the realities of the global order: now, the global order needs to change too-or, more correctly, key actors in that order need to change- to reflect the realities of a global order that contains an increasingly powerful China.” China’s expectation regarding the advancement of its expanding interests entail a reduced likelihood of being challenged from America and western powers. This expectation emanates from China’s anticipation that as the power gap diminishes between itself and the U.S., changes will be introduced in the policies adopted by the United States, which China opposes. Such expectations are anticipated from developing Asian nations too. Zhai Kun (2014), a professor in Peking University argues that “After the financial crisis, China’s gap with the US has narrowed and that with its neighbours has widened”. Primarily, developing Asian nations have been demonstrating respect for China’s interests and refraining from posing challenges to them. One potential area of conflict is emerging in South China Sea, of maritime disputes between China and its neighbouring countries- Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Brunei (Jimin, 2021). Another challenge is emerging from China’s increasing power. Given China’s expanding importance, developing Asian countries could side with U.S to challenge or confront China. China expected that with growing trade relations with these countries, they would be economically dependent on China (Fangyin, 2014).

### **Assessment of China's Increasing Influence**

It is unclear whether how much of international influence China wants or which areas it wants to cover. The same is not discussed much among Chinese scholars and experts. However, they assess China's influence by considering its status as the world's second most powerful nation and employ the reference of United States for comparison purpose. Chinese experts assess that its international influence is increasing. On 8 November, 2012, Hu Jintao delivered a speech at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, stating that "its overall national strength and international competitiveness and influence have been enhanced substantially" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Nepal, 2012). China's White Paper titled '*The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*' brings attention to China's increasing influence by stating that "China's international competitiveness and influence are steadily increasing." (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2012). Li Keqiang (2014) while delivering his speech at the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the 12<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress on March 2014 declared that "China's influence in the world further increased".

It is to be noted here that despite of reference being given to increasing Chinese influence, nothing much has been explained in these reports. There are various set of variables and indicators that Chinese experts and academicians use a reference to showcase and justify its increasing influence.

### **Economic Indicators**

Chinese leaders and experts put much emphasis on economic variables and its increasing economic might. For instance, during his speech at the Second World Peace Forum, Foreign Minister Wang Yi (2013) highlighted that "China is the biggest trading partner for 128 countries, a major export market with the fastest growth". He further declared that in year 2012, China spearheaded over 50% of Asia's economic expansion, strengthening its position as a major driver for global economic progress. He noted that in the wake of 2008 global financial downturn, China not only supported the International Monetary Fund and aided struggling nations but also relied on its consistent, vigorous economic performance. China collaborated with other emerging markets and played a crucial role in fostering hope for sustained economic recovery.

Some analysts highlights China's advancement in technology and space, creation of high end development projects as signs of growing China's influence.

Hu et. al. (2021) argues that China's influence will be seen in world development. They noted that China's contribution to world development will be in five ways: as driving for global economic growth; innovation-oriented; contribution to green development; cultural soft power; and knowledge sharing. According to Fu Mengzi, Vice President of China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), "In terms of foreign exchange reserves, export capability, increases in foreign investment, domestic demand and other areas, China has accumulated massive international economic influence, and to a certain extent raised China's political and military influence." (as cited in Glosny, 2016). Although economic indicators better reflect on China's growing significance but the conversion mechanism is underdeveloped.

### **China's growing Significance**

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, in his speech titled "*Turning Your Eyes to China*" at Harvard University noted that "China tomorrow will continue to be major country that loves peace and has a great deal to look forward to." (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 2003). Xu Jian (2008), while examining China's international standing since opening up of its economy suggest that reforms bring changes to its foreign policy and the world gives China significance and "China's achievements and increasing international influence not only reflect the upgrading of its international standing, but also bring about new challenges to China's efforts to promote world cognition and identification." Lai (2012) argues that various foreign assessment has been done to show case China's increased influence. Polling data conducted by GlobeScan for BBC World Services mentioned China as popular nation.

Chinese officials cite evidence of its growing influence through its increasing engagement in international organisations and its participation and hosting of significant global events. Apart from China's membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Chinese nationals are also assuming leading positions in various international organisations. According to China's official report, Chinese are holding prominent roles in international organisations that will contribute to its

“reputation” in global affairs. It is mentioned that in the years ranging from 2003-2013, fifteen Chinese took leading positions in international organisations (Fan and Yanrong, 2013). China has successfully hosted mega events like Olympics, Paralympics Games, and the World Expo, hosted various conferences like Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), informal summit like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation organisation (SCO), sponsored Boao Forum for Asia and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Cheng Dongxiao (2014) views this as an opportunity to enhance its influence and notes that “With the continuous increase of China’s comprehensive strength and international influences, international society now has higher expectations for China’s role in international affairs and its international responsibilities, putting China at the center of the international stage.” Experts also refer the role of G20 in expanding China’s influence (Yafei, 2017). Many of the instances referred above indicates China’s growing influence but do not accurately reflect to its exercise of power in shaping influence.

### **Challenges to China’s Rising Influence**

Many western and Indian scholars contend that the increasing assertiveness of China could potentially contribute to instability in East Asia and South Asia. On the Other hand, Chinese analysts perceive that the actions taken by the United States are aimed at containing China, compelling China to protect its interests. Michael D. Swaine (2010) argues that “The image of the supposedly cautious, low-profile, responsibility shirking free-riding Beijing of the past giving way to one of a more confident, assertive (some say arrogant), anti-status quo power that is pushing back against the West, promoting its own alternative (i.e., restrictive or exclusionary) norms and policies in many areas.” While analysing China’s rising influence in Indian Ocean, Roy-Chaudhury (2018: 106) views this as an “attempt to gain permanent access to these waters and to ‘encircle’ India strategically.”

Various global actors are currently engaged in assessing their increasing influence, not limited to China alone. One significant aspect of this assessment pertains to the rising influence of China, which has drawn attention and concern from western powers, notably the United States. The U.S. perspective on China’s growing influence tends to

be notably critical and negative. A report published by the Pew Research Center (2024) revealed that 81% of Americans hold an unfavourable view towards China, and approximately 7 out of 10 Americans believe that China's influence is increasing. United States views China's growing global influence as a challenge. James E. Risch (2019), Senator from Idaho, USA, noted that "As we proceed through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, China is going to be a major competitor of ours in every way that there is. Obviously economically and militarily, culturally and every other way."

According to official documents from China, despite its increasing power, the country is facing growing challenges, whether at the global or regional level. As per China's 2012 defense White paper titled "*The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*", China "faces multiple and complicated security threats and interests" and "has an arduous task to safeguard its national unification, territorial integrity and development interests." The paper further observes that the most significant challenge the country faces predominantly lies within the maritime sphere, posing a considerable threat to its regional interests. The strategic importance of neighbouring countries for China can be observed from an event that grabbed world's attention- convening of foreign policy work conference on theme of China's periphery diplomacy. In this meeting Xi Jinping emphasised and elucidated the necessity of periphery diplomacy and its significance by stating that China strive "for an excellent peripheral environment for (its) development" so that its two centenary goals can be achieved<sup>40</sup> and to realize the "Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." (as cited in Wang and Boon, 2019: 4). In recent years, China has faced the greatest threat in the maritime affairs due to not only staunch opposition from the United States in the South China Sea disputes but also increasing resistance from its periphery.

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<sup>40</sup> To know more, read, Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Perth. (2022). *China Embarks on the New Journey of the Second Centenary Goal by Dingbin LONG, Consul General of China in Perth*. Retrieved from [http://perth.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/notc/202211/t20221128\\_10981462.htm#:~:text=The%20two%2Dstep%20strategic%20plan,strong%2C%20democratic%2C%20culturally%20advanced%2C](http://perth.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/notc/202211/t20221128_10981462.htm#:~:text=The%20two%2Dstep%20strategic%20plan,strong%2C%20democratic%2C%20culturally%20advanced%2C) (Accessed on 3 May, 2024)



## **China's Assertion: Events showcasing its growing influence**

- **China's opposition to deployment of Terminal High Altitude Air Defense-THAAD system in South Korea**

On February 7, 2016, South Korea and U.S. military authorities announced the initiation of negotiations regarding the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system on South Korean territory. THAAD is an advanced defense system engineered to intercept missiles during their terminal flight phase (Business Standard, 2016). After extensive deliberation, on July 8, the United States and South Korea have jointly announced their decision to deploy the THAAD system on Korean peninsula (Reif and Davenport, 2016). South Korea formally announce that the system will be deployed in Seongju “to maximize its effectiveness while minimizing any impact on residents and the environment.” (Kim and Park, 2016). The decision to deploy the THAAD system faced significant criticism within South Korea (Soo-han, 2016; Cheol-hee, 2016).

The leaders of China have strongly opposed the decision of South Korea to install THAAD system. During the talks between U.S. and South Korea over deployment of THAAD system, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying (2016) made remarks that “the Chinese side is deeply concerned about it.” and delivered China's opposing remarks. After finalisation of deployment of missile defense system, China suspended all high level defense meetings with South Korea (The Korea Times, 2016). In an interview to Reuters, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (2016) stated that “the coverage of the THAAD missile defense system, especially the monitoring scope of its X-Band radar, goes far beyond the defense need of the Korean Peninsula. It will reach deep into the hinterland of Asia, which will not directly damage China's strategic security interests, but also do harm to the security interests of other countries in this region.” There is no doubt that analysts and leaders in China vehemently opposed the deployment of the THAAD system. The aspect that particularly concerned China the most was the inclusion of the X-band radar system in THAAD.

- **China's new Coast Guard Law**

China introduced the new Coast Guard law at the 25<sup>th</sup> session of the Standing Committee of China's 13<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress (NPC). The law came in effect from 1 February 2021. The law permits the Chinese coast guard to use weapons on foreign vessels and to destroy economic facilities in disputed areas.

The new law invokes strong reaction from China's neighbours. Kawashima Shin (2021) explained two factors determining the sensitivities of China's neighbours. First, is the definition of 'jurisdictional waters' that is problematic. The draft of the law define jurisdictional water as internal waters, territorial sea, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelf. Later, the definition was deleted and no other definition has been provided. In the case that the definition as provided in the draft will be applied, there is fear that the China's coast guard will execute the law as proposed. Second is the ongoing territorial dispute between China and its neighbours over East and South China Sea. The parties to the dispute worry that China would manage and control the disputed territories and zones.

- **The Case of Lithuania and China**

One of the core interests of China is Taiwan issue. China does not take things lightly when it comes to its core interests. There are various incidents to show how China responds to things that are of its core concern. One recent incident is growing tension between Lithuania and China which has major impact on European Union (EU) - China relations.

In July 2021, Lithuania, a tiny European state announced the setting up of a Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius, its capital. To the casual readers, the statement may seem unremarkable but to China, the move was intolerable and has crossed red line on sensitive issues. Lithuania is the only EU member to open such office. They are very unusual not in Europe but in much of the world. The difference is in the naming. The offices are not named as Taiwanese but as Taipei Economic and Cultural Centres. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory. To avoid offending China, most countries follow 'One China policy'.

Lithuania was condemned by China by “downgrading ties, recalling its ambassador, an effective trade blockade, and especially the move to pressure European countries to stop sourcing from Lithuania” (Hindu, 2022). The EU is watching nervously as one of its member faces China’s coercive diplomacy. According to Hindu editorial 2022, the forcefulness of China’s response suggests that the move is to ensure that others don’t follow the same path. It is an attempt to “kill the chicken to scare the monkeys”.

- **Olympics torchbearer**

Another move by Chinese authorities to show that China do not take its core interests lightly is selection of PLA Galwan commander as Olympics torchbearer. Chinese government has managed to keep Galwan valley clash in the public spotlight even when both the sides are on disengagement talks along the LAC.

China employed a diplomatic strategy by selecting a young individual named, Qi Fabao, as a torchbearer in the Olympic Games torch relay who had been injured during the clash in Galwan Valley in June 2020. Consequently, India abstained from participating in the opening ceremony as a form of diplomatic protest against this action.

## **Existing Literature on Influence**

### **1. The China Index 2022**

A new study conducted by Doublethink Lab and the China in the World (CITW) network to explore the Chinese overseas influence. The project- *The China Index 2022* objectively measure and visualize PRC’s influence in 82 countries to assess country’s exposure to China’s influence. The nine domains are- Military, Academia, Domestic Politics, Media, Economy, Law Enforcement, Foreign Policy, Society, and Technology<sup>41</sup>. Each domain comprised of eleven indicators to observe the phenomenon of Chinese influence. The list of indicators along all nine domains that the China Index uses to provide overall ranking can be accessed from Appendix-6. The study puts Pakistan at the top, Cambodia in second place and Singapore in third. Paraguay, North Macedonia, and Albania were ranked as least influenced. China’s influence is found

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 6

most in east and Southeast Asia and Central Asia is the second most influenced region (China Index Report, as of November 2022).

## **2. Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity Index (FBIC)**

The FBIC Index was created by Jonathan D. Moyer and his team in 2018. It is one of the most well-known influence index in use. They attempted to create a foreign influence index in part due to lack of consensus on the concept. As mentioned in their report:

“Conspicuously absent in popular and scholarly debates is an understanding of what inter-national influence is. Beyond anecdotal evidence or broad-brushed descriptions of the utility of ‘soft’, ‘smart’, or ‘civilian’ power, there is simply neither a clear concept nor a systematic measurement of international influence derived from relational dependence” (Moyer, et al, 2018: 4).

The FBIC Index is built upon two main categories of indicators to measure the overall influence. The first category, known as “*Bandwidth*” assesses the extent of economic, political, and military relationship between two countries. The second category, called “*Dependence*”, measures the level of one state’s reliance on another for vital economic and security aspects. In Appendix 6 the lists of variables along with their weights that the FBIC Index uses along both the categories to measure the overall influence.

Employing the variables and weights as identified in appendix-6, the FBIC Index yielded noteworthy and interesting findings. According to the results, the United States emerged as the most influential country in the world, although its proportion has diminished overtime, from 25.1 % in 1963 to 11.2 % in 2016. While, China, who was not even among the top ten in 1963, jumped to fourth place in 2016 with 6% share. Furthermore, the share of top three countries (US, UK, and France) in 1963 accounts for more than 50% of world share, by 2016, the share fell to 26.7 % which is half to what it was in 1963.

The present research work differs from Moyer approach in a way that FBIC Index is intended to give an annual assessment of each state’s capacity for influence on the world stage. It is a generalized analysis on the proportion of global influence possessed

by significant countries rather than an explicit evaluation of bilateral influence. However, the indicators used in this research work are bilateral and dyadic, and thus can help to examine certain kind of relationships.

### **3. A Theory of Change**

Samantha Custer and her team (2018) adopted a different perspective to comprehend the concept of influence. They devised a ‘theory of change’ to capture the impact of China’s public diplomacy efforts. The work suggest that by using public diplomacy to gain influence over certain actions, policy results, and behaviours, China seeks to produce what authors called as ‘good-neighbours’ effect which combines two aspects - First, Positive public perception of China and Second, support from elites and leaders aligning with China’s foreign policy objectives. The theory of change begins with a hypothesis that as China increases its quantity and quality of public diplomacy, it results in good neighbour effect in two aspects- high favourability in public eye and closer adherence in country’s policy decisions by China.

The layout of ‘theory of Change’ has “*inputs*”, which are the resources applied including finance, people networks, communication channels, and other tools. These inputs then generate “*activities*” like exchange programs, financial diplomacy, information channels, and elite to elite diplomacy, which, in turn, produce “*outputs*”- short-term direct results such as increased awareness, engagement and exposure to China’s values, norms, and position, and value based enticement by China. These outputs then create *outcomes* that involves support, adoption, promotion, and collaboration with China’s values, norms, and position. Finally, the outcomes produce *impact* that China desires- enhanced power, increased solidarity, greater alignment, and synchronized actions.

While this approach offers a valuable conceptual understanding of how investments can bring about changes in state’s behaviour, it is essential to acknowledge that this causal chain remains theoretical and hypothetical. There is no concrete evidence supporting these specific causal relationships. In many instances, the path from inputs to impact involves various factors, often not following a straightforward linear progression from point A to point B.

## **Lessons from Theoretical Review**

The examination of theoretical literature on influence reveals several valuable insights:

- The above mentioned indexes are quite beneficial in that they provide potential variables to consider while developing a theory of influence.
- Influence can manifest in many forms- direct and indirect, open and covert, ideational and implicit. It remains uncertain which holds greater weight in the long run.
- Relying on direct coercion as a strategy of influence often results in anger and backlash and seems to have its limitations in its effectiveness.
- The input variables and their relative significance or weightage are likely to vary significantly depending on the specific case.
- High level of interdependence may produce complex implications like resentment and rejectionist tendency by the key countries.

The above lessons point to one important conclusion- having large number of potential influence factors does not necessarily generate the unquestioned control as desired by the influencer state. The path from potential to actual influence is far from straightforward or linear. While examining the extent of Chinese influence in key countries, it is crucial to avoid oversimplified linear assumptions based solely on specific inputs.

## **Pre-requisites for analysing China's influence**

To analyse the extent of China's influence in the South Asian island countries, the researcher undertook two tasks- firstly, a conceptual framework has been prepared to assess how China seeks influence in bilateral relationships. Secondly, this framework is applied to assess the extent of China's influence using the following sources of data and qualitative insight:

1. The researcher gathered available quantitative metrics reflecting the status of various variables and dimensions, as mentioned in this chapter's literature review under the heading existing literature on influence. Not all the variables could be analysed but these tools indicate the status of China's influence in key countries.

2. Various case studies, in addition to the selected ones, were examined to understand China's efforts to employ its means of influence to achieve specific outcomes.

3. The researcher drew insights from interviews with military officials and academicians, delving into various aspects of China's influence and its intentions. The detail of these interviews are available in annexure 7.

This assessment of influence does not provide a model or index, instead, it focuses on China's drive for influence and the outcomes of its efforts. More specifically, it assesses China's influence in Sri Lanka and Maldives, two South Asian island countries. Hence, the study does not aim to compare India and China's influence in these selected countries, although some data may present bilateral comparisons. The study also does not claim that these focused countries represent the entirety of the South Asian Region. They were chosen for their geopolitical significance and relevance to India and China's strategies. Many other South Asian countries are strategically important to China and India, but this work serves to be illustrative rather than comprehensive.

**Table 7- Conceptual Framework for analysing China’s influence**

<b>POLITICAL INFLUENCE</b>			
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>			
Diplomatic	Economic	Military-Security	Cultural

<b>VARIABLES</b>			
Agreements with China at sub-national level	Trade	Military ties/Pacts	Impact on civil society and Academia
Positive Public Response of China	FDI inflows	Proliferation Civil/Nuclear	Language prevalence
Regime Change	China’s overseas lending/official loans	Arms exports/imports	Education exchange programs
High level meetings	Tourism	Military/ Security aid	Confucius Institute
	Infrastructure development	Military visits/PortCalls/Exercises	

Note: The variables in this framework are derived from review of relevant literature on influence and current studies of China’s influence seeking drive. These variables are selected as they emerged as most significant in examining China’s influence. The variables are selected to cover the large scale Chinese influence.



This chapter introduces a framework to assess Chinese influence mechanism, which is based on review of related and relevant literature on influence as discussed in the chapter above. The parameter selected for China's influence is Political. The framework has two key components: Dimensions and Variables. The conceptual framework identifies dimensions and variables to measure the extent of China's political influence. These deep dives aimed at measuring China's political influence in selected case studies.

**Dimensions:** Dimensions involves the areas or spheres where China has its political influence. Political sphere is then divided into four dimensions on the basis of degree of directness of the China's actions involved: Diplomatic/Strategic, Cultural, Military-Security, and Economic.

**Variables:** The variable represent the raw materials or tools of influence, encompassing the activities and initiatives employed by China to enhance its influence over other countries. Under all four dimensions, some variables or tools have been identified. The variables are selected on the basis that they produce direct coercive actions designed to achieve certain result.

The framework is discussed in detail below:

- **Strategic/Diplomatic:** Considering China's size, economy, and demography, its inevitable role in global affairs becomes evident. As the world's largest trader and manufacturer with substantial pool of foreign exchange reserves and capital, every country around the globe is likely to seek engagement with China. Hence, this study aimed to identify, distinguish, and evaluate those specific activities or actions that might constrain possibilities, reduce decision making risks, and favours narrow interest groups, elites, or leaders.
- **Economic:** This is particularly significant because China frequently combines its economic and political tools to broaden its range of public relations outreach. When China invests heavily in a country it creates opportunities for political maneuvers especially when countries need investment for development. Economic variables such as significant investment to engage the elites must be counted as these activities affect public opinion.

- **Cultural:** This is critical because China like any other outside power, cultivates friendly voices and that too emanates from political influence.
- **Military-Security:** As China is rising as an economic power, it translates to China's growth as military power. China's military relations with South Asian countries has been consolidated with China's material support and defense cooperation agreements.

The researcher has explored the above mentioned dimensions of China's political influence to reveal about how China attempts to exert influence around the world.

### **Conclusion**

Among the key findings is that China's exponential economic growth, serves as the foundation of its influence. Additionally, China's ability to manipulate local political, economic, and social events to its advantage is a significant mechanism in its influence efforts. While the attraction of its economy is at the core of its influence, China's capabilities to effectively reach other countries and manipulate their perceptions and events also plays a crucial role in its influential power.

It has been observed that China's economic growth has enhanced its capacity and increased its influence. However, Chinese experts believe that China's influence has not increased proportionately with its growing power. It has also been noted that China's increasing power has led its neighbors to create challenges for it.

Beijing denies all the accusations yet its trade as a tool of influence and its strategy of coercion remains indifferent to China's proclamation of peaceful doctrine. Be it true or not, the influx of China's capital has left small South Asian countries in tatters and their future mortgaged to it.

China's longstanding foreign policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations faces challenges as China seeks ways to sustain high level of economic growth with limited natural resources. This dilemma tests China's approach to maintain its influence on the global stage.

## **Chapter-6: China's Increasing Influence in South Asian: The Case of Maldives**

### **Overview of China-Maldives historical relations**

The diplomatic ties between China and Maldives were formalized in 1972, and since then, the two nations have maintained an amicable relationship. Their collaborative efforts encompass a wide spectrum of fields, including trade, defense, housing development projects, biodiversity preservation and addressing climate change. Following Abdulla Yameen's coming to power in 2013, the Sino-Maldives relations took a turning point. Coincidentally, it was the same year when Xi Jinping was elected the Chinese president and in few months to power, launched the ambitious BRI.

A significant moment highlighting the Chinese government's increasing emphasis on the Indian Ocean and Maldives within its foreign policy was president Xi Jinping's visit to Maldives in 2014. During his visit, President Xi, was accompanied by a delegation of 100 business representatives, extended an invitation for the Maldives to become part of Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). Maldives agreed to take part in the effort as it would boost tourism, trade, culture, and infrastructure development. The Maldives publicly supported the BRI and became the second country in South Asia to formally endorse the BRI, after Sri Lanka.

Chinese officials have consistently encouraged its citizens to visit Maldives<sup>42</sup> and its business to invest there. China has invested in various projects ranging from construction of roads, highways, bridges, airports, power station among others. China has also directed its investments into the tourism sector of the Maldives, establishing itself as the primary source of tourists for the country.

The diplomatic relations between China and Maldives completed 50 years in 2022. Although, China's diplomatic relations with the Maldives were established later in comparison to other nation, such as India, the connection has grown deeper as China aims to enhance its global influence. The strategic significance of the Maldives to China is underscored by its central location within the Indian Ocean, strategically situated

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<sup>42</sup> Maldives is mostly known for its pristine beaches and luxury resorts, and regarded as a vacation destination for the rich and famous.

along vital sea routes. This engagement materialised primarily in the wake of China's 21<sup>st</sup> Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), a component of broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Within this context, this chapter delves into an examination of the escalating influence of China in Maldives, whereby providing overview of China's economic engagement, political involvement, cultural exchanges, and military and security cooperation with Maldives. Furthermore, an assessment of the repercussions stemming from China's influence on Maldives' economic and political landscape in particular and the broader regional security dynamics in general is undertaken. Notably, China holds the distinction of being the world's largest economy after surpassing the United States of America in GDP in PPP terms. Its burgeoning economic prowess is accompanied by a concurrent pursuit of enhanced global influence. This has been achieved through a strategic approach that has been notably effective in persuading smaller nations to align with its objectives over recent years. Through this chapter, the readers will understand how China has increased its influence in the small island nation and how it helps China to gain control over Maldives. The chapter further analyses the potential challenges for India and examines the response of India.

### **Economic Influence**

China's economic influence has been rising significantly in Maldives over the past decade, with its most pronounced manifestation seen through the implementation of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This section deals with the rising Chinese economic involvement in Maldives in various key areas, including bilateral trade relations, China's involvement in major infrastructure projects in Maldives, financial assistance through loans and grants, and tourism investments. The section also engage in academic debate over China's policy of debt trap. It is argued that China's has bought significant economic opportunities for country but it has also led to heavy reliance on Chinese loans, increase in indebtedness, and potential loss of sovereignty as visible in the leasing of Hambantota port to China for 99 years. The extent of Chinese economic influence has its own long term implications for Maldives economy.

For analyzing China's economic engagement in Maldives, some variables are selected. This section will briefly analyse China-Maldives trade and economic cooperation, tourism, China's financial assistance through loans and grants, and Chinese investment and infrastructure drive.

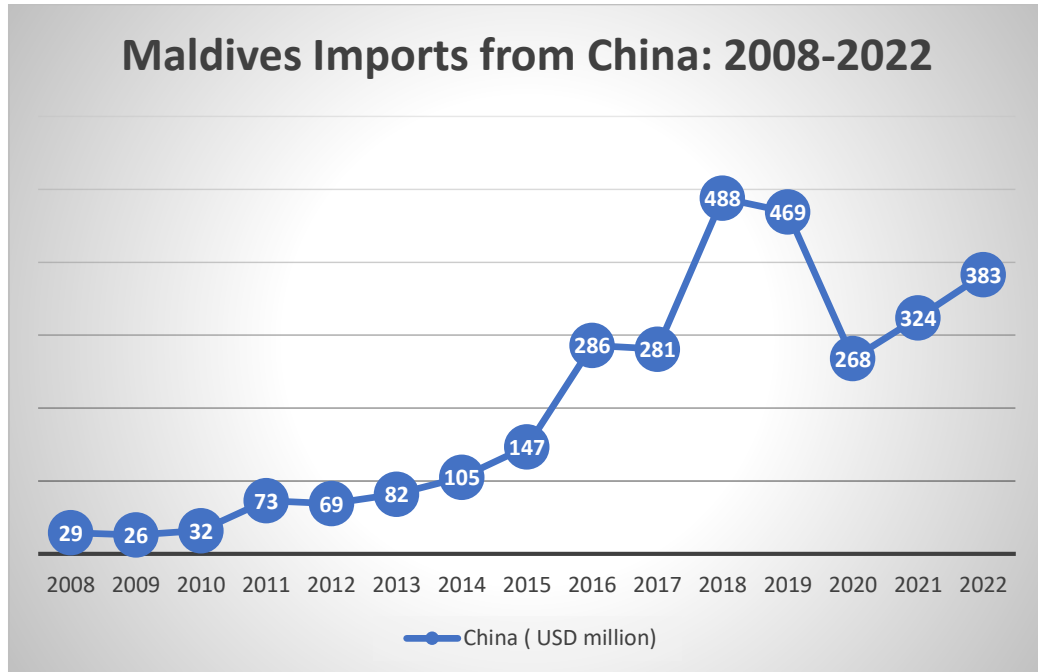
### **1. Trade- Exports/Imports**

To examine potential China's economic influence, the assessment of independent variable including trade has been done. It is found that Maldives is heavily dependent on China for trade. The graph below shows data on trade relationship of China with Maldives. It shows comprehensive summary of Maldives trade dependency (imports) which creates the potential of highest influence in economics terms.

From the analysis, it is shown that Maldives imports from China has increased significantly, which indicates that Maldives is heavily dependent on China. China's exports to Maldives has increased significantly, making the country extremely dependent on China for trade of goods.

According to statistics given by Maldives Customs Service, China exported USD 488 million worth of goods to Maldives in 2018, while India exported USD 287 million. Maldives is heavily dependent on China for imports. Figure below shows the increasing trend in Maldives imports from China. It has increased tremendously since 2013. In 2013, the imports from China amounted to USD 82 million and it has increased to USD 469 million in 2019 (United Nations Comrade).

**Figure 18- Maldives dependence on China for trade imports (2008-2022)**



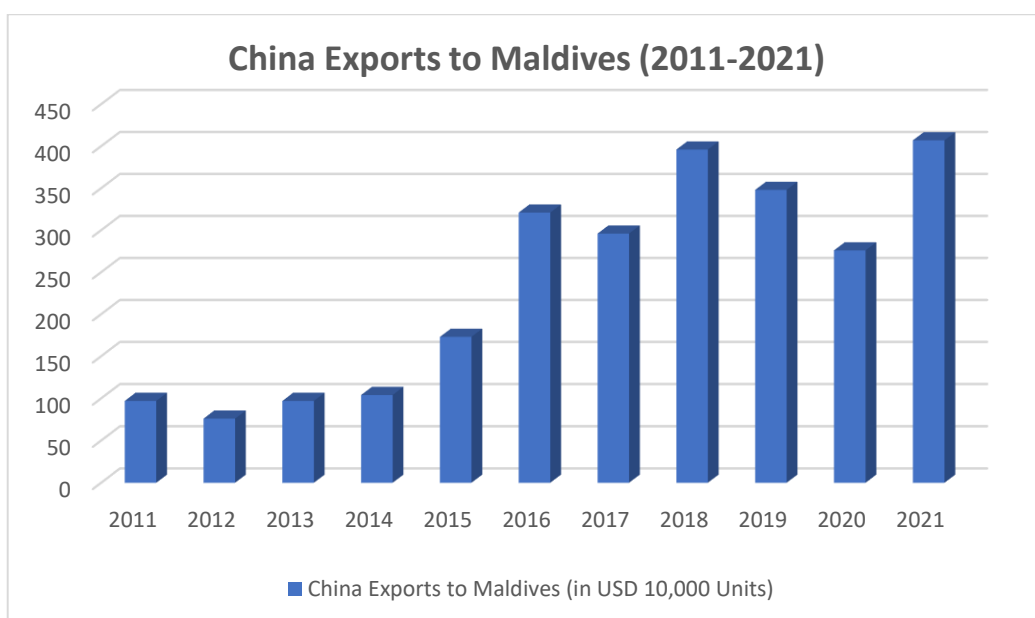
**Source:** Created by author based on data from UN Comtrade, available at <https://comtradeplus.un.org/> and World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS). Retrieved from <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/MDV/Year/2019/TradeFlow/Import> ; Maldives: Economic and Political Overview. Foreign trade figures of the Maldives. Retrieved from <https://www.tradeclub.standardbank.com/portal/en/market-potential/maldives/trade-profile#> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023); Import Statistics. *Maldives Customs Service*. Retrieved from <https://www.customs.gov.mv/Statistics> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023); Annual Reports. *Maldives Monetary Authority*. Retrieved from <http://www.mma.gov.mv/#/research/publication/reports/ar/Annual%20Report> (Accessed on 22 June, 2023)

From the year 2008 till 2014, China was not even in the top five export destination for Maldives. For the first time in 2015, China became part of top five export countries for Maldives (World Integrated Trade Solution). India held third place in 2015 as Maldives export partner with USD 171 million worth of goods and services. In the year 2016 for the first time, China surpassed India as Maldives export partner with USD 286 million of goods and services being exported to Maldives whereas Indian exports valued at USD 276 million. China holds the second place as export partner in the years 2018 and 2019 with exports worth of USD 488 million and USD 469 million while India was at fourth with USD 287 million exports in 2018 and USD 290 million in 2019 (World

Integrated Trade Solution). India for the longest time hold third rank as Maldives important export partner until China take over its place in the year 2016 and again in 2018 and 2019.

According to the Maldivian Embassy in China, there was no proper trade between them in the period 1982 to 2002. However, since 2002 till 2010, the trade grow drastically from US \$2.9 million to US\$ 64 million, while it crossed US\$ 469 million in 2019 (Embassy of Maldives, Beijing).

**Figure 19- China's Exports to Maldives (2011-2021)**



Source: Created by author from the data available at UN Comtrade, available at <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>

**Table 8- Top Trading Partners for Maldives and China (2019)**

MALDIVES		CHINA	
Export Partners	Import Partners	Export Partners	Import Partners
Thailand (24%)	UAE (24%)	US (17%)	South Korea (9%)
United States (13%)	China (16%)	Hong Kong (10%)	Japan (8%)
China (12%)	Singapore (14%)	Japan (6%)	Australia (7%)
France (11%)	India (11%)		Germany (7%)
Germany (11%)	Malaysia (6%)		US (7%)
Italy (5%)	Thailand (5%)		Taiwan (6%)
UK (5%)			

**Source:** The World FactBook, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2019 (Accessed on 28 April, 2023)

In terms of trading partners, while, the Maldives does not rank among China’s foremost trading partners. Noteworthy changes emerged in 2019, as China elevated its status to become the third- largest exporting partner and the second-largest importing nation for the Maldives. By looking at the data, given above, it is clear that India is nowhere the top exporting partner for Maldives while India holds fourth place as importing partner of Maldives.

**Impact:** Signing of Free Trade agreement in 2017 but not yet in effect (Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China). This is Maldives first bilateral Free Trade Agreement with a foreign country.



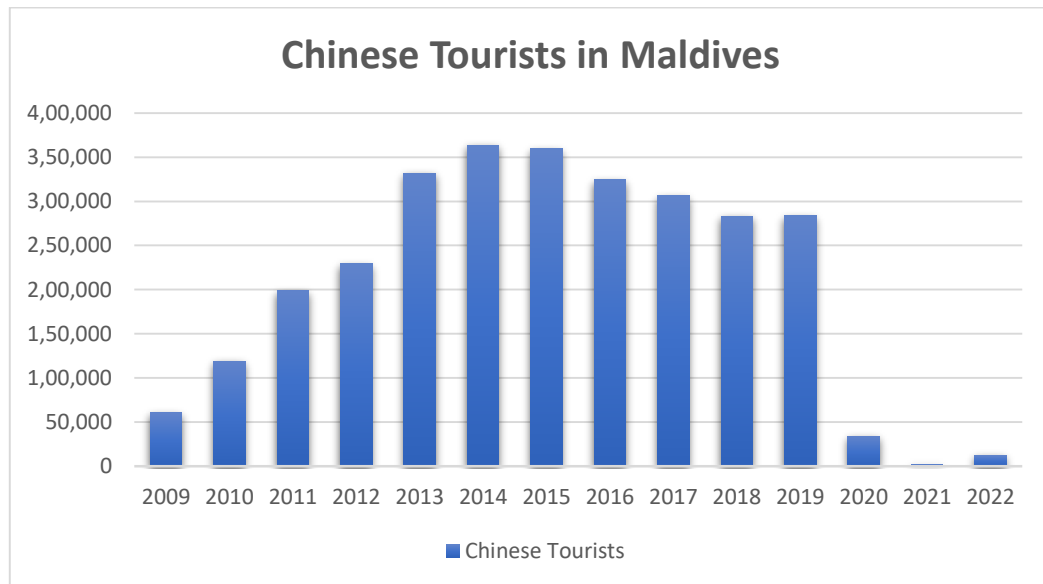
Maldives used to have trade surplus on the account of islands strong service sector. However, the country fall into trade deficit in 2016, the reason for which is promotion of infrastructure projects that require imports of machinery, cement, and other material from China. Maldives used to enjoy favourable balance of trade with China till the year 2014. However, since then, this balance shifted towards China as Maldives started importing raw material from China. In 2016, the dependency ratio on Chinese imports reached 16%, far exceeding the 13% on Indian imports (Kuronuma, 2018).

## **2. Tourism**

The backbone of the Maldivian economy rests upon its tourism sector, responsible for a substantial 70% of its GDP. This encompasses both direct contributions and indirect effects including transportation, communication, and construction. The Maldives attracts a substantial global tourist influx, with China alone contributing 60, 666visitors in 2009, a figure that escalated to 363,626 in 2014, constituting roughly a third of the total arrivals.

Notably. the United Kingdom held the prime position in terms of tourist arrivals in the Maldives in 2009, with 105,950 tourists, accounting for 16.2% of total tourist arrivals. According to Maldivian statistics, 118,961 Chinese tourists visited Maldives in 2010, making China the leading source of visitors to Maldives. It was since 2010 till 2019, China became the leading source of tourists to Maldives. China has emerged as the principal wellspring of tourists to the Maldives with Chinese tourists peaking in 2014 subsequent to a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the Maldives during the same Year.

**Figure 20- Chinese Tourists Arrival in Maldives (2009-2022)**



**Source:** Created by author, based on the data from the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), <https://tourism.gov.mv/statistics/publications/year-2022> (Accessed on 20 April, 2023)

Besides the striking allure of the archipelagic nation, other elements propelling the surge in Chinese tourism to the Maldives encompass direct charter flight routes originating from Beijing, Kunming, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Chongqing, and Hong Kong to Maldives (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Maldives). Facilitating this growth, China Union Pay (CUP) has initiated cash withdrawal services for its cardholders at 95% of the ATM’s in the Maldives. Furthermore, collaborative endeavors have transpired, such as the partnership between China’s Guandong Beta Ocean and a Maldivian enterprise, securing Vaavu Atoll Kunaavashi for the establishment of a 5-star luxury resort comprising 142 rooms. An additional instance involves a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) inked by the Maldivian Tourism Ministry and the state- owned China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) in 2014, delineating plans for the development of Thaa Atoll Kalhufahalafushi as a resort (Kumar, 2016). This expansion of cooperative ties has fuelled the growth of tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

Although China enjoyed the preeminent status of contributing the highest number of tourist arrivals in the Maldives between 2010 and 2019, this coveted position has since shifted. Notably, India emerged as the primary source of tourists to the Maldives in the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, surpassing Chinese visitors. In the year 2020, Indian tourists were 62,960 in numbers, making 11.3% of total tourists in Maldives, while Chinese tourists were 34,245 (6%) almost half of Indian tourists. In the year 2021, Indian tourists accounts for 22.1%, which counts to 291,787, while Chinese tourists were numbered to 2,238 (0.2%). The year 2021 marks the least arrival of Chinese tourists to Sri Lanka. The year 2022 has 219,988 Indian visitors, sharing 19.1%, whereas Chinese tourists held 0.8% (12,764) of total tourist share (Ministry of Tourism of Maldives).

### **3. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**

Table below represents the total share of Maldivian Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and its share to GDP. The data displays that Maldivian economy is heavily dependent on FDI for its development. It reflects the foreign ownership of production.

The initial loan granted to the Maldives was extended by the Export-Import Bank of China<sup>43</sup> (EXIM China) in 2010 for the construction of housing projects in Hulhumale. Since then, the bank has supported Maldives in projects ranging from housing, transport to infrastructure, especially in the development of Hulhumale island. EXIM China also supported the development of China-Maldives Friendship Bridge and Velana International Airport runway, and other mega projects (Ministry of Finance of Maldives).

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<sup>43</sup> The Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM China) is a state-owned policy bank of the People's Republic of China, with the status of an independent legal entity. It is a bank directly under the leadership of the State Council and dedicated to supporting China's foreign trade, investment and international economic cooperation. With the Chinese government's credit support, the Bank plays a crucial role in promoting steady economic growth and structural adjustment, supporting foreign trade, and implementing the "going global" strategy. The Bank offers financing such as concessional financing and preferential export buyer's credits.

**Table 9- Maldives- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Net Inflows (2007-2021)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>% of GDP</b>	<b>In US\$</b>
2007	7.09	132,432,080
2008	7.98	181,255,431
2009	6.74	157,963,586
2010	8.36	216,468,945
2011	15.27	423,530,663
2012	7.90	227,976,866
2013	10.95	360,816,336
2014	9.02	333,375,218
2015	7.25	297,975,993
2016	10.43	456,639,057
2017	9.63	457,808,313
2018	10.86	575,658,028
2019	17.13	961,037,565
2020	11.76	440,711,709
2021	8.20	443,473,179

**Source:** World Development Indicators, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#> (accessed on 2 February, 2023)\

#### **4. Infrastructure Development**

China and the Maldives established bilateral relations in 1972. Since then, China has steadily increased its investment and maintained amicable relations with different Maldivian governments.

Commencing in 1985, China initiated contract projects within the Maldives. According to Mitra (2022), the cumulative value of these contractual undertakings reached the value of \$ 46.37 million by the close of 2001, with a turnover exceeding \$40 million.

Chinese financial investment in the Maldives remained relatively modest during the first decade of the 2000s, but the intensity in investment increased post 2013 due to the BRI. Under this initiative, China provided loans for infrastructure projects and economic development. China has been actively involved in developing capital assets in Maldives including the modernization of the Maldivian International Airport, the construction of a bridge linking airport with Male, the capital city, and initiatives related to housing, transportation, and road infrastructure.

#### **Suspicion on China's development projects**

China has invested billions of dollars in smaller economies particularly after the announcement of BRI, including Maldives. The Maldives occupies a crucial position within China's Indian Ocean strategy. Integration into the Maritime Silk Road Initiative occurred through the Ihavandhippolhu Integrated Development Project or IHavan, located in the northernmost region of the archipelago. This project traverses the strategic 7-degree channel, linking significant maritime passages from Southeast Asia and China to West Asia and Europe. China's strategic presence in this region capitalizes on the movement of goods valued at approximately US\$ 18 trillion annually across the 7 degree channel (Singh, 2022).

One project that could have strategic implication was Makunudhoo Observatory. The observation station could be used to observe more than just ocean situation and movement. Maldives scrapped the project on India's continuous urge.

The pursuit of economic interests masked under the guise of development has emerged as a fundamental element of China's expansionist agenda (Valiathan, 2020). Chinese investments are widespread throughout South East Asia, South Asia, and Africa.

## **Challenges associated with Chinese Economic Engagement**

### **➤ Leased Islands in Maldives**

#### **1. The Case of Feydhoo Finolhu Island**

Maldives has leased Feydhoo Finolhu island for 50 years in the year 2016 for development purpose at the cost of about \$ 4 million (Chaudhury, 2016). The island is located approx. 600 away from India and is strategically located near the international Airport of Male. Since 2006, the island was used as a security jail and in 2010, it was reopened for Correctional Training Centre for Children (Getty Images) and later on an undisclosed Chinese company has acquired the tiny islet in 2016. However, military usage of these leased islands cannot be ruled out. China has had long history of reclaiming islands. An illustrative instance can be found in the South China Sea, where China has constructed seven artificial islands following the obliteration of reefs within the Spratly Islands (Francis, 2020).

Recent satellite imagery portraying the Feydhoo Finolhu island in the Indian Ocean has sparked security apprehension within India. The images show dramatic facelift courtesy land reclamation. It is found that the satellite image taken on January 2018 displays the actual size of the island that is approx. 38000 sq. metres but the picture clicked on February 2020 shows land reclamation by China following the destruction of the reef (Francis, 2020). This land reclamation is very much visible in images below. The image in 2014 and the image in 2019 shows the extension of island. The image taken in 2023 shows the development of possible resort hub. These images display that Chinese company is involved in drilling and filling the area with huge quantity of sand for making an artificial extension of the leased island.

## Feydhoo Finolhu Island



**Figure 21-Feydhoo Finolhu Island in 2014**



**Figure 22- Feydhoo Finolhu Island in 2019**

**Source:** Valiathan, K.V. (2020). China's Investments in Maldives: Implications for India in the Indian Ocean Region. Issue Brief, No. 259. *Centre For Land Warfare Studies*.



**Figure 23- Feydhoo Finolhu as of May, 2023**

Source: Google Earth Pro, 2023

## **2. The Case of Kunaavashi Island in Maldives**

Another island, Kunaavasi situated within the Vaavu Atoll, has been granted a 50- years lease for resort development to China Machinery Engineering Company (CMEC), a government-operated entity. Just weeks after agreement to lease Kunaavashi island, it is announced that a five-star resort will be developed on the island by China's private company CJL Investments Pvt. Ltd (Hotelier Maldives).

China's movement over both the islands are under scanner due to the possibility of them being used by China as a possible secret military purpose. Observers within the Indian Ocean express concerns that China's expansion endeavors may result in the establishment of facilities with dual applications, serving both civilian and military purposes. The island's strategic location has raised security concerns in India. The islet position would allow it to monitor traffic going to and fro from the adjacent international airport on Male. An article in Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (2020) has cleared all the speculations that fears surrounding Chinese projects in Maldives are overblown and there is no evidence to show that Chinese projects are more than they appear. But the possibility cannot be ruled out in the future, as the satellite images could be deceptive.

### **China's other Development Projects**

While the investment in the two islets are susceptible to strategic considerations, the most visible infrastructure development have been in Male, capital of Maldives and the nearby island of Hulhumale. These undertakings encompass the expansion of Male's Velana International Airport and the construction of 'Sinamale Bridge' also recognized as the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, connecting the Male with Hulhumale. Initially, it was GMR Male International Airport Limited (GMIAL), the Indian company which was to modernize the International airport and operate it for 25 years. Maldives canceled the agreement unilaterally and handed it to China. GMR took the case to International Arbitration Court over abrupt termination (Firstpost). The Court ordered that GMIAL to be paid \$270 million as compensation. Maldives paid the amount promptly which is after it is suspected that China has been the helping hand (Pararajasingham, 2017).



Throughout the previous decade, the Export- Import Bank of China (EXIM China) has been a crucial financier of development projects. Their substantial investments extend to the Maldives, where they have actively participated in the construction of China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, residential units in Maldives and Hulhumale, and the augmentation and development of Ibrahim Nasir International Airport at Hulhumale (Maldives Independent), among other initiatives.

Moreover, this has been Chinese practice, whereby providing loans for infrastructure development and connecting them with BRI, China gains access to nations; maritime borders and therefore secure its hold in their respective economies. This trend has been in smaller nations, where the main concern lies in repayment. The failure of which may result into debt-trap. It is a worry for island country like Maldives which relies heavily on tourism for revenue. Concerns would be exacerbated in case of natural disaster or pandemic, the one that happened in 2020. Lockdowns and shutting down of economies created huge ruckus in their financial plans and making it difficult for legislators to take efficient decisions.

China's triumph in developing artificial islands within the South China Sea serves as an exemplar. Similar in the context of the Indian Ocean, China's potential acquisition of rights for island construction could result in its encroachment upon India's sphere of influence. Given the strategic location of Feydhoo Finolhu island to Male International airport and its proximity to capital city of Maldives gives the questionable impression that China might use it for dual purpose in the future- civil and military-strategic. Thus the uncertainty prevails.

### **Debt-Trap Controversy**

The External debt of Maldives as of June 2022 stood at MVR 32.3 billion, of which EXIM China holds the largest share with 30% of total external debt outstanding creditor (National Bureau of Statistics, Maldives).

According to former president Mohamed Nasheed, Maldives own \$3.1 billion of debt from China. While the officially reported range is between \$1.1 billion-\$1.4 billion, an amount of significant magnitude for a nation with a GDP of \$4 billion (Ethirajan, 2020). He views that the island country is "falling deeper into Chinese debt trap". He said that,

“Already more than 70% of our foreign debt is owed to Beijing, which gives it huge leverage over us, undermining Maldivian sovereignty and independence” (Kuronuma, 2018).

### **Diplomatic Influence**

The escalating diplomatic influence that China wields in the Maldives is a recent development. Maldives has maintained friendly relations with India on the account of its geographical proximity and historical connections, whereas China’s presence and influence has been recent and has deepened over years through various means. This section analyses various political variables to assess China’s diplomatic influence that includes both countries officials’ high level visits, China’s interference in Maldives domestic politics, Maldives alignment with China’s key stances in matters such as the unification of Taiwan, territorial disputes in South China sea, and human rights issues in China’s northwestern region. The political alignment has allowed China to strengthen its hold on the small island nation.

#### **1. High level meetings<sup>44</sup> between China and Maldives (2008-2022)**

Maldives began its formal relations with China in 1972, and the relationship has progressed steadily since then. The Maldives inaugurated its embassy in Beijing in 2009, and reciprocal visits by political delegations served to cement this diplomatic bond. Further strengthening the ties, China reciprocated by establishing its own embassy in the Maldives in 2014, a noteworthy move given that it is the sole non-South Asian nation to have a diplomatic mission in the Maldives, a move primarily aimed at catering to the influx of Chinese tourists visiting the island nation.

Significant advancements in their bilateral relationship were marked by notable high-level visits. The sequence of these visits commenced with the arrival of Maldives foreign minister, Fathulla Hameel, in 1980, followed by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom visit in 1984.

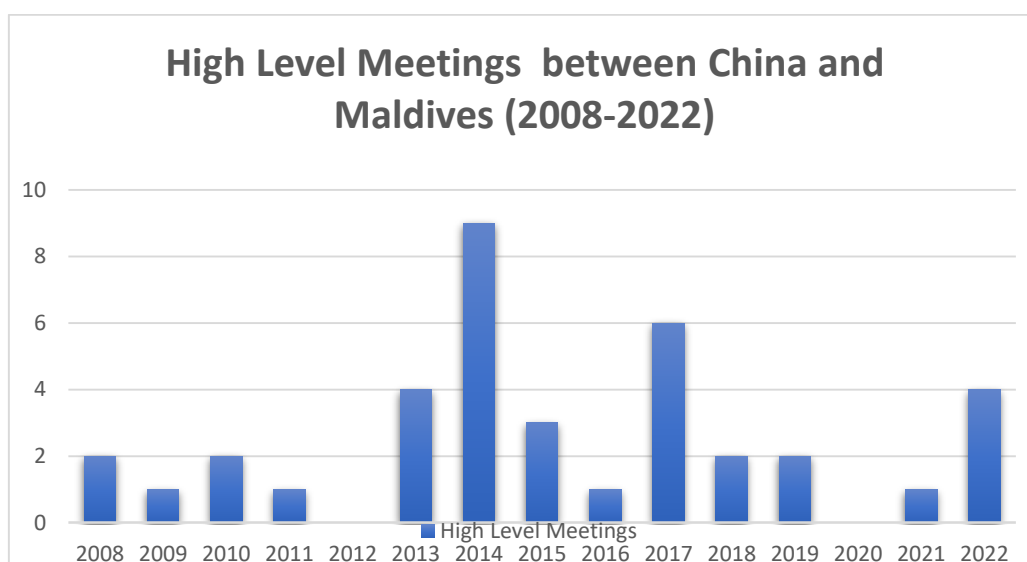
The year 2014 has been historical in China-Maldives relations. Maldives President During this remarkable period, the respective leaders, Maldives President Abdulla

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<sup>44</sup> A meeting was counted as high-level if at least one head of state was in attendance.

Yameen Abdul Gayoom and Chinese President Xi Jinping, conducted reciprocal visits within a span of a month. During these visits, both nations voiced their commitment to build 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road, a move that opened up abundant collaborative prospects and mutual benefits. In this context, the two nations also established a “Future-Oriented All- Round Friendly and Cooperative Partnership” that includes agreements on foreign ministry cooperation, healthcare, and infrastructure projects (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Maldives, 2015 ).

**Figure 24- High level meetings between China and Maldives (2008-2022)**



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. Available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2737\\_663478/2739\\_663482/index.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2737_663478/2739_663482/index.html) (Accessed on 27 March, 2023)

During the 7<sup>th</sup> round of Diplomatic consultations between China and Maldives in 2021, both parties reached a consensus to actively advance their bilateral relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China , 2021):

- “To deepen anti-pandemic cooperation
- To support economic recovery
- To expand bilateral cooperation in the fields of culture, youth, education, healthcare, agriculture, and the ocean.

- To strengthen multilateral coordination and cooperation”

In 2022, a significant event occurred when Wang Yi, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China, undertook an official visit to Maldives. During this visit, the two nations entered into agreements spanning various areas of cooperation. These agreements encompasses matters such as mutual visa exemption; economic and technical cooperation involving grant aid; follow-up management and maintenance of the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge; a project for sea-water desalination; and a program focused on hospital assistance and cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China).

## **2. Positive public response of China**

- **One-China policy**

Maldivian Foreign minister Abdulla Shahid highly appreciates China’s long standing support in the fields of education, infrastructure, and energy. Shahid semphasized Maldives’ commitment to upholding the One-China Principle. He said that “the One-China principle is also an international consensus confirmed by the UN General Assembly resolution, and I have released a press statement as President of the UN General Assembly to make my position clear” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China .

## **3. Regime Change**

Situated strategically within the Indian Ocean, The Maldives archipelago assumes a crucial position along important sea lines of communication (SLOCs), much like Sri Lanka. While historically under the sphere of India’s influence, concerns about the impact of China’s growing influence emerged in early 2018 amid the “self coup” orchestrated by President Yameen Abdulla Gayoom. The tranquillity of the Maldives was disrupted when President Yameen declared a state of emergency following Supreme Court order to release prominent political adversaries, including former Maldivian president, Mohamed Nasheed. The crisis soon spiralled into power struggle between India and China. Nasheed appealed to India and requested military intervention. He also accused China of seizing land. China has seized 16 islets among 1192 scattered coral islands. He calls Chinese actions as “land Grab” (as cited in

France-Presse, 2018). He also alleged that “without firing a single shot, China has grabbed more land than the East India Company at the height of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (as cited in news article WION, 2018). He even added that 2018 presidential elections is the “the last chance to extricate the Maldives from increasing Chinese influence”. China categorically refuted these allegations, asserting that its assistance comes without any conditionalities and has ‘no strings attached’ (Associated Press, 2018).

The major highlight of the crisis was China’s warnings to India and the world to not interfere and to not take actions. All this pointed towards China’s strong foothold in Maldives. During the crisis, Chinese warships sailed in the region. Tiezzi (2018) writes that China’s warnings against any outside interference is because China did not want Yameen government to fall from power as this would jeopardize China’s progress. The Chinese government has justified their presence that the ships carried normal exercises. The real intention behind China’s naval presence in the East Indian Ocean had an ulterior motive, as cited in Miglani and Aneez, (2018), aiming to support Yameen in the event of potential Indian intervention to unseat him.

Maldives has had close economic and military relationship with India until the overthrow of President Nasheed’s regime in 2012. Nasheed’s call for military- backed envoy has historical antecedent. In 1988, India intervened militarily on Maldives request when a group of mercenaries attempted to take over. Later, India has also aided Maldives transition to democracy.

Nonetheless, in recent years, China has made significant headway in the Maldives as “Yameen, who is perceived as ‘pro-China’, in India, decided to use the Maldives strategic location on the Indian Ocean to play one power against the other” (Kumar and Stanzel, 2018). This trajectory commenced with the replacement of an Indian company with the Chinese one for the development of Male International airport. During Chinese president Xi Jinping’s visit to the Maldives in 2014, Yameen openly expressed that “At such a crucial juncture of our development, it is indeed a source of major encouragement and inspiration that one of our most constructive economic partners is willing to support our national effort to transform our economy, bring capital, and promote trade and development” (Firstpost).

Furthermore, the Yameen administration amended the constitution to permit foreign ownership of land, including entire islands. Although, this move was criticized as this could impact regional stability and will turn Maldives into a “frontline state” in a “new cold war” between India and China (The Wire).

**Figure 25- Key Maldivian leaders since 1978**



Yasheed’s defeat in 2018 paved the way for Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to assume power, leading to an increased prioritization of India over China (Mitra, 2022). Consequently, Maldivian foreign policy is intricately linked to its domestic political landscape, influencing its orientation. The outcome of the forthcoming presidential elections will determine the prevailing inclination.

### **Military Influence**

The increasing military influence of China in Maldives has raised concerns among both regional and global stakeholders. Though China’s presence in the archipelago nation is primarily through economic and political engagement, however, there are indications of growing influence in the sphere of military as well. Under BRI, China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in Maldives ranging from roadways, airports, highways, friendship bridges, and development of islands. These projects have not only boosted Maldivian economy but has raised question of potential military implications. China has conducted joint military exercises with Maldives, port calls, training exercises, and Chinese navy’s visit to Maldives on multiple occasions. These demonstrate China’s intention to enhance its military cooperation with Maldives which is viewed with concern by India. The geographical proximity of Maldives and it being centrally located in Indian Ocean make it a matter of national security concern for India.

It is important to highlight that there is ongoing debate and speculation regarding the scale and nature of China's military activities within the Maldives are subject to debate and speculation. While China's economic and political impact has been substantial, question remains about its military influence and long term objectives.

### **1. Military agreements**

In 2012, China and the Maldives entered into a military aid agreement aimed at providing free assistance from China to the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) (Minivan News Archive). Initially China's focus was on establishing a military presence within the Maldives. However, China's unwillingness to antagonize US and India (Security partners of Maldives), the goal has taken a back seat. Nonetheless, there have been indications that China is actively engaging with the Maldives to counter America's potential establishment of a new military base on the southernmost island of Maldives, Gan (Kumar, 2016).

### **2. Port Calls/Military Exercises**

- In 2017, Chinese Navy 150 Fleet made friendly visit at Maldives port. The visit "deepened friendship and enriched the content of the exchange between Chinese and Maldivian armies, leaving a strong mark in the history of relations between the two armies and the two countries" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Maldives).
- In 2013, the PLA Navy deployed "Peace Ark" hospital ship on a goodwill visit to the Maldives, offering humanitarian medical services to local communities over a period of six days. This event marked the first occasion of a Chinese naval ship visiting Maldives and providing humanitarian medical aid to Maldivians (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Maldives).
- Traditionally, India has played a role as the primary security provider for the coastal areas of Maldives and the two nations have engaged in joint coast guard exercise called "Dosti".
- Since 2013, the Maldives has been a participant in the Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation (TMSC) agreement involving India and Sri Lanka, underscoring the importance of maritime security in the region.

## **Cultural Influence**

China's cultural influence in Maldives is primarily driven by increased tourism, people-to-people contact, education exchange programs, and media presence. China constitute the primary origin of tourists visiting the Maldives. These Chinese tourists bring along their distinct language, culture, food habits, and customs which have an impact on Maldives local tourism industry and cultural landscape. The Chinese government also provides scholarships to Maldivian students to study in China which exposes them to Chinese culture. Chinese media outlets also have a role in spreading Chinese culture in Maldives exposing local population to Chinese culture through movies, news, music, television dramas, documentaries, and pop culture. China's expanding cultural influence in Maldives is not without controversy as it may have an impact on Maldivian unique cultural heritage and loss of traditional practices.

In 2021, Dhivehi language program was inaugurated in the School of Asian Studies of Beijing Foreign Studies University. The opening was historic as it was for the first time that the language Dhivehi (which is spoken only in Maldives) has been offered in international university. The language program is a testimony to the long standing friendly relations between China and Maldives. It is a "model for the international community to build efficient ties and develop further engagement between a large country and a country of small size" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Maldives).

## **Overview of India-Maldives relations in context of China's influence**

While historically a friend of India,<sup>45</sup> Maldives' relationship with India remains intricate, dynamic and ever-evolving. This complexity arises due to various factors such as internal political rivalries within Maldivian and the substantial role that foreign policy plays in the perceptions of the Maldivian populace, especially considering the country's strategic geographical location.

India was among the earliest nations to acknowledge the Maldives' independence in 1965. Additionally, India took the initiative to establish a resident mission in Male, the

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<sup>45</sup>Maldives, which is barely 70 nautical miles away from Minicoy Island in India's Lakshadweep archipelago and 300 nautical miles away from India's west coast, making it in close proximity to India.



capital of Maldives. Reciprocally, the Maldives established its own fully-fledged High Commission in New Delhi in 2004<sup>46</sup>. The relation between Maldives and India has been growing with economic and diplomatic cooperation. A pivotal juncture was reached in 1988, when India executed Operation Cactus in response to a coup attempt against former Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (Sibal, 2020; Banka, 2022). Although Gayoom has sought military intervention from other countries as well, India came to rescue (Times of India). During Gayoom presidency, his government maintained cordial ties with India, but also veered towards China (Mitra, 2022).

The year 2008 presidential elections in Maldives brought Mohamed Nasheed to power. During Nasheed's presidency, both countries have signed various defense agreements and his regime was more pro-India. China's allure intensified for the Maldives following the ascension to power of President Mohammed Waheed Hassan and Abdulla Yameen, both of whom displayed a favorable disposition towards China (Kumar, 2016).

The principles of India's "neighbourhood first" and Maldives "India's first" policy underpin their relationship. The two nations share close ties in the spheres of defense, recognizing the crucial significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the imperative to defend it against diverse threats, both conventional and non-conventional threats.

### **Potential Challenges of rising China's rising influence in Maldives- Implications for India**

As the Maldives draws closer to China, it simultaneously distances itself from India's sphere of influence. The Maldivian administrations with a pro-China stance occasionally took antagonistic measures against India. For example, the government led by Abdulla Yameen decided to return two Dhruv naval helicopters that had been gifted to the Maldivian coast guard by India (Firstpost, 2018). When Maldives was engulfed in deep political crisis with the introduction of state of emergency in 2018

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<sup>46</sup> At that time, it was among the four diplomatic missions worldwide that Maldives opened.

(Meredith, 2018), Maldives Defence ministry calls India not to militarily intervene in the country as an affront to its sovereignty (The Wire, 2018).

In late 2018, change in Maldivian leadership began to improve tense diplomatic relations between India and Maldives. The current democratically elected government with President Ibrahim Solih in power backtracked on previous government agreements such as Free trade agreement (FTA) (Macan-Markar, 2017) with China and put on hold the return of two Dhruv naval helicopters (The Indian Express, 2018).

The growing China's presence, particularly the movement of its navy ships close to Indian territorial waters is causing tremendous alarm in the Indian subcontinent. China has substantially invested in the archipelago, both financially and through leasing a few islands in the name of development. The Maldives reliance on Chinese imports enabled China to extend loans to the country, raising concerns about a potential 'debt-trap' scenario in the in the near future. If China intends to convert any of the leased islands into a naval base within the archipelago, this could have security implications for India.

Until 2014, for more than three decades, India was Maldives leading export destination. India's exports to Maldives have increased year on year basis but its role as leading trade partner over the years have been overshadowed by China. The status-quo has disturbed after Yameen held presidential position of Maldives. During his presidency, he encouraged investments into the island nations, therefore paving the way for China to invest in Maldives and hence increasing its presence in the IOR- the strategic space for India (McDougall and Taneja, 2019).

Given China's history of transforming islands into strategically significant locations with dual uses, such as its activities in the Spratly Islands within the South China Sea, there is a significant risk of similar developments occurring in the Indian Ocean too. Although, India's export to the Maldives have been increasing annually, its position as a primary provider of goods and services is encountering a substantial challenge from China. However, China's increasing influence in the neighbouring countries of India has compelled India to refocus on its 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.

## **India's response in the context of China's rising influence in Maldives**

### **➤ India-Maldives High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP)<sup>47</sup>**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed during the visit of former Indian External Affairs Minister of India Late Smt. Sushma Swaraj to the Maldives in 2019 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Maldives), providing a grant assistance of \$5.5 million (85 million MVR) for the High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP). When Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid visited India in 2021, the revised MoU for HICDP increased to \$ 10 million (155 million MVR). In 2022, during the visit of India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar to the Maldives, an additional grant of \$ 6.5 million (100 million MVR) for the HICDP was formally agreed upon. Now, the total outlay for HICDP is \$ 16.6 million (255 million MVR). As of June 2023, a total of 38 HICDP have been approved across Maldives. Out of these, 7 have been completed (India-Maldives High Impact Community Development Projects).

### **➤ Infrastructure Projects/Loans/Aids**

In the year 2020, India unveiled a \$500 million aid package to the Maldives aimed at constructing bridges and causeways that would link the country's capital with three islets. The aid consisted of \$100 million grant and \$400 million line of credit (Haidar, 2020). The project will be single largest infrastructure project than any of Chinese funded projects (Aljazeera, 2020). These loans are part of an endeavour to counterbalance China's expanding influence in the small island nation, which has historically shifted aligning with India and China. Presently, the pendulum has swung towards India, with a pro-India government led by the President Ibrahim Solih in the

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<sup>47</sup> HICDPs constitute an important dimension of the dynamic development partnership between India and the Maldives. These projects are driven by the needs of communities on the islands. Projects under HICDP are selected by Government of Maldives through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and are those that involve a high-level of community impact and participation in the areas of livelihood and income generation, health, education, gender and child empowerment, sports, sustainable development, etc. The objectives for implementing these projects are three-fold: i) To develop high-impact assets for the benefit of the local island community; ii) To build capacities within the Local Councils that are fully responsible for the projects, right from their commencement to conclusion; iii) To support and strengthen the local economy.

Maldives (Col Dr. Vasudeva, 2018) but this proximity does not necessarily signal a decline in Chinese influence in Maldives.

In 2018, Maldives received a financial grant of \$1.4 billion from India aimed at offsetting previous Chinese loans (Miglani, 2018). Unlike the non-transparent and potentially unsustainable Chinese loans, Indian financial assistance comes with clear terms and favourable conditions. The Indian loans are not only transparent but also contribute to local businesses and job creation in Maldives. This approach empowers Maldives to independently select and execute their preferred projects (Palanisamy, 2020).

### **India as a reliable partner during COVID-19**

Most recently, India has reaffirmed its role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) during Maldives recovery from Covid-19 pandemic. India has extended humanitarian assistance, donated essential medicines, dispatch medical relief team to deal with the outbreak. Despite strained relations between the two countries, India upheld its obligation to provide aid, showcasing notable example of India's Neighbourhood First Policy (Shaahunaz, 2020).

It is important to highlight that an excessive dependence on India could potentially grant India leverage in using crises as a negotiation tool for security arrangements with Maldives. However, its important to emphasize that such a situation has not materialized thus far. India will need to address and manage China's expanding economic and maritime interests in the IOR, which are perceived as challenges to India's national security.

### **Conclusion**

The rivalry and power struggle between India and China are evident in their interactions concerning Maldives. India has consistently demonstrated its support and favour towards Maldives since the establishment of their bilateral relations. Conversely, China's approach has varied depending on the ruling regime. It is anticipated that China will continue its engagement with the current Maldivian government, regardless of its orientation. China's substantial contributions to developing nations extend beyond domestic political considerations. Despite India's involvement in Maldives, China's

presence has not diminished significantly, as it remains involved in multiple economic projects aimed at bolstering the country's economy.

China has gained significant influence in Maldives, marking a notable development in contemporary history. While initial speculations about China establishing a military base in Maldives as part of its "String of Pearls" strategy have not materialized thus far.

Recent shifts in governments of Maldives in recent years have led to a gradual transformation in the dynamics between India, China, and Maldives. After Mohamed Nasheed assumed the presidency of the Maldivian state (2008-2012), relations between India and Maldives began to expand. However, with Abdulla Yameen coming to power, there was a policy shift witnessing inclination towards China while with India relations were strained. It was not just the proximity of Maldivian leaders towards China but also the China's ability to provide funds to fulfill the development projects in Maldives. During Yameen's presidency, China has invested heavily in the island country and even leased Feydhoo Finolhu Island for 50 years. China's first loan came through EXIM China in 2010 for the construction of houses in Hulhumale. Considering China's history in the South China Sea, there is a strong possibility that China might exploit one of the leased islands for strategic purposes. Over time, India has voiced its concerns. Furthermore, the relationship between India and Maldives deteriorated during Yameen's tenure. After 2018 presidential elections in Maldives, pendulum has swung in India's favour with Pro-India government in power. China's influence is overshadowed by India with new regime.

However, a comprehensive examination of China's presence in Maldives offers valuable insights. This presence should be contextualized within China's broader efforts in the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR), where it has made significant advancements- a region once considered primarily within India's spheres of influence.

India need to acknowledge that China's influence in Maldives is entrenched, and therefore, India should pursue policies and actions that avoid sparking a zero-sum competition with China in Maldives. It is evident that these two Asian powers are vying for relative advantages in Maldives. However, a complete alignment with either of these powers is not a feasible option for Maldives, given its ongoing economy recovery from

the pandemic. While India's financial aid and humanitarian assistance contribute to improving ties with Maldives, they might not be sufficient to compel China to withdraw its involvement.

One undeniable fact is that due to its geographical proximity and the multidimensional relationship it shares with India, Maldives cannot simply overlook India's importance.

## **Chapter-7: China's Increasing Influence in the South Asian Region: The Case of Sri Lanka**

### **Overview of China-Sri Lanka relations**

Centuries have witnessed the enduring relationship between China and Sri Lanka. This bond was fortified through trade exchanges along the Maritime Silk Route, accompanied by robust collaboration in cultural and intellectual domains.

These longstanding affable ties took the formal shape of diplomatic relations in 1957, marked by the establishment of Resident Embassies in each other's capitals. An influential milestone was Sri Lanka's pioneering recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950 within the South Asian region. A historic accord, the Rubber-Rice Pact<sup>48</sup> of 1952, holds significance as one of the initial agreements inked by PRC with a non-communist nation.

The year 2013 witnessed a pivotal elevation in bilateral relations, transitioning to a strategic cooperative partnership. Celebrations commemorated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic ties between both nations in 2017.

The relationship's evolution spans from trade interactions and cultural linkages to encompass more strategic facets, such as infrastructure development and investment, and global interconnectedness. China provided steadfast support to Sri Lanka during and post the ethnic conflict period. In return, Sri Lanka facilitated China's entry into the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971 and World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. These relations are underpinned by the enduring "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", driving the progression of both countries and their indispensable role in each other's economic advancement.

Over an extended period, China has stood in solidarity with Sri Lanka, extending invaluable aid for its economic and societal progress, thereby becoming the country's foremost development collaborator. China places significant emphasis on Sri Lanka within its neighbourhood diplomacy, considering it a noteworthy cooperative ally in

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<sup>48</sup> It was a barter arrangement, whereby, Sri Lanka supplied rubber to China in return for rice.

South Asia. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi envisions that “China-Sri Lanka cooperation will become a model of maritime cooperation in the new era, and expect Sri Lanka to become a dazzling pearl on the ‘Maritime Silk’” (Wang Yi, 2015).

## **Economic Influence**

### **1. Trade**

Sri Lanka doesn’t hold the top position as China’s most significant exporting or importing partner in terms of overall trade volume. However, China elevated its status to become Sri Lanka’s second- largest importer in 2008, a move up from its third- place ranking in 2007. This trend persisted through 2019, where China maintained its position as a substantial importer for Sri Lanka, while United States took the lead as Sri Lanka’s primary exporting partner, with India securing the second position (The World Factbook, US Central Intelligence).

**Table 10- Top Trading Partners for Sri Lanka and China**

<b>SRI LANKA</b>		<b>CHINA</b>	
<b>Export Partner</b>	<b>Import Partner</b>	<b>Export Partner</b>	<b>Import Partner</b>
United States (24%)	India (24%)	US (17%)	South Korea (9%)
India (8%)	China (23%)	Hong Kong (10%)	Japan (8%)
United Kingdom (7%)	Singapore (7%)	Japan (6%)	Australia (7%)
Germany (7%)	UAE (6%)		Germany (7%)
	Malaysia (5%)		US (7%)
			Taiwan (6%)

**Source:** The World FactBook, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2019 (Accessed on 28 April, 2023)

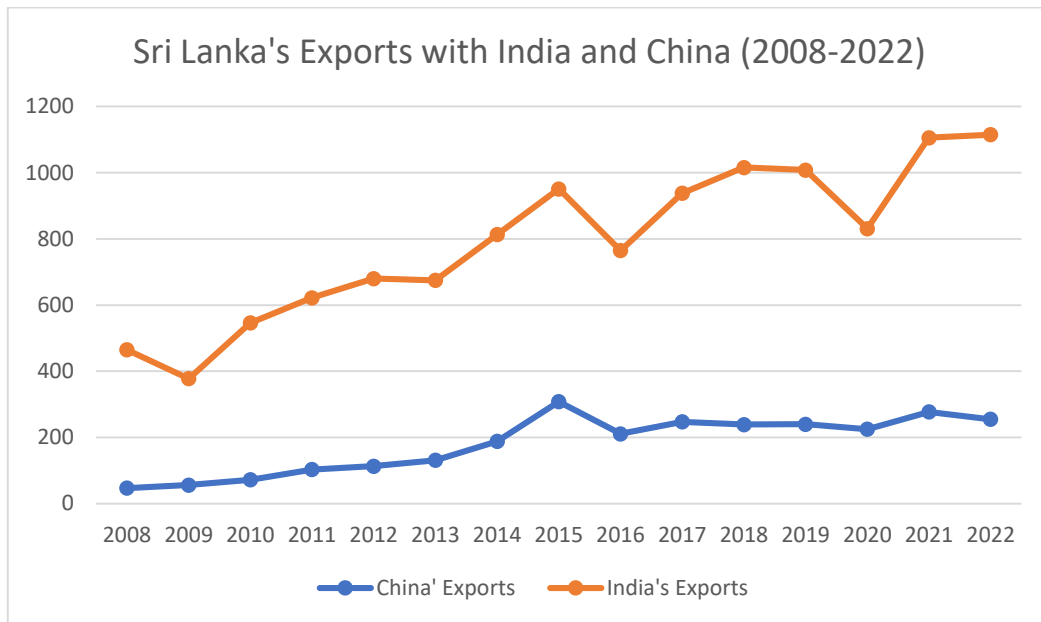


Meanwhile, India continues to retain its role as Sri Lanka's primary importing partner. Recent years have witnessed a notable strengthening of trade ties between China and Sri Lanka, as evident from trade data reported by both countries. This decade's bilateral trade indicates a substantial expansion, exemplified by the trajectory over the past few years. Back in 1990, the total bilateral trade, encompassing both imports and exports, amounted to US\$ 125.6 Million. By the year 2000, this figure had doubled to US\$ 256.2 Million.

It is worth acknowledging that despite the surge in Sri Lanka's trade interactions with China, the growth rate of its trade with India has outpaced this trend. In 2008, the trade value between Sri Lanka and China trade was recorded at US\$ 3.9 Billion, whereas with India, it reached US\$ 1.1 Billion. Notably, Sri Lanka's trade with India experienced three times the growth.

Fast forwarding to 2021, Sri Lanka's exports to China reached US\$ 491 million to China. Over the past 26 years, Sri Lanka's exports to China have displayed an annual growth rate of 23.7%, rising from US\$ 1.95 million in 1995 to US\$ 491 million in 2021. By contrast, China's exports to Sri Lanka totalled US\$5.48 billion. China's exports to Sri Lanka have grown at an annual rate of 14.5% during the last 26- year period, ascending from US\$ 161 million in 1995 to US\$ 5.4 billion in 2021(Observatory of Economic Complexity).

**Figure 26- Sri Lanka's Exports with India and China (2008-2022)**

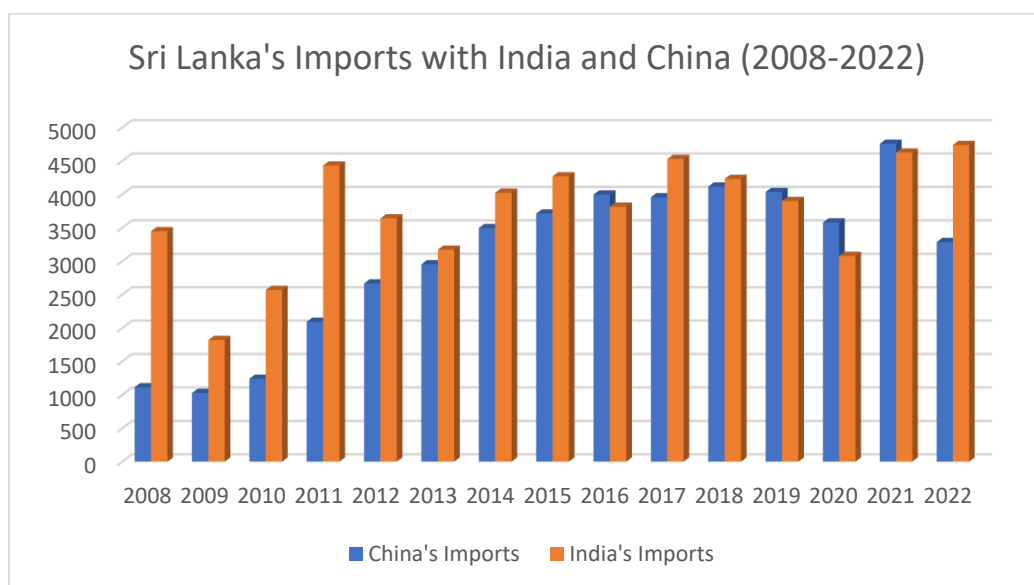


Source: Prepared by author from the data available through Central Bank of Sri Lanka Annual Reports (2008-2022) Available at <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports> (Value in US\$ million)

It is to be noted that from the period 2008 till 2022, western countries-USA and UK continued to be Sri Lanka’s major export destinations, holding first and second place respectively. India consistently ranks as Sri Lanka’s third largest source country for exports, with exceptions in the years 2008, 2009, and 2011.

Regarding imports, India has traditionally held the top position in subsequent years, except for the period between 2019 and 2021, during which China emerged as the leading source of imports for Sri Lanka, replacing India. Over these years, main imports from India are refined petroleum products, sugar, copper wires, motorcycles, and auto-trishwas while imports from China comprised of machinery, building material, medical, pharmaceuticals, mechanical appliances, and cotton. Driven by higher imports, India holds the unique position as Sri Lanka’s major trading partner. In 2008, China was nowhere in the first three places. Singapore and Iran holds the second and third place as import source countries in 2008.

**Figure 27- Sri Lanka's Imports with India and China (2008-2022)**



Source: Prepared by author from the data available through Central Bank of Sri Lanka Annual Reports (2008-2022) Available at <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports> (Value in US\$ million)

In 2009, China took third place and since then emerged as the foremost import originating country. Imports from China have seen steady year-on-year growth. While India remains the dominant trading partner for Sri Lanka, China overtook India as the primary trading partner in 2019. In this year, China regained its status as the main import source for Sri Lanka for the second time since 2016, a position it has held for three consecutive years (2019-2021), China was the main source of imports for Sri Lanka. In 2022, India regained its position as major trading partner (largest source of import) since 2018, followed by the USA and China. All three contributed to around 41% of total Sri Lankan trade. China's total trade with Sri Lanka declined significantly in 2022 due to supply chain disruptions in China amidst COVID-19.

Other point to be highlighted is that Sri Lanka recorded the highest trade deficit with Asian countries as of 2020. With China it has trade deficit of US\$ 3.4 billion, India US\$2.5 billion followed by UAE, Singapore, Malaysia and Japan. This shows that Sri Lanka needs to take measures to increase its export income and reduce import expenditure in order to improve trade balances with them.

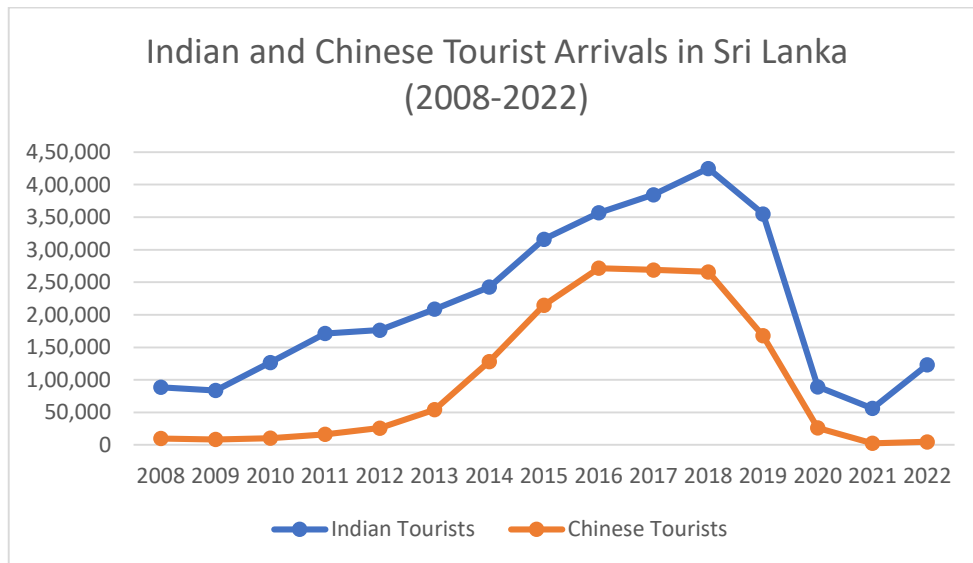
## **2. Tourism**

Tourism sector in Sri Lanka hold the third rank when it comes to foreign income earning and its contribution to Sri Lankan economy accounts for 6.1% of GDP in 2021 (Economic Impact Research). An analysis of top source markets reflects that Germany was the highest source of tourists to Sri Lanka from the period 1984-1994. Prior to 2004, the leading positions in terms of tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka were held by Germany, India, and the United Kingdom.

China was nowhere in the top ten markets for tourist arrival from the period 2008-2012. China's impact on local tourism was marginal until 2014. However, in both 2013 and 2014, China ascended to the third position as key tourism partner for Sri Lanka, contributing to 4.25% and 8.4% respectively of total tourist arrivals. From 2015-2018, China secured the second rank as Sri Lanka's tourist partner.

This growth rate underscores the substantial potential of China as a significant tourism ally for Sri Lanka. Recent patterns in Chinese tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka indicate a remarkable increase of 72.5% during 2010 to 2016. In contrast, tourist arrivals from India and UK experienced comparatively moderate growth rates of only 19.3% and 10.3% respectively. Moreover, Chinese tourist numbers exhibited an exponential surge after 2010 till 2016 and this upswing can be attributed to the promotional campaign orchestrated by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau in China during 2013, enhanced engagement with the Chinese media, the tranquil atmosphere in Sri Lanka, and the strengthening of economic and political ties between China and Sri Lanka.

**Figure 28- Indian and Chinese Tourist Arrivals in Sri Lanka (2008-2022)**



**Source:** Created by the author based on the data from Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA)

Recent years have witnessed a significant reduction in the number of Chinese tourists travelling to Sri Lanka. But these figures could change as there is high possibility that Sri Lanka would become a premier destination for Chinese tourists. Sri Lankan Embassy in Beijing is frequently promoting tourism in the Chinese market and has even set a target of 1 million Chinese tourists to visit Sri Lanka with relaxation in travel restrictions. The embassy is also exploring the options to position Sri Lanka as a preferred Chinese tourism destination which includes formal request to authorities, raising awareness among Chinese tourists and travel operators by organizing events like Sri Lanka Tourism and Culture Event (Embassy of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka ).

### **3. Infrastructure Development**

China has made substantial investments in the recent infrastructure development of Sri Lanka. Notably, Sri Lanka has embraced Chinese initiatives such as the Hambantota port, the Norochcholai power plant in Puttalam, the expansion of Colombo South Harbour, the Colombo port city, the Moragahakanda multipurpose development project, the Mirigama Exclusive Economic Zone, and the Maththala airport. According to available statistics, China contributes to over half of Sri Lanka's financing for

construction and development projects, surpassing any other nation, with an estimated value exceeding US\$ 6 billion (Mahoharan, 2022).

Among these endeavors, the Hambantota port, inaugurated in November 2010, stands out as a striking illustration of Sri Lanka's deepening ties with China. However, it has also been a subject of controversy. China's control over the Hambantota port has positioned it strategically within the Indian Ocean, addressing its Malacca Dilemma, and granting it influence across an extensive region spanning from the East of Africa to the west of Australia, reaching down to Antarctica. It is noteworthy that the Hambantota port was handed over to China Merchant Port Holdings Co Ltd under a 99 year lease agreement after Sri Lanka encountered difficulties in repaying the US\$ 1.1 billion loan acquired for the port development. To finance the Hambantota project, Sri Lanka borrowed US\$ 1.2 billion from China's EXIM bank (Rithmire and Li, 2019) while China committed US\$1.4 billion from the same bank for the Norochcholai power plant in Puttalam (Samaranayake, 2011).

## **Suspicion over Chinese Investment in Sri Lanka**

### **The Case of Hambantota Port**

The Hambantota Port Development Project garnered significant attention due to its debt-related issues. The tenure of Mahinda Rajapaksa concluded in 2015, succeeded by the new government led by Maithripala Sirisena. This new administration faced challenges in repaying loans acquired from China. Following prolonged negotiations and under substantial pressure, Sri Lanka was compelled to lease the port for a duration of 99 years (Col Dr Vasudeva, 2018). This arrangement granted China control over territory situated merely a few miles away from India, while also providing China a strategic foothold along a critical maritime route connecting South East Asia with the Middle East.

The scenario surrounding the Hambantota port serves as a prominent illustration highlighting China's ambitious utilization of loans and economic assistance to extend and consolidate its influence globally, often employing assertive strategies.

The debt agreement has amplified concerns regarding Xi's flagship Belt and Road Initiative, emphasizing how infrastructure development and investments in developing

or vulnerable nations can lead to debt entrapment, increased corruption, and support for autocratic tendencies in struggling democracies.

China's Export-Import Bank (EXIM) initially provided a substantial loan of \$307 million for the construction of the Hambantota project, contingent on China Harbor being the designated builder. To further expand the port, the Sri Lankan government in 2012 asked for \$757 million from China, but now with steeper terms. The first loan of \$307 million was given with interest rate between 1 or 2% but the fresh funding was settled above 6.3% fixed rate (Abi-Habib, 2018).

Originally funded by Chinese loans, the Hambantota port faced challenges in generating sufficient revenue, leading Sri Lanka to hand over its management to China Merchants Port Holdings, a Chinese company. As a consequence of loan repayment difficulties, Sri Lanka opted to lease the Hambantota port for a span of 99 years. Similarly, the nearby Mattala Airport, also financed by Chinese loans, has gained the reputation of being the "world's emptiest airport" (Larmer, 2017), creating a financial burden on the Sri Lankan economy.

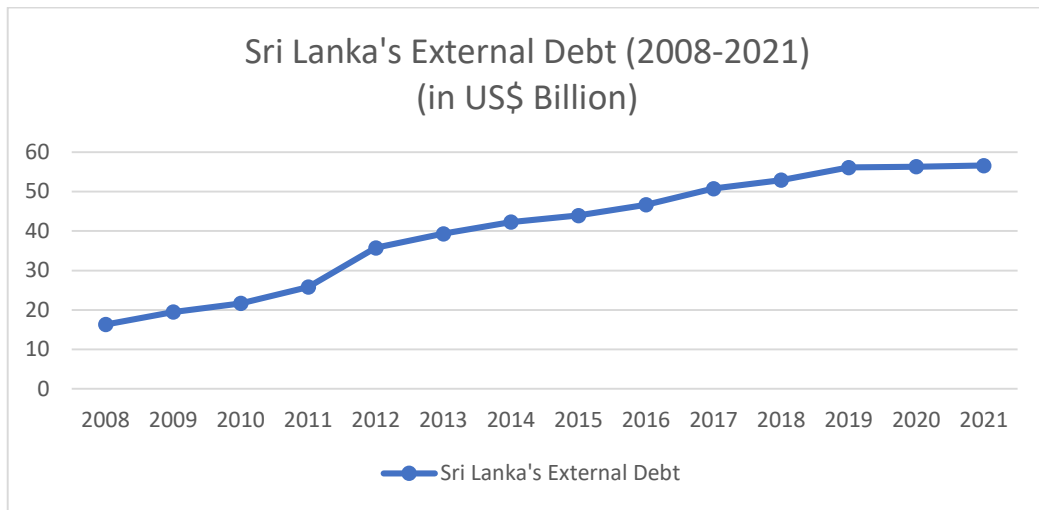
### **Debt trap**

The issue of Sri Lanka falling into China's debt trap is a consequence of Sri Lanka's reliance on borrowing from China to fund various construction projects. Reports put that Hambantota port which cost around \$1.4 billion loan from China has lost \$300 million in six years. An airport built with \$200 million Chinese loans crippled and was unable to cover its electricity bills (Zeeshan, 2022).

As of 2021, Sri Lanka's external debt had reached a substantial sum of US\$ 56.3 billion. However, by the end of April 2022, the total outstanding foreign debt of Sri Lanka stands at USD 34.8 billion, of which China accounts for 45% share as bilateral creditor, followed by Japan and India, accounting for 25% and 10% respectively (Department of External Resource of Sri Lanka).

Sri Lanka is the most vivid example to call other South Asian country's government to learn necessary lesson of not over burdening on foreign loans.

**Figure 29- Sri Lanka's External Debt (2008-2021) (in US\$ Billion)**



Source: The World Bank, International Debt Statistics. External Debt Shocks, total (DOD, current US\$)- Sri Lanka. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.DOD.DECT.CD?locations=LK&start=2008> (Accessed on 26 May, 2023)

Sri Lanka's crippling problem has been owned to China's failed projects. Chinese infrastructure in Sri Lanka is a debt trap as country is not able to recover profits from such swanky projects. Complicating the matter further is China's response to Sri Lanka's challenging circumstances.

### **Opposition by People of Sri Lanka to China moves**

Sri Lankan citizens gathered in protest and expressed dissatisfaction over agreement between Sri Lanka and China to develop the Hambantota Port and establish an industrial zone. Demonstrators feared that they would be displaced from their land to facilitate the development of the industrial site (Shepard, 2017). Other factors that drive local protests over Chinese projects include environmental impacts and absence of adequate public discussions. The agreements between the Sri Lankan government and the Chinese corporation has not been disclosed to the public (Perera, 2018). There are various reports analysing the impact of China's BRI in South Asia Region. There are concerns that BRI will increase environment pollution in those who are already susceptible to environmental crises (Ali et al., 2022).



### **Looming economic crisis in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka encountered a concerning situation when its external reserves declined to \$1.6 billion in November 2021, triggering apprehensions across different sectors. A reduction in foreign reserves is often indicative of a country moving towards the brink of sovereign default. This situation led economists and think tanks to issue warnings about a potential sovereign default in Sri Lanka. Consequently, the country's credit rating was downgraded to 'CC' rating by the American credit rating agency, Fitch. So far, Sri Lanka has never been defaulted despite the fact that its foreign debt is mounting over the years. But the current economic meltdown followed by rapid dollar crises, mounting living costs, and a possibility of food shortage in 2021 is a concern and threatening to break the earlier record.

Mainstream economists suggest that Sri Lanka's most viable recourse to address this crisis is to engage in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and implement external debt restructuring. Conversely, the Sri Lankan government asserts its ability to manage the crisis without resorting to an IMF loan and is exploring alternative avenues. These alternatives encompass seeking financial aid from India, along with ongoing discussions with China. Sri Lanka's Central Bank Governor, Ajith Nivard Cabraal, emphasized that "the IMF is not a magic wand" and ruled out the possibility of an IMF bailout (Presse, 2022). This current approach entails Sri Lanka seeking another loan disbursement from China to tackle the economic challenges it faces.

Amid this crisis, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi embarked on a visit to Sri Lanka on 9 January, 2022. Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa sought China's assistance to restructure the debt that it owns from China. The debt owned from China is over \$5 billion that amounts to 10% of the country's total debt (Srinivasan, 2022).

Sri Lanka has sought \$1.5 billion credit facility to augment its rapid depletion in foreign reserves. India has extended support of \$500 million line of credit (LOC) to Sri Lanka. Along with this \$900 million has also been provided (Srinivasan, 2022).

### **China's response to Debt-Trap diplomacy**

The Global times, daily tabloid newspaper under Communist Party of China's publication, came out with an article criticizing debt trap diplomacy as this is nothing but an attempt by the US and western politicians and media to "endlessly slandering China and smearing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)". The article further writes that "they have been maliciously building a discourse system of China's "debt trap theory"" (Feng, 2022).

Islam (2022) writes in another article that, "Propaganda about the "China debt trap" has emerged as a major weapon of geopolitical strategy" by the western world.

### **4. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)<sup>49</sup>**

The annexure at the end of the thesis illustrates the total of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into Sri Lanka from various source countries, along with the corresponding FDI share as a percentage of GDP. Between 2005 and 2015, China emerged as the primary contributor to Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Sri Lanka, with a combined value of \$14 billion. The majority of this contribution constitutes ODA, primarily in the form of loans and grants, amounting to \$12 billion, directed towards energy, infrastructure, and services sectors. Additionally, there has been a notable presence of private Chinese investments, currently valued at \$2 billion and counting to grow (Bhaitia, Kulkarni, and Gayakwad, 2016).

In a broader context, China's FDI presence in Maldives has significantly outshone investments from other nations. In 2005, China's FDI amounted to \$16.4 million, contributing 1% of the total FDI in Sri Lanka. However, by 2015, Chinese FDI had surged to \$147 million, constituting 22% of total Sri Lankan FDI (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report, 2015). In 2008, the highest FDI inflow was recorded from China with US\$ 145 million, followed by UK and China amounting to US\$ 80 million and

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<sup>49</sup> Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a long-term and non-debt creating financial flow that helps to increase aggregate investment of a country. Unlike other capital flows, FDI embodies many desirable features such as transfer of technology and development in human capital through transferring managerial and marketing skills etc. Further, FDI helps facilitate global integration, infrastructure development, and technology innovation, while creating employment opportunities and new markets.

US\$ 78 million respectively (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report, 2009). In 2018, Chinese FDI in Sri Lanka reached to its peak with \$872 million, sharing 54% of total Sri Lankan FDI (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report, 2018). The political turmoil out of economic crisis in 2021 and change of government in Sri Lanka due to its economic crises has once again put focus on China's 'debt trap' diplomacy.

## **Cultural Influence**

### **1. Confucius Institute**

Sri Lanka has four Confucius Institutes till date.

#### **i. University of Colombo<sup>50</sup>**

Confucius Institute University of Colombo (CIUC) has made tremendous progress in providing Chinese language course and training programs to the students of Sri Lanka. CIUC stands as the foremost institution and has served as a learning hub for individuals seeking proficiency in the Chinese language, supported through a valuable partnership with the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka; Hong-He University, China; and Beijing Foreign Studies University, China. Active since 2016, the CIUC has its own journal for Chinese studies in Sri Lanka- 'Colombo Journal for Chinese Studies' (Confucius Institute, University of Colombo).

#### **ii. University of Kelaniya<sup>51</sup>**

It was founded in 2007. It has cooperated with Chongqing Normal University, China since 2011.

#### **iii. Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka<sup>52</sup>**

#### **iv. China Radio International (CRI) Confucius Classroom at Lumbini College<sup>53</sup>**

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<sup>50</sup>To know more, visit, Confucius Institute. University of Colombo. <https://ciuc.cmb.ac.lk/>

<sup>51</sup>To know more, visit, University of Kelaniya. <https://units.kln.ac.lk/ci/>

<sup>52</sup>To know more, visit, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. <https://www.sab.ac.lk/fssl/confucius-classroom-links>

<sup>53</sup>To know more, visit, Lumbini Confucius Classroom. <https://www.confuciusclassroom.lk/about-us/>

## **2. Educational Exchange Programs**

In 2022, on the occasion of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary marking the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Sri Lanka, both nations made a joint decision to enhance their educational interactions and collaborative initiatives. As part of this effort, they inaugurated the Master of Business Studies program, with sponsorship from the University of Kelaniya and co-sponsorship involving the Sri Lankan Embassy in China; the International Academic Exchange Committee of the China-Asia Economic Development Association (CAEDA); and BeautifulHuaxia Investment Co.Ltd.

## **3. Scholarships**

### **i. Chinese Language Teacher Scholarships<sup>54</sup>**

To address the escalating demand for Chinese language educators on an international scale, the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) has introduced the international Chinese Language Teachers Scholarship. This scholarship program is designed for qualified Chinese language educators outside of China, aiming to propagate Chinese language education worldwide and facilitate the professional growth of Chinese language teachers.

The sub-categories are as follows:

- Scholarship for Doctor's Degree in International Chinese Language Education
- Scholarship for Master's Degree in International Chinese Language Education
- Scholarship for Bachelor's Degree in International Chinese Language Education
- Scholarship for One-year Study Program
- Scholarship for One- Semester Study Program
- Scholarship for Four-Week Study Program

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<sup>54</sup> To know more, visit, International Chinese Teachers Scholarship. Available at <https://ciuc.cmb.ac.lk/index.php/2023/02/22/international-chinese-teachers-scholarship-2023/> (Accessed on 22 March, 2023)

## **ii. The Confucius China Studies Program (CCSP)**

The scholarship is applicable for potential students in the wide field of Humanities and Social Sciences.

## **4. Language Prevalence**

Chinese language-Mandarin, is the most widely used in the world. One of the five official languages of the United Nations is Mandarin. It is second language of Australia and USA. Despite not being the official language of Sri Lanka, the majority of students are studying it as foreign language. The Chinese language is imparted across various educational institutions such as schools, Universities, Colleges, and Confucius Institutes. In addition, numerous students also choose to pursue studies in China to gain proficiency in the language.

- i. **Language courses in Bandaranaike Center For International Studies (BCIS)<sup>55</sup>**
- ii. **Chinese Language Courses for Sri Lanka Police<sup>56</sup>**
- iii. **Vocational Chinese Training Program in China Hardware Engineering Company (CHEC) and China Machinery Engineering Company (CMEC), Sri Lanka Division.**

The Program is developed by Confucius Institute of University of Colombo and CHEC and CMEC to provide Sri Lankan employees basic communication skills in Mandarin language and general understanding of Chinese culture. The program is funded by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Sri Lanka (CCCSL) (Confucius Institute, University of Colombo).

- iv. **Vocational Chinese Training Programme in Sri Lanka Customs**

The program was developed with the objective that Chinese language is important language in the world and that the custom officers, especially those working in

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<sup>55</sup> To know more, visit, Language Courses in Bandaranaike Center for International Studies. <https://bcis.edu.lk/index.php/course/language-courses/>

<sup>56</sup> To know more, visit, Inauguration Ceremony of the Chinese Language Courses for Sri Lanka Police. Available at <https://ciuc.cmb.ac.lk/index.php/2023/01/18/inauguration-ceremony-of-the-chinese-language-courses-for-sri-lanka-police/> (Accessed on 22 March, 2023)

airport, should have knowledge about Chinese language and culture. The programme is funded by Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka (Confucius Institute, University of Colombo).

### **Impact of Chinese cultural influence on Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan students studying Chinese language has advantages. It helps the students to locate job opportunities, particularly in tourism industry. Post- civil war, Sri Lanka is growing rapidly and its widespread infrastructure development is generating more job opportunities. Over the past century, the amicable relations between China and Sri Lanka have considerably deepened. China has provided economic aid for infrastructure development to Sri Lanka. Substantial investment from China has allowed Sri Lanka to expand its tourism sector.

The scholarship offered by Chinese government influence young students to pursue Chinese as a foreign language. Also, the students who aspire to go for higher studies has advantages as they get access to Chinese scholarship and they have the opportunity to join national and international companies both in China and Sri Lanka.

China's Confucius Institutes (CI) serves as a pivotal element of China's soft power diplomacy, thereby raising queries about the future prospects of educational cooperation between India and China. It is alleged that China is using educational institutions to expand its influence and threaten academic freedom and freedom of expression in educational organizations and democracies (Central Tibet Administration, 2018). Some have argued that CIs are more than an instrument of propaganda and are 'Trojan Horse', breaching nation's security across globe (The Print, 2022).

Confucius Institutes allow China to gain a foothold to exert control over the study of China. There are numerous examples of withdrawing invitations from controversial speakers and removing certain publications under pressure from China.

- Controversy arose around the sculpture titled "The World Turned Upside Down", crafted by the Turner Prize -winning artist, Mark Wallinger within the campus of the London School of Economics for showing Taiwan as sovereign

entity. This led to protests by Chinese students. The university later decided to adjust the display of Taiwan and People Republic of China (PRC) after pressure from Chinese students (Jeong-Ho, 2019).

- In 2014, censorship of conference material at European Association for Chinese Studies Conference was reported. Following objections from Xu Lin, the director-general of Hanban, certain conference material were confiscated, and specific pages containing an advertisement for Taiwan co-sponsor, Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange were removed (Inside Higher ED, 2014).
- Withdrawal of Invitations to the Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama. Case of Mongolia (Reuters, 2017), Sri Lanka (Ramchandran, 2023).

### **Conclusion of Cultural influence**

One of the major sources of America's global influence has been the widespread adoption of English as a second language, often as an official or semi-official language within many numerous professions. Hence, a sign of relative influence would be whether Mandarin is gradually supplanting English to significant extent. Unfortunately, reliable data on this subject is challenging to find, particularly in terms of the global language-learning landscape. However, existing databases do indicate a notable surge in the study of the Chinese language due to the country's economic ascendancy. In the specific instances of Sri Lanka and Maldives, it is evident that Sri Lanka hosts four Confucius institutes, while Maldives currently does not have any.

### **Diplomatic Influence**

Other nations should learn from how China's foreign policy has developed in recent decades to strengthen its national interests. In past two decades, South Asian Region has gained importance in Beijing's foreign policy as the SAR constitutes as a strategic element in China's policy making.

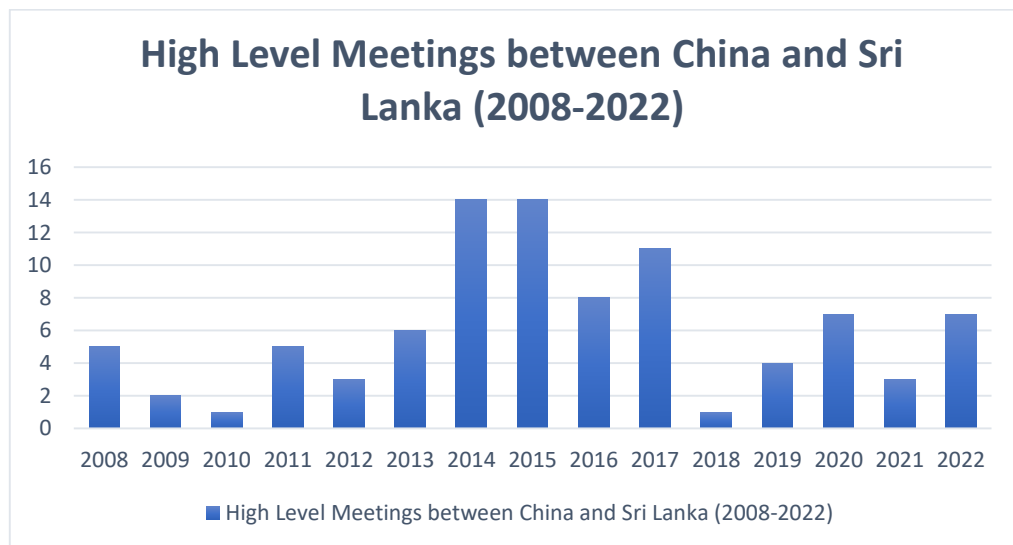
#### **1. High Level Meetings between China and Sri Lanka: 2008-2022**

Over the years, the relationship between China and Sri Lanka has flourished through frequent high-level engagements. During his presidency, Mahinda Rajapaksa played a pivotal role in concluding the prolonged ethnic conflict in 2009, fostering a stronger

bond between the two nations. Under his leadership, China-Sri Lanka relations grew even more robust. Mahinda Rajapaksa was extended five invitations to visit China, resulting in a total of 61 high- level meetings between China and Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015. The years 2014 and 2015 saw a remarkable peak in visits, each with 14 meetings. Notably, this led to Xi Jinping’s historic visit to Sri Lanka in 2014, marking the first time a Chinese president had set foot in the country.

The year 2018 shows that the high level meetings between the two was low because of Constitutional Crises in Sri Lanka as President Maithripal Sirisena ousted Ranil Wickremesinghe and appointed Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister (Uyangoda, 2018). Sirisena’s political maneuver ignited constitutional crises, resulting in a situation where the island nation had two individuals asserting their claim to the role of Prime Minister. This political upheaval stalled high level meetings due to political instability as the nation itself had become destabilized.

**Figure 30- High Level Meetings between China and Sri Lanka (2008-2022)**



**Source:** Prepared by the researcher, based on the data from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

During Mahinda Rajapaksa tenure, the bilateral relationship was elevated to a strategic cooperative partnership in 2013. In 2005, the two established all-round cooperative partnership of sincere mutual assistance and friendship, setting a future direction for development of bilateral ties. Cultural exchanges between the two nations increases. Sri Lankan students went to China for studies and Sri Lanka became a tourist



destination for China. On the economic front, China and Sri Lanka collaborated on substantial infrastructure developments, including projects such as the Colombo Port Southern Container Terminal, Hambantota Port, coal-fired power plant in Puttalam, Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, among others.

In 2012, during a goodwill visit by Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) to Sri Lanka. On his meeting with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, discussions centered on strengthening economic and trade cooperation. A three-point proposal was introduced by Wu to advance collaboration between the two nations:

- “To adjust trade structure and expand trade scale
- To maintain momentum of cooperation in infrastructure projects
- To enhance cooperation in maritime research, climate change, disaster relief, animal husbandry, and biomass energy” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2012).

Overall, Mahinda Rajapaksa rule experienced frequent high level visits, deepening political trust, strengthening and fruitful economic and trade cooperation, and active cultural exchanges.

In 2020, during a meeting between when Vice Foreign Minister of China, Luo Zhaohui, and Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage, both sides committed to enhancing bilateral relations to new heights through close collaboration. To this end, a six-point proposal was put forth:

- “To maintain high level exchanges
- To deepen cooperation in fight against the pandemic
- To accelerate economic recovery
- To tighten cultural and people-to-people ties
- To strengthen law enforcement and security cooperation
- To continue to support each other's core interests” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020)

In the same year (2020), separate meetings were held between Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, and Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The discussions led to an agreement to promote investment in Sri Lanka and to assist the nation in establishing shipping and logistics hubs, as well as industrial and financial centers ((Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020).

In 2015, a significant milestone was reached when the Special Envoy of the Chinese government and Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin, visited Sri Lanka. During this visit, substantial agreements were reached, outlined follows:

- “To work closely to advance bilateral strategic cooperative partnership
- To intensify high level contacts
- To build the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road
- To build cooperation projects on the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and win-win results
- To work closely to make good use of 2014-16 non-reimbursable assistance to Sri Lanka
- To expand and consolidate cultural, tourism, human resource training foundations” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2015).

Furthermore, both nations concurred on the establishment of a joint committee on Coastal Zone and Maritime Collaboration in 2015. This committee aimed at enhance collaboration in areas such as ports, marine resources management, ecological preservation, and marine search and rescue.

## **2. Positive Public response to China**

- **One-China Policy**

Sri Lankan president Ranil Wickremesinghe emphasises through a series of tweets that his country has consistently upheld “One-China policy” (Srinivasan, 2022). This stance was further reaffirmed during a meeting between Liu Jinsong, Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs at China's Foreign Ministry, and Dr. Palitha Kohona, Sri

Lanka's Ambassador to China. Kohona firmly conveyed that Sri Lanka "firmly supports the One-China principle and recognizes the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and Taiwan is a part of China" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

- **Support during COVID-19 pandemic**

China's timely assistance during challenging times has been greatly appreciated by Sri Lanka. Notably, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, China provided vital vaccines and medical supplies to Sri Lanka during. During a meeting between Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa with China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, Gotabaya Rajapaksa expressed profound gratitude for China's invaluable support in the nation's battle against the pandemic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

- In 2020, a significant exchange took place between Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. During this interaction, Sri Lanka expressed high regard for "China's role in world stability and development" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020).

### **3. Regime Change**

During the 2015 presidential elections in Sri Lanka, allegations arose regarding China financial support for Mahinda Rajapaksa campaign. Rajapaksa, known for his pro-Chinese stance, was a key figure in China's strategy to shift Sri Lanka's allegiance from India. Documents and Checks retrieved from a government investigation confirmed these payments (Abi-Habib, 2018).

In the final stages of the 2015 Sri Lankan presidential elections, the Chinese Ambassador violated diplomatic norms by encouraging various groups, including Golf Course Caddies, to back Mahinda Rajapaksa against the opposition. This move was aimed at safeguarding trade relations with China, which were under threat. Consequently, a Substantial sum of money flowed into Rajapaksa's inner circle. According to records obtained by "The Times" from an ongoing governmental inquiry,

China Harbor<sup>57</sup> transferred a minimum of \$7.6 million from its Standard Chartered Bank account to Rajapaksa's campaign affiliates. These documents were validated. Just 10 days before the polls, approximately \$3.7 million in cheques were disbursed—\$678,000 for campaign materials, including T-shirts, and \$297,000 for gifts to supporters such as women's sarees. An additional \$38,000 was provided to a prominent endorsing Buddhist monk who was backing Rajapaksa's election campaign. Furthermore, two cheques totaling \$1.7 million were delivered by volunteers to Rajapaksa's official residence, Temple Tree (Abi-Habib, 2018; Daily Mirror Online, 2018; News 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018).

## **Military Influence**

### **1. Arms Transfer**

Although China and Sri Lanka had longstanding economic and political ties, their military relationship has developed more recently. Historically, China's military engagement with Sri Lanka focused mainly on arms trade. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China emerged as Sri Lanka's primary arms supplier. Since 1959, China has supplied military equipment worth US\$ 749 million. Notably, from 2000 to 2008, arms trade reached US\$ 276 million (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). It is to be noted that the year 2009 marks the end of Sri Lanka's civil war. Thus, the arms sale figure before 2009 substantiated China's role in defeating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This relationship shifted after the end of the Sri Lanka civil war in 2009, marked by a decline in arms purchase from China, although some continued.

### **2. Military visits**

Significant military interaction between China and Sri Lanka had been limited, with the exemption of the year 2005 when Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga in the capacity of defence minister visited China. Since the end of ethnic conflict, the two countries witnessed increase in the bilateral military interactions. In 2012, General Liang Guanglie, the Chinese State Councilor and Minister of National Defence, became

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<sup>57</sup> China Harbour Engineering Company, one of China's largest state-owned enterprises. It had earlier accusations of corrupt practices. It was banned from Bangladesh over the accusations of bribing an official at the ministry of roads. Its parent company, China Communications Construction Company was banned from Philippines for eight years in 2009 for corrupt practices

the first Chinese defence minister to visit Sri Lanka. This visit marked the beginning of an upward trajectory in military interactions. In 2021, General Wei Fenghe, China's Defence minister and a member of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, visited Sri Lanka with a delegation of 37 high-ranking officials. The visit is significant in the manner that Military Assistance Protocol was signed and the launch of the official website of the Chinese National Defence University Alumni Association of Sri Lanka, underscoring efforts to strengthen military-to military ties (Ministry of Defence of Sri Lanka, 2021).

### **3. Port Calls/ Military Exercises**

While Sri Lanka is undergoing financial crisis in 2021, the Chinese spy vessel- *Yuang Wang 5* was set to refuel at Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on Aug 11, 2022. It is a space and satellite tracker ship which can also be used as intercontinental ballistic missile launch with an aerial scope to track the region within 750 kms. India expressed concerns to the Sri Lankan government, cautioning that it could jeopardize India's national security. Consequently, Sri Lanka requested China to postpone the arrival of its ship at the Hambantota port.

China reacted to India's advice and said that it (China) hoped "relevant parties would refrain from interfering with its legitimate maritime activities" (Tian and Das, 2022). China has described India's opposition to vessel visit as "senseless" and asked New Delhi to "not disturb normal exchanges" with Sri Lanka (Krishnan, 2022).

Geostrategic and Geopolitical analysts in India are apprehensive, particularly due to Sri Lanka's past decision to allow Chinese submarine named *Changzheng-2* and a warship called *Chang Xing Dao* to dock at its Hambantota port in 2014. Later, at that time, Beijing brushed aside India's concern by stating that "it is nothing unusual as it is an international common practice for naval vessels, submarines, warships to stop for refueling and replenishment at an overseas port" (The Economic Times, 2014).

Later on, amid pressure from China, Sri Lankan government has granted permission to Chinese vessel to visit the island and China has finally docked its ship at Hambantota port. Within few days of acceptance and rejection and warnings from India, China has shown that no one could stop it to do whatever it wants. This shows the intensity of

Chinese influence over Sri Lanka. Despite various warnings from Indian side, Sri Lankan government has allowed China to dock its vessel. According to Chaudhary (2022), it is Sri Lanka's financial needs that have shaped its decision. China owns 10% of Sri Lanka's foreign debt making China the biggest bilateral creditor to the island nation. He further writes that Sri Lanka needs China support to restructure its external borrowing in order to qualify for IMF bailout. Besides that, Sri Lanka is going through its worst financial crisis and sought financial assistance from China.

Since Sri Lanka is receiving financial help from both India and India, putting it under delicate diplomatic spot during 'spy vessel' case. Sri Lanka has to choose between two of its close partners having geostrategic interests. Sri Lanka gives nod to China on the condition that no scientific research done.

### **Implications for India**

China's increasing maritime footprints in India's proximity is always a security concern for India. Kumar (2023) argues that China is strategically encircling India in order to limit India's influence. China seeks to gain a dominant position in the international system by reconstructing it in accordance with its hegemonic agenda, which basically is a defining feature of 'Revisionist States' and India should comprehend it carefully.

China has a historical pattern of asserting claims over lands and islands. An instance of this is China's assertion of ownership over the Russian region Vladivostok, despite the amicable relations between China and Russia. Similarly, China's efforts to expand territorial control by reclaiming islands and marine areas in the South China Sea and East China Sea have raised concerns for both United States and Japan (Narang, 2020). Additionally, China's growing increasing presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has also prompted concerns in India too.

In Sri Lanka, China secured a lease for the Hambantota port lasting 99 years. There is potential dual- use aspect to various infrastructure projects, which could be repurposed during conflicts. China has storage and refueling facilities at Hambantota port which could also be used by military fleet when conflict escalates between India and China. Likewise, Chinese support is aiding the modernization of the Colombo port, a major hub handling nearly 70% of India's shipping traffic. Most significantly, China can

easily keep an eye on all ships, military and otherwise travelling between India's east and west coastlines.

There is always a possibility to turn these projects against India. In the words of Manoharan (2022: 167), "Something like 'Malacca Dilemma' for China, it could be India's 'Sri Lankan Dilemma'".

China's operation of the Hambantota port has serious implications for India's security. First, it places China in close proximity to India and second is that port might be used to dock PLAN ships and submarines.

Despite Sri Lanka's assurances to India that the port will not be used for military purpose by China, India remains uneasy due to prior instances of Chinese ships and submarines docking at Colombo and Hambantota. While India's position is confined to northeastern region of Sri Lanka, the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Accord clearly stipulates that "Sri Lanka was not to be used by military which is prejudicial to India's interests". Although the accord stands, but India should go now by island nations deeds, not words.

### **India's moves to counter China's influence in Sri Lanka**

Against the backdrop of increasing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka, India should carefully plan its strategy by paying attention to China's multi-pronged strategy in Sri Lanka that comprises of economic diplomacy, financial assistance for infrastructure development, technical assistance, and making inroads in domestic politics to hold strong grasp on island nation.

Sri Lanka is reeling under economic crises, the worst the nation has ever countered. India has extended financial help of \$2.4 billion to cope with severe economic downturn. Amidst Sri Lankan economic Crisis, Maritime Security agreements between India and Sri Lanka have been inked, including the provision of a Floating dock facility from India at no cost, projected to save Sri Lanka about Rs 600 million annually on external docking repairs, Additionally, India has offered the Dornier Reconnaissance Aircraft to Sri Lanka free of cost, for maritime surveillance and search and rescue operations (Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence, 2022). India has also signed agreement with Sri Lanka to set hybrid power projects. In total three projects have been signed

involving Adani Group and National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). These projects were earlier decided to be handover to Chinese firm but later on replaced to India. India's diplomacy of executing the project on grant rather than on loan helps India to win the deal. If given to China, these projects will have huge security concerns for India as they are located 50 km off Tamil Nadu. India's collaborative maritime security initiatives with Sri Lanka coincides with its own endeavors to bolster security, cooperation and intelligence surveillance in the South Asia and Indian Ocean Region due to China's increasing influence in the India's neighbouring regions.

In response, India should offer multi-dimensional assistance to help Sri Lanka in getting out of economic crisis resulting from debt-trap diplomacy of China and wrong policy decisions of Rajapaksa government.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between China and Sri Lanka has deepened over time, driven by their mutual needs. China has assisted Sri Lanka during LTTE crisis by supplying arms and also through diplomatic support at the UN Human Rights Council (Manoharan, 2022). Sri Lanka is a key element in China's "String of Pearls" strategy. The island nation is strategically important for China as Sri Lanka has strategic location, situating at the crossroads of important trade routes to South Asia, East Asia, Europe, and US. Another reason that makes Sri Lanka strategically important to China is that it is part of China's BRI project. Three infrastructure projects, namely- Hambantota port, Colombo port city, and Colombo International Financial City are part of China's BRI. When China's BRI was unveiled in 2013, Sri Lanka voluntarily chose to participate. Sri Lanka's then president, Mahinda Rajapaksa-known for pro China stance, visioned to "reposition Sri Lanka as the 'Pearl of the old Silk Route'" (Mehta, 2011). Since Rajapaksa held position in 2005, China's activities have increased dramatically, making China the largest benefactor of Sri Lanka. Between 2006 and 2020, China has invested US\$ 13.5 billion on Sri Lankan infrastructure (Manoharan, 2022).

On the other hand, Sri Lanka needs China for its infrastructure development, economic assistance, and diplomatic support. China's increasing footprint in Sri Lanka is through infrastructure development ranging from ports, railways, roads, airports, expressways,



and hospitals. Out of all these, ports have strategic implications for India. These ports end up in vicious cycle, which some experts call as “Debt Trap”.

Economic ties between China and Sri Lanka have grown significantly, with China emerging as Sri Lanka’s largest trading partner. China’s expanding aid and promotion of Sri Lanka as a tourist destination are noteworthy developments.

Manoharan (2021) characterises the China- Sri Lanka ties as “need based”. Sri Lanka exemplifies China’s amphibious use of economic assistance to expand global influence and apply pressure on recipient countries. As cited by a diplomat in Mehta (2011), Sri Lanka prefers China over India is because of “no strings attached” policy with the former. The island nation’s tendency to lean more towards China is problematic.

China’s escalating influence in Sri Lanka holds substantial implications for India, necessitating strategic considerations and counter policies. Over the past decade, China has made substantial investment in Sri Lanka and since China’s inauguration of BRI project, the investment has been enormous especially in infrastructure development of ports, bridges, roadways, highways, and power plants. This investment has bolstered Sri Lanka’s economic growth, made it fall to the prey to China’s debt-trap strategy and questioned its sovereignty rights. BRI has provided China to deepen its geopolitical presence in the IOR which is raising concerns among Indian policymakers.

China’s influence in Sri Lanka possesses the potential to upset the regional power equilibrium. China’s presence in Sri Lanka aims to augment its naval capabilities and complicate India’s security calculus.

## **Chapter- 8: Neighborly Intricacies: Unpacking China's Presence in India's Vicinity and its impact on national security**

### **Introduction**

The increasing presence of China in SA-IOR has emerged as a significant concern for India's national security. This chapter delves into the implications of China's growing influence in India's immediate vicinity and the potential repercussions for both India and the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR).

China's expanding maritime influence across the Indian Ocean serves as a litmus test for the future trajectory of India-China relations. Among the interconnected areas of Chinese and Indian interests, the developments arising from China's increasing influence in South Asian nations hold particular significance. This chapter dissects the complexity of India-China relations by assessing points of convergence and divergence, along with the ramifications of China's proximity for India's strategic interests.

A scrutiny of China's military strategy reveals that the associated issues straddle diplomatic and economic domains. The Belt and Road Initiative and the String of Pearls present a geopolitical challenge necessitating a comprehensive national policy response. The spectrum of Policy options spans from optimistic to pessimistic, contingent on the assumptions about the nature of India-China relations and China's pursuit of great power status.

When naval admiral Zheng He embarked on his voyage to extend China's glory, all he encountered was wind and waves across vast empty oceans. The modern oceans or seas, however are far from empty. As China seeks to expand into distant waters, it is increasingly likely cross paths with the United States in the Pacific Ocean and India in the Indian Ocean. The key query is whether China will harmonize with the global system or attempt to reshape the existing global and regional order through its maritime endeavors in the Indian Ocean.

China's deepening influence along the BRI and String of Pearls, combined with its growing maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, stems from the need to secure trade

and energy routes, which in return presents a complex strategic scenario which is impacting China's relationship with India and other regional powers. The South Asia-Indian Ocean Region offers both opportunities and lingering tensions. India, as a key player in South Asia has vital national interests and seeks stability and prosperity in the region. Addressing the challenges posed by China's expanding maritime footprints is crucial for India's future prosperity and security.

Recently released data by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (SIPRI Fact Sheet, 2022) reveals that global military spending increased by 0.7% in 2021, reaching a record \$2113 billion despite the economic repercussions of Corona pandemic. The top five spenders were the US, China, India, UK, and Russia, jointly accounting for 62% of the total expenditure. The United States and China alone constitute 52%.

China's military spending of \$293 billion ranked second largest spender in the world. This was up by 4.7% from 2020, marking the 27<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of growth, the longest such streak globally.

India, as the world's third- largest global military spender, allocated \$76.6 billion to its military in 2021, reflecting a 0.9% rise from 2020. Given the present international landscape and ongoing border tensions with China and Pakistan, which at times escalate into armed conflicts, India is focusing on modernizing its armed forces and bolstering its domestic arms production. In a push to strengthen the self-reliance on arms production, India has allocated 64% of capital outlay of military expenditure for acquisition of indigenous arms.

Military expenditure in Asia and Oceania accounted for \$586 billion in 2021. Spending in the region was up by 3.5% than in 2020. The report stated that the increase in 2021 was primarily due to growth in India and China military expenditure. Together, the two Asian giants accounted for 63% of military spending in the region in 2021.

According to the World Bank (2019), the South Asian Region (SAR) is the fastest growing region economically. The SAR is an attractive location for China to establish export markets for Chinese commodities, utilize surplus foreign currency reserves, and

deploy production capacity for economic cooperation along the Maritime Silk Road, a goal endorsed by President Xi. Yet, China's engagement in the SAR primarily centers around safeguarding its interests including ensuring secure raw material passage, energy imports- particularly oil from the Persian Gulf, projecting maritime capabilities in the Indian Ocean, continental border disputes, curbing Tibetan activism, development of its western provinces, countering piracy activities. Securing economic interest in the region is as much as about safeguarding security interests.

China's increasing influence across the SAR is disconcerting for India. China's deepening ties with India's neighbours pose challenges, and its maritime strategies like the BRI and String of Pearls are viewed as its geopolitical efforts to constrain India's maritime endeavors. In response, India has adopted a comprehensive strategy to tackle China's challenge in SA-IOR, encompassing diplomatic outreach to neighbouring countries, alignment with like-minded allies, and adopting an offensive strategy to counter China's moves. To address the challenge of China, India too has adopted multi-faceted approach. India seeks to contain China's influence in the South Asian Region while safeguarding its own interests. In conclusion, it necessitates a comprehensive understanding of changing regional dynamics and the evolution of strategic responses to protect India's national interests.

### **Impact of China's increasing presence in the South Asian Region**

There has been growing interest among policymakers, analysts, academicians and diplomats to understand and interpret China's foray in SA-IOR. There are various aspects to it:

- India holds the position of being the dominant economic and military force in South Asia, yet it has faced challenges in effectively uniting the region on its own terms. Its hegemony over the region has been incomplete and inadequate. India being a hesitant hegemon has acquired the image of big brother so far which loomed large but has little benefit for India. Efforts by India to assert its influence over the South Asian Region and safeguard its national interest through interventions in smaller South Asian nations have, at times, proved to be detrimental and counterproductive. Since liberalization, India views South

Asian region more from economic perspective contributing to India's economic development. To counter India's dominance, smaller South Asian nations might find China's assistance as a force to balance India. With the advent of globalization, the notion of power and dominance were changing. China has expanded its interests across globe and finds it difficult to remain indifferent to burning issues. To protect and further its interests, China gets involved in resolving disputes and local tensions. China has significantly expanded its presence in the region through economic, military, cultural, and political means. For smaller South Asian states, China is a significant source of investment and aid.

- China's cheque book diplomacy is now dubbed as debt trap diplomacy as the recipients have to pay high price in the long run. An illustrative instance showcasing China's ambitious utilization of grants, loans, and aid to amass global influence is the Sri Lankan financial crisis, which underscores its readiness to exert pressure on nations it assists financially. This was visible during the 'spy vessel case' where despite various warnings from the Indian side, Sri Lanka has granted permission to China. It is Sri Lanka's financial needs that shaped its decision to grant permission as China owns 10% of Sri Lanka's foreign debt, making China the biggest bilateral creditor to the island nation. Sri Lanka is the most vivid example to call other South Asian countries to learn necessary lesson of not over burdening on foreign loans.
- To counter China's debt trap diplomacy and its growing influence, The United States, Japan, and India are advancing their initiatives to support the development of emerging economies. During the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity leaders' summit, US President Joe Biden announced that the US would assist economies in Western Hemisphere with infrastructure building. He pledged billions of dollars in support and stated that a new investment platform would be established through collaboration between the US International Development Finance Corporation and the Inter- American Development Bank. This platform aims to channel resources towards sustainable infrastructure development in Northern Hemisphere (The White House).

Meanwhile, India and Japan have launched a joint program aimed at supporting the development of Africa. One notable initiative is Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). The AAGC aims to implement a sustainable growth strategy centered around the well-being of individuals. It will be constructed upon four main pillars: Development and Cooperation Projects; Quality Infrastructure and Institutional Connectivity; Capacity and Skill Enhancement; and People-to-People partnership. The distinct feature of this initiative will be its emphasis on fostering direct relationships between individuals. The AAGC's strengths will be tailored to the development needs of various countries and sub regions of Africa, leveraging both their similarities and differences. This approach seeks to enhance economic growth and connectivity within and between Asia and Africa, contributing to the realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific region (Asia Africa Growth Corridor Portal).

- India's relationship with other smaller South Asian nations has been hindered by historical complexities, unlike China, which lacks similar baggage. India's connection encompasses religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties with South Asia, endowing it with the potential to exert soft power. Unfortunately, the soft power has not been used to full extent. China enjoys the image of neutral player in South Asia (Wagner, 2016). The general conclusion that can be followed is that China with its economic, political, military, and soft power is far ahead of India in competition of influence in SAR.
- Smaller South Asian nations are trying to capture the best of both worlds by balancing out between India and China.
- Jabin T. Jacob (2018) analyses China's growing influence in South Asia compared to India. He views that "while India has ambitions of becoming global power, it has simply not been able to come anywhere close to matching Chinese investments in not just diplomatic cadre strength but also a whole ecosystem of educational, research and training institutions, the organizing of international conferences, including Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, as well as of delegation visits abroad from the central government ministries, provincial and city governments and communist party organs."

- The South Asian countries, closely intertwined with China's economy are inclined to act in their own interests, maintaining their trade affiliations with China.
- Optimal security prospects for South Asia hinge on India cultivating robust relationship with all countries of South Asia. These connections should span bilateral and multilateral dimensions involving diplomatic, cultural, economic, and military. India must compete based on merit in economic and diplomatic realms. In terms of defense, India must shoulder the responsibility of bolstering its military power to ensure safety of South Asian nations, thus creating a buffer against potential future military threats from China. As China's influence expands, India's strategy should prioritize retaining its pivotal role as the primary regional security provider and preferred economic partner.
- Countries across South Asia and beyond that seek substantial loans from China at high interest rates for their infrastructure development should learn from Sri Lanka's experience. China's financial assistance is not without strings attached. If a borrowing country struggles with repayment, China may demand compensation in various forms- such as ownership of land, as seen in Sri Lanka, infrastructure projects as in the Maldives, territorial concessions, as in Tajikistan (Col Dr Vasudeva, 2018), or even the establishment of naval bases, as seen in Djibouti. Nations contemplating involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative should exercise caution, recognizing that Chinese funds come with significant obligations.

### **Consequences for India**

While analyzing China's containment strategy towards India by building network of strategic points, called, pearls around it, Brahma Chellaney (2007) pointed out that India's ability to prevent the emergence of a China-centric Asia will hinge on its success in establishing domination in the South Asian-Indian Ocean Region. The China that expands its footprints in the Indian Ocean and wields growing influence over smaller South Asian nations "will pave the way for a Sino-centric Asia and for a greater strategic squeeze of India". Without vigilantly overseeing the various entry points to the Indian Ocean by leveraging its power and cultivating strategic partnership with key

stakeholders, New Delhi could find itself facing Chinese naval forces in both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

- Another security issue with the China's funding is erosion of sovereignty. China has often been reprimanded for debt trapping the governments to whom it has lent money to for undertaking infrastructure development and various projects. Sri Lanka's Hambantota port is a valid example that China took over in 2017. Djibouti is another case. The China's business as usual is to push for projects where just the China's state-owned undertakings can bid. Such tactics have additionally led the projects being costly and unviable like the Mombasa-Nairobi railway project in Kenya which is built at an expense of \$5.6 million per km- estimated 4 times the original expense (Devasher, 2020).
- In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Indian Ocean serves as the pivotal arena for global economic maritime activities. As the focus of the world shifts from the West to the East with the rise of Asia, the Indian Oceans' significance has undergone a seismic shift. The Indian Ocean region boasts substantial reserves of oil, minerals, hydrocarbons and other natural resources, positioning it as an energy epicenter and redirecting global energy dynamics towards Asia. Crucially, the Indian Ocean links the Pacific Ocean to the East and the Mediterranean to the West, solidifying its importance. Moreover, it has evolved into a pivotal crossroads for maritime trade, facilitating the exchange of natural resources between producing nations and the consumer states. Over 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of global oil and more than 80% of China's oil traverse this maritime expanse. Additionally, approximately half of all global container shipments navigate through this region (Arjun, 2020).
- Khurana (2016) observed that China's significant sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean could instigate regional nations, particularly those in India's immediate neighbourhood, to pit one regional power against another. In the context of Pakistan, situation could be severe as it is likely to show intransigence against India particularly in the form of proxy war strategy. It would limit the India within the subcontinent and thereby encouraging China to expand its political and military assertiveness against India. Another



significant implication noted by him is India's preparedness for two front conflict scenario. One front is land border and second front is maritime border. China's established naval maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region would introduce another maritime dimension to India's military and security strategy, potentially rendering India's maritime assets susceptible to China's military activities.

China seeks to disrupt the post- World War II liberal international order. The great powers and others seeking this order views China as a strategic competitor or rival. Among the strategies pursued by China is the global competition to seek influence.

### **Counter-Containment Strategies of India**

It is visible that India faces a profound challenge as a consequence of China's expansion. Although, this does not constitute the only issue that India must address. China's economic rise has endowed it with enormous potential to increase its influence in India's neighbourhood. In response to the challenge that China represents, India has adopted various tools and policies to counter Chinese move. India has cultivated strategic partnership with the littorals in the IOR, strengthened its ties with US- potential ally to counter China's aggressiveness, neighbourhood first policy that seeks to politically engage the countries in India's vicinity, "Look East" or "Act East" to contain the dragon, and adopted an offensive posture in retaliation to China's String of Pearls and BRI by initiating Necklace of Diamonds approach and Sagarmala project respectively.

#### **➤ Security Relations with the Littorals**

Considering the transition of strategic influence from land to sea, India's strategic orientation is gradually shifting towards the maritime space. In response to China's naval presence in the Indian Ocean, the Indian navy has proactively fostered security relations with the littoral states, bolstering India's capacity for power projection in the region, while simultaneously aiming to counteract China's attempt at coordination with the regional member nations. Analysts within the strategic community contend securing that authority and predominance over the Indian Ocean would empower India to exert significant influence towards the East. The control of India over the Indian Ocean could serve as a mean to extend its maritime footprint in the Asia-Pacific region "as a

counterstroke to China's aggressive maritime posture of 'String of Pearls'" (Arjun, 2020). India has entered agreements with the Indian Ocean Littorals to enhance its presence in the region.

➤ **“Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region”**

On 10 March, 2018, the two countries established a joint strategic vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region to collectively harness the opportunities and to confront the challenges together due to their shared vital interests' region. India and France share concerns regarding emerging challenges in the IOR such as maritime traffic security encompassing piracy and terrorism, climate change, freedom of navigation, peace and prosperity of the region. The agreement facilitates mutual access to their military facilities including naval bases (Ministry of External Affairs, 2018), thereby, granting the Indian navy access to France's Djibouti port.

➤ **United States as an ally**

India has strategically positioned itself as a pivotal partner alongside the United States in countering China's influence within South Asia and the region beyond. Common interests, particularly related to addressing the challenges posed by China, have solidified the partnership between the U.S. and India. The economic rise of china has posed a geopolitical challenge to India and US. As China is poised to become a world superpower, it challenges US dominant position in world politics (Thi Thuy Hang, 2017) while for India the security challenge rises from China's increasing presence in SA-IOR.

The partnership announced an agreement in 2023 that seeks to expand cooperation in defense technology, supercomputing, semi-conductors, advanced telecom, and other high-tech technologies and looks to strengthen critical and emerging technologies to offset China's dominance in cutting edge technologies (Swanson, 2023).

The nuclear cooperation agreement between India and US introduces a new aspect of bilateral relations between the two. The year 2008 marked a significant milestone with the initiation of a pioneering nuclear cooperation agreement between India and the United States. This accord had its origin in 2005, when the former Indian Prime

Minister, Manmohan Singh, embarked on a visit to the United States. The subsequent joint announcement of this agreement was made by US President George Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, ultimately materializing in 2008. The deal lifts US sanctions since thirty years after India tested its nuclear weapons. The agreement provides US assistance to India's civil nuclear activities, and augment US-India cooperation in civilian space programs and energy technology (Reaching Critical Will).

According to some experts, China was the motivating factor in the agreement. China's expanding presence in the region has motivated the US to cultivate a strategic alliance with India. As CFR's Ferguson suggests, "The United States is trying to cement its relationship with the world's largest democracy in order to counterbalance China" (Bajori and Pan, 2010). A confidential White House document echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that, "A strong India, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China". The document underscores the objective of fostering India's ascendancy and its role as a net security provider in the region. To this end, the U.S. seeks to build defense cooperation, expand defense trade, support India's inclusion in Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), elevate its leadership in East Asia Summit (EAS), provide assistance through economic, military, and intelligence channels, enhance India's position as a defense partner and encourage India's engagement beyond the Indian Ocean Region (Outlook).

Hence, the partnership between India and the United States holds potential to amplify cooperation in shared interests, working to counterbalance China's influence in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

#### ➤ **India's "Neighbourhood First" Policy**

India's unique geography, characterized by its borders with countries of varying sizes, economies, human resources, and political systems, presents an enduring challenge in cultivating enduring and trustworthy relationships with its neighbours, a challenge partly rooted in the legacy of British colonialism. As former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee aptly stated, "You may alternate your friends, but you cannot change your neighbours" (Das, 2016). Establishing a significant impact on the global stage

necessitates India aligning its domestic aspirations with foreign policy priorities. India's political and economic progress hinges on a secure, stable, and peaceful neighbourhood. C. Raja Mohan has rightly posits that, "no country can establish itself as a credible power in the neighbourhood or the world, without rooting hegemony in its region". The path to becoming predominant Asian power rests on India's ability in maintaining strong relations with its neighbours (Muni and Mohan, 2004). Measheimer argued that, "the preeminent outcome a state can endeavor for is to be a regional hegemon and probably control another region that is adjoining and manageable over land. Once the mission of regional hegemony is accomplished, then it can seek to thwart states in other regions from replicating their feat. To put it differently, regional hegemons do not embrace rivals" (Mearsheimer, 2006). Post-Independence, India initially embraced an idealist approach to foreign policy, but the India-China war in 1962 and the 1965 war between India and Pakistan exposed the hard realities of global power dynamics, prompting a shift towards prioritising security as a paramount national.

During the tenure of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India, a transformation in nations' approach towards its neighbours occurred. A dynamic regional diplomacy strategy unfolded, aimed at fostering engagement with neighbouring countries. Recognizing that foreign policy starts at the nations' borders, Modi's initial move was to invite all the heads of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to his inauguration ceremony, signalling his commitment to strengthen ties between India and its neighbours. For India to attain global power status, it must address the factors that have eroded its regional influence over the last several decades.

Modi has deliberately pursued an attempt to forge lasting relationship with India's neighbours. He chose to visit Bhutan as his first foreign trip soon after assuming office of Prime Minister. He cited the relations between the two nations as "unique" in nature and referred to it as "Bharat to Bhutan" (B2B) relations (Srivastava, 2015).

During his visits to Bhutan and Nepal, Modi championed the notion of trans-Himalayan regionalism and as a pillar for Asian politics, environmentalism, culture, and regional security (Singh and Marwah, 2022). By openly addressing the challenges and

articulating India's strategy, Modi has successfully bridged the communication gaps and bolstered confidence between India and its neighbours (Das, 2016).

In a historic move, Modi became the first Prime Minister to visit Sri Lanka in almost three decades (Pant and Super, 2019). During his visit to the island country, Modi underscored historical and cultural ties, while expressing a desire for renewed relations (Sahoo, 2016). In December, 2015, Narendra Modi assured Afghanistan of India's support, stating that "India's involvement in Afghanistan sought to contribute rather than compete, to build a better future rather than to spark conflict, and to rebuild lives rather than to destroy a nation" (The Hindu, 2015).

The India and Maldives defense partnership action plan of 2016, described by Modi as "inextricably related to India's national interest as well as the stability and security of Maldives" (Vaughn, 2018). Modi also pledged the island nation "the necessary assistance in establishing democratic institutions, and the two countries signed additional agreements to expand their defense cooperation in the areas of SAARC satellite development"<sup>58</sup>, "conservation, tourism, and taxes" (Chaudhury, 2018).

Modi's outreach to India's neighbours aligns with his neighbourhood-first approach, aimed to counter China's growing influence in India's proximity. By enhancing connections with neighbouring countries, India aims to thwart China's strategic designs in the South Asian Region.

#### ➤ **Quadrilateral Partnership**

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), popularly known as the "Quad", represents a strategic security dialogue involving member countries- India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe initially proposed the QSD in 2007 (Speers, 2021). The Quad ceased in 2008 following the withdrawal of Australia. The dialogue regained momentum in 2017 when all the member nations agreed to

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<sup>58</sup> The SAARC Satellite, now the South Asia Satellite, is a geostationary communications and meteorology satellite operated by the Indian Space Research Organisation for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region. The satellite was launched on 5 May 2017. During the 18th SAARC summit held in Nepal in 2014, Prime Minister Modi promoted the idea of a satellite serving the needs of SAARC member nations as a part of his neighbourhood first policy. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are the users of the multidimensional facilities provided by the satellite.

reestablish the alliance during the ASEAN Summit in Manila. Notably, the leaders of member states have gathered in 2023 in Japan for their third summit. The first summit took place in Washington in 2021, followed by the second summit in Tokyo in 2022, with two virtual meetings occurring within a span of less than two years (News Nine). This swift succession of gatherings underscores the Quad's evolution from a conceptual idea to a significant regional partnership. The alliance centers around the shared vision of "free and Open Indo-Pacific" as all of them is heavily dependent on open sea lanes for trade worldwide. Though the alliance is not formal, yet the group has intensified its security and economic cooperation.

The Quad's establishment aims to concentrate on areas of mutual points of convergence, and it arises in response to China's growing influence. China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region is increasingly evident, with maritime and territorial disputes involving several littorals, including border conflicts with India.

In 2022, the China and Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Cooperation Agreement was officially signed (Liu, 2022). According to credible reports, "the security pact permits Chinese warships to dock on the islands and that China could send security forces to assist in maintaining social order" (Pandey, 2022). The security agreement has sparked concerns among Australian policymakers about Chinese naval presence.

Japan has been the biggest cheerleader for pursuing the quadrilateral arrangement, with Abe intending to establish the "Asian Arc of Democracies". Japan's motivation to pursue this alliance stems from China's escalating incursions within the region. China's assertive stance over a group of islands in the East China Sea (Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyutai in China) has notably alarmed Japan. In addition Abe was "anxious to establish a regional order that is not defined by China's economic, geographic, and strategic dominance" (Chanlett-Avery, 2018). To this end, Japan has pursued stronger security relationships with countries in China's proximity.

As for the United States, the two Oceans-Indian and Pacific serves US's maritime interests as trillion worth of goods passes through the region. China's growing assertiveness to challenge America's hegemony and regional status quo compels Washington to work closely with strategic partners in the region (Smith, 2021). The

United States is driven by a desire to safeguard its interests within the region and foster regional growth, sustainability, and inclusivity in the region, as seen in the establishment of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). In a recent move, US reopens its Embassy in Seychelles after 27-year absence and restored its mission in the island country. The reopening of the Embassy serves as a strategic move within the broader U.S. mission to counter China's expanding influence across the Indo-Pacific. This objective is further exemplified by the U.S. ongoing effort to establish an Embassy in Maldives and has opened or announced to construct embassies in the Pacific Soloman Islands, Tonga, and Kiribati (The Hindu, 2023; The Economic Times, 2023).

All the four members in recent have felt China's coercive pressures. The leaders of the Quad underscored their collective adherence to shared values, such as advocating for peaceful dispute resolution, and opposing unilateral actions aimed at altering the status quo. Though, they did not mention the name China but repeated references to principles of regionalism show their concern that China is attempting to challenge maritime boundaries. Similarly, their emphasis on open sea lanes, adherence to a rules-based order, support for freedom of navigation, open seas, and unimpeded overflight stands in opposition to China's efforts to assert its rights to control maritime and airspace and its increasing use of coercive means to gain political objectives.

According to some analysts and commentators, tension between Quad countries and China have fueled fears of "a new Cold War in the region" (O'Connor and Jamali, 2022; Heydarian, 2021; Kobara and Moriyasu, 2021; Rasheed, 2020; Power, 2021). China responded to the QSD by calling it "Asian NATO" (Mohan, 2022; Financial Express, 2021). India's Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar refutes the allegations put forth by China and claimed that India never had "NATO mentality". He stressed that "Indo-Pacific strategic construct is not about reinforcing the cold war era but to 'overcome' it" (Basu, 2021).

The Quad is not just restricted to counter Chinese actions but the four countries are cooperating in the fields of cyber, global health security, space, infrastructure, climate change, and emerging technologies. The Quad leaders have initiated the Indo-Pacific

Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), offering real time, integrated, and cost effective maritime picture across the Indo-Pacific (White House Government).

➤ **Necklace of Diamonds**

Instead of adopting a passive approach in response to China's "String of Pearls" strategy, India has proactively embraced the strategic offensive principle of war, adhering to the adage that offense is the best defense. This approach has led India to initiate its own strategy known as the "necklace of diamonds". This counter-encirclement strategy seeks to encircle China through the expansion of Indian naval facilities and the cultivation of alliances and partnerships with strategically positioned nations within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

During an address at a think tank in August 2011, on "India's Regional Strategic Priorities", Lalit Mansingh, a former Indian Foreign Secretary, introduced the term "necklace of diamonds" to describe "India's strategy of doing everything it is supposed to do in terms of protecting its interests". As a response to the "String of Pearls" concept, India has devised its own doctrine, referred to as the "Necklace of Diamonds". "Just as the Chinese are building port facilities, we (India) are tying up naval cooperation with almost all the major powers of the Indian Ocean Region" (Ask an Expert, MP-IDSA). It is to be noted that some popular phrases in strategic discourse like China's "string of pearls"; India's "necklace of diamonds"; and "Salami Slicing"<sup>59</sup> strategy are not official government strategies but interpretations made by analysts based on the actions of the respective governments.

Concerned about China's aggressive maneuvers, most notably its "string of pearls", to which Tom Miller, managing editor of the "*China Economic Quarterly*" characterises as "Beijing's design to tighten a maritime noose around India's neck" (Miller, 2017). India has expanded its presence within the IOR and fostered robust security partnerships with regional countries. India identifies itself as the region's net security

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<sup>59</sup> Salami Slicing is a divide-and-conquer tactic used to dominate opposition territory, piece by piece. Recently, the term has been increasingly used to describe China's unilateral military actions in India, Japan and countries in the South China Sea region. To read more, visit, [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/77868465.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/77868465.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)



provider, viewing any external interference as a direct threat to its national security. The Indian navy takes pride in its role as being the first responder in the region (Captain Parmar, 2022). The Indian Maritime Security Strategy of 2015 outlines one of its objective as “to shape a favourable and positive maritime environment, for enhancing net security in India’s areas of maritime interests” (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015). To counter China’s ambitions in the IOR, India has established naval bases and cultivated alliances with strategically situated nations within the region. A central focus of India’s efforts has been to establish a significant presence near the Strait of Malacca, a critical strategic junction for China (Sukhija, 2021).

**Figure 31- Necklace of Diamonds**



Source: Javaid, A. (2016). What is Necklace of Diamonds Strategy. *Jagran Josh*. Retrieved from <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/necklace-of-diamond-strategy-1592404137-1> (Accessed on 29 May, 2023)

In order to counter Chinese activities in the IOR, India requires access to strategic ports. Access to strategic ports and bases will allow India to prevent China from expanding its “String of Pearls”.

## **India's Strategic Bases**

- **Changi Naval Base, Singapore**

In 2018, India and Singapore entered into bilateral agreement, granting the Indian navy access to Changi base. This base, situated in proximity to the disputed South China Sea and will provide the Indian navy with essential logistic support, including refuelling capabilities (Gurung, 2018).

- **Sabang Port, Indonesia**

In 2018, Indonesia agreed to give India military and economic access to the strategic island of Sabang. Sabang also recognized as Weh island, holds a strategic position 710 km Southeast of the Andamans Islands and less than 500 km from the entrance of the Malacca Strait (Chaudhury, 2018). The Strait of Malacca stands as a crucial maritime chokepoint in the region. It is crucial for global energy security as high volume of trade passes through it. The Sabang arrangement showcase new strategic partnership in the Indian Ocean. The deep sea port will provide India access to Southeast Asia as a counter balancing force against China and will be a key element in India's Indo-Pacific strategy (Chaudhury, 2019).

- **Duqm Port, Oman<sup>60</sup>**

In 2018, India and Oman signed an agreement conferring India access to Duqm, a strategically important port for military utilization and logistics support in Oman (Basak, 2022). Duqm's strategic location encompasses views of the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. This access offers India an advantageous stance against China's escalating activities within the Indian Ocean Region. The agreement enables Indian military vessels to dock at the port for dry-dock maintenance, substantially aiding India's efforts to counter Chinese maritime expansionism (Roy, 2018). Notably, the Duqm port also holds significance for business and investment ventures. A notable Indo-Omani joint venture has led to the establishment of the largest

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<sup>60</sup> Oman is a strategic maritime partner of India, being the only country in the Gulf region with which all three services of the Indian armed forces conduct regular bilateral exercises and staff talks. Oman also provides critical operational support to Indian naval deployments in the Arabian sea for anti-piracy missions.

Sebacic acid plant in the Middle East with an investment exceeding \$1.2 billion. During S. Jaishankar's visit to Oman in 2019, an agreement on Maritime transport was successfully signed between the two nations (Maritime Gateway).

- **Assumptions Island, Seychelles**

In 2015, during Narendra Modi's visit to Seychelles, India and Seychelles mutually agreed to establish a naval base on Assumption Island. Under the revised pact valid for 20 years, India will construct an airstrip and a jetty for its navy on the island. This partnership extends India's influence through a \$100 million line of credit to augment Seychelles's defence capabilities (Laskar, 2018).

- **Agalega Island, Mauritius**

India and Mauritius signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2015 which allows India access to Agalega island, intending to develop it as an air and naval facilities for surveillance purposes in the South-west Indian Ocean and for facilitating it as an intelligence outpost. The remote island of Mauritius will facilitate Indian navy maritime patrols over the Mozambique Channel (Bashfield, 2021). Currently, both the nations deny of the existence of India's military base on the remote island. The access to the Agalega island will act as a crucial nod in India's maritime footprints in the IOR, useful for communication and electronic intelligence collection. Media reports claim that India is building an air strip on the island which will be used as runway for P-81 aircraft (Al Jazeera).

- **Chabahar Port, Iran**

The construction of the Chabahar port in Iran has reignited interest as a prospective international trade hub and a key arena for geopolitical dynamics. India's interest in the port is rooted in its aspiration to access Central Asian and Afghan markets without relying on Pakistan's land routes. This initiative aims to bolster India-Iran relations and act as a countermeasure against Chinese presence via the Gwadar port in Pakistan. Furthermore, the Chabahar project holds the potential to balance the expanding Sino-Pakistan alliance (Aliasgary, 2021).

The Chabahar port is situated in the Gulf of Oman, serves as a link between the Arabian Sea and the strategically important Strait of Hormuz. As Iran's only deep sea port, Chabahar's location in the Indian Ocean Region is vital. The port's exemption from US sanctions facilitates smoother international trade operations (Mohapatra, 2020).

India and Iran initiated the flagship project in 2013, though substantial progress was realized in 2016. During India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Iran in 2016, a joint technical committee was established to develop the Chabahar port. In 2022, India and Iran solidified a long-term agreement for operations at strategic port of Chabahar. This new agreement replaces the original pact, which solely covered India's operations at Shahid Behesti terminal in Chabahar port and was to be renewed every year. This new accord will be valid for ten years, subject to automatic extension (Laskar, 2022; Chaudhury, 2023).

➤ **'Look East' or 'Act East'**

The changing global order has spurred India's foreign policy to adapt to shifts, exemplified by the "Look East" Policy, which was rebranded as the "Act East" in 2014 under the current administration. Despite their distinct names, these two versions essentially represent two different phases of India's approach towards the Asia-Pacific region. With an objective to free itself from China's geopolitical strangulation, India appears to have counter contained Chinese actions in the form of its "Look East" or "Act East" approach. Through these strategies, India has effectively bolstered its ties in social, cultural, economic, and security domains with nations in South East Asia and the Asia-Pacific member nations.

The conclusion of the Cold war in 1991 resulted in a significant transformation in the strategic and economic policies of various Asian countries. These nations were compelled to enact policy reforms to address the evolving economic and security landscapes in the region. India was not exempt from this, and it also underwent three notable policy shifts: the implementation of economic reforms in 1990s; the pursuit of a multifaceted foreign policy fostering stronger economic and strategic connections with the United States, culminating in the pivotal civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2008; and the initiation of Look East policy in 1992 (Kesavan, 2010). This policy

adjustment was India's response to the fresh challenges stemming from the breakdown of the cold war security environment. Although India's relations with Southeast Asian countries were well-established, this advantage has not been adequately considered in its strategic calculations (Devare, 2006).

The period of the Cold war period furnishes India with a compelling rationale for deepening its ties with the Southeast Asian Region for mutual advantage. The Indian economy bore the brunt of the Gulf War (1990-91) due to an unprecedented surge in oil prices. It was further exacerbated by the dissolution of the USSR, on which the Indian economy was highly dependent. Consequently, India had to seek alternative economic sustenance sources. Unfortunately, India's immediate neighbours in the South Asian Region did not offer favourable opportunities for trade and investment. A combination of factors including political disputes, lack of trust, and economic underdevelopment in the region drove India to look towards Southeast and East Asian region (Kesavan, 2020). As China was rapidly modernizing, it was on its way to becoming a dominant force in the Indo-Pacific Region. Simultaneously, Japan, then the world's second- largest economy, had already established its influence in the ASEAN region by establishing its manufacturing bases there. Recognising the vast growth opportunities presented by ASEAN and East Asia, India launched its Look East Policy (LEP).

Although the initial impetus was primarily economic, LEP soon acquired strategic dimensions as well. Over time, India established alliances with numerous nations in the region, with the foundation of these relationships resting on three key pillars: the establishment of institutional frameworks; shared economic interests such as infrastructure development and connectivity; and mutual strategic concerns (Kesavan, 2020).

The comprehensive evaluation of India's relations with ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, and Australia illustrates that the extensive network of institutional structures has resulted in strengthened bilateral engagements. India's journey with ASEAN began as a sectoral partner in 1992 and transitioned to full- fledged member in 1994. Presently, India actively participates in ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asian Summit

(EAS), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, alongside annual summit-level meetings and some thirty sectoral dialogue mechanisms and seven ministerial level exchanges (De, 2018).

India's economic ties with ASEAN have witnessed remarkable growth in recent years. The signing of two trade agreements in goods and services between India and ASEAN has created one of the largest trading zone, comprising a population of 1.8 billion people and a combined GDP exceeding US\$ 3 trillion. The annual trade volume between India and ASEAN stands as US\$ 80 billion, a historic high (De, 2018). ASEAN holds the position of India's 4<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner while India ranks as ASEAN's 7<sup>th</sup> biggest trade partner (Press Information Bureau, Government of India).

Over the years, particularly since Narendra Modi adopted the Act East policy, India has forged strategic partnership agreements with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Additionally, India has cultivated strong ties with the group of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)<sup>61</sup> and IOR countries.

The Look East policy had not produced positive outcomes due to lack of commitment as most of the policies being limited to just rhetoric. Hence, since 2014, India has been working not only to Look East but Act East as well. Modi's state visits to Mongolia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, and South Korea are examples to showcase that the present government is vigorously pursuing the Act East policy. Historical ties of culture, Buddhism, and colonialism, state visits, promotion of tourism, and people-to-people engagement (P2P) are used by India to foster a sense of solidarity and is viewed as a friendly non-threatening move backed by goodwill.

Another critical issue for China is South China Sea and there is no consensus among ASEAN countries on the way to deal with the issue. India's standpoint on the South China Sea emphasises support for freedom of navigation as stipulated in UNCLOS. India advocates for peaceful resolution of disputes. India has noted that "Sea lanes of communication passing through the South China Sea are critical for peace, stability,

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<sup>61</sup> BIMSTEC Member Countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand

prosperity and development.....and urges all parties to show utmost respect for the UNCLOS” (Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India).

In terms of China, India’s Act East policy takes on an entirely distinct dimension. The Act East policy goals appears to be two-fold: to improve India’s stand as regional power by forging strong regional cooperation; and counterbalancing china’s escalating strategic influence.

Evidently, India’s approach to China is evolving. India appears to have initiate a policy of internal and external balancing to counter Chinese activities. The Act East policy seems to constitute India’s employment of soft power to balance the power dynamics in the region. India’s use of soft power to assert its position has been clear through the events occurred since 2014.

#### ➤ **India’s Maritime Initiatives**

The two projects- ‘Mausam’ and ‘Sagarmala’ have generated much debate on India’s supposed counter moves to Chinese endeavors in the IOR. The discussion is based on reasonable assumptions but ultimately the truth is more complex. Apart from being domestic initiative, these two projects could serve as key pillars of Indian strategy for greater regional integration.

#### ➤ **Project Mausam**

The project “Mausam” is an initiative led by the Ministry of Culture of India, carried out in collaboration with Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the National Museum as affiliated organisations. The project has a dual purpose. On a broader scale, it aims to reconnect and re-establish communication with the countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The objective is to enrich the understanding of their cultural values, norms, and concerns. On a more localised level, the project seeks to gain insights into national cultures within the context of regional maritime environments (Ministry of Culture of Government of India). This initiative will play a significant role in identifying cultural routes and maritime landscapes that interconnect various regions along the Indian Ocean littorals, bridging coastal centres with their hinterlands. With a multi-disciplinary approach, the project seeks to reignite historical connections among countries across the Indian Ocean region and foster new avenues of cooperation and

exchange, and interaction (Ministry of Culture of Government of India). Ultimately, the project goal is to strengthen cross-cultural ties and revisit historical maritime, cultural, and economic connections with the Indian Ocean littoral nations.

➤ **Project SAGARMALA**

The project was approved in 2015 and has introduced a National Perspective Plan (NPP) as part of its concept for the comprehensive development of India's coastlines, coastal areas, and maritime domain. The ambitious Sagarmala project aligned with this initiative, has a grand vision of propelling the nation's development through a port-centered approach. Leveraging its extensive 7,500 km long coastline and around 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways as well as its strategic position along crucial international maritime trade routes, the Sagarmala project aims to enhance the country's maritime potential. The government of India initiated this project with the overarching aim of reducing logistics costs for exports and imports and domestic trade. The SAGARMALA project encompasses five key elements: "Port Modernization and New Port Development; Port Connectivity Enhancement; Port-linked Industrialization; Coastal Community Development; and Promotion of Coastal Shipping and Inland Waterways in India" (Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways of Government of India).

Although both the projects are outwardly developmental projects but also in some ways have strategic undertakings. Project Mausam that aims to explore maritime routes and sharing of cultural knowledge among Indian Ocean littorals could in the long term results into greater Indian influence in the IOR. While Sagarmala projects entails access to ports and enhanced connectivity with the regional centres, it could well expand into regional integration. These initiatives would enhance India's counter leverages in the IOR against Chinese setting of ambitious maritime infrastructure. Together, these two projects are pivotal in upholding India's geostrategic influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Ask an Expert, MP-IDSA).

**India and China: Cooperative v/s Competitive**

India and China are fast emerging as two economic engines in the world. Both are neighbours, maritime powers, and nuclear powers. Trade is on increase between them. Both have shared interests like poverty reduction, climate change, energy security, free



navigation, and so on. India and China has increased their collaboration through trade. However, there are some irritant issues between them like border disputes, Tibet, China-Pakistan axis, US-India ties, competition over resources, and expansion of their presence in their respective traditional zone of influence. Though India and China have mutual suspicion over each other's actions, they have to increase their zone of cooperation and trade has become one of key motivations.

It is expected that the growth of world economy in the next decade will be powered by Asia. Major economic engines include India, China, and Japan. The major challenge for Asian economies is to work collectively as there is lack of strong regional institutions in the continent to resolve issues. The future of Asian continent will be determined by ties between India and China and among other major countries.

### **What does the rise of China mean for South Asia and especially now that Xi Jinping has become president for unlimited period???**

The views on this debate differs. Opinions on this discourse vary. China's rapid economic expansion has been interpreted as both a source of envy and a source of inspiration for developing countries. To illustrate, Vietnam implemented reforms process on the lines of Chinese model. Smaller South Asian Countries perceive China as an alternative to India and the Western powers for the purposes of infrastructure development, securing financial resources, and obtaining Capital.

Given that Xi Jinping has assumed the presidency of China for an unlimited tenure, this presents a significant challenge to India's foreign policy in the South Asian Region (SAR). There is a consistent patterns seen, where during Xi's leadership, China has made expansive sovereignty claims, the possibility of the same for unlimited period worries China's neighbors. For India, it is likely for China to increase its transgression along LAC. As highlighted by Jacob (2018) in his article that Doklam stand-off served as a reminder of "China's ability to challenge India's regional dominance"

Another challenge for India will be the further push of Xi's on China's BRI, given that the mega project was his brainchild. The consequences for India will be the possibility of increased Chinese influence in South Asian countries such as providing financial aid and loans, interfering in internal politics (as seen during emergency in Maldives).

Another consequence would be that China will work hard to resolve the opposition of BRI in host countries which involves China's activism such as Taliban talks. This exemplifies China's inclination to involve itself in the internal affairs of other nations. Xi's long tenure will strengthen these gains, create new opportunities.

### **India's stand in the world**

In one of the article titled 'India as a democratic superpower', Tony Abbott stated that India is no longer the emerging democratic power, in fact it has emerged as a democratic superpower. It has become more than capable of providing leadership than that United States cannot always give. He views India to be a world leader 50 years from hence. He also shared his views on China, that there is a need to rethink of the China led globalization. As long as China has hegemonic intentions, other countries should keep a distance. He further advised India that India should look it as an opportunity and should present itself as a trustworthy partner to substitute China in fellow democracies. He further suggested India to extend its 'Make in India' campaign to all the consumer and intermediate goods currently made in India.

Abbott's observation proved to be true in the sense that India is now being recognized as a country that nations can look up to. Recent instance of Russia- Ukraine war is a perfect example to showcase India's status as a responsible superpower. India stands freely to its neutral status on Russia-Ukraine war and never shied away from putting its views on other issues. The world was keenly watching the move of India and was assured that it is only India that could stop the war. India is placed uniquely to appeal to the conscience and the world now starts to admit to this power of India. It is now being accepted that India is more capable than any other nation to exercise moral leadership.

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind expressed that although the term "Indo-Pacific" is relatively new in geopolitical dictionary, India's historical engagement with the region spans several centuries, and the nation consistently advocates for an "open, balanced, rules based, and stable international trade regime".

## **Policy Recommendations for India**

Considering the implications for India, the researcher offers the following recommendations to enhance the nation's strategies in the competition for influence:

- Extend credible offers of assistance to China's targeted countries, in case they choose to resist China's coercion and pressures.
- Develop a comprehensive approach to comprehend, monitor, and respond to China's specific policies and programs designed to exert influence on particular regimes.
- Increase efforts to provide investment platforms that offer a viable alternatives to Chinese infrastructure investment.
- Support initiatives for transparency, journalism, and independent research on China's influential activities in targeted countries.
- Formulate a counter influence strategy that goes beyond media and journalism, involving non-governmental sources to shape opinions, activities, and actions in key countries.
- Countries that are targeted by China should be provided with credible promises of assistance when they stand up against China's pressure.
- Implement a holistic approach to understand, monitor, and respond to China's targeted influence programs targeted at specific interest groups, elites, regimes, or leaders.
- India should support and foster think tanks, researchers, journalism with focus on comprehending Chinese activities in key countries.
- In the region of BRI and the String of Pearls, particularly around India, India's efforts should be focused on expanding its influence in a way that have wider appeal among the various regional countries.
- In order to assure its continuous impact in SA-IOR, India needs to synchronize and facilitate both political and military approaches to achieve its goals. Utilizing military strength to attain political goals is essential, akin to China's approach, where political strategy and military establishments align. China's military activities effectively serve its political and economic interests as evident by initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and String of Pearls

strategy. China's concentration to modernize its navy demonstrated its political and military alignment. Hence, by following certain aspects of China's approach, India can counter Chinese expansionist tendencies while maintain its own space of influence in SA-IOR.

- India has encountered growing pressure from China due to adopting a more defensive position. To prevent China's navy from encroaching on its backyard or territorial waters, India should exert naval power at strategic chokepoints aligned with its vital interests.

### **Conclusion**

The rise of China, coupled with its assertive stance in both Himalayan and Maritime domains, give rise to concerns that extend beyond merely encircling India. They encompass containing Indian influence in its immediate neighbourhood, that is, the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR). The key strategic worries for India involves China's expanding influence and power, which diverges asymmetrically from India in defense and economic sectors. In navigating this uneven strategic landscape, India priority should be to safeguard its interests while formulating policies. In response to China's proactive stance in the SA-IOR, India has chosen to strengthen its ties with allies within the IOR that can support and enhance India's capabilities and providing an alternative within the Indo-Pacific paradigm and to maintain a favourable regional standing.

As change is an inherent facet of nature, it also applies to the realm of geopolitics too. China seeks to establish what it perceives as its rightful status as a middle kingdom and has bolstered economic, military, cultural, and diplomatic ties with its neighbours in Southeast and South Asian Region. These interactions give rise to apprehensions for India. India remains vigilant of Chinese maritime intentions and ambition in the IOR, coupled with concerns about China's encirclement strategy.

As a response to china's growing influence in the South Asian Region, Indian strategists are actively devising strategies to counterbalance China's expanding capabilities. While China's signature Belt and Road Initiative poses a challenge to India, India is still in the process of calibrating its response, leading many South Asian nations hedging

between India and China. Consequently, India has adopted a policy that involves varying degrees of power balancing.

In line with this approach, India and the U.S. signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018. The agreement allows greater communication of high-end encrypted data between the militaries of United States and India, offering a legal framework for the transfer of high end defense technology and will enhance India's defense capability and preparedness. Following border disputes with China, including border clashes in Galwan, Doklam, and Tawang, India's foreign policy has assumed a more assertive tone. The Act East policy coupled with various development initiatives like Make in India, Skill India, Digital India, Smart cities project, along with efforts to promote energy security, active diplomacy among others can be viewed as a strategic blueprint to create flexibility and political space to contend with China's heightened assertiveness and unilateralist stance. India has prioritized military modernization and has placed significant emphasis on its engagement with Quad, reflecting its growing recognition of the necessity to adapt to the fast changing geopolitical landscape while safeguarding its strategic interests in the IOR. As China persists in asserting its power and influence, India will likely to prioritise its military modernization drive and strategic collaborations with like- minded countries to counter China's increasing influence within the region.

The contestation for primacy has intensified between India and China and the race for supremacy has gained new vigour. In order to counter China's increasing maritime influence in the SA-IOR, India's strategy is dual-fold: First, building strong ties with India's immediate neighbours in its own way. India's engagement should be prioritized not only in the context to counter China's assertiveness but also assuming the role of a net security provider in the region. On an optimistic note, South Asian security convergence should not be aimed at any particular country, rather should contribute to creating harmony with one another to make the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Asian century. Furthermore, as the Indo-Pacific region becomes the stage for a new great game, South Asia's role and particularly India's position, assumes even greater significance.

The Indo-Pacific region is evolving into a pivotal strategic arena for the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between India and China, with China already initiating diverse maneuvers to secure access to strategic ports and military bases to advance its interest in the region. India has begun to take initiatives and has been successful in engaging neighbours and littorals in the region. However, until India makes necessary investment in modernizing its naval capabilities, its vision of free, secure, and open Indo-Pacific will remain unfulfilled. India must take appropriate steps to increase its investment in naval modernization as it seeks to counter increasing Chinese presence in the IOR.

## **Chapter-9: Conclusion**

It was not long ago that China was viewed primarily as a regional actor with prime focus on activities in its proximity. In the span of few decades, China has gained popularity as a major player on world stage. It has established itself as one of few nations with global interests and the capacity to pursue them. China's presence is felt over globe and the South Asian Region is no exception.

To examine the phenomenon of China's increasing presence in SAR, the work analyses China's influence mechanism and its implications on SAR security architecture and India's national security. For the comprehensive analysis, objectives are framed which are as follows:

1. To examine China's political, economic and strategic agendas to attain great power status in the South Asian region.
2. To analyse China's maritime strategies and emerging security challenges for India.
3. To assess the emerging China's political influence and its strategic repercussions on India.
4. To analyze China's presence in India's immediate neighborhood and its implications on India's national security.

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides a conceptual understanding of the term containment while Chapter 2 give the literature review. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 highlights the strategic calculations in forming China's South Asian policy and maritime strategy in IOR respectively.

Chapter-5 measures the expanding influence of China in SAR. To this end, Conceptual framework has been framed and some variables are selected to assess China's influence.

Chapter- 6 and Chapter-7 provides the comprehensive analyses of china's increasing influence in Maldives and Sri Lanka respectively. To assess the mechanism of China to expand its influence in the SAR, two case studies are selected. The island countries of South Asia are selected to cover the large scale Chinese influence efforts in SAR.

The case studies are helpful in showing the different aspects of how China's activism have played out in practice. These cases demonstrate about what tools China is relying upon to advance its interest and it is found that China's influence mechanism is flexible.

Chapter-8 assess the implications of China's influence mechanism in selected case studies, SAR as a whole and India's national security. Taken as a whole, they highlight that China is relying heavily on economic statecraft for pressing gains. The analysis of variables shows that SAR countries are navigating cost-benefit analyses as they enter into partnership with either India or China.

Chapter-9 provides the overall analyses of the framed work. China has geostrategic interests in expanding its ties with South Asian nations that are wary of India's influence in their internal affairs and its position as a regional hegemon. India's tense relations with SAR nations provides China a chance to counter balance India's influence. Nonetheless, China bid to influence these countries has challenges emanating from India's closer and stronger linguistic, cultural, and historical ties. Beijing officials also bid to woo smaller South Asian countries as they hold voting power in international forums. The unwillingness of these countries to criticize China helps china to legitimize its policies on Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang.

The findings presented in this study showcasing that China has increased its initiatives to win favors with the public and authorities in South Asian countries. Though, focused on one region-South Asia, this research provides insights into ways and potential responses to China's influence mechanism on a larger scale. In this concluding chapter, the researcher summarises key findings about the nature and impact of China's influence in SAR in general and Sri Lanka and Maldives in particular. The researcher provides recommendations for government officials of targeted countries about China's overtures. Finally, suggestions for India has been provided to counter increasing Chinese influence.

### **Why India sees China's rise with suspicion?**

With respect to India, Chinese actions are viewed with suspicion. Border skirmishes with China like Doklam incident, Galwan clash, and its resistance to India's aspirations for NSG membership and UNSC permanent membership as well as to stall India's



attempt to sanction Pakistan based terrorists under UNSC resolutions suggest that China's actions does not match with its words, causing more distrust and suspicion. Given China's past track record and the enormous discrepancy its words and deeds does not inspire confidence in the authorities of India.

### **Key insights on China's increasing influence in selected countries**

Chinese officials have substantially invested huge amount of finance, energy, and human resources to carry influence drive in the SAR. However, Chinese activities may not be as perfect to realize the advantages or gains as planned. Reflecting on the findings presented in the work, the researcher pose key insights on the impact of Chinese influence mechanism in selected case studies as well as on the SAR. In South Asia, China seeks to strengthen its strategic presence, expand economic activity and influence, secure overland energy corridors to avoid maritime chokepoints, and limit India's influence through strategic concirclement. In order to pursue these goals, China has employed its economic incentives and has expanded diplomatic ties with countries throughout the region.

### **South Asian Region**

- The SAR is central to China's signature BRI. The region's strategic location serves as a junction for both the projected 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and the Silk Road Economic Belt. Since 2013, China has signed over \$100 billion in investment in South Asia (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2022). China's massive infrastructure development and investment programme via its BRI is looked with deep suspicion as they could support China's broader geopolitical goals of encircling India. By whatever means, China uses its carefully tailored approach to enhance its national interests, whether it be counter terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan, tourism and infrastructure development in Maldives, port access in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, or sowing the seeds of suspicion in its Asian regional rival, India. Overall, it seems that China is hardly engaging the SAR for mutual benefit, but primarily (if not exclusively) for its own advantage. Therefore, all South Asian Nations should be well aware of what exactly China is seeking in their state and its potential long term implications.

- China has been wooing South Asian countries not just with trade and investment. The most powerful and effective tools of China's influence in the South Asian Region are infrastructure development and cheap loans. Over the past decade in general and since the inauguration of ambitious BRI project in particular, China has steadily expanded its influence in SAR.
- China's Cheque book diplomacy has largely been welcomed in the region as a means for infrastructure development and new economic opportunities, for which the region is in dire need of. However, China's preference for secret negotiations and opaque agreements, along with cautionary tale of debt trap has sparked public debate and led to change in government in some countries.
- China has gained support from South Asian countries where leaders want to play the china card as an additional or alternative or to counter India in their domestic affairs. Chinese authorities have been fast to adapt to maintain elite ties amid political transition despite setbacks when pro- China leaders have been ousted from office.

### **Sri Lanka**

Due to Sri Lanka's advantageous location in the SA-IOR<sup>62</sup>, China values it as an 'important pearl'<sup>63</sup> and strategic partner as pro-Chinese government in Sri Lanka allows China to counter India's military through dual-use ports that gives Chinese navy a stopover while responding to maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean.

China has maintained cordial ties with Sri Lanka but Sri Lanka as a strategic partner to China is of recent. For a significant portion of its early history, Sri Lanka's close linguistic, historical, and cultural ties to India and its shared values of democracy with the west put China at a relative disadvantage in developing friendship and a sense of comfort and ease with Sri Lanka. However, the relationship reached new heights between 2005 and 2015 under the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa. The end of Sri Lankan civil war marked a turning point in China and Sri Lanka relationship.

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<sup>62</sup> Strategically located at the midpoint of shipping lanes that connect the PRC and the Middle East.

<sup>63</sup> Sri Lanka's Hambantota port is geostrategically located in the Indian Ocean, potentially supporting String of Pearls.

Towards the end of cold war, “China’s financial aid reached US \$1 Billion by 2008” (Smith, 2016; Popham, 2010). Beijing has provided diplomatic protection to Sri Lanka from international censure on human rights abuses. China’s support during this critical time allowed Sri Lankan government to launch infrastructure drive that helps the nation to reconstruct and gave its state owned enterprises to deliver their investment pledges. Mahinda Rajapaksa’s defeat in 2015 president elections was major setback as new government formed by Maithripala Sirisena alleged that Chinese loans for infrastructure has bankrupted the country. Moreover, there is increasing realization in public domain that Chinese funded projects are not commercial viable.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China and Sri Lanka relations have grown exponentially and are strengthened through regular diplomatic visits and economic engagement. China’s interest in Sri Lanka is of recent because of its strategic location. Sri Lanka is an important pearl on the 21<sup>st</sup> century MSR, connecting major SLOCs. Furthermore, Sri Lanka is dependent on BRI to fund its numerous infrastructure and development projects. As a result, MSRI is critical for Sri Lanka to establish itself as a prominent actor in developing trading ports in Indian Ocean.

China has made significant FDI in Sri Lanka and has repeatedly been the top source of FDI destination to Sri Lanka. In 2002, with China’s assistance, Sri Lanka began constructing a new port in Hambantota. With years, Sri Lanka has defaulted on Chinese loans, the failure of which results into lease of port to China for 99 years. The port failure has emerged as poster child for China’s unsustainable development investment, also known as ‘debt trap diplomacy’.

In 2022, Sri Lanka faced its severe economic crises. It was triggered by foreign currency shortage, which further worsened by unsustainable debts. Sri Lanka defaulted on billions of loans and is currently in bailout negotiations with the IMF. During the crisis, China pressures Sri Lanka to dock its military ship at Hambantota port, despite providing prior assurances that the port will not be used for military operations or purposes.

It is found that despite Sri Lanka’s strategically important location in the Indian Ocean and its close proximity to India, China’s influence mechanism particularly its drive for

infrastructure development and development assistance has significantly shaped Sri Lanka's foreign policy to adopt hedging<sup>64</sup> to maximize benefits.

### **Maldives**

Prior to 2011, the relations between China and Sri Lanka were limited. China did not even have an embassy in Maldives. However, as China increases its maritime power and as part of its BRI, Maldives rose to prominence majorly on accounts of its location<sup>65</sup>. India has always considered Maldives as an important and strategic player in the IOR and accorded it the necessary importance in its neighbourhood first policy. China's inroads in Maldives is recent phenomenon and in particular since its presence in the IOR as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and BRI.

Chinese investment boom in Maldives in 2014 with Xi Jinping visit to the archipelago nation. Investments were made in expansion of Male international airport, housing project, and the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge. Maldives has given on lease two of its islands- Kunaavashi Island and Feydhoo Finolhu Island for infrastructure development. The islands since then has been dramatically expanded, in the similar pattern to the artificial island that PRC has constructed in the Pacific in South China Sea (SCS).

As per International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2020, "Maldives was at 'high risk' of debt distress". China accounts for more than 50% of Maldives external debt.

The foreign policy of Maldives is influenced by its domestic politics and which in turn indicates the direction the country will lean. Whatever be the case, India should keep a proactive approach towards the Maldives and support the country in addressing issues like climate change, development, and terrorism.

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<sup>64</sup> Hedging normally refers to a national security or alignment strategy, undertaken by one state toward another, featuring a mix of cooperative and confrontational elements

<sup>65</sup> The archipelago serves as an intersection of the Indian Ocean that touches the main shipping route between the PRC and the oil suppliers of the Middle East and Europe.

### **Hypothesis Tested**

This research aims to address the following questions:

1. How China is expanding its influence in South Asian countries?
2. What tools China employs to seek influence?
3. What implications this strategy could have on South Asian region as whole and India in particular?

At the end of this work, the conclusion drawn from this research are as follows:

1. After decades of limited engagement, China has swiftly deepened and strengthened its ties with South Asian countries in a relatively short span.
2. During the literature review phase, conducted at the initiation stage of the research, it was observed that China was bolstering its relationship with small developing countries through economic means. However, as the research progressed and case studies were conducted, it became evident that China's influence extends beyond trade and economic dimension. While economic factors serve as a foundation for its deepened relationships, they also contribute to enhancing its diplomatic engagement. Consequently, China's impact resonates in the political processes of South Asian countries, whether it involves aiding in regime changes or influencing elections. China's influence was also noted in policy-making processes.
3. Based on the analytical findings derived from case studies of Maldives and Sri Lanka, it was observed that China's engagement extends beyond the economic realm and encompasses domains such as education, culture, scholarship programs, public policy and governance.
4. It was also observed that India's engagement with countries in its South Asian neighbourhood is limited despite its geographical proximity. The relationships of South Asian countries with India are unique due to its historical and cultural ties. In contrast, there is no such diversity in the relationships of South Asian countries with China.

5. This research also elucidated how South Asian countries are leveraging the benefits from best of both worlds and are playing cards to advance their own interests and address their concerns.

### **Key Takeaways**

This thesis clearly shows that China is expanding its influence in the South Asian countries so as to protect its national interests. This study analysis major findings which are summarised below:

#### **➤ China's influence mechanism is flexible**

Taken as whole, it concludes that China's influence mechanism is flexible and is according to the needs of state actors. China employs a variety of tools depending on its level of engagement with a particular nation, the strength of country's institution, and China's personal connection with regime leaders. As Maldives is a tourism based economy, China accounts for highest share of tourist arrival in Maldives, whereas Sri Lanka is dependent on infrastructure development, China is investing heavily in Sri Lanka for infrastructure development. China has adopted extensive lending tactics in Sri Lanka. China's approach to draw Maldives into its orbit is similar to its approach in bringing Sri Lanka into its sphere of influence. It is found that China has emerged as a heavyweight in trade, tourism, and infrastructure development in Maldives whereas in Sri Lanka, China's tool is infrastructure development.

#### **➤ Heavy Reliance on Economic Levers of Influence**

Another major highlight illustrates that China is relying heavy on economic statecraft as a primary tool for pressing gains and imposing sanctions when failed to do so. China is assisting these countries to build massive infrastructure projects. China lent \$4.5 billion to Sri Lanka in 2022, while the total amount to Maldives is reportedly in between \$1.1 billion to \$1.4 billion. These economic dealings aid in achieving its geopolitical goals and boosting its influence in the region in what has long been considered as India's strategic backyard.

#### **➤ Interference in Domestic Politics**

Another major finding includes China's interference in political system of Maldives and Sri Lanka by tipping the scale in favor of pro Chinese leaders. Chinese adopted

proactive approach, exploring possibilities, contacting public and private stakeholders, and finishing projects in time to coincide with upcoming elections. This has helped them to earn goodwill in target countries.

➤ **Containment+ Encirclement= CONCIRCLEMENT**

China is relying heavily on economic statecraft as a primary tool for pressing gains and imposing sanctions when failed to do so. China is luring countries with developmental opportunities by providing them cheap loans and when failed to pay back, obtains control of strategic assets. This strategy is also dubbed as Debt trap diplomacy.

China has acquired Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on lease for 99 years- adding a new link in its String of Pearls.

➤ **Controversy surrounding Chinese infrastructure projects**

"Sri Lanka has become a vivid example of the dark underbelly" (Smith, 2020) of China's BRI. Chinese infrastructure deals accused of secrecy, promoting corruption, and undermining democratic governance in Sri Lanka illustrates the challenges of China's BRI and its debt trap diplomacy. Maldives, another island in the SA-IOR, has received less publicity but presents some similarities to Sri Lanka's case. There are, of course, some significant distinctions as well. There is no valid proof that Chinese infrastructure agreements with Maldives have secret and sovereignty violating provisions as in the case of Sri Lanka. Despite accusations, there is lack of concrete evidence of secret provisions or military plans by China.

**Is China Containing India?**

The persistence strengthening of China's relations with South Asian countries and its attempt to impede India's influence in SAR and the deepening forays of China in India's neighbourhood are all factors indicating China's policy of containment of India's growth. China aims to become the sole superpower in Asia and is pursuing this goal by keeping India engaged in regional matters rather than global affairs while neutralizing Indian influence in the SAR. All of this is taking place despite significant improvement in trade relations, and tourism revenue from India and a renewed focus on bilateral engagement.

China's long term commercial and strategic interests in gaining access, power, and influence in the SA-IOR are evident. However, concerns arise due to the darker side of China's actions, which often reflect the influence of the CCP. Some of China's huge investment projects have been dubious from commercial and strategic standpoint. China has consistently displayed authoritarian instincts. China's economic engagement have frequently attracted the charges of secrecy, corruption, espionage, and hidden objectives.

Chinese actions in the SA-IOR are not purely commercial but has hidden intention to limit the power of India by containing its influence. Although the heightened engagement with China draws criticism and speculation from both domestic and international arenas. Nevertheless, China has developed a framework to establish both economic and political influence in the SA-IOR, which was not present a decade ago. This shift has created new challenges for democratic powers in the region and provided a new alternative for leaders with authoritarian leanings. To maintain the balance in favour of economic and political freedom, India and its allies will need to adapt to this changing landscape.

India is closely monitoring China's growing influence in the South Asian Region and its potential implications on its security. India is slowly accepting China's growing presence as strategic reality. China is actively playing a role detrimental to India's national security.

- There are currently two opposing schools of thoughts with respect to India and China playing their cards on smaller South Asian nations. One school of thought believes that Smaller South Asian nations try to play both sides against each other to get the best possible arrangement on economics sphere, arms sales, and strategic concerns. Pattanaik (2022) argues that China's presence is somewhat advantageous to South Asian countries as it compelled India to act swiftly over issues over which India sits for long period of time. The maritime great game played out between India and China might lead to more demand of smaller states. The state with the most leverage in this three way communication will likely to take more advantage over others. Most South Asian countries have



benefitted by skillfully engaging with both India and China and played their rivalry to gain. Bangladesh to a large extent is one such exception. It has so far successfully engaged with the two to make profit. The current trend in the region has been in favour with China to expand and deepen its ties with smaller South Asian nations. While India on the other hand has to respond in all way (diplomatic and economic) to counter China's efforts. The two Asian giants share a relation of Congagement- mixture of conflict and engagement.

- Another School believes that China has managed to enter into the region through its soft power diplomacy. China's ability to invest and to efficiently complete the projects remain major attraction for South Asian countries which are economically deficient and perceive China as coping mechanism for uncertain future. India on the other hand has sluggish decision making and its inability to complete projects. China's role in the region has grown significantly while India is still grappling with its much advertised neighbourhood first policy.
- India should not necessarily be worried of China's billion dollar investments in the region but should be concerned of Hambantota type situations where a nation's inability to pay debt could lead to China's taking over of the assets. This would result into China's strategic presence in India's neighbourhood. One thing is starkly clear that South Asian nations cannot ignore India given its geographical proximity.

### **China's failure to bring South Asian nations together to work against India**

India's South Asian neighbours have not unanimously come together to work against India. There is no grand coalition strategy to go against India, which shows that they cannot side with China. It is also not clear whether China would gain by increasing its influence in South Asia or could contain it. South Asian nations are not bandwagoning with India. They never collectively come out to show their concerns over India. India's neighbours have apprehensions with its dominance in the region but that too differs from country to country. Like for instance, China's growing friendship with Pakistan has its roots in India- China war of 1962, and India-Pakistan war of 1965. The two

mingle since then. Pakistan is being looked for geopolitical significance and a gate to Middle East by China while China serves Pakistan's development objectives. Pakistan sees China as essential to counter India's dominance in the region. Raju (2022) views that China's attempts to contain India by maintaining cordial relation with Pakistan is bound to fail as Pakistan seems to be a failed state. China has to realize that without having friendly relations with India, it could not enhance its presence in the South Asian Region.

China's regional offensive has yielded mixed results, with instances of domestic criticism and international scrutiny. Smith (2020:18-19) has rightly remarked that "in each instance there has been a case of 'buyer's remorse' and, usually following an election, an attempt to renegotiate terms with China". For example, Maldives faced political backlash when Yameen's government embraced China during his presidential tenure.

### **India is still a traditional security partner for South Asian nations**

South Asian Region is affected by various non- traditional threats. These threats have transnational dimension and no single nation can handle them alone. Coping with these threats become a challenge for nations and hence cooperation in the region is required. Among all South Asian nations, India is and has the potential to tackle traditional and non- traditional threats. According to Mukherjee (2021), despite having deep extensive relationship, China is still not the one. China is already facing the limitations of commercial empires established far from home. Public in smaller states hold China responsible for the adverse consequences of unreasonable infrastructure projects. India appears up at every event to offer a sound alternative. Sri Lanka's worst economic crises could be one example to illustrate this.

India's stature as the dominant power in the South Asian Region is evitable and the South Asian nations has acknowledged this reality. Hence, India is the dominant power and will continue to do so in coming years. India's stature in the region is inevitable and India's neighbours cannot run away from the reality. For non- traditional security challenges, they largely are dependent on India. During Covid pandemic, India has reached out to its neighbours through vaccine diplomacy.

### **Recommendations for India**

What is happening in Sri Lanka and Maldives is of interest to India, not least that both island countries straddle the SLOCs but both are India's immediate neighbours. A country cannot rise as a regional power when its neighbours are in trouble. In recent years, both countries are grappling with political and economic instability. Geopolitically, both nations have become a battle ground for influence and strategic access between India and China in SA-IOR.

To advance its national interests in the SA-IOR and to promote peace, stability, democracy, and prosperity, and to balance the regional security architecture, the Indian government should emphasize:

- There is need to view the IOR beyond the 'China's phenomenon' (Krothwal and Kumar, 2023). It would be better to pitch assistance based on its merits and inherent value rather than anti-China objective. Conveying a positive agenda will gain more favour among authorities, businesses, and general public.
- To increase its cooperation and coordination with Maldives policy as visible through High Impact Community Development Programs.
- To offer them alternative to China's BRI
- Promoting high quality, transparent, trusted standards, and sustainable infrastructure development/model should be the focus.
- In order to strengthen the relationship with South Asian nations for long term, it is important to broaden the range of engagement on issues of strategic importance. In case of Maldives and Sri Lanka, one such issue is climate change. The island nations are at high risk due to climate change.
- To pay attention to the development priorities and domestic needs of the countries in the region and formulate proposals and policies accordingly.
- Consistency in regional engagement and long term policy for the region.

### **Way forward for India**

The Indo-Pacific region has increasingly become a crucial focal point in the geopolitical game of India and China as both are engaging in maritime competition. While China has gained access to strategic ports and military bases to secure economic, military, and

security advantage by employing illiberal economic tactics, The United States view India as the net security provider in the region in terms of maintaining open seas, lanes and freedom of navigation. As India seeks to counter increasing Chinese footprints, it must strengthen its naval capabilities. In addition to cooperation with the allies and littorals in the region, India should spend more on naval modernization. Construction of new aircraft carriers, attack submarines, and increasing its maritime domain awareness will ensure that India has modern navy capable to counter growing Chinese dominance in the IOR.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix-1: China and Focus Countries Bilateral High –Level Visits

#### MALDIVES

Year	Meetings
<b>2008</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo met in Beijing with Foreign Minister of Maldives Abdulla Shahid (26 May, 2008)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met in Beijing with Foreign Minister of Maldives Abdulla Shahid (26 May, 2008)</li> </ul>
<b>2009</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao met with Maldives President Mohammed Nasheed on the context of group meeting with Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Grenadian, and Sudan government officials (17 December, 2009)</li> </ul>
<b>2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed met with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Male, Maldives (5 January, 2010)</li> <li>• Chinese President Hu Jintao held talks in Shanghai with President of Maldives Mohamed Nasheed (2 May, 2010)</li> </ul>
<b>2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President of Maldives Mohamed Nasheed met with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun in Maldives (9 November, 2011)</li> </ul>
<b>2012</b>	-
<b>2013</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with President of Maldives Mohamed Nasheed (January, 2013)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi held talks with Maldivian Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed (January, 2013)</li> <li>• Chinese President Hu Jintao held talks with Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed (May, 2013)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yunnan’s Governor Qin Guangrong met with Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed (September, 2013)</li> </ul>
<b>2014</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayom meets with Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin in Male (6 January, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin met Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives Dunya Maumoon in Male (6 January, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin held 5<sup>th</sup> round of China-Maldives Diplomatic Consultation in Male with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives, Fathimath Inaya (6 January, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin met with Ambassador of Maldives to China Mohamed Rasheed (17 March, 2014)</li> <li>• President Xi Jinping meets with President Abdulla Yameen of the Maldives in Nanjiang, China (16 August, 2014)</li> <li>• Chine President Xi Jinping held talks with President Abdulla Yameen of Maldives in Male (15 September, 2014)</li> <li>• Xi Jinping met with Speaker of People’s Majlis Abdulla Maseeh Mohamed and former President of Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in Maldives (15 September, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao met with Delegation of Officials of the Maldivian Government (31 October, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao met with Minister of the President’s Office Mohamed Hussain Shareef of Maldives (17 December, 2014)</li> </ul>
<b>2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin met with Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed of Maldives (16 September, 2015)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao attends reception marking 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Maldives Independence (18 July)</li> <li>• Vice President Li Yuanchao met with President Abdulla Yameen of Maldives and other Foreign guests in China (11 June, 2015)</li> </ul>
<b>2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou meets with Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed of Maldives (18 August, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Xi Jinping held talks with President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom of Maldives in China (7 December, 2017)</li> <li>• Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom of Maldives in China (7 December, 2017)</li> <li>• China's Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou met with Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed of Maldives (14 September, 2017)</li> <li>• China's Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou held the 6<sup>th</sup> round of China-Maldives diplomatic consultation with Maldivian Secretary for bilateral Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Khaleel in Male (19 February, 2017)</li> <li>• President Abdulla Yameen Gayoom of Maldives met with Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou in Maldives (19 February, 2017)</li> <li>• China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Asim of Maldives in China (5 January, 2017)</li> </ul>
<b>2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Xi Jinping's Special Envoy and Minister of Culture and Tourism Luo Shugang met with President Ibrahim</li> </ul>

	<p>Mohamed Solih of the Maldives at the State House of Maldives (18 November, 2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special envoy of President of Maldives and Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed met with Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi in Beijing (8 February, 2018)</li> </ul>
<b>2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice President Wang Qishan met with Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives at Zhongnanhai (19 September, 2019)</li> <li>• State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Foreign Minister of Maldives Abdulla Shahid in Beijing (20 September, 2019)</li> </ul>
<b>2020</b>	-
<b>2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with the Foreign Minister of Maldives and President of the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly Abdulla Shahid in Anji County, Zhejiang Province (25 November, 2021)</li> </ul>
<b>2022</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China's State Councilor Wang Yi met Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid on the sidelines of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), New York (24 September, 2022)</li> <li>• China's Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Liu Jinong met Ambassador of Maldives to China Ms. Aishath Azeema (27 June, 2022)</li> <li>• State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi held talks with Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid in Male (8 January, 2022)</li> <li>• Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih met with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Male (8 January, 2022)</li> </ul>

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2737\\_663478/2739\\_663482/index.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2737_663478/2739_663482/index.html) (Accessed on 27 March, 2023)

## SRI LANKA

Year	Visits
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa met with Deputy Foreign Minister of China Wu Dawei (2 August, 2008) (Dawei was on State visit to attend 15<sup>th</sup> South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation SAARC Summit as an observer)</li> <li>• Chinese President Hu Jintao met with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (7 August, 2008) (Rajapaksa went to attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics and relevant activities)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse met with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Colombo (10 September, 2008)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake met with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Colombo (10 September, 2008)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama met with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Colombo (10 September, 2008)</li> </ul>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama (3 July, 2009)</li> <li>• Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao met with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake on the sidelines of 10<sup>th</sup> Western China International Economy and Trade Fair (16 October, 2009)</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Gamini Lakshman Peiris (12 August, 2010)</li> </ul>

2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Zhang Zhijun met with Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Karunatilaka Amunugama (22 March, 2011)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi held talks with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Gamini Lakshman Peiris (24 May, 2011)</li> <li>• Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo met with Sri Lankan Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne in Kunming (5 June, 2011) (Jayaratne was on his visit to attend 19<sup>th</sup> China Kunming Import and Export Fair and the Fourth South Asian countries Trade Fair)</li> <li>• Chinese president Hu Jintao met with Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapakse in St. Petersburg (17 June, 2011)</li> <li>• Chinese premier Wen Jiabao met with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa in Zhongnanhai (11 August, 2011)</li> </ul>
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China Wu Bangguo met with Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament Chamal Rajapaksa (13 June, 2012)</li> <li>• Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China Wu Bangguo met with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa (17 September, 2012)</li> <li>• Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China Wu Bangguo met with Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament Chamal Rajapaksa (17 September, 2012)</li> </ul>
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Ma Zhaoxu met with Delegation of Officials from Sri Lanka and Additional Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka Kshenuka Senewiratne (18 April, 2013)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa (28 May, 2013)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (29 May, 2013)</li> <li>• Vice President of China Li Yuanchao met with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (30 May, 2013)</li> <li>• Member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Secretary of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee met with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (8-10 September, 2013)</li> <li>• Member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Secretary of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka D.M. Jayaratne (8-10 September, 2013)</li> </ul>
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director-General of the Department of Consular Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China Huang Ping met with Additional Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka E. Rodney M. Perera (20 February, 2014)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Liu Zhenmin met with Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka Gamini Lakshman Peiris (24-25 April, 2014)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Liu Zhenmin met with President's Special Envoy on Human Rights and Minister of Plantation Industries of Sri Lanka Mahinda Samarasinghe (24-25 April, 2014)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Liu Zhenmin met with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (24-25 April, 2014)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Liu Zhenmin met with Secretary of Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka Kshenuka D. Senewiratne (</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (22 May, 2014)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of china Liu Zhenmin met with Deputy Solicitor General of Sri Lanka Jayantha Jayasuriya (6 May, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Professor Gamini Lakshman Peiris (10 August, 2014)</li> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Liu Jianchao met with press delegation of Sri Lanka (1 September, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka D.M. Jayaratne (17 September, 2014)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Speaker of Parliament of Sri Lanka Chamal Rajapaksa (17 September, 2014)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa met with Chinese President Xi Jinping (16 September, 2014)</li> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Liu Jianchao met with delegation of former senior diplomats of Sri Lanka (13 November, 2014)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister Li Baodong met with the delegation of the UN Association of Sri Lanka (9 December, 2014)</li> </ul>
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe met with Special Envoy of the Chinese Government and Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao (6 February, 2015)</li> <li>• Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera met with Special Envoy of the Chinese Government and Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao (6 February, 2015)</li> <li>• President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena met with Special Envoy of the Chinese Government and Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao (6 February, 2015)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera (27 February, 2015)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera (27 February, 2015)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera (27 February, 2015)</li> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Liu Jianchao met with the press delegation from Sri Lanka (23 March, 2015)</li> <li>• Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) Zhnag Dejiang met with President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (26 March, 2015)</li> <li>• Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (26 March, 2015)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (26 March, 2015)</li> <li>• Sri Lanka former President Mahinda Rajapaksa met with Special Envoy of the Chinese government and Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin (8 October, 2015)</li> <li>• Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena met with Special Envoy of the Chinese government and Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin (8 October, 2015)</li> <li>• Sri Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe met with Special Envoy of the Chinese government and Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin (9 October, 2015)</li> <li>• Deputy Director-General of the Protocol Department of the Foreign Ministry Zhang Yiming met Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Karunasena Kodituwakku (16 November, 2015)</li> </ul>
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Foreign Minister of China Mangala Samaraweera (6 February, 2016)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Liu Zhenmin met with Minister of development Strategy and International Trade of Sri Lanka Malik Samarawickrema (1 March, 2016)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese Premier Le Keqiang met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe (7 April, 2016)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe (8 April, 2016)</li> <li>• President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena met with Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi (8 July, 2016)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe (9 July, 2016)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera (8 July, 2016)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena (16 October, 2016)</li> </ul>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Kong Xuanyou met with Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Karunasena Kodituwakku (Kong Xuanyou attended the reception marking 69<sup>th</sup> Independence day of Sri Lanka ) (4 February, 2017)</li> <li>• Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe met Assistant Foreign Minister of China Kong Xuanyou (during 10<sup>th</sup> round of China-Sri Lanka diplomatic consultations in Sri Lanka) (20 February, 2017)</li> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Kong Xuanyou met President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (on the sidelines of 10<sup>th</sup> round of China-Sri Lanka diplomatic consultations in Sri Lanka) (21 February, 2017)</li> </ul> <p>Chairman of National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Yu Zhengsheng on official goodwill visit to Sri Lanka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (8 April, 2017)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe (8 April, 2017)</li> <li>• Met Speaker of Parliament of Sri Lanka Karu Jayasuriya (8 April, 2017)</li> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe (16 My, 2017)</li> <li>• Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe (16 May, 2017)</li> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Kong Xuanyou met with Secretary of the Ministry of Law and Order and Southern Development of Sri Lanka Jagath Wijeweera (7 August, 2017)</li> <li>• Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka Tilak Marapana (30 October, 2017)</li> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Chen Xiaodong met Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka Tilak Marapana (Tilak Marapana visited China to attend the reception marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of China-Sri Lanka relations and the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the agreement on Rice for Rubber) (31 October, 2017)</li> </ul>
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Foreign Minister of China Chen Xiaodong met with Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Karunasena Kodituwakku (Chen Xiaodong was in Sri Lanka to attend the reception marking 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence day of Sri Lanka) (4 February, 2018)</li> </ul>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese President Xi Jinping met with President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (14 May, 2019)</li> <li>• Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena (15 May, 2019)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Luo Zhaohui met with Speaker of Parliament of Sri Lanka Karu Jayasuriya (15 December, 2019)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Luo Zhaohui met with Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Karunasena Kodituwakku (30 December, 2019)</li> </ul>
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa met with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (14 January, 2020)</li> <li>• President of Sri Lanka Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (14 January, 2020)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena met with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Colombo (14 January, 2020)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Yang Jiechi in Colombo (9 October, 2020)</li> <li>• Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa met with Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Yang Jiechi in Colombo (9 October, 2020)</li> <li>• Vice Ministerial Level video conference on COVID-19 response among China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal (referred to as “the Five Parties”) (10 November, 2020)</li> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of china Luo Zhaohu and Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage</li> </ul>

	<p>together chaired the 11<sup>th</sup> round of diplomatic consultation virtually (23 November, 2020)</p>
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Foreign Minister of China Luo Zhaohui met with Sri Lankan Ambassador to China Dr. Palitha Kohona (3 March, 2021)</li> <li>• State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi hosted conference of Foreign Ministers of China Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka on COVID-19 (27 April, 2021)</li> <li>• Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of China Liu Jinsong met with Ambassador of Sri Lanka to China Dr. Palitha Kohona (26 August, 2021)</li> </ul>
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Colombo (9 January, 2022)</li> <li>• Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa met with State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi in Colombo (9 January, 2022)</li> <li>• Director-General of the Department of External Security Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of China Bai Tian and Secretary of the Ministry of Public Security of Sri Lanka Major General Jagath Alwis held video conference on security guarantees for Belt and Road Cooperation projects (13 January, 2022)</li> <li>• Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of China Liu Jinsong met with Ambassador of Sri Lanka to China Dr. Palitha Kohona (9 June, 2022)</li> <li>• Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of China Liu Jinsong met with Ambassador of Sri Lanka to China Dr. Palitha Kohona (22 June, 2022)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of China Liu Jinsong met with Ambassador of Sri Lanka to China Dr. Palitha Kohona (30 August, 2022)</li> <li>• State Councilor and Foreign Minister of china Wang Yi met with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Ali Sabry (on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 23 September, 2022)</li> </ul>
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**Source:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2782\\_663558/2784\\_663562/index.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2782_663558/2784_663562/index.html) (Accessed on 28 March, 2023)

**\* These do not include phone conversations and congratulatory remarks.**



## Appendix-2: Imports-Exports with China, by focus countries

### MALDIVES: Maldives imports from China and India (2008-2022) (in US\$ million)

Year	Total Imports	China's Share	India's Share
2008	1388	29	145
2009	966	26	117
2010	1095	32	126
2011	1412	73	143
2012	1555	69	148
2013	1733	82	154
2014	1993	105	171
2015	1897	147	227
2016	2128	286	276
2017	2360	281	284
2018	2961	488	287
2019	2887	469	290
2020	1839	268	246
2021	2574	324	318
2022	3515	383	496

Source: UN Comtrade, available at <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>

World Integrated Trade Solution. Retrieved from <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/MDV/Year/2019/TradeFlow/Import> (Accessed on 23 May, 2023)

Maldives: Economic and Political Overview. Foreign trade figures of the Maldives. Retrieved from <https://www.tradecub.standardbank.com/portal/en/market-potential/maldives/trade-profile#> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023)

Import Statistics. *Maldives Customs Service*. Retrieved from <https://www.customs.gov.mv/Statistics> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023)

Annual Reports. *Maldives Monetary Authority*. Retrieved from <http://www.mma.gov.mv/#/research/publication/reports/ar/Annual%20Report> (Accessed on 22 June, 2023)

### China's trade with Maldives- Imports and Exports (2011-2021)

(in US\$ 10,000 Units)

Year	Imports from Maldives	Year	Exports to Maldives
2011	135,718	2011	97,122,449
2012	185,751	2012	76,487,693
2013	417,925	2013	97,414,297
2014	380,430	2014	103,990,109
2015	177,337	2015	172,648,094
2016	238,477	2016	320,702,236
2017	620,503	2017	295,626,356
2018	1,033,042	2018	396,173,017
2019	33,718,734	2019	347,985,885
2020	5,771,090	2020	275,699,565
2021	4,357,802	2021	406,886,036

Source: UN Comtrade, available at <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>

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### Sri Lanka's exports to China and India (2008-2022)

(in US\$ million)

Year	Total Exports	Exports to China	% Share	Exports to India	% Share
2008	8,111	47	0.6	418	5.2
2009	7,085	56	0.8	322	4.5
2010	8,626	72	0.8	474	5.5
2011	10,559	103	1.0	519	4.9
2012	9,774	113	1.2	567	5.8
2013	10,394	131	1.3	544	5.2
2014	11,130	188	1.7	625	5.6
2015	10,505	308	2.9	643	6.1
2016	10,310	211	2.0	554	5.4
2017	11,360	247	2.2	691	6.1
2018	11,890	239	2.0	777	6.5
2019	11,940	240	2.0	768	6.4
2020	10,047	225	2.2	606	6.0
2021	12,499	277	2.2	829	6.6
2022	13,106	250	1.9	860	6.6

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Reports, Available at <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports>

### Sri Lanka's imports from China and India (2008-2022)

(in US\$ million)

Year	Total Imports	Imports from China	% Share	Imports from India	% Share
2008	14,091	1,114	7.9	3,447	24.5
2009	10,207	1,029	10.1	1,820	17.8
2010	13,451	1,240	9.2	2,570	19.1
2011	20,269	2,092	10.3	4,431	21.9
2012	19,190	2,667	13.9	3,640	19.0
2013	18,003	2,953	16.4	3,171	17.6
2014	19,417	3,494	18.0	4,023	20.7
2015	18,935	3,712	19.6	4,268	22.5
2016	19,183	3,996	20.8	3,815	19.9
2017	20,980	3,955	18.9	4,527	21.6
2018	22,233	4,116	18.5	4,231	19.0
2019	19,937	4,034	20.2	3,899	19.6
2020	16,055	3,579	22.3	3,079	19.2
2021	20,637	4,756	23.0	4,625	22.4
2022	18,291	3,285	18.0	4,738	25.9

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Reports, Available at <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports>

### Appendix-3: Chinese Tourists arrival in focus countries

#### MALDIVES

##### Tourists Arrival by Major Nationalities in Maldives (2009-2022)

Year	Total Tourists	Chinese Tourists	% share	Indian Tourists	% Share
2009	655,852	60,666	9.2	15,850	2.4
*2010	791,917	118,961	15	25,756	3.3
*2011	931,333	198,655	21.3	30,978	3.3
*2012	958,027	229,551	24	31,721	3.3
*2013	1,125,202	331,719	29.5	38,014	3.4
*2014	1,204,857	363,626	30.2	45,587	3.8
*2015	1,234,248	359,514	29.1	52,368	4.2
*2016	1,286,135	324,326	25.2	66,955	5.2
*2017	1,389,542	306,530	22.1	83,019	6.0
*2018	1,484,274	283,116	19.1	90,474	6.0
*2019	1,702,887	284,029	16.7	166,030	9.7
2020	555,494	34,245	6	62,960	11.3
2021	1,321,937	2,238	0.2	291,787	22.1
2022	1,675,303	12,764	0.8	241,382	14.4

**Source:** Ministry of Tourism (MOT), <https://tourism.gov.mv/statistics/publications/year-2022> (Accessed on 20 April, 2023)

Data provided by Maldives Immigration

\* Indicates the year when China was the leading source of visitors to Maldives.

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### Tourists Arrival by Major Nationalities in Sri Lanka (2008-2022)

Year	Total Tourists	Chinese Tourists	%share of Chinese Tourists	Indian Tourists	%share of Indian Tourists
2008	438,475	9,812	2.23	88,628	20.21
2009	447,890	8,550	1.90	83,634	18.67
2010	654,476	10,430	1.59	126,882	19.38
2011	855,975	16,308	1.90	171,374	20.02
2012	1,005,605	25,781	2.56	176,340	17.53
2013	1,274,593	54,288	4.25	208,795	16.38
2014	1,527,153	128,166	8.39	242,734	15.89
2015	1,798,380	214,783	11.94	316,247	17.58
2016	2,050,832	271,577	13.24	356,729	17.39
2017	2,116,407	268,952	12.70	384,628	18.17
2018	2,333,796	265,965	11.39	424,887	18.20
2019	1,913,702	167,863	8.77	355,002	18.55
2020	507,704	26,147	5.15	89,357	17.60
2021	194,495	2,417	1.24	56,268	28.93
2022	719,978	4,715	0.65	123,004	17.08

Source: Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), available at <https://sltda.gov.lk/en/annual-statistical-report> and <https://sltda.gov.lk/en/tourist-arrivals-from-all-countries>

Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Reports, Available at <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports>

## Appendix-4: Chinese Infrastructure Projects in Focus countries

### MALDIVES

#### Chinese Projects in Maldives

<b>Ports/Airports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion and Upgradation of Velana International Airport</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China-Maldives Friendship Bridge</li> </ul>
<b>Acquisition/Leasing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lease of Feydhoo Finolhu island for 50 years</li> <li>• Acquisition of majority share of Trans Maldivian Airways by Bain Capital and Tempus Global</li> </ul>
<b>Special Economic Zones</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint development of Airport Economic Zone in Hulhumale</li> </ul>
<b>Energy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fifth Power development Project</li> <li>• Installation of 1.5 MW of solar photovoltaic systems</li> </ul>
<b>Urban Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of 7000 housing units in Hulhumale</li> <li>• Construction of 1000 housing units in Hulhumale</li> <li>• Construction of 1500 housing units in Male and Hulhumale</li> <li>• Construction of a four star hotel</li> <li>• Resort development on 3 reclaimed islands in North Male Atoll</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resort Development on Ambara Island, Vaavu Atoll</li> <li>• Resort Development on Kunaavashi Island, Vaavu Atoll</li> <li>• Leasing of Kalhufahalufushi Island, Thaa Atoll for resort development</li> <li>• The Maldives Fahala Airport island development project</li> <li>• The Maldives Olhugiri island development project</li> </ul>
<b>Utilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China-aid-micro-grid Seawater Desalination project</li> <li>• China-aid municipal solid waste treatment and recycling project</li> </ul>
<b>Research &amp; Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of Joint Ocean Observation Station</li> </ul>

**Source:** Bhandari, A.; Jindal, C. (2018). Chinese Investment in the Maldives. Retrieved from [https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GH\\_MaldivesMapA3-0803.png](https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GH_MaldivesMapA3-0803.png) (Accessed on 1 March, 2023)



**India-Maldives High Impact Community Development Projects (approved)**

(\* indicates completed projects)

Sr. No.	Name of High Impact Community Developing Projects
1	fish-processing plants in Maradhoo, Addu city
2	fish-processing plants in Hithadhoo, Addu city
3	fish-processing plants in Hulhudhoo, Addu city
4*	eco-tourism zones in Hithadoo, Addu city
5	eco-tourism zones in Maradhoo, Addu city
6*	eco-tourism zones in Feydhoo, Addu city
7*	eco-tourism zones in Hulhudhoo, Addu city
8*	eco-tourism zones in Meedhoo, Addu city
9	bottled water plant in Hoarafushi
10	Development of Arts centre in Male
11	Construction of Lh. Hinnavarau New Council Office
12	Establishment of Mental Health Unit at Abdul Samad Memorial Hospital
13	Procurement of four school buses for Fuvahmulah, Kulhudhuffushi, N. kendhikulhudhoo and L.Gan
14	School Digitalisation Programme in L.Atoll Education Centre
15	Development of Sh. Milandhoo Running Track
16	Development of Outdoor Gym in Addu City

17	Development of Outdoor Gym in Addu City, Hithadhoo Rasgedhara Dhaairaa
18	Development of Outdoor Gym in Ha. Dhidhoo
19	Development of Outdoor Gym in GDh. Vaadhoo
20	Establishing a Mental Health Centre at Addu Equatorial Hospital
21	A Speech Therapy Unit at Kulhudhufushi Regional Hospital
22	Prosthetics and Orthotics Manufacturing Workshop at Hulhumale Hospital
23	Preservation of Cultural Places in Noonu Landhoo Maabudhuge and Thaa Dhiyamigili Ganduvaru
24	Development of a Multi Sports Complex in Noonu Manadhoo
25	Development of Youth Centres in Gaafu Alif Gemanafushi
26	Development of Youth Centres in Alif Dhaalu Dhigurah
27	Agriculture and Community Linkages in Hanimaadhoo
28*	Drug Detoxification Centre in Hulhudhoo, Addu City
29	Neighbourhood Fish Processing Plant in N. Kendhikulhudhoo
30	Installation of 100 Street Lights in Th. Thimarafushi
31	Installation of 100 Street Lights in Th, Veymandoo
32	Establishing an Ice Plant in L. Maabaidhoo
33	Construction of Dhangethi Cultural Centre
34*	Procuring Sea Ambulances

35*	Olympus Hall Upgrading Project, Male
36	Strengthening Inclusive Education Support Units at Aboobakuru School, Ihadhdhoo School, and HA.AEC
37	Construction of N. Miladhoo Council Building
38	Development of Milandhoo Running Track

Source: Prepared by the author from the data available at (Maldives Launches 9 Development Projects under \$5.6 Million Indian Grant. (2020). *News 18*. Retrieved from <https://www.news18.com/news/india/maldives-launches-9-development-projects-under-5-6-million-indian-grant-2740545.html> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023)

India, Maldives sign 10 MoUs related to development projects. (2023). *The Print*. Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/world/india-maldives-sign-10-mous-related-to-development-projects/1611410/> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023)

MoUs signed between the Maldives and India to implement seven projects under High Impact Community Development Scheme. (2022). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maldives*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.mv/en/news-and-communications/mous-signed-between-the-maldives-and-india-to-implement-seven-projects-under-high-impact-community-development-scheme> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023)

India-Maldives High Impact Community Development Projects (status as on June 2023). Available at <https://hci.gov.in/male/?pdf17749> (Accessed on 21 June, 2023)

## SRI LANKA

### Chinese Projects in Sri Lanka

<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Northern Roads Rehabilitation Project</li><li>• Priority Roads Project-I</li><li>• Priority Roads Project-II</li><li>• Priority Roads Project-III</li><li>• Construction of outer circular Road in Trincomalee</li><li>• Construction of Colombo-Katunayake Expressway</li><li>• Construction of Outer Circular Highway (Kadawatha- Kerawalapitiya)-Phase III</li><li>• Construction of Central Expressway Project (Kadawatha-Mirigama)- Phase I</li><li>• Construction of the Southern Expressway (Galle to Matara)- Phase II</li><li>• Extention of the Southern Expressway (Matara to Beliatte)- Phase I</li><li>• Extention of the Southern Expressway (Beliatte to Wetiya)- Phase II</li><li>• Extention of the Southern Expressway (Wetiya to Andarawewa)- Phase III</li><li>• Extention of the Southern Expressway (Mattala to Hambantota via Andarawewa)- Phase IV</li><li>• Matara- Kataragama Railway Line Extension (Matara- Beliatte)- Phase-I</li></ul>
<b>Energy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lakvijaya Coal Power plant</li><li>• Moragahakanda Reservoir Headwork Project</li><li>• Broadlands Hydropower Project</li><li>• Thalpitigala Reservoir Project</li><li>• Natural Gas Power Plant</li></ul>

<b>Utilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thambuttegama Water Supply Project</li> <li>• Kattankudy Division Sewage Disposal Project</li> <li>• Greater Kurungela Water supply and sanitation project</li> <li>• Katana Water supply project</li> <li>• Gampaha, Attangala, Minuwagoda Integrated Water supply scheme</li> <li>• Waste water Infrastructure for Greater Hambantota</li> </ul>
<b>Ports/Airports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colombo South Harbour Expansion Project</li> <li>• Hambantota Port Development Project</li> <li>• Mattala Hambantota International Airport</li> </ul>
<b>Industries/ Special Economic Zones</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colombo Port City</li> <li>• Sri Lanka-China Logistics and Industrial Zone</li> </ul>
<b>Oil/Gas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muthurajawela Oil Tank Farm Project</li> <li>• Bunkering Facility and Tank Farm Project</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colombo Lotus Tower</li> </ul>
<b>Research &amp; Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China-Sri Lanka Joint Centre for water technology research and demonstration</li> </ul>

**Source:** Bhandari, A.; Jindal, C. (2018). Chinese Investment in Sri Lanka. Retrieved from [https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GH\\_SriLankaMapA3-0803.png](https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GH_SriLankaMapA3-0803.png) (Accessed on 1 March, 2023)

## Appendix-5: China's Foreign Direct Investment in Focus Countries

### SRI LANKA

#### Sri Lanka- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Net Inflows (2013-2022)

Year	Total (in US\$)	China's share* (in US\$ million)	India's Share (in US\$ million)
2013	932,551,317	45	52
2014	893,628,980	21	60
2015	679,655,644	147	72
2016	897,049,375	103	126
2017	1,372,723,043	407	181
2018	1,614,044,009	872	177
2019	743,466,231	46	120
2020	433,869,416	15	77
2021	597,522,167	23	146
2022	898 million*	6	238

**Source:** World Development Indicators, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#> (Accessed on 2 February, 2023)

\* Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Reports, Available at <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports>

## Appendix-6: Existing Literature on Influence

### Indicators as used in the China Index 2022

<b>DOMAINS</b>	<b>INDICATORS</b>
1. Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Media organizations that belong to the World Chinese Media network</li><li>2. Journalists or Media organizations which are members of the Belt and Road Media Cooperation Alliance/Union, the Belt and Road News Alliance, or other Belt and Road media networks that connected to PRC (eg: Belt and Road Media Community, Belt and Road Journalists Network, Belt and Road News Network, or B&amp;R TV Networks).</li><li>3. Journalists, Media organizations or online influencers who have attended all-expenses paid media tours in PRC.</li><li>4. Journalists, Media organizations or online influencers who have received trainings from PRC state owned media or PRC-connected entities.</li><li>5. PRC state-media is broadcasted in a local language.</li><li>6. Local media outlets wholly or partly owned by PRC citizens or corporations.</li><li>7. Media outlets that have delivered cheap or free contents provided by PRC state-fund media.</li><li>8. PRC state-media or government advertisements inserted within local newspapers, online news websites or social media.</li></ol>

	<p>9. Journalists who have had pressure exerted on them by the PRC, including public document, revocation of journalist ID, denial of visa.</p> <p>10. Incidents of media outlets censoring views critical of the PRC government.</p> <p>11. Media personalities or celebrities who deny the existence of human rights abuses in the PRC.</p>
2. Academia	<p>1. Universities have established research partnerships with PRC-connected entities.</p> <p>2. Confucius Institutes/Classrooms</p> <p>3. Inclusion of Chinese language in K12 or primary education, and receives free or subsidized educational books and teachers from PRC.</p> <p>4. Think tanks and academic research centers belong to PRC-affiliated networks/associations.</p> <p>5. Think tanks and academic research centers have received financial support from PRC- connected individuals or entities.</p> <p>6. Experts participation in PRC talent recruiting programs</p> <p>7. Scholars trip to the PRC paid by PRC- connected individuals or entities.</p> <p>8. PRC- connected student groups, such as Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs), are involved in attempts to censor staff or students.</p>



	<p>9. Scholars or Academicians have been denied visas to travel to the PRC after expressing opinions or producing scholarship that is critical of the PRC.</p> <p>10. PRC- connected entities have been involved in school or university curriculum design.</p> <p>11. Reports of teachers or professors avoiding the discussion of sensitive political issues.</p>
<p>3. Economy</p>	<p>1. Number one Trading partnership.</p> <p>2. PRC Owning 50% of country’s sovereignty debt.</p> <p>3. PRC as customer of extractive industries.</p> <p>4. PRC-related entities own, operate or substantially control critical infrastructure or sensitive sectors.</p> <p>5. Joining of AIIB</p> <p>6. Major businesses are members of the Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce, or of the Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Alliance, or of the Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p>7. As being target of PRC economic coercion that was specifically tailored at products or services that are highly dependent on the PRC market.</p> <p>8. Harassment of local businesses due to their activities or statements in support of causes deemed unacceptable by the PRC government.</p>

	<p>9. Free trade agreements with the PRC that primarily deals with trade in goods and services, including digital goods or services.</p> <p>10. Relaxation or removal of regulatory restrictions, or establishment of special economic zones to attract investments or economic participation from the PRC.</p> <p>11. Requisition of infrastructure or land for failure to repay debts in a timely manner</p>
4. Foreign Policy	<p>1. Legislature has a joint parliamentary friendship group, committee or other forms of sub-organizations with PRC.</p> <p>2. Representatives of a political party have met officially with representatives of the PRC.</p> <p>3. PRC providing training to diplomats or civil servants on governance.</p> <p>4. Politicians or government employees have been pressured by PRC diplomats to change their political or diplomatic stances.</p> <p>5. Detention in PRC or denial of exit visas, and believed to be suffering from unfair legal treatments for political reasons.</p> <p>6. The head of state, head of government or foreign minister has denied Taiwan's right to participate as a member. Observer opr guest in WHO.</p> <p>7. Public support of the appointment of PRC official to be the head of the United Nations Agency or other intergovernmental organizations.</p>

	<p>8. Support of PRC’s territorial claims.</p> <p>9. Showcase of PRC’s treatment of its Uyghur population.</p> <p>10. Showcase of PRC’s treatment of its Tibet population.</p> <p>11. No public criticism of PRC’s imposition of the National Security Law on Hong Kong.</p>
<p>5. Law Enforcement</p>	<p>1. Maintaining an extradition treaty, legal mutual assistance or other similar arrangements with the PRC.</p> <p>2. Law enforcement authorities have signed cooperation agreements with the PRC on combatting terrorism.</p> <p>3. PRC connecting gangs are known to be operating.</p> <p>4. Reports of economic espionage targeting the private sector that were suspected to benefit PRC-connected entities.</p> <p>5. Reports of cyber-attacks targeting government, critical infrastructure, or enterprises that were suspected to be initiated from the PRC.</p> <p>6. Triads are known to have threatened or used violence to coerce, intimidate or punish Chinese dissidents.</p> <p>7. Deployment of video or internet surveillance systems from the PRC for law enforcement.</p> <p>8. Representatives of the PRC police force have had joint patrols with local law enforcement.</p> <p>9. Detention of people at the request of the PRC for committing a crime involving engagements with social</p>

	<p>movements or resistance activities in Hong Kong, Xinjiang or for other human rights or civic rights issues.</p> <p>10. Deportation of Taiwan citizens to the PRC to face prosecution.</p> <p>11. Extradition or deportation of individuals to the PRC, although such decisions had attracted criticisms from politicians, government employees or from local or foreign NGOs.</p>
<p>6. Domestic Politics</p>	<p>1. Politicians or government employees at the sub-national level are signing agreements with the PRC government or state-owned enterprises.</p> <p>2. Local municipalities have sister-city ties with municipalities in the PRC.</p> <p>3. Politicians or government employees have taken trips to the PRC paid for by PRC-connected individuals or entities.</p> <p>4. Politicians or government employees visit the PRC and have meetings with PRC officials and think tanks.</p> <p>5. Law enforcement and judicial related training offered the PRC-connected individuals or entities has been accepted by national or subnational governments.</p> <p>6. Reports of politicians or political parties receiving campaign donations that originate in the PRC.</p> <p>7. Groups with reported links to the United Front Work Department (UFD) have hosted fundraisings or have</p>

	<p>provided other forms of support for government employees, politicians or parties.</p> <p>8. Groups with reported links to the United Front Work Department (UFWD) have made public statements opposing the candidacy of a local political candidate or party, claiming them being “anti-China”.</p> <p>9. Politicians or government employees have publicly expressed positive views of the PRC government.</p> <p>10. Politicians or government employees have received direct or deferred benefits from PRC-connected individuals or entities openly or covertly during or in retirement from public office.</p> <p>11. Security services offered by private PRC companies are contracted by national or subnational governments.</p>
7. Military	<p>1. Import of military or law enforcement equipment or components of equipment from the PRC.</p> <p>2. Country exports military or law-enforcement equipment or components of equipment to the PRC.</p> <p>3. Co-development or co-production of military or law-enforcement with the PRC.</p> <p>4. Reports that the PRC has expressed intentions or has taken actions to establish basing.</p> <p>5. PLAs participation in Humanitarian Relief and Disaster Assistance (HADR) effort.</p>

	<p>6. PLA military personnel are permanently or rotationally deployed (excluding defense attaches and peacekeepers).</p> <p>7. Members of the military have received professional military education from the PRC.</p> <p>8. Members of the military have received peacekeeping training from the PRC.</p> <p>9. High-ranking retired or current military and/or intelligence officers have received direct or deferred benefits from PRC-connected individuals or entities openly or covertly during or in retirement from public service.</p> <p>10. High-ranking retired or current military and/or intelligence officials advocate for more coordination with the PLA.</p> <p>11. Cooperation with the PLA on military exchange exercises, including drills and war games.</p>
8. Society	<p>1. Local groups or organizations with words like “Promotion of Peaceful Reunification” in their name, and they regularly publicize their views on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjing issues.</p> <p>2. Members of United World Chinese Association.</p> <p>3. Labor Unions cooperation on exchange s or official visits to the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) in the PRC.</p> <p>4. Reports of personnel linked to UFWD who make appearances at Chinese Diaspora Community events and activities.</p> <p>5. PRC connected professional associations that are closely engaged with their counterparts locally, such as All-China</p>

	<p>Journalists Association, China Artists Association, China Writers Association, or All-China Women Federation.</p> <p>6. PRC- connected individuals or entities donate money or provide other types of support to religious communities and charities.</p> <p>7. PRC- connected entities distribute entertainment products or related hardwares freely or at a cheap price.</p> <p>8. Cultural products typically portray the PRC in a positive light.</p> <p>9. Celebrities regularly publish or share propaganda narratives from the PRC.</p> <p>10. The national or local governments regularly publish or share propaganda narratives from the PRC.</p> <p>11. Majority of citizens have positive views of the PRC government.</p>
9. Technology	<p>1. PRC-connected entities or their subsidiaries provide telecom services.</p> <p>2. Telecoms have signed agreements to adopt hardwares or technical specifications of 4G or 5G cellular networks that are produced or developed by Huawei, ZTE or other PRC enterprises.</p> <p>3. Telecoms have adopted hardware or technical specifications by PRC-connected entities in internet/wifi/telecommunication service infrastructure projects in addition to 4G/5G cellular network.</p>

	<p>4. PRC-connected entities are authorized vendors to supply tech-related equipment or services to our government, military or security services.</p> <p>5. Central or local governments have collaboration with the PRC government or PRC-connected entities on facial, voice recognition or other applications involving biometrics achieved by AI.</p> <p>6. Cities have procured or have signed contracts with PRC-connected entities to establish “smart city” systems.</p> <p>7. Financial institutions use the China Cross Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) clearing and settlement services system.</p> <p>8. PRC-connected venture capital invests in technology start-ups.</p> <p>9. Public announcement that MOUs have been signed to collaborate on technological development.</p> <p>10. PRC- connected entities are shareholders or developers of the top five popular social media/messaging apps, based on usage.</p> <p>11. Central or local governments have collaborated with the PRC on endorsing the use of BeiDou Satellite Navigation System.</p>
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Source: <https://china-index.io/>



**Variables used in FBIC Index**

<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>VARIABLES</b>		
	<b>ECONOMIC</b>	<b>SECURITY</b>	<b>POLITICAL</b>
<b>BANDWIDTH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total Trade</li> <li>• Trade Agreements</li> <li>• Total % of total trade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total arms transfers</li> <li>• Military alliances</li> <li>• Arms imports, % of total arms imports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of representation</li> <li>• Intergovernmental membership</li> </ul>
<b>DEPENDENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total % of GDP</li> <li>• Aid, % of total aid</li> <li>• Aid, % of GDP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arms imports, % of military spending</li> </ul>	-

**Weights of each variable**

<b>BANDWIDTH</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>DEPENDENCE</b>	<b>%</b>
Total Trade	<b>35%</b>	Total trade as % of GDP	<b>28%</b>
Trade Agreements	<b>14%</b>	Total trade as % of total trade	<b>16%</b>
Total arms transfers	<b>8%</b>	Aid as % of aid	<b>12%</b>
Military alliances	<b>13%</b>	Aid as % of GDP	<b>21%</b>
Level of representation	<b>11%</b>	Arms imports as % of military spending	<b>10%</b>
Intergovernmental membership	<b>19%</b>	Arms imports as % of total arms imports	<b>13%</b>

Source: Moyer, J.D; Swejis, T.; Burrows, M.J.; Manen, H.V. (2018). *Power and Influence in a Globalized World*. Atlantic Council, Washington, DC

## **Appendix-7- Expert Interaction**

### **Transcribed Version of Prof Swaran Singh's Interview**

By Indu Krothwal, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Language, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

#### **About Dr. Swaran Singh**

Professor and Chairperson, Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament (CIPOD), School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

#### **Personal Interview**

**Dated: 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2022**

**Time: 4:00 PM- 5:00 PM**

For PhD thesis titled 'China's Strategic Containment of India and Emerging Regional Imperatives: A Maritime Security Analysis'

Respected Sir,

Let me give you a brief background of my research work, I am critically examining China's maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region, which some analysts dubbed as 'containment of India' where China is increasing its economic, political, and military influence in smaller South Asian countries (especially along BRI and String of Pearls). What are the dynamics of China's maritime involvement in South Asian Region (SAR); How China came to terms with its rise and how it is emerging as a regional power in the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR). What are the regional imperatives with China coming to the Indian Ocean and what policies India should pursue to counter the influence of China in its immediate neighborhood?

**Q-** As expressed by Jabin T. Jacob (2018)<sup>66</sup> in his article that "Doklam stand-off was a reminder of China's ability to challenge India's regional dominance". Doklam Stand-off was one such incident which could challenge India's dominance. On the same lines, China's increasing economic, political, and military influence in South Asian Region too poses a challenge to India's dominant position in the region. How do you see China's presence in India's sphere of influence?

**Ans-** Sheer size of India is inordinately large compare to rest of the nations in South Asia, so, howsoever benign India behaves there is a certain imagination of India's dominance in South Asia. Other than Afghanistan and Pakistan, none of these neighbours of India even share borders with each other, so that makes them all the more feel segregated around a large country called India. So, the question of this being India's sphere of influence or India's dominance in South Asia is interesting area to examine. Whether India is actually trying to seek dominance or even the most benign posture of India would still trigger imaginations of India's sphere of influence or dominance. China's increasing engagement with these countries has at least given them a choice.

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<sup>66</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2136509/what-unlimited-xi-presidency-china-means-india>

So, very often, there is something called small states syndrome, which means, particularly in democratic countries where you have elections and rhetoric is very important in politics. These small nations often find it easier to blame it on India if they are not able to sort out their own sins at home. Now, they have China engaging them, so, likewise, as I mentioned its not clear whether India is seeking to be dominant in SAR. I am not sure if China is seeking to be dominant here either. But of course smaller nations would like to play their part where they have alternative big power engaging them and therefore stand up to China or India in that sense. As far as this issue of Doklam or Ladakh or Tawang more recently, that again as an academic view to see could be led both by increasing capabilities but also by changing intentions. Intentions and capabilities combine together to give a direction to a country. At the most simple level, both India and China have transformed in last 30-40 years. China particularly has transformed in last 40 years from about 300 million dollars of GDP to now almost 18 trillion GDP. So, more prosperity means more facilitation in every sphere of life inside China. So, whether they are carpenters, soldiers, or surgeons, everyone is able to be better compensated and better working conditions, So, what I am saying here is that the modernisation of People's Liberation Army, the infrastructure on the border and to some extent the same is also true of India because India has also made progress in the last 40 years. Basically, more infrastructure, more equipments, stronger morale of armed forces means that they will be now able to bring forward in frontier areas heavy equipments, larger number of soldiers much faster and more frequently. Now, that has nothing to do with intentions, its not that national leaders are asking them to do that. But for example, we have now 600 incursions or aggression on the borders, that is partly because it is easier for both sides to do the rapid patrolling and go forward and that means soldiers meet each other more often and they also are the staying power, they don't just meet each other and go away sometimes they settle down. So, for example, we have Doklam issue, 73 days long which had happened before. What had happened before was likewise, for example, 21 days, 15 days, or we had what happened in Galwan, that kind of staying long and then violence and now in Tawang. So, it could be result of very simple physical transformation in frontier areas and more capabilities. Now, one can attach intentions to it also. At most simple level, more incursions could simply be a method of communicating with each other. I am not happy with how other

countries behaving. India's growing proximity to United States could be a reason for China to be upset and it's a messaging, it's a signaling method. I am not sure if it is just as simple as signaling method. It could be more than that. When we talk about South Asia as large, China from 300 billion to 18 trillion. For 15 years, China is the largest trading country around the world. So, its not only that they are focusing on South Asia, they are going around the world. They are the largest trading nation and the largest manufacturing nation, almost 27-29% of global manufacturing happens in one country called China, the factory of the world. Now that makes China engage economically almost all nations, other than it doesn't have China as a largest trading partner. The same thing happened in South Asia, so South Asia is not segregated separately to China's engagement. China's engagement is happening global so also in South Asia but What I am saying that South Asian nations sometimes like to play their trap (K.P Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal making certain speeches against India). So, may be it is more because of our own neighbours trying to play those cards rather than China intended to do that or if these kind of neighbour's behaviour helps China then may be China is happy with that, that India's immediate neighbours are not happy with India but happy with China and that also be something that China would not like to negate and may be use that to some extent. Some of our neighbours like Sri Lanka, Mauritius are Indian Ocean nations, they not only engage China economically but also strategically because China's increasing naval presence and particularly the anti-piracy patrols that China does in cooperation with Japan, India, Russia, United States. These all countries patrol these areas together and so also China. But China is a new character in Indian Ocean Region and a new country to align with Indian Ocean. India is used to Soviet naval's fleet. They are not here anymore because Soviet Union withdrew mostly. But United States is an old player, United Kingdom is an old player, and France is an old player. China is a new player in Indian Ocean so when China gets some facility in Djibouti or base Gwadar and Hambantota, they draw greater attention of India because China is a new actor but also because India has complicated relations with China.

**Q-** (Interrupting in between to ask one question) China coming to the Indian Ocean and engaging with South Asian countries have negative repercussions. We have cases of debt trap diplomacy in Sri Lanka and now Maldives is on the verge of debt trap, Sri

Lankan financial crises (intensified because of Chinese loans), the political turmoil in Maldives. How would you justify China's presence in this background?

A- China's investments are not very unique to South Asia. They are similar to China's investment in other places. That is a one-way trade, one-way investment because China has very rapid growth, very quickly has allowed them to have enormous amount of foreign exchange reserves. They want to invest them and they are the largest manufacturer so they need to sell those things and they are churning out millions of young graduates every year and they need employment. For 40 years China absorbed all these things internally. They have built an internal infrastructure but now they have to go out and built the same thing outside so that the growth rates can continue in the country. Growth rates are important for political stability. So, again when they are going to these countries, it's not unique to South Asia. China is doing that everywhere. What is the problem for us (India) is that if that kind of one-sided trade and one-sided investments do not become commercially viable then those nations are not able to pay back these loans and if that leads to certain turmoil, certain instability in India's neighbouring nations, it is a matter of concern for India because India wouldn't like to have countries surrounded facing that kind of instability. At some time, there was also concern about military coups happening in Bangladesh, Maldives, and Pakistan. Any instability in India's neighbourhood concerns India and if that instability is resulting from China's economic intervention, then India has to find an answer to them because India is not comfortable to see instability around it which means India will also have to also engage these nations but remember there is a huge asymmetry here. India's GDP is about 3.2 trillion whereas China is reaching at about 18 trillion. India can do a lot but there is a limit as to one can do. So, what India is doing, India is acting smartly. India is not trying to do exactly same what China is doing. India is saying our relations with our neighbours is not just commercial, is not just strategic considerate relationship but we have linguistic, ethnic, people-to-people, historic, geological, cultural, religious, and historic relations. That is something which is we are (India) trying now to make sure we are able to engage these nations differently and they understand that. But the lower of quick money or projects is ofcourse understandable and that's what China has done. China has built big projects which are commercially not viable now. After 10 years,

these nations now understood that this has not really been good for them in longer term. There is a kind of change in that strategy internally in China also. There are questions that needs to be asked: What are the per dollar return? What is the profit? This is something which cannot be continued endlessly. So, China has to redefine their strategy. India will have to redefine its strategy. So, China for example now is talking about going beyond BRI. They are talking about global development initiative, global security initiative where they want to influence a partner and participate in building narratives which is what India and several western countries are trying to do when they want to talk about blue dot network and build a better world. They are focusing more on processes rather than projects, making things transparent in terms of decision making and making things mutually beneficial. So, China is gradually drifting in that direction also. They may not continue to do same thing as they were doing earlier, built massive projects. They might now also try to focus on regulation, quality control, technology transfer, and transparency. But Indian Ocean, India for long time was the only local Asian country which was seen as influential but now across Indian Ocean again with all the littoral countries, China is beginning to engage and that makes India not as important because Chinese are able to deliver much more. It's a one party rule so no questions asked when party decides to do something. In India we have multi-party system so, Indian Ocean policy with Sri Lanka would be influenced by Tamil Nadu. In India, we have several checks and balances. Fundamentally we have to adopt different strategy to tackle this enormous rising China challenge in South Asia and Indian Ocean.

**Q-** Is China a challenge to India?

**A-** Definitely, China is a challenge not only to India but to almost everyone around the world. United States for example in October (2022) they published National Security Strategy, China is mentioned in that 57 times and China is mentioned as the greatest systemic challenge to United States. Because any country that can potentially undermine the stature of United States is China and National Security Strategy report says that China not only has intentions but today has capabilities to do all this. So, yes if China is a challenge to United States, ofcourse it is a challenge to India because India is an immediate neighbor, and India has the longest disputed border with China. Impact on India is definitely much more immediate compared to United States which is looking



at systemic implications. India has to look at security implications both on the borders and the Indian Ocean Region, So, in that sense yes China is definitely a challenge for India.

**Q-** There is an argument among academicians that every nation wants to protect its national interest and China is doing the same then why the world sees China with suspicion. What are the reasons for it?

**A-** It is human nature to be reluctant to accept change. Human mind gets used to a certain way of life.

**Q-** From Indian perspective, if we see Japan or South Korea rising, we would not be worried of their rise. But when it comes to China, given its historical relations with India, Chinese actions cannot be seen as mere part of its national interest.

**A-** Every nation pursues its own national interest except for the way for example country A understands its national interest. Country B may not understand country A's national interest in exactly same way. Ofcourse, it would like country A to behave in country B's national interest because they want every country to behave in their national interest. Even if we don't think that is happening, even the understanding of country's A interest by leaders of country A and country B will be different. So, that is a disjunction that happens. Second, I was saying human mind is reluctant to accept change. So, for almost last 350-370 years, since the Westphalia system came into being is basically Greeko-Roman ethics and Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence which has governed International government. We live in nation-state system, western civilization has promoted this way of life. Now this is for the first time that a country like China is emerging as a very capable country atleast in economic wherewithal it is very powerful now. China does not think in the same way as those western nations think. It has its own oriental mindset, history, tradition, and civilization. It has its own values, processes, and structures. South Korea and Japan are also Asian countries. They accepted to become junior partners of those dominant western powers. They were also smaller countries by comparison. They also became economic power houses at a time we were still in cold war. That time military power was the yardstick of national power. Today security is blended with development. Security is not just physical security now,

its also well- being and therefore geostrategy has moved towards geoeconomics. So, country's national strength is understood not only in terms of military but also in terms of soft power, economic power and therefore economic power is able to lead to military monetization. China is a large country and China is not trying to become a junior partner of these status-quo great power. That is why they feel rattled. They contributed to China's economic growth by making it a factory for their products. So as long as these developed nations were able to design new technologies and mass produce in China, treat China as a factory, it was fine. The problem is that China is now beginning to develop on brands, which are beginning to give competition to those dominant western powers. Now, they see China as a competition, as a challenge. As long as China was subservient destroying their own environment, having cheap labour, cheap land, electricity to produce goods which make profit for western nations, it was fine. But China didn't stay there. Over a period of time, China became prosperous, starting to develop its own brands. 5G for example is such a controversial event and western nations don't want the world to take over by China. Because India was also partly kind of aligned to those western systems because we had peaceful transfer of power, we continued with similar institutions that we inherited from British, same structure, same processes, rules and regulations, English language, university education and therefore, we were much more comfortable in working with those western nations so western nations saw India not as a challenge but as a friend as a partner, not China. Because China, first is a communist country and then ofcourse even it has become a market socialist society, its not completely seen as a friend and a partner by western nation. It is seen as a competition. For example, as an academic let me say United States goes around the world fighting wars to impose democracy because they think democracy as a good way of life but other nations may not think that. Likewise, Chinese also have their way of thinking. When they go out and give aid, trade or investment, they don't questions of whether you have democracy or not. They think they have their own kind of democracy which other world nations sometimes don't think that Chinese are democratic. Fundamentally, it's a clash of different visions and different narratives and as I mentioned, China's intentions and not capabilities to impose its own system. So, any country has its own vision of itself. When it also become capable of implementing its vision, then it upsets some other nations who were beneficiaries of

this nation being weak. China, for example as an imagination of its borders. Today, China thinks I can really take those territories. Xi Jinping talks of new era where century of humiliation is finished. In that sense, China thinks that century of humiliation is over. China today is capable of achieving national rejuvenation by realising what you always thought you were. This is my territory and today I can take back my territory. That is a concern for India because we have disputed border but at international level China also sees itself as a great nation and middle kingdom and that at international level impacts nations that are really beneficiaries of the way the international structure is evolved. For example, this year (2022), India has become the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy by crossing United Kingdom but UK still has a permanent seat in United Nations Security Council (UNSC). India with 1.4 billion population is the largest democratic country on the planet, 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy, 3<sup>rd</sup> largest defense vendor, does not have a permanent seat. So, people who are beneficiaries of the system, they do not want to seek any reformation. They do not want to go to the periphery and allow somebody else to come to centre. That is their problem with China.

**Q-** China's cheque book diplomacy which is now dubbed as debt trap diplomacy as the recipients have to pay high price in the long run. China's massive lending to smaller South Asian countries translates to an increase in political leverage for China? What are your views on China's Debt trap diplomacy in the context of SA-IOR?

**A-** It is a challenge because as I say Chinese are manufacturing and trading nation but they have gone beyond with their investments. They are using their investments judiciously. There they are able to wield political influence because they are able to deliver.

**Q-** This was visible during the 'spy vessel case' where despite various warnings from the Indian side, Sri Lanka has granted permission to China. This is another security issue with the China's funding- the erosion of sovereignty. In the words of Chaudhary (2022), it is Sri Lanka's financial needs that shaped its decision to grant permission as China owns 10% of Sri Lanka's foreign debt, making China the biggest bilateral creditor to the island nation.

A- India has a different stature and China has a different stature and both have their cost and benefit vis-a vis India is immediately supported by most major powers. India is a unique country which has good relations with all major powers including Russia and China. We have problems with China but we are able to communicate, talk to each other, do things together. India is now chair of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which is basically a Chinese organization. So, that is unique advantage of India. China doesn't have, China has clear countries that are seen as adversaries, countries that are seen as friends, countries that are seen as challenge but India is able to communicate with, we now have policy of multi-alignment, from non-alignment to multi-alignment. They are now getting on the sides of Russia, CSTO, North Korea, Pakistan, and some of these countries are on one side. Infact, someone, I think, National Security Advisor of United States who made a comment about two days back saying, "If there is any confidence today that Russia will not use nuclear weapons, that credit should go to India". That's a major endorsement. In Ukrainian crisis, India had a major role to play. Of course, Turkey had a major role to play also but the statement that Indian Prime Minister made that "this is not an era of war" was repeated by so many other leaders. It was part of G20 final declaration. India has its own capabilities, assets, advantages. China has its own advantages.

Q- Academicians from around the world had predicted that SA-IOR would play a major role in forming the world politics. From time and again they have predicted (Karl Gunnar Myrdal, 1971 a renowned economist and sociologist in his landmark work "Asian Drama: An inquiry into the poverty of Nations") that India and China would compete with each other (in terms of economy). Other than economic factor, what are the factors responsible for competition between the two Asian giants? What additional forces, if any, are at play behind the ongoing power shift in SA-IOR, other than China's unprecedented rise?

A- China and India, that unprecedented rise is only new, since 30 years. They were not friends before. So that means there adversarial relationship is rooted elsewhere. This rise of China only empowered it to display that adversarial relationship much more. Adversarial relationship is grounded in the history. The fact that both China and India had minimum contact, they always had contact with each other, but they have minimum

contact because of the Himalayas in the northern. So, both civilisations were able to evolve in their own unique way independently. They were not mixed and merged and when hundreds and thousands of year of evolution happens, close to each other, aware of each other but not in interaction with each other. You do develop different ways of life so they are not similar, they are dissimilar. And then ofcourse, they were never nation-states. Nation-States is the result of their colonial subjugation. It is colonial powers who turned us from principalities, kingdoms, empires into nation-states. Nation-states are inflexible in terms of their demarcation. It is line on the border and it must not change. Whereas in older fashion of kingdoms, principalities, and empires, we only have frontiers and frontiers could expand. They were flexible and hence no problem. We have adopted upon ourselves a personality that we are not. We were never like that. It is like horse trying to behave like a zebra. They are putting few lines here and there. So, there is a certain amount of artificiality in us trying to become nation-states. That is why both China and India, there are sometimes debates, are there one nation or are there multiple nations into one state. We have debates on multinational and nationalisms but state is one. There is set amount of artificiality and that means you are not comfortable with who we are. That itself creates a certain friction and then you want to demarcate borders which have no history because these are either glaciers, or tropical forest, other than little middle zone. Nobody knew. There are basically no historical records, no one collecting taxes. So, we are just trying to push and shove each other. Third, we both came from different political systems. Chia may came from a violent revolution which is resulting in a communist country, India became a non-violent, peaceful transfer power with a liberal democracy. Both were large civilization and therefore very ambitious that rest of Asia we should look like models. So both want to become model nations for rest of Asia. They were completely opposite to each other. China has communist central planning while India has democracy. India is a country which entire West thinks as a friend whereas there is China which entire communist world thinks they are friends. So, that also created anonymous disjunctions between the two states. So, now prosperity only makes them do those things louder with great force and greater capability but that rivalry and adversariality was always there. We realize now that there is no going back to those frontiers and kingdoms era. We have to behave like nation-states and we have to be at home which means we need

to demarcate our borders. Both sides understand that we need to demarcate borders and stop fighting and putting each other. Particularly so because we are in a very rapid growth trajectory now and we don't want to derail. India and China are at a historical opportunity to reemerge as great powers. They were great powers until Industrial revolution came. Until industrial revolution, China and India were almost half of global GDP that is why Sone ki chidiya 'Golden Bird' and all. And then European nations were coming here to find opportunities, spices, labour, civilisation, knowledge, everything. These two nations have only time to go back and emerge as great powers again and if they start fighting between themselves, they will only derail that whole process. China cannot appear to be weaker in front of India. That is what Indian Prime Minister has said several times. It says, "problem of difference of perceptions". Our perception and their perceptions, our motivations their motivations, our visions their visions, is not exactly same but we need to work together and come to some median mode where we can minimize the cost and maximize the benefits. Theoretically we understand that but practically its not possible because neither of the two sides can appear to be weaker and making compromise and making concessions. Out of the two, we think China is now more powerful. They should make concessions. China is economically more powerful and they are one party rule so leader can take bold decisions but when you talk to Chinese they say we also to listen to public opinion which sitting here and listen would catch response- really!!!! You do listen to others but you can't do anything because that is there explanation is. Making concessions to India because they have also built the national narrative over years and years saying that this is our territory and India is sitting on it. India could say the same. So both sides find it difficult to make compromise. For the last 40 years, what they have done so beautifully is to manage. Not resolving, but let us atleast manage, minimize killing each other. So focus was on peace and tranquility on the borders. Let us ensure peace and tranquility on the border. May be when we think we can then we can resolve it also or we will peacefully try to resolve it. Peace and tranquility, I go back to my first answer I gave you is also disrupted now because of the methods and mechanisms and techniques that we are done are not delivering now. Increased frequency, magnitude, the thing is that we are now entering into the new world. Both countries are now

capable. Therefore, they have to design their methodologies which can take care of the future challenges.

**Q-** What are your views on China's containment strategy?

**Ans-** Containment is out of fashion because it is not possible. Today, even countries that think each other as an adversaries are connected in so many ways. For example: China and United States. They think they are challengers or adversaries, they have almost trillion dollar trade every year. Look at the number Chinese are going to United States. This whole pandemic thing brings light to this issue that how much collaborations between China and United States has together. So, its not possible now to treat countries that with these countries I have nothing to do and these are the countries with whom we have to constantly connect. World is getting connected and it is not possible to stop that connection. Today you want to have friends in Pakistan on social media, how come state control that. We are talking to people around the world. We are communicating with them. We are doing commerce with them. We are doing seminars with them. We are doing joint research with them. So, world is so connected now, it is not possible to pursue containment of any country by any country.

The point is- Is that China's only intention. Now, this could be a byproduct and China might be okay with that. China has now trade almost 5 trillion of dollars and they say for us it is important to ensure safety of SLOCs. They are also guided by their national interest. Now when I am guided by my national interest, if someone is upset with what I am doing that is not my problem. That's how Chinese would explain the thing. So, they are expanding and they are going around the world doing new things, going to Indian Ocean, going to Europe. BRI has gone all over the world now. So, they are pursuing basically the China dream- national rejuvenation, to make China great by 2049. Advanced nation, beautiful nation, etc. So, they are pursuing their national interest and yes they have to be sensitive of other nations but sometimes other nations perceive that they are not sensitive. Maybe Chinese thinks they are sensitive. Sometimes when I teach conflict resolution. I always say conflict occurs very often out of good intentions. So, for example I am trying to do something nice to you but in your judgement it is a terrible thing. And that happens sometimes because my awareness

about you is limited. China is perceiving its national interest but others think that they are not careful about their national interest.

**Q-** What other terms could you suggest instead of containment?

**A-** I think its fundamental China's rising influence. And that is being used by local elites in the neighbouring countries to project it as if they are able to play this card of India vs China and China vs India. India and China must not fall in their trap of letting these small nations play them against one another.



## **Transcribed Version of Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet Khurana Interview**

By Indu Krothwal, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Language, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

### **About Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet Khurana**

Directing Staff and Professor

Naval War College (NWC)

Verem, Goa - 403109 (INDIA)

Member, Drafting Committee, Newport Manual of Law of Naval Warfare, U.S. Naval War College, Newport (Rhode Island)

Former Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi

### **Personal Interview (Online mode-Skype)**

**Dated: 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2022**

**Time: 8:00 PM- 9:00 PM**

For PhD thesis titled 'China's Strategic Containment of India and Emerging Regional Imperatives: A Maritime Security Analysis'

Had discussion on China's Geostrategy for the Indian Ocean through power point slides.



**Filled interview form by Dr. Shubhamitra Das, Assistant Professor, Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**

Respected Ma'am,

Let me give you a brief background of my research work before providing you the questionnaire. I am critically examining the China's maritime containment strategy in the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR) where China is increasing its economic, political, and military influence in smaller South Asian countries. How China came to terms with its rise and how it is emerging as a regional power in the South Asia-Indian Ocean Region. What are the regional imperatives with China coming to the Indian Ocean and what policies India should pursue to counter the influence of China in its immediate neighborhood.

**Q-** China is fast rising as a major economic power with global significance. Every nation work in the direction to achieve their national interest. China is no different. What makes China's actions suspicious to others (like America, Japan, India, Australia are wary of china's rise) as it is also working in its national interest. Why do countries have different opinion on China's rise? So, I would like to know how you see the rise of China and in what ways it is related to the ongoing power shift in the Asia-Pacific?

**A.** China's rise was debated on the grounds of a) whether it will be peaceful or aggressive, b) economic growth of China was completely opposite to what neo-liberal theory is all about, the western understanding of Keynesian model of growth and democracy are the only ways for economic growth which is popularly known as Washington Consensus, which was refuted point-blank by the Chinese economic growth which is called as Beijing Consensus. Research on this is done very less to the extent that Chinese economic growth is completely downgraded by the western theorists, c) Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is a masterpiece for global connectivity and prosperity, but China's idea of infrastructural building is only for its own

development and has been of literally no help to the developing countries like Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Myanmar and Pakistan in debt trap and had to help China more than themselves. China's BRI is so meticulous if successful then China will be a force to reckon with and I think the whole idea of Indo-Pacific has emerged to control the rise and influence of China, though not economically but militarily, d) China's historical claim of extending its border, China has border disputes with almost all its neighbours, and e) China's claim on the South China Sea.

**Q-** Now coming to India's concerns, China's entry into the Indian Ocean by building naval base in Djibouti and ports in Pakistan (Gwadar), Sri Lanka (Hambantota), Bangladesh (Chittagong), Myanmar (Sittwe), and buying up islands in Maldives gives the impression of China encircling India in the Indian Ocean. How do you visualize China's shift of power from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean? What are China's strategic intentions behind its activities in the Indian Ocean?

**A-** First China has not shifted from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean. China has planned for quite long to become what it is today. Like Deng Xiaoping had said, "keep a low profile and bide your time." Xi Jigping has shown that it is time now to showcase China to the world.

I would not say China was encircling India nevertheless India is being threatened by China weaning away the countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar from India. China is basically in the Indian Ocean to refute India that It is not India's Ocean, 2<sup>nd</sup> BRI and 3<sup>rd</sup> to refute US on Indo-Pacific strategy, more so of the Quad.

**Q-** In the past few years, China's actions to assert and defend its maritime territory and exclusive economic zones (EEZ) claims in South and East China Sea have heightened concerns that China may be attempting or seeking to dominate or seize control of its nearby sea regions. It increased connections with Russia and North Korea have also posed a significant threat to region's stability. However, China's development of soft power to increase influence and win friends as well as its inclusion in number of regional organizations like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), gives the

impression that China is gearing up for something significant or that these are all small components of its grand strategy.

Given its strategic posture in the Pacific Ocean, analysts views that first China has asserted its control over the Pacific region and now China is doing the same in the Indian Ocean Region. It is increasing its economic, political, and military influence in South Asian countries to develop its strong foothold, thus containing India in its own regional influence. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives are the most vivid examples.

A- China has gained ground on the Pacific Ocean Island Countries the same way it gained access to the Least Developed States in the Indian Ocean to gear up its plan of One Belt One Road, I would rather say it means all roads must lead and pass through China. In China the OBOR is still used only to mellow down the international media BRI was termed. In the Pacific the small island countries are prone to depend upon international aid and China's problem with Taiwan is an issue China started its close relations with Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and is even planning to build its military base in the region. But the Pacific Quad of US, Australia, France and New Zealand had been at close guard to check and balance China in the region.

China has always been an active member in the multilateral settings like ARF, ASEAN plus Three, APEC, EAS, even RCEP. China's role in the region become more pronounced for its active participation in these regimes.

Q- In the first place, what according to you are the reasons that Smaller South Asian Countries are tilting more towards China for their infrastructure development given that China is distant neighbor, whereby India is in their proximity.

A- The main reason is China's cheque book diplomacy with no conditions and when the time for repayment comes these small countries do not have the amount to repay, falling into a debt trap like Sri Lanka that had to lease Hambantota to China for 90 years. Similar is the case with Cambodia, too poor to pay and has not really gained from China's infrastructural development in the countries, another case is Pakistan. China has a way to deal only with the weak countries and not the countries that are stronger

like India or Indonesia though it punches its weight on all the countries since almost all countries are heavily dependent of China for trade and economy.

**Q-** How do you perceive China's increasing presence in South Asian countries? What kinds of changes do you anticipate in South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR), given the China's overall strategic posture?

**A-** China is here to stay and also to play a significant role in the region. The more US led group goes further and further in strategizing the Indo-Pacific region, China may become more aggressive but on the other hand China is also wary not to make the regional countries to be too much at an edge.

(The rest we can discuss when you come here )

### **Transcribed Version of Assistant Professor Dr. Shubhamitra Das Interview**

By Indu Krothwal, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Language, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

#### **Personal Interview**

**Dated: 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2022**

**Time: 12:00 Noon- 1:00 PM**

For PhD thesis titled 'China's Strategic Containment of India and Emerging Regional Imperatives: A Maritime Security Analysis'

**Q-** China's cheque book diplomacy, which is now dubbed as 'debt-trap diplomacy' as the recipients have to pay high price in the long run. The example of Sri Lanka. China's massive lending to smaller South Asian countries translates to an increase in political leverage for China. Maldives, Sri Lanka, are the best examples. What are your views on China's debt trap diplomacy in the context of South Asia-Indian Ocean Region? What are its implications for India and smaller South Asian countries?

**A-** China's cheque book diplomacy is not only for the South Asia, it is all over for the least developed countries in South East Asia and the Pacific Islands as well. This is one way of taking it further on the BRI issue. Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia countries are all attached. India has to be cautious about this and India is doing a lot on political side as well. When the border issue with India aggravated in the present times that led to more severe policy making within India. This the major implication and apart from that if you see the debt trap policy, impact on India would be that India is also becoming diplomatically smart. With Sri Lanka and Maldives, India was able to impact the domestic politics to a large extent. So, India's influence in these countries is not less. Even in spite of the debt trap, Sri Lanka was trying to come closer to India on some issues. Though India has provided financial aid to Sri Lanka, China's would be more. That kind of influence India doesn't have. But India's impact is as a king maker for smaller countries, South Asia specially. The severe implication of debt trap is not really scary for India though we are taking steps. India delays on many aspects but when it comes to typical domestic politics, India has enough leverage with these countries especially in South Asia.

**Q-** What other South Asian countries should learn from Sri Lankan example (in terms of influence)?

**A-** Best is Pakistan but Pakistan has different equation with India vis-a vis China. It is Pakistan which has to understand but than Pakistan has advantage because not only China even US supports Pakistan to some extent. In a way, it is not only balancing India but also balancing China. Pakistan is being casualled by both US and China from time to time and that actually is to balance India to a large extent and inspite of that whoever or whichever country is trying to wean away from India and trying to be very pally with

China, it is Pakistan, Myanmar, Burma has to learn that lesson what Sri Lanka has got through. But Pakistan has big shots supporting it to some extent but still Pakistan is having severe problems with China which they are not trying to show out because that would make India laugh.

**Q-** What according to you these South Asian countries have adopted: are they balancing or bandwagoning between India and China?

**A-** Even if they bandwagon with China or India, they are not that powerful. For bandwagoning, you require equal members, equal partners. Smaller countries are usually smaller in military capabilities and also economic. If you require a group, that group has to be strong enough. In what way? Militarily, if these South Asian countries, take an example of Maldives, militarily patching up with China, does it really impact India. If India has to become stronger militarily which won't impact if these South Asian countries bandwagons with China. Is India's Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA), if these rim countries have come together as one organization, not only for economic reasons but militarily. They have to understand their responsibility within the Indian Ocean Region and that will give more impact if the smaller countries are bandwagoning. I will not use the word bandwagon here at all. Smaller countries are not bandwagoning. They cannot bandwagon with China because they need India and China both. Nowadays, there is no country which doesn't want China. Everybody has trade with China and that too on number one or two position. If that is the case then how much of partnership, what kind of partnership are we looking at. If you say bandwagoning, it has to be atleast middle powers coming together to bandwagon. If the poor countries are coming together to bandwagon against one country, is it showing diplomatically? Are they going against India on any of the instances? I don't consider that south Asian countries are balancing either. For a very long time countries like Sri Lanka and Maldives are very much attached to India politically, diplomatically, economically, and socio-culturally. It's very difficult for them to come together and completely bandwagon one country and leave another country or even balance India and China. India doesn't have a history of abression. So, nobody has to balance India. If you say that these smaller South Asian countries are balancing India and China, I would disagree. Because if they have history of aggression with India, then other

countries would bandwagon with them. Then balancing act comes in. But India is trying to play a different kind of role. If you see India's history of foreign policy making, you will never find India to be considering for an outright war or any kind of aggression. Even the border dispute India and Bangladesh was completely managed so diplomatically. Those things can happen and that is India's example. That is why I would not say that any country would balance against India. It is US and China that would try to bring India within their group but India is again standing on its own. It has always stood on its own ideologically but I would not say that India is too ideologist all the time. Now, India's foreign policy position also, though it wants to be friends with China and US. Actually you can say that India is trying to balance US and China but not the countries of South Asia trying to balance India and China.

**Q-** How do you perceive China's increasing presence in South Asian countries and what kind of changes do you anticipate in South Asia-Indian Ocean Region, given China's overall strategic posture?

**A-** China's presence has started nearly 50 years back. The presence which is making the countries think is Belt and Road Initiative. What a meticulous way to bring the whole globe together through its own policy. China has prepared a web with almost all the countries within it and it was done very meticulously and they were slowly without telling to anybody, no media hype, quietly they brought AIIB and that is a bank which is supporting the infrastructure activity for BRI. Though it's a very ambitious project but it has created a kind of leverage for China among all the countries and all the countries are involved in the Chinese strategy. You cannot deny it. Though India says we are not part of it, you are part of it thinking about it everyday. In every policy it is China which is one of the core factors to take any decision. Apart from this, the bank is not only creating a kind of Chinese currency becoming more pronounced in the region making the dollar supremacy go. This is the major influence that China is having on the region economically and what Deng Xiaoping has said "Keep it a low profile and when the time comes you can show" and they have done it so well. Even it is your enemy, you have a very good enemy to fight for. It will increase your intelligence.



**Q-** Some analyst believe that China's great activism in regional cooperation is a bid for regional hegemony while others observe it as an attempt to increase economic interdependence and mutual interest. What according to you are the strategic intentions of China in SA-IOR?

**A-** It's historical claims that is South China Sea. Is that South China Sea dispute ever to go? Until China stops its historical claims. It is claiming the whole of South China Sea. Strategic Intentions I want to say is that it wants to claim the whole of the region as its own. The same strategic interest it has on Tibet but is it claiming all this. The strategic intentions of China is to expand its wing and become the original middle kingdom but is that logical? Will that happen? Can India stop it? Will it end up like a nuclear war?

**Q-** What according to you are the potential challenges India is facing or could face with growing China's assertiveness in the SA-IOR?

**A-** You can see the direct impact on the disputes which have been increased. Second, the impact is on economy and India is trying to work on Chinese products. Another challenge is how India will bring all these South Asian countries together in one fold. It is not anti-China but it is to create a strategic regime in the region so that no country can becomes hegemon in the region. India has always been proud of one capability that it has good institutional building capabilities. India is lacking in one thing and that is the implementation part. India's major challenge is how India look at its border disputes and its policy stand on that. Second is the military capabilities, especially the naval force. These things needs to be strengthened.

**Q-** What India should do to maintain its regional status or to deal with rising China's influence in SA-IOR?

**A-** I would say India has to immediately implement the Indian Ocean Region Initiative to bring the countries of the region together so the strengthen the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). This is the most important aspect I would constantly suggest. India should get into strengthening the already available Indian Ocean countries organization and strengthen it to an extent that it is not only a diplomatic group but it has to be

economic, military, and strategic and these countries can actually come together and build a strong security regime for the Indian Ocean Region. IORA has a lot of potential.

## Appendix-8- List of Publications

- Research paper titled as '**Theatre of India-China Strategic Rivalry: The Indian Ocean**' is published in '*Comparative Strategy*', Volume- 42, Issue-5, pp-655-669, August, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2023.2236490>  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/IVJQ7UZISJU9MBIVSWEC/full?target=10.1080/01495933.2023.2236490>
- Research paper published in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Cycle Research* , Volume- 13, Issue- 6, pp-1-8, June, 2021 entitled '**India-China(LAC) Standoff and the Five-Point Action Plan- The 'New Panchsheel'**'  
[DOI:18.0002.JICR.2021.V13I6.008301.3171228960](https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2021.1911228)
- Research paper titled as '**Inescapable biological events and Inescapable impact: International Politics in the wake of COVID-19**' is published in *International Journal of Management And Social Science Research Review* (IJMSRR), Volume-9, Issue- 9, pp-122-130, September, 2022.
- Research paper titled '**Political Participation of Women in the States of Haryana and Kerala: A Comparative Study**' is published in *International Journal of Research and Analytical Review* (IJRAR), Volume- 8, Issue- 4, pp- 214- 222, December, 2021
- Research paper published in *Journal of Information and Computational Science*, Volume- 13, Issue- 9, 2020 titled as '**Displacement and Exclusion on Border Villages of District Rajouri**'

## Appendix-9- List of Conferences

- Presented Research Paper '*Navigating New Horizons: The Analysis of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Southeast Asian Countries*' in 2<sup>nd</sup> All India Conference of East Asian Studies (AICEAS) On theme **East Asia in the Post-Pandemic Era: Internal and External Dynamics**, organized by Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) in collaboration with Centre for East Asian Studies, Department of International Studies, Political Science & History, Christ University (5-6 April, 2024)
- Presented Research Paper '*The Phenomenon of China's Influence: The Case Study of Island Nations of South Asia-Indian Ocean Region (SA-IOR)*' in International Conference on **Ocean Security: South Asia and the Indian Ocean** organized by Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Sri Lanka (16 October, 2023)
- Research Paper titled '*The New-Geopolitics of India and China: An Analysis of Increasing Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean*' is presented in International Conference- **Recent Political Developments in South Asian Region: Changing Strategic and Security Priorities** organized by Department of Political Science, School of Distance Education, University of Calicut (20, 21, 22 February, 2023)
- Presented Research Paper '*China's Increasing Influence in the South Asian Region: Role of Media in Security Studies*' in International Conference on **Emerging Media Trends & its Impact on Society & Governance**, organized by School of Journalism, Film, and Creative Arts, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India (28-29 April, 2023)
- Research Paper presented in **Third International Online Multidisciplinary Research Conference (IOMRC-2020)** held at Osmania University Centre for International Program, Osmania University Campus, Hyderabad, India (11 September, 2020). The paper entitled as '*Displacement and Exclusion on Border Villages of District Rajouri*'
- Participated in '**Energy Security Conference 2020**' organized by **Global Counter Terrorism Council (GCTC)** in association with the Ministry of

**External Affairs, Govt of India, Central Board of Irrigation & Power (CBIP), Federation of Petroleum Industry (FIPI) & MitKat Advisory Services Private Limited.**

- Participated in National E-Conference on **‘Education and Development: Post COVID-19’** organized by **School of Education, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India**

#### **Appendix-10- List of Workshops/ Training Programs/ Webinar**

- 4-week online program on '*Decoding Contemporary China*' Jointly organized by **Centre for East Asian Studies (CEAS), Christ University and Asia Slate**
- Distinguished Lecture Series Oration on '*India's Quest for Maritime Capabilities in the Indo-Pacific Region*' organized by **Council for Strategic Affairs**  
**Speaker:** Admiral Pradeep Chauhan
- '*Potential and Opportunities for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific between India, Germany and the EU*' Organized by **Observer Research Foundation and the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung**
- Guest lecture on the occasion of National Maritime Day on the theme '*Territorial Disputes: South China Sea*' organized by **Department of History and Geography, School of Humanities, Lovely Professional University**  
**Speaker:** Commandant Niranjan Pratap Singh (Indian Coast Guard)
- One month workshop on '*International training on Authorship, Research Methodology, and Scopus free publication process*' organized by **Eudoxia Research Centre, India**
- 7 days online workshop on '*Research methods and methodology in Social Sciences*' organized by **University of Lucknow, A.P Sen Memorial Girls PG College (Lucknow), Govt KRG PG College (Gwalior, MP) in association with Sociological Society of Uttar Pradesh**
- Webinar on '*Emerging Dynamics in the Middle East and India's options*' organized by **Department of Political Science, Lovely Professional University, Punjab**
- 7 days online workshop on '*Quality Enhancement in Research*' organized by **Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and sponsored by MPHEQIP, Govt. of MP.**
- Guest Lecture on '*Sustainable Development and Nuclear Technology*' organized by **Department of Political Science, LPU**  
**Speaker:** Dr. Reshami Kazi

- Guest Lecture on '*Maritime Security in The Indo-Pacific*' organized by **Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE)**.  
Speaker: C. Uday Bhaskar
- 2 weeks online program on '**Research Training**' organized by **MSME-Technology Development Centre, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Govt. of India)**
- **Innovative teaching and learning methods for inspiring students (ITLMIS-2020)** organized by **Sagi Rama Krishnam Raju Engineering College (A)**