

**THE SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTE: EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES IN
SOUTH ASIA**

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Exam Roll No. 071818

Batch. 2019

TU Registration No. 5-2-33-79-2010

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Political Science

To

Department of Political Science

Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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July 2023

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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RECOMMENDATION LETTER

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank in the first instance my respected Supervisor, Mr Chakra Raj Dahal, for his encouragement and support throughout the process, and for not doubting that I would get to this point of completion of my job. I have especially valued the clarity and detail of his feedback on drafts of the thesis, and his gentle manner of persuasion.

I would also like to thank the Head of the Department Mr Bishnu Kumar Bhattarai, Mr Sakul Shrestha, Mr Amrit Kumar Shrestha and Mr Bigyan Sharma for their immense support, guidance and suggestions from the initial phase of my thesis title selection and proposal writing to thesis completion.

I am also pleased to appreciate the big support of my father, mother and sisters who always reminded me of my thesis and the time limit all the time. They have encouraged me to complete my thesis with vigour. And, also my thanks go to Mr Bhuparaj Rijal for his support in the administrative procedure of viva voce and thesis submission.

On a personal level, I like to give thanks to my friends Pritam Kumar Shah and Arati Ban for their support and help during my entire thesis writing journey.

Anil Raj Bhandari

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP	ii
RECOMMENDATION LETTER	iii
APPROVAL LETTER	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
THE LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	ix
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.3 Research Questions.....	4
1.4 Research Objectives.....	4
1.5 Significance of the Study	5
1.6 Delimitations of the Study	5
1.7 Organization of the Report	6
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.1 Concept of International Relations	7
2.2 Territorial Disputes in the International Relations Theory	8
2.3 Geopolitics and Geopolitical Theories	10
2.4 Geopolitics of India and China	12
2.5 Balance of Power Theory	14
2.6 Balance of Power and International Relations.....	15
2.7 China, India and the Balance of Power	17
2.8 Conceptual Framework.....	20

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODS	22
3.1 Selection of the Study Area	22
3.2 Research Design	22
3.3 Nature and Sources of Data	23
3.4 Data Collection Technique/Analysis	23
3.5 Data Analysis Methods.....	23
CHAPTER FOUR DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION	24
4.1 China–India Relations	24
4.2 China-India Border Dispute.....	25
4.3 Line of Actual Control (LAC)	27
4.4 Sino-Indian Border Dispute: 1947-1962	33
4.5 Sino-Indian War: 1962	34
4.6 Nathu La Conflict: 1967	36
4.7 Border Dispute: 1975-2015	37
4.8 Doklam Confrontation: 2017	38
4.9 Sino-Indian Border Skirmishes: 2020-2022	39
4.10 Sino-Indian Border Dispute and its Geopolitics	40
4.11 Sino-Indian Rivalry and the Power Balance in South Asia.....	74
CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	82
REFERENCES	88

THE LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Mackinder's Heartland Theory	11
Figure 2 Global Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) choke points	12
Figure 3 Graph that explains the power balance between North Korea (NK), South Korea (SK), and their respective allies (US and China).....	16
Figure 4 Conceptual Framework of the study.	21
Figure 5 Sino-Indian disputed border regions in the map.	26
Figure 6 Line of Actual Control (LAC) in three different sectors.....	28
Figure 7 Disputed region of Aksai Chin.....	29
Figure 8 Disputed tri-junction region of Doklam between India, Bhutan and China.....	33
Figure 9 Indo-Pacific Region.....	44
Figure 10 Belt and Road Initiatives with its land and maritime route across the globe ..	45
Figure 11 South Asian region.....	47

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BBIN	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal
BCIM	Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar
BDN	Blue Dot Network
BIG-B	Bay of Bengal Growth Belt Initiative
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative of Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiatives
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DBO	Daulet Beg Oldi
DSDBO	Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi
EU	European Union
FAIR	Foreign Affairs Insights & Review
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPS	Indo-Pacific Strategy
IR	International Relations
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LBA	Land and Border Agreement
MCC	Millenium Challenge Corporation

MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEFA	North-East Frontier Agency
NRC	National Register of Citizens
OBOR	One Belt One Road
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRC	People's Republic of China
QSD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RIC	Russia-India-China
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SALPIE	Small And Less Populous Islands Economics
SCO	Shangai Cooperation Organisation
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India
UN	United Nations

ABSTRACT

The Sino-Indian border dispute is a longstanding territorial conflict between India and China, with its roots dating back to the early 20th century. The border dispute primarily revolves around two main regions: Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. This territorial disagreement has resulted in multiple military confrontations, including the 1962 Sino-Indian War followed by the Doklam confrontation in 2017 and the Galwan Valley skirmishes in 2020. Despite several rounds of negotiations and confidence-building measures, a permanent resolution to the dispute remains elusive. This study aims to assess an overview of the border dispute and analyze its effects and consequences in the context of South Asia through the lens of geopolitical and balance of power theories. This study is methodologically qualitative and descriptive based on the information collected from secondary sources. It aims to bring to light the Sino-Indian border dispute and its impacts on the political, economic and strategic status of the South Asian countries. The ongoing conflict has fueled mistrust, hindering cooperation on regional and global issues. China's growing assertiveness in the region has prompted India to strengthen its ties with other countries, such as the United States, to balance China's influence. The dispute extends beyond bilateral relations, impacting regional security dynamics. Other South Asian countries have been wary of being drawn into the conflict. They need to adopt cautious approaches in their dealings with China and India. It has strained bilateral relations, influenced regional geopolitics, impacted economies, and posed challenges to regional security. These findings indicate a need for a peaceful resolution to the dispute for fostering stability, cooperation, and development in the region.

Keywords: Sino-Indian Border Dispute, Geopolitics, South Asia, Balance of Power, BRI, Indo-Pacific Strategy

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

China and India are the two giant states residing in East Asia and South Asia respectively. From the Indian sub-continent viewpoint, China is in the North while India is in the South. China- India Relations are also called Sino-Indian relations or Indo-Chinese relations. China-India relationship refers to the bilateral relationship between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of India. The diplomatic relationship between China and India was established on 1st April 1950. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Premier of China Zhou Enlai were the signatories of the bilateral relationship (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017).

Sino-Indian border disputes are complex historical issues. It is an ongoing territorial dispute over the sovereignty of two relatively large countries of the world. It includes several smaller, separated pieces of territory between the two nations. China and India share about a 3488 km land border (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2017). They share a long land border which remains separated by the Himalayas.

Aksai Chin, the first of the territories, is administered by China and is part of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and the Tibet Autonomous Region. In contrast, India claims the territory as the Union Territory of Ladakh. Similarly, another disputed territory is south of the MacMahon Line which was formerly known as the North-East Frontier. It is now called Arunachal Pradesh. The MacMahon Line was part of the Simla Convention of 1914, signed between British India and Tibet. Later, China stated that it does not own the agreement stating that Tibet was never independent when it signed Simla Convention (Hoffmann, 1990).

The significant escalation between the countries was seen in 1962 in the form of the Sino-Indian war which was fought in both disputed areas. The war of 1962 was the beginning of Sino-Indian territorial disputes (Britannica, 2023). Starting from the 1962 war to the recent major issues in the 2020-2022 skirmishes, the issue of territorial disputes has come a long way along with its multidimensional relational impacts. To be more precise, we can observe various effects and consequences in the South Asia region.

The conflict between two emerging global giants undoubtedly has severe impacts on relatively smaller and least-developed countries of South Asia. This dispute has come up with territorial, socio-economic, political, and diplomatic and many more impacts on South Asian countries. Nepal as a landlocked country between India and China has a significant impact of Sino-Indian border disputes. Similar is the case with Bhutan along with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Maldives. Comparatively, geographically Sri Lanka and Maldives seem to be far but they also have the impact of the conflict equally. World's rising economic giants India and China indulged in this issue comes up with several serious socio-economic and socio-political issues among South Asian countries. This issue is directly linked with the future of the whole of South Asia along with India and China themselves which has impacts and consequences in South Asia in a wide spectrum.

1.2 Statement of the Problem.

China and India are fast-emerging global economic powers which have a significant role in world politics, economics and strategic affairs. They are prominent political and economic stakeholders in the global arena. Hence, the prevailing consistent territorial disputes among such giants cannot be undermined in any sense.

They have been confronting this issue for the past seven decades which still has remained unsolved. In such circumstances, there are possible chances of several issues and their impacts on the South Asian region. South Asia is a very poor and backward region in the whole world so far. All countries located in this geography are politically, economically and socially backward. They are still struggling for democratic practices. Their endeavours for democracy and development are still not up to the mark. They are lagging in numerous issues and suffering hardships of economic development. They are struggling with socio-cultural and religious issues. Regionalism, terrorism, corruption, poverty and racism are major challenges in South Asia.

Thus, this study looks forward to finding out the severe socio-economic and political adversities that may affect the South Asian countries due to the possible warfare or upheavals in the relationship between China and India over territorial issues. In such circumstances, the whole of the Indian Sub-continent may come under the influence of such a crisis.

What are the unresolved issues of Indo-Chinese territorial issues? Why are they still unable to resolve this issue? These are serious questions that demand concrete answers. The conflict of 1962 had serious impacts on various aspects of South Asia. Later, periodical skirmishes between them are continuously affecting the South Asia region. Individual relationships of India and China with the rest of the South Asian countries are also matters that cannot be ignored. The India-Pakistan issue, the Nepal-India issue, the China-Pakistan relation, and China- Sri Lanka relations are equally crucial aspects whose future is more or less determined by the Sino-Indian clash.

Indo-Chinese border disputes do have other direct or indirect impacts in other aspects as well. To be specific, SAARC is one important instance that China-India has a lot to do with. Because of China-India issues, SAARC is facing the challenges of its survival. The question, "why is SAARC dysfunctional?" has the answer embedded in the Sino-Indian conflict. The study of the failure of SAARC is also a prominent part that justifies the relationship between Sino-India and South Asia. In the present context of 2019 to 2022, there have been a lot of incidents in Sino-Indian border disputes which have raised multiple questions and the environment of chaos relating to the clash of these two giants. It not only has South Asian issues but is an issue of global tension and fear.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a much ambitious economic project to connect China with the rest of the world through the means of land connectivity i.e. to revive the ancient Silk Road in the new era (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2023). It is another major factor that has possible challenges to the future of South Asia. In contrast, the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States as a counter to BRI has intensified the pacific region (The White House, 2022). It is the power game being played over this fragile region which has serious impacts on the region. The power balance between western power and two neighbours is a matter of greater challenge. Amidst such circumstances, South Asia is standing alone as a victim. How the Indo-China conflict over territory may lead to more intense rivalry and affect the Indian Subcontinent is a prime question. How this issue plays a role towards the political instability and hindrance to economic development in South Asia is another prominent question which demands an answer. Thus, these are the problems that our research aims to find out. The major objective is to find out the effects of the Indo-China territorial dispute in the broader spectrum amidst the rivalry between the two giants. Additionally,

it aims at finding out the consequences and the byproducts of such rivalry from a multidimensional perspective.

1.3 Research Questions

This research topic has raised some questions which are as follows:

- What is the most significant effect of Sino-Indian territorial disputes on the political, economic and strategic aspects of South Asian countries?
- How is the China-India border dispute responsible towards the dysfunction of South Asian organizations?
- What are the challenges of the Sino-Indian conflict regarding China's BRI and its counterpart Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States in the scenario of western influence and power balance in the fragile South Asian region?

1.4 Research Objectives

Long term goal of the research is to establish an understanding of the relationship between India and China in terms of territorial perspective. The crucial aspect that determines the relationship between India and China has been the territorial issue rather than any other issues.

The general objective of the research is to understand the root causes of territorial disputes in a descriptive manner. To find out the major effects and the consequences of the Sino-Indian crisis in South Asia is the objective of the research which is obtained through the study and analysis of the two countries' basic territorial border crisis. To fulfil these general objectives, there are some specific objectives aimed at this research. They are:

- To attain a comprehensive review of territorial disputes between China and India including the historical background, geography, territory and border issues.
- To outline the conceptual framework of the Sino-Indian border crisis and its multi-dimensional effects and consequences in its immediate region i.e. South Asia region.
- To find out the challenges of the China-India border dispute not only as a border issue but in the strategic aspects of Western influence and power balance between

China's BRI and Western influence through Indo Pacific Strategy of the US in the fragile South Asian region.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The result of this study would be a valuable asset to the students and researchers of international studies as well as political and diplomatic figures to understand, analyze and figure out the issues and measures to solve to eradicate the hindrances and progressively resolve the issues.

Further, the study helps to make clear-cut views regarding the problems and their long-term effects and consequences in South Asian countries, and it helps to work at the policy level and diplomatic level to protect South Asia from the hazards of Sino-Indian conflicts.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

This whole research work is qualitative in which interpretation is carried out based on historical observations and analysis through the lens of theories. The theories and the subject matters introduced in the paper are comprehensive. Thus, this short research paper might not be able to accommodate all the major components of the theories and literature.

Similarly, the paper has the limitation of studying the time of history of China-India relations as well as border disputes. The paper is fully focused on the border disputes among the countries since the 1950 diplomatic relationship establishment. More specifically, the study is limited to the Sino-Indian war of 1962 to the Doklam Plateau confrontation of 2017 followed by the 2020-21 violent Galwan Valley skirmishes. In addition, the study is focused basically on the political aspect of the border disputes that have a direct or indirect relationship of geographical proximity with Pakistan in the west and Bhutan in the east.

Thus, the limitation of the study is the inability to accommodate the overarching scopes and theories as well as the comprehensive historical background of the Sino-Indian relationship and its various aspects relating to its impacts in entire South Asia.

1.7 Organization of the Report

The material presented in this research work is organised into five different chapters. Each chapter has described the different aspects of the thesis work.

Chapter One is the introductory chapter which has presented the introduction of my research topic with its brief historical background. This chapter has included the study background of the Sino-Indian border along with its research questions and research objectives. It has also described the significance of the study including the delimitations of the research work.

Likewise, Chapter Two includes a literature review and conceptual framework of the research topic. In this part, I have discussed different literature based on my research title. I have reviewed the literature and explained the research gaps of that literature and the significance of my topic to fulfil those research gaps. This part includes the theories on which my whole research work is based upon. Similarly, I have explained the conceptual framework of my research topic with a graphical representation which describes the variables and elements of the research topic.

Chapter Three includes the Research Methods of my research work. This part has described the research methodology, research design, research technique, sources and nature of data that I have adopted and included in the whole research work.

Chapter Four includes the data analysis and presentation of the research work. In this part, I have described the research topic and its content in a comprehensive manner. It includes the historical background of the Sino-Indian border dispute along with the events in a chronological manner. I have included the research questions and their objectives comprehensively in this part.

Chapter Five is the last part of the research work which includes the summary and conclusion of my research work. I have included a brief summarization of Chapter Four in this part and concluded the research work concisely.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Concept of International Relations

International Relations (IR) is the study of relationships and interactions between countries as well as the nature and consequences of such relationships. It is a subject concerned with the relationships among the governments of various sovereign states (Khanna, 2013).

Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century was the first person to use the term 'International Relations'. Although its Latin equivalent 'inter gentes' was used a century earlier by Rijnshare Zouche. The terms used by both of them were in the context which later came to be known as international law. Today, nation-states are highly interdependent. The relations between them that are in the field of political and economic aspects have developed into an essential area of knowledge. The term international relations may be used for condition and discipline (Wright, 1955).

The official relations between the sovereign countries are described as international relations. Though according to Wright, the word "interstate" would have been more accurate as the 'state' can be the term applied to societies in political science. Hence, as a condition, international relations refer to the facts of international life. It is the actual conduct of relations among nations through diplomacy based on foreign policy as well as it includes the areas of cooperation, conflict and war. According to Quincy Wright, IR should tell the truth about the subject. It should tell how such relations are conducted and as a discipline, IR should treat them systematically and scientifically (Khanna, 2013).

International Relations (IR) tries to explain the actions, reactions and interactions of states in the global interstate system. It is the study that describes the behaviours which occur across the boundaries of the states. It is the study of conflict, war, issues, organisations, and events that are beyond the boundaries of the nations (International Relations, 2019).

2.2 Territorial Disputes in the International Relations Theory

In an article (Choi & Eun, 2018), territory as a fundamental element of a state has much significance in various aspects of a state and the entire international political system. It has certain tangible properties and it has strategic and economic benefits in it as it offers control of trade or communications routes. The military position is significantly determined by the territory of a state. Along with material reasons, states value territories for intangible reasons. Though they seem to have surficial impacts on the real ground, they do have real impacts on states. Choi and Eun (2018) argue that they can be termed as ideational values of a state. Such ideational values are measured in terms of symbolic or relational values which can be related to historical claims, religious attachment or cultural significance. The territory is extremely linked with a state's national identity and nationalism. People relate them or equate them with a particular territory and their own identity is strongly connected and inherited with the territory of their residing land and the region which holds their history as well. Thus, interstate border issues are inevitable in the world which can be interpreted and understood through the lens of IR theories.

According to Choi and Eun (2018), if the power factor of realism is applied to territorial disputes, it is hard to manage the issues simply with diplomatic or peaceful endeavours. If the hardcore realist approach is applied, invasion or conquering seems to be the ultimate solution to gain territory. In such circumstances, the struggle for territory is inevitable among the states. As there is no supreme authority to resolve disputes, each state tries to protect its vital interests with force. The balance of power phenomenon eventually applies to balance each other and prevent the extremities of disputes.

Simmons (2005) explains that the exercise of state authority over territory is well limited by international borders. It also provides the physical space to exercise authority for national security. In the realist approach, power and national interests are key in international relations. Thus, as power exercise and national interests are determined by the territory, they can be interpreted through a realist lens. Further, he quotes Hans J. Morgenthau, as he has remarkably placed geography and natural resources as the elements closely associated with the territory as the element of national power.

Schelling says that international boundaries involve mixed-motive games with the elements of mutual dependence, conflict, partnership and competition. Realists argue that the territory may have a symbolic, political, and historical significance which makes it quite difficult for a state to give up. Similarly, it is hard to manage or resolve the dispute in a mutually beneficial way as it is hard for them to share or give up the territory through unilateral policies. If bilateral policies are formulated and mutually beneficial agreements are made, territorial disputes can be resolved with mutually beneficial trade and other economic affairs (Simmons, 2005).

Similarly, Starr (2006) explains the development of the Westphalia state system following the Thirty Years War and its significance to understand the broader concept of “border” as the demarcation of two sovereign states. The location of states and their proximity to one another are the key elements of the border concept in the study of international conflict phenomenon which is ultimately advocated by the realist approach to international relations. Fundamentally, the borders are primarily and intimately related to the security of states which ultimately is the primary concern of realism. According to John Herz, the sovereign territorial states provide a “hard shell” against possible aggressors which ultimately makes a state the dominant organization. Thus, territoriality is the basic political unit of a nation-state. Hence, territoriality and borders play a vital role in the well existing of a state. The borders thus may also manifest as the cause, source or stakes of a conflict. Therefore, borders or territories play a role as the source of conflict which represent the potential of both opportunity and willingness. A contiguous border can be a major source of disputes among the bordering states.

Choi and Eun (2018) have tried to explore territorial disputes through the lens of liberalism and constructivism theories of IR to understand and resolve territorial disputes. Likewise, Simmons and Starr in their works have made a realist approach to the study of territory and territorial disputes. However, their entire work is based and limited only to liberalism and constructivism as well as realism. This paper, therefore, aims to review territorial disputes through the lens of geopolitical and power balance theories.

2.3 Geopolitics and Geopolitical Theories

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Geography (n.d.) is “a science that deals with the description, distribution, and interaction of the diverse physical, biological and cultural features of the earth’s surface”.

Geography is the study of the diverse environment, places and spaces of the earth’s surface as well as their interactions. The modern academic discipline of geography is rooted in ancient practice whose separate identity was first formulated and named some 2000 years ago by the Greeks in which ‘geo’ and ‘graphein’ were combined to mean “earth writing” or “earth description” (Johnston, 2018).

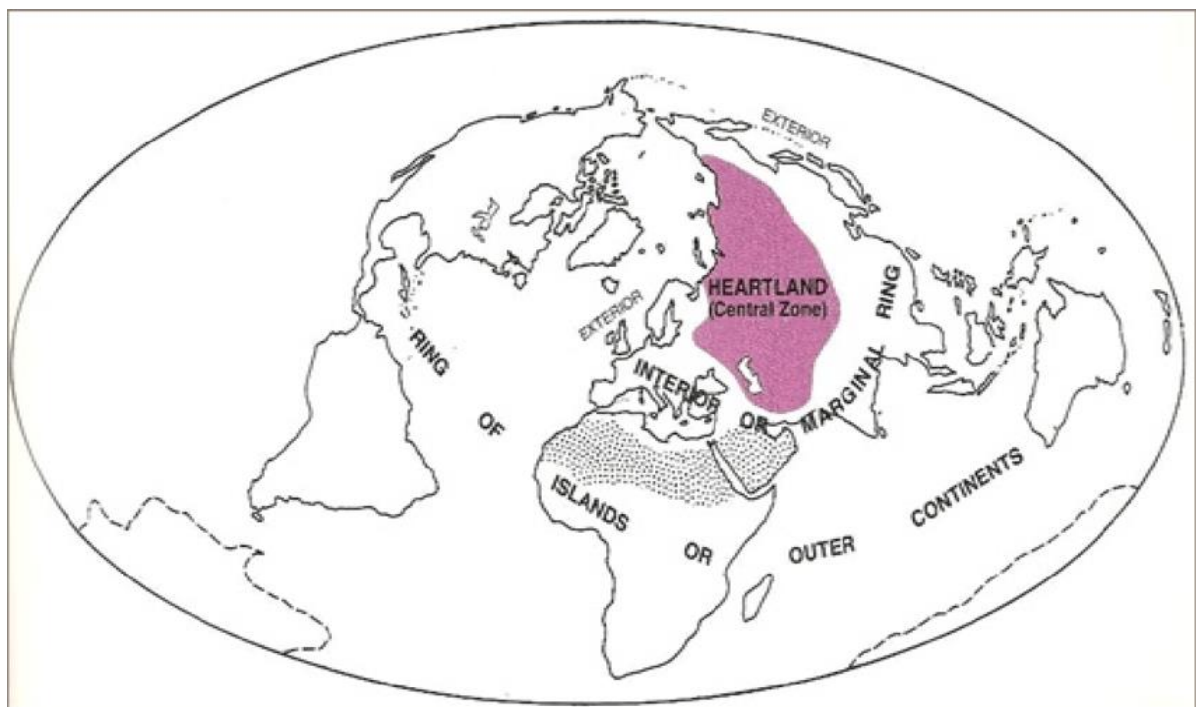
Robert D. Kaplan in his work *‘The Revenge of Geography’* (2012) explains that Geography is concerned with the structure and interaction of the ecological system that links human beings to their environment. Geography is the study of the earth’s surface, and its topography and is concerned with human endeavours that are linked with the study of trade, environment, people-to-people connections and interactions relating to culture and institutions. Similarly, political geography (n.d.) according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary is, “a branch of geography that deals with human governments, the boundaries and sub-divisions of political units (as nations or states), and the situations of cities”.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Geopolitics (n.d.) as, “a study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics and demography on the politics and especially foreign policy of a state”. Further, it defines geopolitics as “a combination of political and geographic factors relating to something (such as state or particular resources)”. At the level of international relations, geopolitics is a method of studying foreign policy to understand, explain and predict international political behaviour through geographical variables. This includes the areas of climate, topography, demography, natural resources etc. Geopolitics focuses on political power linked to geographic space. For instance, United States marine patrolling in the disputed region of the South China Sea, US regime-changing issues in the Middle East, Indopacific Strategy, BRI, MCC, China-India border disputes etc. are all the pursuits of geopolitics.

Major Theories on Geopolitics

There are three prominent theories on geopolitics which are discussed briefly. Among those three geopolitical theories, “The Heartland Theory” postulated by a British geographer Sir Halford John Mackinder in 1904 is important. He wrote a paper called “The Geographical Pivot of History”. He has stated in his theory that whoever rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World Island and who rules the world island commands the world. The “Heartland” he referred to as the “pivot area” and as the core of Eurasia. He considered all of Europe and Asia as the World Islands (Rosenberg, 2018).

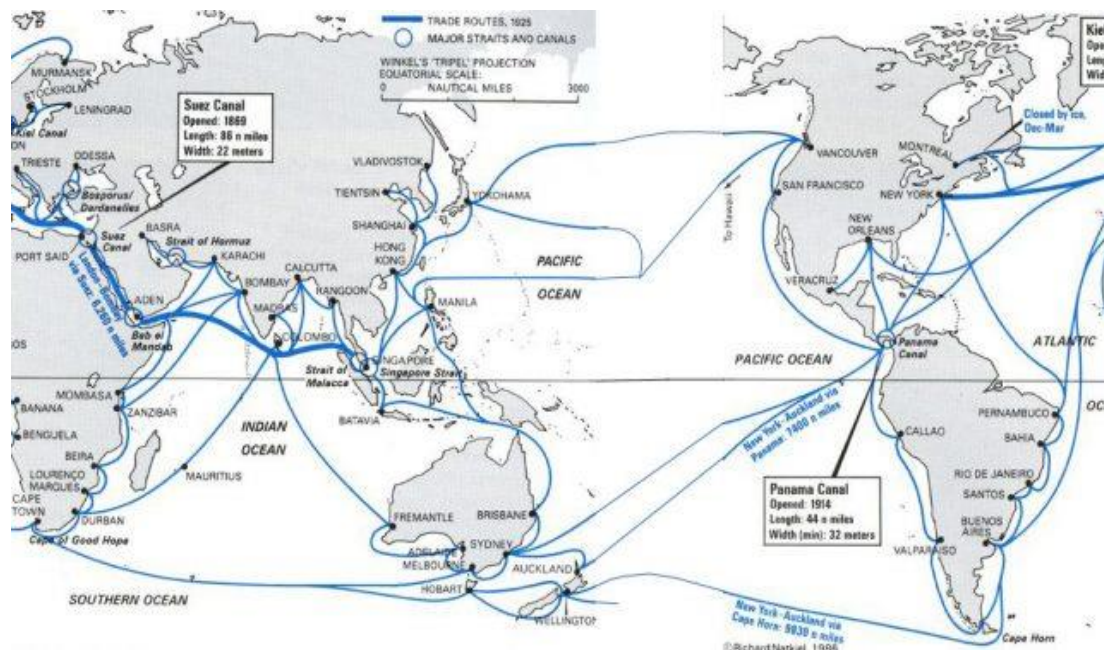
Figure 1 Mackinder's Heartland Theory



Source: researchgate.net

The second prominent theory is the “Sea Power Theory” introduced by Alfred Thayer Mahan through his famous work “The Influence of Sea Power upon History”. In his work, he reviewed the role of sea power in the emergence and growth of the British Empire. He famously listed six fundamental elements of sea power: geographical position, physical conformation, the extent of territory, size of the population, character of people and character of the government. Based on these factors, Mahan envisioned the US as the geopolitical successor to the British Empire (Sempa, 2014).

Figure 2 Global Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) choke points



Source: ijnhonline.org

The third important geopolitical theory in international politics was introduced by Nicholas John Spykman as “Rim Land Theory”. He has been both a follower and a critic of Mahan and Mackinder. His work is based on assumptions similar to Mackinder including the unity of world politics and the world sea. He extends this to include the unity of the air as well. He has adopted Mackinder’s divisions of the world by renaming those terms (American Geopolitical Society, 2011).

Mackinder refers to the Heartland, Inner Crescent and World Island while Spykman emphasizes rimland which has 3 sections: the European Coastland, Arab-Middle Eastern Desert Land and the Asiatic Monsoon Land. According to Spykman, he who controls the rimland controls Eurasia and he who controls Eurasia controls the world. He argued that the power of the heartland could be kept in check by the peripheral rimland (American Geopolitical Society, 2011).

2.4 Geopolitics of India and China

Geography and regional locations are the fundamental elements of power in geopolitics. Thus, geopolitics plays a vital role in making a state a global power. Dar (2017) explains the significance of geopolitics in the power politics of a state. The

former PM of India, Atal Bihari Bajpayee once said that you can change history but not geography (Chicago Tribune, 1999). Geography can help a state in gaining status in the international community. Thus, Geopolitics plays an important role in India's ambition to emerge as a regional power. India's geographical positioning in South Asia or Indian Sub-continent has been exciting as it is placed between China and Pakistan remarkably. All of these three states are nuclearized states, thus India's relationship with China and Pakistan has greater significance to analyze in terms of how it affects regional stability, nuclear weapons use as well as regional competition.

Dar (2017) argues that India and China are emerging powers in the Asian region. Due to their rise to bloom in the global inter-state hierarchy, the bilateral relationship between them has descended into an annoying pattern as they are alert and serious about each other's rise. They are the two major powers in Asia with global aspirations and some noteworthy incompatible interests which have resulted in a notable rise in the friction in their relationship.

Similarly, Shivshankar Menon in his work *India and Asian Geopolitics* (2021) have explained the geopolitical significance of Sino-Indian relations. China-led Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) have a remarkable influence and impact on the geopolitics of China and India. China's attempt to consolidate the Eurasian landmass through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, its Belt and Road Initiatives and its link with Russia and Europe are significant matters. Eurasia is being consolidated in the emerging Asian order. Though the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy (ISP) has influence in the region which seems to be like a counterpart of BRI, for the first time a power other than the US is attempting to dominate both the Eurasian heartland and the Asian rimlands, and the oceans from Africa to the American West coast. Moreover, the territorial or border disputes between India and China in later years have notably emerged on the surface. The frequent skirmishes in the disputed border regions have been a serious issue between them in several aspects of geopolitics.

The geopolitical situations for both India and China are working under the competitive umbrella of survival which has a notable regional race. Certainly, these both actors in addition to Pakistan in this geopolitical arena have significant consequences. Pakistan's diplomatic relation with China shows an impactful threat to India. Through the lens of realism, Dar (2017) explains that India is spending more on defence as it is a

rising economy as well. Furthermore, the geopolitical matrix of China-Pakistan pushes India towards maximizing its power relative to China and Pakistan by aligning more with the USA and other similar allies.

Menon and Dar both have explained the circumstances of the Sino-Indian relation based on realistic as well as geopolitical approach but their works are primarily focused on the power politics of the states. They have missed explaining the impacts of the Sino-Indian tussle in the immediate region of South Asia. Hence, this paper is comprehensively dedicated towards the effects and consequences of territorial disputes of China-India in the region of South Asia in the political as well as socio-economic aspects.

2.5 Balance of Power Theory

In international politics and the academic discipline of International Relations (IR), the balance of power is historically one of the most important concepts. Scholars of international politics take the balance of power to be a mechanism that would make states intentionally or unintentionally join the weaker part against the strong to equalize or balance the power distribution amongst states in the international system (Andersen, 2018).

According to Hans J. Morgenthau (1948), the balance of power refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality. The Balance of Power Theory rests upon several fundamental postulates and assumptions. There are fundamental five principal assumptions of the Balance of Power which can be stated below:

1. Balance of Power assumes that states are determined to protect their vital rights and interests by all means including war.
2. The vital interests of the states are threatened.
3. The relative power position of states can be measured with a degree of accuracy.
4. Balance of power assumes that “balance” will either deter the threatening state from launching an attack or permit the victim to avoid defeat if an attack should occur.
5. The statesmen can, and they do make foreign policy decisions intelligently based on power considerations.

Moreover, the basic principle of Balance of Power is that excessive power anywhere in the system is a threat to the existence of others and that the most effective antidote to power is power. Compensations, alliances and counter alliances, intervention and non-intervention, divide and rule, buffer states or zones, armaments and disarmaments and the holder of balance or the balancer are the major methods of Balance of Power (Jain, 2020).

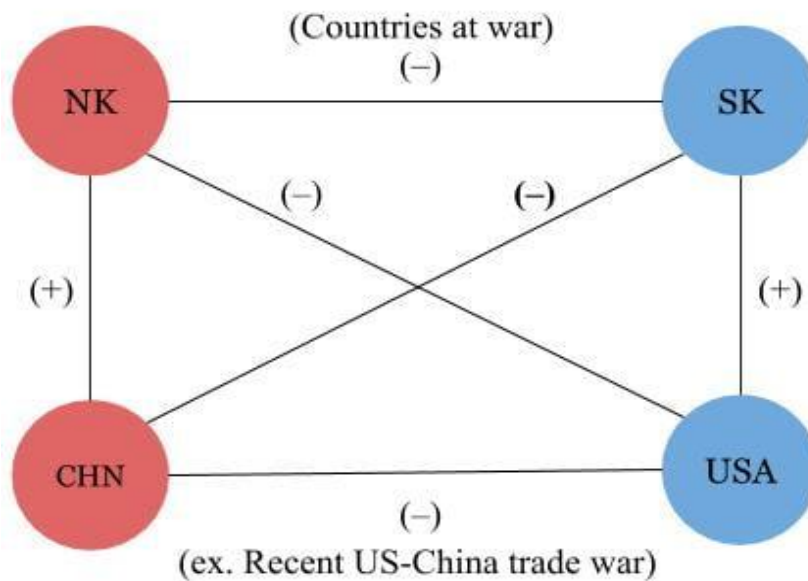
2.6 Balance of Power and International Relations

States in circumstances, when finding any sort of threats to their security, counter them by allying with other threatened states by increasing their military capabilities. Forming a geographical-based coalition of states to surround and block an expansionist power is called containment. For instance, post World War II; the United States followed this policy towards the former Soviet Union by building military alliances and bases throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia. In the international system, if one state attempts to conquer a region, then it will provoke counterbalancing actions and attempts by other states. This is what the theory of Balance of Power politics is. This phenomenon of the balancing process helps to maintain the stability of relations between states (Andersen, 2018).

In an international system, two or more states can ally to form a power balance. At the same time, the alliance formation or breaking is fragile based upon the core interests of states regardless of values, religion, or of the form of government. At times, a single state can play a balancer role shifting its support to oppose whatever state or alliance is strongest. Britain can be taken as an example as it played this role in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in its relations with France, Russia and Germany. In the cold war period, the United States and the former Soviet Union both expanded their nuclear arsenals to balance against each other. Thus, two states can balance each other through the proliferation of weapons and military capability. A state's power derives from the size of its land mass, population, its level of technology along with the factors like economic strength, gross domestic product etc. which determine the potential military capability. Thus, a weakness of the balance of power concept is the difficulty of measuring power. The effective use of military force depends on such elements as leadership, morale, geography etc. States' or leaders' miscalculations and misconceptions regarding the power and capabilities of their own and rivals can severely

affect and may create big unimagined circumstances. For instance, during the Vietnam War (1959-1975), the US president underestimated the strength of the Vietnamese communists because, by conventional measures of power, they were much weaker than the United States (Sheehan, 1996).

Figure 3 Graph that explains the power balance between North Korea (NK), South Korea (SK), and their respective allies (US and China)



Source: blogs.cornell.edu

Let us discuss the Balance of Power in today's context of international politics. After the Cold War ended up with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the United States became the world's sole superpower. According to the theory of Balance of power, equilibrium of power is an essential element to maintain balance. In this context, it lacks power balance. Though Russia, China, France, and Germany are key states who could have resisted the power of the US, it was not seen in the past as they have no remarkable initiations regarding it. For example, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was opposed by these countries yet it did not work to stop the US from acting. Small states with less or no military capabilities fear joining any counterbalancing coalition or alliances. In exception, the comparatively small country North Korea is developing nuclear weapons to expand its military capability to balance against US power. China and US trade issues along with BRI and ISP are remarkable relational issues in the

present time which still cannot show a clear path of balancing power as it seems to be a chaotic situation in the international arena (Sheehan, 1996).

The balance of power has been a central concept in the theory and practice of international relations past three centuries. The core idea of the concept is to explain the situation where states will ally themselves to prevent the hegemony of one state over all others. Thus, the most important element of this theory is the most effective check on the power of a state is the power of other states.

2.7 China, India and the Balance of Power

Mohan (2006) explains the significance of India in the balance of power in the Asian region and global arena. In the South Asia region or say Indian sub-continent, India has a significant place and role in maintaining a responsible role as an economic, strategic and military rising power. India is now on the brink of becoming a great power after New Delhi signed a nuclear pact with President George W. Bush in July 2005. India is now emerging as the swing state in the global balance of power. India's grand strategy divides the world into three concentric circles. In the first, India has sought primacy and a veto over the actions of outside power enclosing its immediate neighbourhood. Secondly, it holds the so-called extended neighbourhood stretching across Asia and the Indian Ocean coast to balance the influence of other powers and prevent them from undermining its interests. The third one is which includes the entire global arena where India has tried to take its place as one of the great powers and key players in international peace and security. In the past, great power rivalries along with India's tensions and indulgence with Pakistan and China have complicated its efforts to maintain order in its immediate region. The Indo-Pak conflict has been one of the biggest challenges for India which has impacted various aspects of India in its rise in the world. If India could have progressed in resolving the conflict over Kashmir with Pakistan, it could have liberated the political and diplomatic energies of India so that it could play a bigger role in the world. India got engaged with all the great powers especially with the United States only after the end of the Cold War. In the early 1990s, it initiated its relations with US, China, Japan and Europe which were undeveloped. The Sino-Indian ties since the 1990s have been important and intriguing as they have witnessed the nightmare of the 1960 Sino-Indian war. Keeping aside the violent history of the 1960 war, China and India engaged in the economic relationship through bilateral trade which boomed remarkably. China

became India's largest trade partner within a few years. India has also cooperated with Pakistan and other neighbouring states.

In contrast, Rajagopalan (2017) in the article *India's Strategic Choices: China and the Balance of Power in Asia* argued about the challenges of India for power balance in the Asian region. The China-India relationship has significant aspects in various dimensions. It has not been the sole concern of bilateral trades and diplomatic formal relations but has other prominent challenges as they are both rising economic and strategic rivals in the Asia region and the world as a whole. In recent years frequent border disputes and tensions have been a big threat and challenge for both of them which have big consequences in the immediate region. Compared to China, India is still behind in terms of economic, strategic, infrastructure and social development but is on the verge of rapid growth. But it seems that its growth is occurring in the shadow of China's even more impressive ascent. Beijing's influence has a prominent influence on the geopolitics of Asia. In such circumstances, the power balance concept has possible threats in this region.

On the other side, Han and Paul (2020) have opposing thoughts as they have argued that China's sole concern is concentrated towards economic rise rather than any sort of strategic attempts to alarm the world order of power politics. The international system is dominated by the United States after the Cold War era. This dominance has been shaken by its relative downturn in the economy and the simultaneous rise of China. China is rapidly emerging as an economic and strategic giant as a serious contender for the United States. China's strategy between 1990 and 2010 has made a peaceful rise. In the article, they argue that China's strategy was not to alarm the international order but to use economic tools to achieve global power status. Chinese political elites and scholars claim that they have no such intentions to challenge the international order but would like to emerge as a major market in the world economy by using capitalist instruments of trade and investment. 'Peaceful rise' holds that peace and development are essential elements of today's international system, thus, the objective of China is to consolidate such a system and not the political and security issues. Due to this scenario, the intense hard balancing of power is still difficult to achieve because China is still substantially weaker than the US.

The military strategy and alignment behaviour of China shows that it is not a sufficient approach for the intense hard balancing of power. China's security strategy and military doctrines cannot be perceived as a threat to other states. China's military doctrine in the 2015 White Book on China's Military Strategy is an "actively defensive strategy". This phrase implies that China will not be proactive in war and will not initiate war against others but if China sees any offensive conditions or threats over them, then it can adopt offensive tactics to eliminate offensive acts of its counterparts. Post 2010, after nearly two decades of relying on hedging based on soft balancing, China is now moving closer to a hedging strategy based on limited hard balancing, soft balancing and engagement. China's foreign policy of keeping a low profile has shifted to more proactive and assertive policies where there is an increment in the hard balancing components of its foreign policy. Its expansion of naval presence in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea has created hard balancing threats (Han & Paul, 2020).

Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) is an ambitious project of China which has been analyzed and interpreted by different scholars from different perspectives. For instance, economists see BRI as an ambitious economic plan for economic growth and international trade while political leaders of the United States are concerned about its functioning as a geopolitical competition (Han & Paul, 2020). China uses soft instruments like BRI as economic instruments to prevent a balancing coalition that is emerging in the Indo-Pacific region. China's relations with Pakistan and India have significantly determined the discouraging in power balancing. India's non-participation in BRI and opposition to Pakistan's involvement in BRI along with smaller states like Nepal can be understood as the power balancing threats emerging in the region.

From India's perspective, China is a direct military threat to India, specifically in the border disputes between them. It is because China's forces and military capabilities are already stronger and well-funded. The influence of Beijing in international organizations like the UN is relatively strong than that of India. In the new institutions like Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China has got space and opportunities to hamper the interests and goals of India in multilateral forms. Similarly, India's alliance with the US along with its Indo-Pacific Strategy has had significant impacts on the rivalry of power exercise with China and its ambitious BRI project. This to some extent shows that India's counterpart and its attempts are trying to resist the assertive

endeavours of China. The closer alignment of India with the United States represents the best way to meet the challenge of China's rise. It is because the United States is the only power that is stronger than China. New Delhi and Washington share a common interest in balancing Beijing (Han & Paul, 2020).

They have explained the significance of the power balance concept in terms of Sino-Indian power rivalry. They also put forward the importance of power balancing in the Asian region as China and India are emerging world powers with significant roles in the world order. However, they have missed explaining the territorial disputes in terms of their impacts and consequences regarding South Asia and the smaller states of the region. They have not explained the power balance in terms of smaller states of South Asia as they have a significant role to maintain the power balance in the region between the two giants China and India.

To conclude the status of India and China in the Asia region in creating or resisting power and power balance, we should analyze their active endeavours in the international system through their foreign policies. If we comprehensively look at their performance and presence, it seems to be full of complexities. Their emergence in global power along with their indulgence in border disputes and rivalry symbolises the chaotic situations. Though they can resist the power balancing as well as act as power balancers at the same time. Thus, this paper aims at a comprehensive study of territorial disputes between China and India with a primary focus on reviewing their significance in the South Asian region. The fundamental objective is to review the Sino-Indian territorial dispute through geopolitical and power balance lenses to find out the effects and consequences of the dispute in South Asia.

2.8 Conceptual Framework.

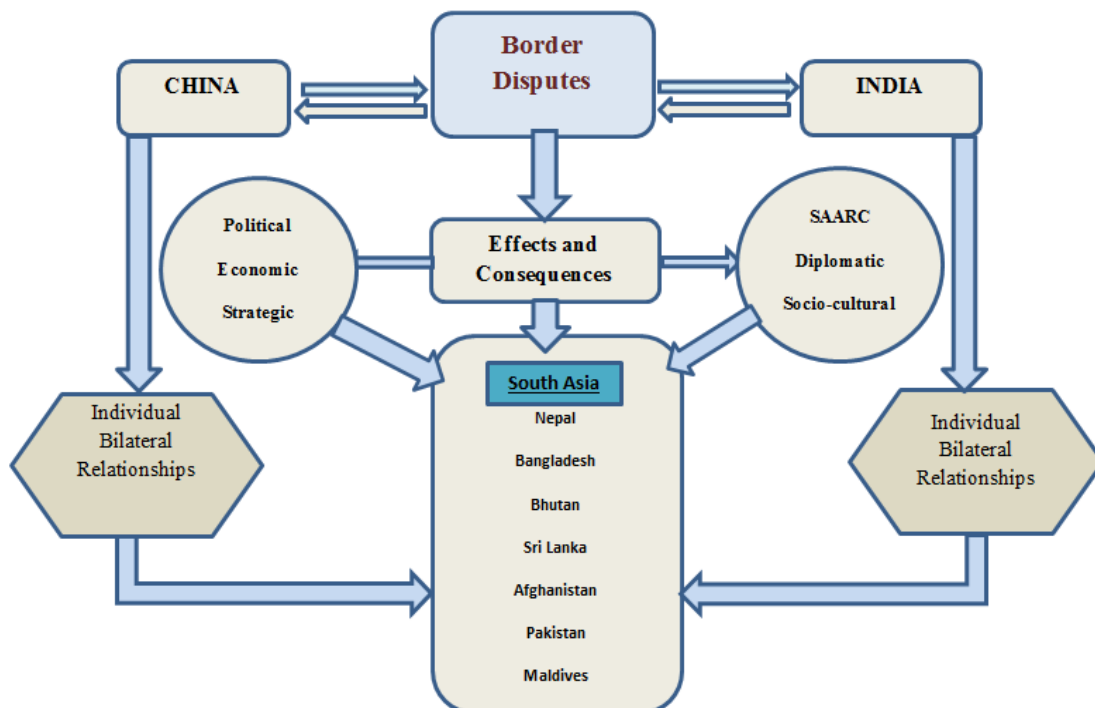
The conceptual framework is completely based on a research topic and its components i.e. different variables of our research topic and the nature of the relationship among the variables. The main objective of this section is to develop a clear picture of the whole research work which explains the theoretical approach of the research in the form of a clear graphical representation of all variables and their relations.

In this research topic, there are different variables. China and India are the two giant states located in East and South Asia respectively. Thus, the research topic expects

the study of border disputes and their effects and consequences in South Asia except for India as it is the part of 'cause' of our research. The remaining countries are the part of 'effect' in the context. Similarly, all the seven countries of South Asia besides India do have individual relations with India and China simultaneously. They are under the influence of Sino-Indian border disputes on the collective as well as individual levels. If we consider South Asia as a Universe then these seven countries are its subsets. The effects and consequences of conflict in South Asia are equivalent to the seven countries. Likewise, other factors including politics, economy, bilateral relations, diplomatic relations, and strategy are inseparable factors of our research topic. These are interconnected variables. Some variables do have one way and some may have both two-way relations.

The geopolitical status, borders and territories are not under the control of state mechanism as they are constant elements, and so are the independent variables while the socio-economic, political, and strategic aspects as well as their effects and consequences are not constant and are under the influence and interactions of state mechanism. Thus, they are dependent and intervening variables.

Figure 4 Conceptual Framework of the study.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are specific procedures for collecting and analyzing data. Developing research methods is an integral part of our research design. It is an important part of research work. Thus, I have adhered to all the methodological norms and guidelines to perform my research task systematically.

3.1 Selection of the Study Area

The selection of my research topic is completely based on descriptive and explanatory patterns. Its objective is to find out the effects and consequences of Sino-Indian border disputes in South Asia. There are numerous research works based on Sino-Indian relations along with border dispute and their impacts. Likewise, a lot of research on the Indo-Pak relations and their animosity can be found including its impacts on SAARC to be almost dysfunctional. But there are no studies or research based on the Sino-Indian border disputes and their effects and impacts on the political, strategic, diplomatic and economic aspects of entire South Asia. Similarly, my study title aims at finding out the effects of the Sino-Indian border dispute in the failure of SAARC in a different perspective relating the Sino-Indian border conflicts in intensifying the Indo-Pak relations ultimately leading to the sidelining of Pakistan from SAARC by India through the means of new organisation BIMSTEC. In this sense, my topic is different and unique which has tried to analyse the Sino-Indian border dispute from a different perspective of South Asia and SAARC dysfunction in multidimensional aspects.

3.2 Research Design

The research topic I have presented here aims at performing research tasks based on the established theories and works of literature of the past. The analytical approach of previous studies is carried out to find out the knowledge gaps. The analysis is made critically, thus constructing new conceptual and theoretical understanding through an in-depth study of former literature. Hence, the research has been conducted descriptively. The resources, data and all other required materials which might be in the form of literature, surveys, opinions etc. are studied. Primary sources are not possible to collect

as it is the delimitation of this research task. It is qualitative, descriptive and inductive research work.

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data

All the data and sources of information that are used in this task are in the form of secondary sources. No primary sources of data are used. The secondary sources of data are used as a basis for this task. Books, and research articles published in different journals and online platforms are fundamental sources. Similarly, electronic books in the form of pdf, website articles, and online videos like youtube are the sources for this research work.

3.4 Data Collection Technique/Analysis

The primary data collection is not conducted in this research. No data collection techniques and analysis are performed. Thus, content analysis is a tool for data collection in this research design. Similarly, secondary sources of data have been collected through the means of resources like books, research articles, and online content like website articles, videos, pdf books and articles etc.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

Since the research is entirely qualitative and descriptive, the interpretive data analysis method is pursued. The correlation between the different variables has been established based on the geopolitical and power balance theories applied in the research work.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.1 China–India Relations

China-India relations, also called Sino-Indian relations or Indo-Chinese relations are the bilateral relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India which holds a historical relationship with peace and harmony for thousands of years in history. However, after the independence of India from British colonial rule in 1947 along with the end of the civil war of China with the establishment of the Communist Party of Mao Zedong in China in 1949, the paradigm of Sino-India relations changed. From the 1950s to the present, the Sino-Indian relationship has witnessed numerous events, incidents and confronted a lot of relational upheavals. Key incidents like the Indian independence of 1947, the rise of the Chinese Communist Party in China in 1949 and Tibet annexation by China are major factors which have contributed to the paradigm-shifting of this historical relationship. Officially, the political bilateral relationship between China and India was established on 1st April 1950. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai were the signatories of this bilateral relationship (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017).

Two ancient civilizations India and China which are separated by a high-altitude desert plateau and large mountain chain were not neighbours in a real sense as Tibet formed a buffer zone between them. It means that geography has played a major role which prevented them from close interaction, trade and commerce or in the matters of being military threats to each other. Hence, for hundreds of years, these two nations coexisted peacefully although they were set apart by a few thousand kilometres distance. These two civilizations evolved with distinct and profound cultures in the Indus and Gangetic plains in South Asia and the Huang Ho and the Yangtze basin in East Asia.

Both nations had to face numerous invasions and suffered foreign rules. India suffered about two centuries of British rule while China did not suffer colonization except in a few parts but it confronted the pressure from the world powers and become submissive to them and was compelled to accept the unequal treaties. It suffered a century or more of such humiliation. It also went through two big revolutions and a civil war. The first revolution uprooted the Manchu Empire in 1911 and established a new

republic and the second one resulted in the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 by pushing the defeated Chiang Kai-shek regime into Taiwan. The end of the Second World War followed by the breakdown of the colonial era went through the rise of two great sovereign and independent countries where one adopting a parliamentary democratic system and another embracing the path of communism (Singh, 2019).

India and China have sought economic cooperation with each other as they are two major regional powers in Asia and the global arena as well. They are the two most populous countries in the world as well as the fastest-growing major world economies (Singh, 2019). India was among the first non-communist countries to recognise the People's Republic of China as a legitimate government of both mainland China and Taiwan. The cultural and economic relations between the countries date back to ancient times which significantly include the Silk Road which served as a major trade route between the countries (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017). China has been India's largest trading partner between 2008 to 2021 and they also have extended their strategic and military relations. However, their relationship has been characterised by multiple factors especially the border disputes which have played a crucial role in determining the Sino-Indian relationship in different aspects in the changing time. The details of the major issue of Sino-Indian relations i.e. border dispute will be discussed comprehensively.

4.2 China-India Border Dispute

The Sino-Indian Border dispute is a territorial dispute over the sovereignty of separate pieces of territories located in the border regions between India and China. They share the longest disputed border in the world. India's Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and a Union Territory of Ladakh, as well as China's Uyghur Xinjiang Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region, are bordered by each other. There are two relatively large and several smaller pieces of territory between them. The first of the territories is Aksai Chin which is part of Xinjiang Uygyur Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region which is claimed by India as a part of the Union Territory of Ladakh. This is an almost uninhabited region at a high altitude. Similarly, another major disputed territory is the south of Mc Mahon Line which was formerly known as North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and is now called Arunachal Pradesh which is administered by India. The McMahan was the part of Simla

Convention of 1914 which was signed between British India and Tibet (Hoffmann, 1990). Later, China annexed Tibet and it disowned the agreement stating that Tibet is part of China which was never independent, thus agreement done with Tibet cannot be accepted.

Figure 5 Sino-Indian disputed border regions in the map.



Source: www.voanews.com

As a result of this dispute, the war between China and India outbreaked in these disputed regions in 1962. In this war, Chinese troops attacked Indian border posts in Ladakh in the western sector and crossed Mc Mahon Line in the Eastern Sector. Likewise, there was also a brief border escalation in 1967 in the region of Sikkim. In 1987 and 2013 the potential conflicts over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) issues were de-escalated. Along, there was a conflict in the border area controlled by Bhutan in 2017 which was also de-escalated. However, multiple brawls broke out in 2020 in the region of Galwan Valley which resulted in the death of dozens of military persons. Again, brief conflict was observed in the Doklam region of the Bhutanese side and the Chinese border (Sali, 1998).

The background of the Sino-Indian border disputes since the 1950s following the 1962 war and the latest violent skirmishes of 2020 are discussed below.

4.3 Line of Actual Control (LAC)

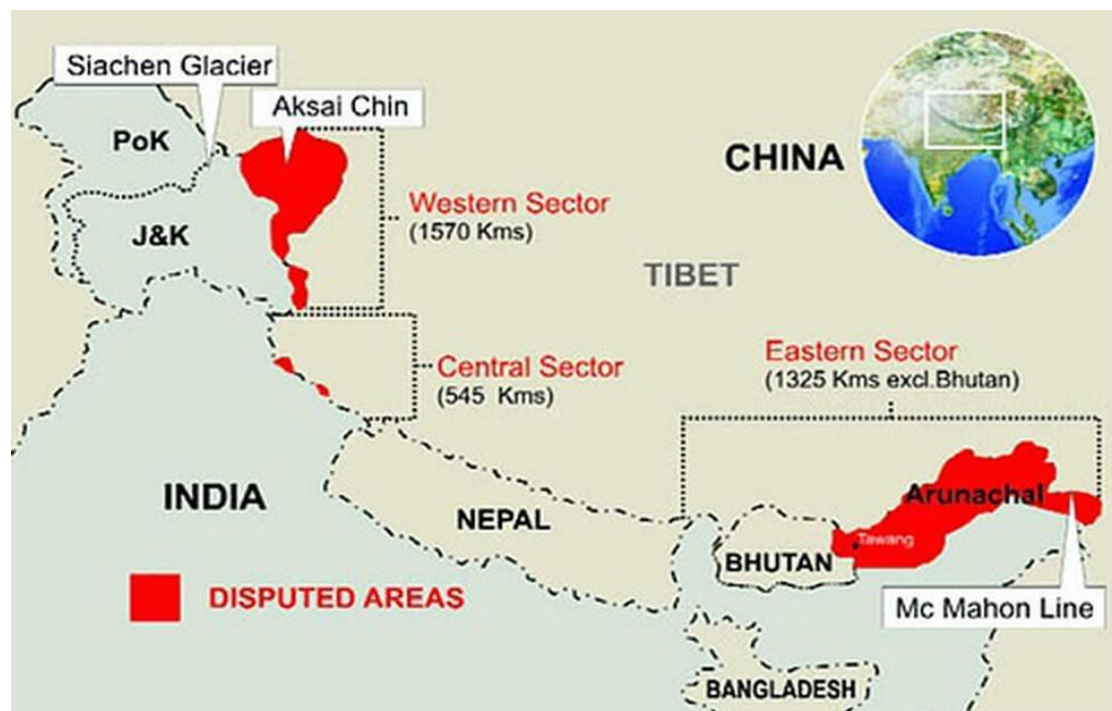
Line of Actual Control, abbreviated as LAC is the term used in the context of the Sino-Indian border dispute which is an imaginary demarcation line which separates Indian-controlled territory from the Chinese-controlled territory. The concept of the Line of Actual Control was introduced in 1959 by Zhou Enlai, a Chinese Premier (Krishnan, 2020). He had first coined the term in a 1959 letter to former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. He mentioned that the proposed line of actual control means the line up to which each country would exercise its actual control. It was rejected by the Indian PM at that time. Later, after the end 1962 Sino-Indian war, this term came into use to denote the line formed after the war.

The actual border between India and China demarcates the regions which are claimed by both countries thus, LAC is different in this perspective. The Indian side claims the entire Aksai Chin as its territory while China claims Arunachal Pradesh as its territory and these claims are not included in the Line of Actual Control concept. In fact, not only the borders are disputed, the LAC itself is not free from dispute. China claims a 2000 km long LAC while the Indian side claims a 3488 km long LAC. Initially, the LAC only referred to the Western sector after the 1962 war but after the 1990s it came to refer to the entire de facto border (Singh, 2020).

The Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been divided into three sectors.

- **The Western Sector:** This sector lies between Ladakh on the Indian side and Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous regions on the Chinese side. India shares about 2152 km long border with China in this sector.
- **The Middle Sector:** This sector lies between Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh on the Indian side and Tibet autonomous region on the Chinese side where India shares a 625 km long border with China.
- **Eastern Sector:** This sector lies between Sikkim, Doklam (tri-junction of Bhutan, China and India), and Arunachal Pradesh of India and Tibet autonomous region on the Chinese side. The region in Arunachal Pradesh is almost based on Mc Mahon Line. In this sector, the two countries share about 1140 km long border.

Figure 6 Line of Actual Control (LAC) in three different sectors.



Source: vajiramias.com

However, both India and China have remained back in the matter of clarification of LAC as they are unable to initiate this step. Thus, the whole scenario of the Sino-Indian dispute of borders and territories is based on the LAC regions of above mentioned three sectors. The major disputed regions of LAC in all three sectors are discussed briefly below.

Western Sector of LAC:

Aksai Chin

Aksai Chin is the geographic location which is in the western sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is the prominent disputed region between India and China. It is the region that is administered by China as a part of Hotan County Uygur Xinjiang Autonomous Region and Rutog County of Tibet Autonomous Region while it is claimed by India as a part of its Leh district of Ladakh Union Territory. It is an eastern portion of the Kashmir region. This region lies in an elevation of about 5180 metres which consists largely of a high, isolated, inhospitable and almost uninhabitable plain. It is bordered to the west and southwest by the Karakoram range and to the north and northeast by the Kunlun Mountains. As it is an isolated and remote region with harsh geographical

features, it remained an ignored corner of the subcontinent for a long time. Later in the 1950s, China built a military road through it to connect Tibet and Xianjing. As India discovered the road, it opposed and created objections to that act of China which ultimately led to the Sino-Indian border clash in 1962. As a result of it, China retained control of about 38000 square kilometres of territory in Aksai Chin. This area has remained a point of strife between the two countries (Pletcher, 2021).

Figure 7 Disputed region of Aksai Chin.



Source: drishtiias.com

During the British rule era in India, two borders between India and China were proposed, one was Johnson's Line and another was Macartney McDonald Line. The Johnson's Line which was proposed in 1865 shows Aksai Chin in erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir (now Ladakh). Thus it indicates that the region is under India's control. In contrast, McDonald Line proposed in 1893 indicates that the region is under Chinese control. In this circumstance, India considers Johnson's Line as a correct demarcation of the national border with China while China on the other hand considers McDonald's Line as the correct border with India. At present, LAC is the line that separates areas of Ladakh from Aksai Chin (Drishti, 2020).

The Karakoram Tract and Siachen Glacier

The Karakoram Range also known as Shaksgam Tract lies between Pakistan and India's northernmost borders which further extends into the western border of China. This range is composed of large numbers of Peaks over 8000 meters which includes the world's second-highest peak K2. The range consists of the Ladakh region of India, the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan and the Aksai Chin region occupied by China. After the end of the Second World War in 1947, India and Pakistan got partitioned. Likewise, in 1949, the communist party led by Mao Zedong took over China. This was the time which contributed towards bringing this region into the limelight. Pakistan occupied the Gilgit-Baltistan region. Similarly, in 1984 Indian Army captured the Siachen glacier which created tension because the northern border of Siachen touches China which is the world's only trilateral border junction between India, China and Pakistan. In 1963, a China-Pakistan boundary agreement was signed which demarcated the borders of both nations in the Karakoram region and Pakistan ceded the trans-Karakoram tract to China (Joshi, 2015).

Demchok

Demchok is a disputed area in the western sector which is a military base in Leh. It is located between the Ladakh and Tibet regions which are claimed by both countries India and China. Demchok is the name of a village located at the junction of the Charding Nullah River and the Indus River. Demchok has witnessed frequent clashes between Indian and Chinese troops. Both countries claim the disputed region of Demchok with a Line of Actual Control between the two countries situated along the Charding Nullah (Arpi, 2018).

In 1684, the treaty between the Kingdom of Ladakh and the Ganden Phodrang government of Tibet was signed in which the Charding Nullah which was mentioned by the name "Lhari stream" was stated as the boundary between the two regions. In 1847, the British placed the border between the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir and Qing Tibet on the stream. But the British maps from 1868 onwards placed the border downstream and west of Demchok. India after its independence claimed the southern watershed of the river as its boundary which is also claimed by China. After the 1962 war, the Demchok region has been divided as a part of the Line of Actual Control (Arpi, 2018).

Chumar

Chumar or Chumur is a region located in southeastern Ladakh of India which is close to the Tibet border. It is a village with a nomadic grazing region. This is situated along the course of Pare Chu River which is close to Ladakh's border with Tibet. It has been one of the disputed regions between the countries (PTI, 2014).

India after its independence in 1947 had conceded part of the valley of Chepzilung to Tibetans but in 1954, India defined its map in which India withdrew from the Panglung River east of Chepzi and set the watershed ridge as the boundary. It allowed the Tibetan graziers access to both rivers of Pare Chu and Chepzi. The people of Chumar claim to have used the farmland and grazing grounds at Chepzi but in recent years People's Liberation Army (PLA) has blocked these lands for them. In the 1960 boundary talks with India, China claimed a boundary north of the Indian claim line. However, it was still south of the general ridge line running across the Pare Chu Valley. In 2014, the region faced a 16-day stand-off which was resolved through several military and diplomatic negotiations (Shukla, 2020).

Middle Sector of LAC:

Kaurik and Tashingang-Shipki La (Himachal Pradesh)

Kaurik region of Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh has been the region of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Kaurik is a village in the Lahaul & Spiti district in the valley of the Pare Chu (also known as Parang) river before its confluence with the Spiti River. It is close to the Tsurupu Sumgyi village on the Tibetan side. It has not confronted any struggles and stand-offs though China claims the village as a part of Zanda County of Tibet (Thukral, 2007). Similarly, the Tashingang and Shipki La regions of the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh are also claimed by China as parts of its Tibet region.

Uttarkashi and Chamoli Districts (Uttarakhand)

Sang-Nilang-Pulam-Sumda region is one of the regions of the border dispute between China and India. Sang, Pulam and Sumda are small hilly villages located in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand Pradesh along with the Nilang River valley with a small village. These are the regions that are close to the Sino-Indian Line of Actual

Control. These regions are claimed by China as a part of the Zanda County of Tibet Autonomous region.

Similarly, the plains of Barahoti in the Chamoli district are also claimed by China as part of the Tibet region. It has claimed by China for the first time in 1954 but later in 1960, China added Laphthal and Sangchamalla to this disputed region (Kumar, 2023). This whole region lies on the Ganges side of the Sutlej-Ganges water divide which is the current LAC between the countries.

Eastern Sector of LAC:

Arunachal Pradesh

A northeastern Indian-administered region, Arunachal is a state of India which was formed from the erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) region which became a state in 1987. In 1912-13, the British Indian government agreed with the indigenous people of the Himalayas of northeastern India to establish North East Frontier Tracts which were divided into three sections: Ballipara Frontier Tract, Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract (Singh, 2019).

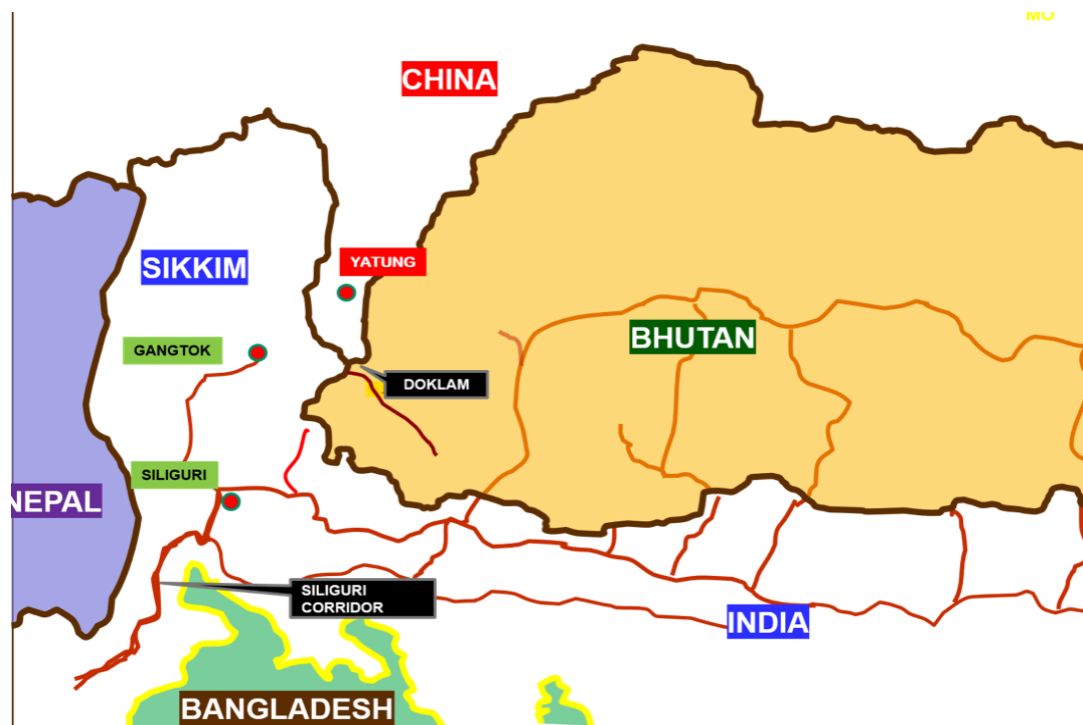
In 1913-14, Britain and defacto-independent Tibet met in India to define the borders of Outer Tibet. Thus, the British administrator Sir Henry McMahon drew McMahon Line which was an 890 km long border between British India and Tibet. They made a Simla Accord including McMahon Line. But, later on, China refused to recognize the McMahon Line stating that Tibet was never an independent state, thus any agreement carried out by Tibet could not be valid. So China still avoids the Simla Convention and claims the entire region of today's Arunachal Pradesh as a part of its Tibet region. China refers to this region of Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet. To be noted, Taiwan which has never been recognized by India as a country has also claimed over Arunachal Pradesh as its territory (Sali, 1998).

Sikkim- Doklam (Bhutan)

Doklam which is also called Donglang (in Chinese) is an area in Bhutan consisting of a high plateau and a valley. It lies between China's Chumbi Valley to the north, the Ha district of Bhutan to the east and the Sikkim state of India to the West. Doklam has been depicted as a part of Bhutan as per the Bhutanese maps since 1961

which is claimed by China. It is an important region strategically to all three countries. But the dispute has not been resolved yet but has been time and again brought to the surface as there have been military stand-offs between China and India in the disputed region of Doklam.

Figure 8 Disputed tri-junction region of Doklam between India, Bhutan and China.



Source: thewire.in

In 2017, a serious military stand-off took place between Indian and Chinese military troops. India itself has no claims regarding the region but it states that it is claiming the region on behalf of Bhutan. The issue of confrontation was that China attempted to extend a 100 km road on the Doklam plateau in the south near Doka La Pass and the Indian troops entered to stop China from acting upon it anymore. Bhutan has formally objected to China's actions in the region. It has been a sensitive tri-junction between the countries which has strategic significance (Aljazeera, 2020).

4.4 Sino-Indian Border Dispute: 1947-1962

The end of the Second World War followed by the dismantling of colonization from the world resulted in the form of independence of India from more than two centuries long British Rule along with the partition of India and Pakistan. Decolonization

left numerous issues unsolved in the South Asian region that primarily includes border disputes that were left behind by British rule.

On the other side, China after its establishment as a communist state in 1949 is a significant reason that intensified border issues in the region. The occupation of Tibet by China in 1950 raised concerns in Sino-Indian relations from the viewpoint of India regarding the intentions of China in the border regions. India and China signed the "Panchasheel Agreement" in 1954 (Maxwell, 1970).

The agreement has five principles of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, the border issues did not settle. It was more intensified when India discovered a 1200 km long road built by China connecting Xinjiang and West Tibet that ran 179 km south of The Johnson's Line through the Aksai Chin claimed by India. India discovered later the road built by China. The reason behind it was that the Aksai Chin region is relatively hard to access from the south side of Karakoram which has complex and harsh geography. But it is easily accessible from the Chinese side. That is why India was unaware of the road until 1957 which was confirmed when China showed the road in its map published in 1958 (FAIR, 2023). India claimed Aksai Chin as an integral part of its territory. The then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru stated that Aksai Chin was part of the Ladakh region of India for centuries. On the other side, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai argued that there was no issue as Aksai Chin was part of China as per the Macartney-McDonald Line. In 1960, Nehru and Enlai agreed to settle the border dispute by holding discussions between the official of both sides. Unfortunately, they could not agree regarding the boundary issue in the western sector of Aksai Chin. Moreover, in 1959, Dalai Lama, a spiritual leader of Tibet sought asylum in India which further intensified the China-India relations (Maxwell, 1970).

4.5 Sino-Indian War: 1962

The Sino-Indian War is the most significant event in the history of the India-China border dispute. It was a conflict between two countries that erupted on October 20, 1962, when China launched a military offensive across the disputed border with India. After several border skirmishes between 1959 and 1962 and as a by-product of the Tibet uprising, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) forcefully attacked the disputed

boundaries. The fighting occurred along the India-China border in the east of Bhutan in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and west of Nepal in the Ladakh region of India. There have been a series of violent border skirmishes in which the Chinese military action was intense and aggressive. It was so because of the Tibet uprising and the asylum of the Dalai Lama in India. Avoiding all sorts of attempts towards the resolution amidst the Cuban Missile Crisis, China invaded the disputed territories along about a 3400 km long border in Ladakh and across the Mc Mahon Line in the erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency. Chinese counterpart aggressively took the move and pushed the Indian troops and captured the claimed territory of the western sector i.e. Aksai Chin along with Tawang Tract in the eastern region. The Indian forces were defeated in which about 7000 armies of Indian troops were killed or captured (Britannica, 2023).

On 20 October, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched two attacks. PLA expelled Indian forces in Chip Chap valley of Aksai Chin in the western theatre while in the eastern theatre; PLA captured both banks of the Namka Chu River. Chinese artillery fire targeted the Gurkha rifles travelling the north. Chinese troops succeeded in securing a substantial portion of the disputed region after four days of fierce warfare. In the Aksai Chin region, China controlled most of the disputed territory. Chinese troops launched several attacks throughout the western theatre i.e. the Aksai Chin surroundings and swept away the remaining Indian troops and captured the territories out there. By October 22, all posts north of Chusul had been cleared (FAIR, 2023).

In the eastern region, the PLA attacked Indian forces near Se La and Bomdi La on 17th November. Instead of attacking by roads, PLA approached through a mountain trail and by attacking cut-off the main road and isolated 10,000 Indian troops. PLA further occupied Se La and captured Thembang which was a route to Se La. Shortly, the PLA reached its claim lines, so they did not advance further. Thus, China declared a unilateral ceasefire on November 21st, 1962. Subsequently, China annexed the Aksai Chin in the western theatre while it withdrew from the area it had taken in the eastern theatre of Tawang which is now located in Arunachal Pradesh of India. Beijing and New Delhi agreed to a de facto boundary line around a loosely agreed Line of Actual Control. Beijing retained about 38,000 km² of Aksai Chin which India still claims as the entire region of its Ladakh Union Territory.

The war ended up with a harsh defeat of India in a four-week brief warfare in which the Indian side suffered big military loss along with its claimed territories. Along, China retained control of its claimed region of Aksai Chin. It was a short and swift war that lasted a month resulting in Indian defeat but the war failed to ensure a permanent solution to the border dispute. The political rift created by the aftermath of the war dampened the bilateral relationship between India and China especially in the border negotiations. And the divergent position of both sides evolved and widened in the post-war years (Banerjee, 2022).

4.6 Nathu La Conflict: 1967

Nathu La and Cho La conflict is also called as Second Sino-Indian War because it was the only fierce clash between the two countries since the 1962 war. The clash was a series of military skirmishes between the countries alongside the border of Sikkim (former Kingdom of Sikkim), an Indian protectorate and Tibet. It was a brief battle in which Chinese troops got defeated by Indian troops (Aljazeera, 2020).

The battle of Nathu La took place from 11th September to 14th September of 1967 while the Cho La clash was taken place on 1st October 1967 for a single day. Nathu La and Jelep La were the passes which have strategic as well as trade route significance. It is also an Old Silk route. Nathu La is an important pass on the Tibet-Sikkim border through which the Old Gangtok-Yatung-Lhasa trade route passes. This region did not have a clearly marked border where McMahon Line was considered to be an acceptable border. However, there were several such points in the area that each of them thought that they belonged to them which resulted in the frequent patrolling in the region from both sides. Such patrolling usually resulted in clashes between the troops of both sides. It resulted in tension and sometimes even casualties. Due to such circumstances, India initiated building a physical barrier to stop the regular issues at the border with the soldiers (Prashar, 2020).

India decided to fence the border with three layers of barbed wires. India started the work on 20th August 1967. Three days later on 23rd August 1967, about 75 Chinese troops marched towards Nathu La. The Chinese troops objected to the use of concertina coils in the fence and tried to interfere with the fence construction work which led to fighting between the soldiers. On 7th September 1967, 100 troops of Chinese soldiers

rushed to the border. The argument between both sides heated up and fist fights broke ultimately resulting in the opening of fires and intense conflict causing several casualties among the troops. The clash lasted for three days with intense conflict. 88 Indian soldiers died while 340 Chinese soldiers were killed in the conflict. The conflict officially ended on 15th September 1967 (Prashar, 2020).

At present, the strategic pass of Nathu La is under the control of the Indian military while the Jelep La pass is under Chinese control. Similarly, on 1st October 1967, another clash between the countries took place at Cho La Pass which is located a few kilometres north of Nathu La. Chinese troops had to withdraw nearly three kilometres away from the occupied post before the battle.

4.7 Border Dispute: 1975-2015

In 1975, four Indian soldiers were ambushed and killed along the dividing line in Arunachal Pradesh. Chinese force had crossed over into the Indian territory at Tulung La in Arunachal Pradesh and ambushed a patrol of Assam Rifles soldiers. Officially India claimed on 20th October 1975 that the Chinese forces had crossed over the Indian territory south of Tulung La and ambushed the Indian soldiers. China also confirmed the death of four Indian Soldiers on 3rd November about the incident of 20th October but placed the sole responsibility for the casualties on India (Shukla, 2020).

Likewise, in 1987, the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China had a stand-off in the Sumodorong Chu valley of Arunachal Pradesh. They were close to war but the crisis was diffused after the visit of the Indian External Affairs minister to Beijing in May 1987. The stand-off had given rise to fears of escalation but got resolved through diplomatic endeavours, especially from the Indian side. Similarly, in 2006 Chinese ambassador to India claimed that the entire region of Arunachal is Chinese territory. At that time both countries claimed the invaded regions as much as a kilometer in the northern part of Sikkim. Likewise, in 2009, India announced the plan for the deployment of additional military forces along the borders. In addition to the incidents of Sino-Indian border issues, another instance is that India proposed China to acknowledge a "One India" policy to resolve border disputes (Aljazeera, 2020).

In April 2013, India claimed that China had established a camp in the Daulet Beg Oldi (DBO) sector on their side of LAC. Indian media claimed that Chinese military

helicopters were entering Indian airspace to drop supplies to their troops which were denied by China. In September 2014, China and India had a stand-off at LAC. Indian workers had started to construct a canal in the border village of Demchok, Ladakh where Chinese civilians protested against the construction work with the support of their army. The stand-off was ended after about three weeks along with the agreement of withdrawal of troops from the region by both sides. In 2015, Chinese and Indian troops faced off in the Burtse region of northern Ladakh. The reason for the face-off was that the Indian troops had dismantled a disputed watchtower which was being constructed by the Chinese near the mutually agreed patrolling line (Shukla, 2020).

4.8 Doklam Confrontation: 2017

In 2017, India and China had a more than two months-long face-off in the high-altitude Doklam region of Bhutan. Doklam is a strategically significant region which is a tri-junction region of China, India and Bhutan. Thus, it is a sensitive region for all three countries. The Doklam stand-off of 2017 was a confrontation between the Indian Armed Forces and the People's Liberation Army of China. The only reason for stand-offs at the time was the issue of road construction by China near the tri-junction border area of Doklam. On 16th June 2017, road extension work was commenced by the Chinese troops. They approached the region with Chinese troops carrying construction vehicles and road-building equipment in the southward region of Doklam which is the territory claimed by China and by India on behalf of Bhutan.

Doklam plateau is strategically a very important and sensitive region for India as it gives China access to the so-called "Chicken's Neck" of India. Chicken's Neck is a thin strip of land located in the Siliguri of West Bengal that connects the northeastern states of India with the rest of the country. India seems to be highly sensitive and alert because of this region (Aljazeera, 2020). Hence, on 18th June 2017, about 270 armed Indian troops with two bulldozers crossed the Sikkim border to reach Doklam to stop the Chinese troops from constructing the road. The issue was resolved on 28th August 2017 as both India and China announced that they had withdrawn their troops from the region of their face-off (Philip, 2019).

4.9 Sino-Indian Border Skirmishes: 2020-2022

The Sino-Indian relations' 70th anniversary in the year 2020 was a historic moment for the bilateral ties between India and China. Unfortunately, the year 2020 also became a dark year which witnessed a violent stand-off in the border region of Ladakh which was a major historic clash between India and China in the last 45 years since 1975 (Aljazeera, 2020).

Following disagreements over territorial delineation and armies setting military posts in and near disputed regions, Indian and Chinese troops confronted violently at Galwan Valley near Ladakh on 15 June 2020. The incident led to the death of 20 Indian soldiers and an unidentified number of Chinese soldiers. On 5 May 2020, Indian and Chinese had a violent clash while patrolling near Pangong Lake followed by Naku La skirmishes in Sikkim with injuries on both sides on 9 May 2020 (Banerjee, 2022). High levels discussions and bilateral talks were conducted but could not progress anything remarkable. Above all, the major violent clash in 45 years occurred in Galwan Valley of China administered the disputed region of Aksai Chin which was a violent clash with fatalities.

The clash of 15 June broke out over two Chinese bases and observation towers allegedly built on the Indian side of LAC. India claimed that the Chinese troops breached the line and set up temporary structures a week before the agreement on tension de-escalation. Clashes broke out as Indian patrol approached the hill to confirm if the Chinese troops had withdrawn. At the same time, a large group of Chinese troops came face to face with Indian troops which soon turned into an armed conflict. There are two major reasons for violent clashes. The first one is India's repeal of Article 370. It led India to have full control of Ladakh as it was the major disputed region between the two countries. Another, China was reacting to road construction and checkpoints on India's border because India had built a 255 km Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) along the LAC. As a result, these factors led to the violent Galwan Valley crisis (Tamer, 2022). The localized intense conflict escalated into a full-blown crisis with both sides deploying additional military forces, arms and ammunition which was on the way towards the brink of another war. Fortunately, further conflict was prevented by the political and military officials' endeavours (Banerjee, 2022). Similarly, a Chinese soldier was captured by Indian Army in Ladakh on 9 January 2021 and was returned on 11

January. Later, on 20 January 2021, a minor border clash took place in Naku La Sikkim which was denied by the Chinese officials. During this period, a series of talks were held at different levels from both sides in diplomatic, military and state levels which calmed down the intense situations gradually. However, the construction works of infrastructures, patrolling and other activities are undergoing in those disputed regions and surroundings which come to the surface at times.

To discuss the latest developed situations in the border issue, an event of 9 December 2022 is a notable one. There was a clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh with a few soldiers suffering minor injuries on both sides. India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressed the parliament that the Chinese troops encroached into Indian territory and tried to change the status quo along the disputed border near the Yangtse area. On the other side, the Chinese foreign minister giving no details on the incident stated that the situation at the border was generally stable (BBC, 2022).

To sum up, the harsh clash of Galwan Valley was a significant event in Sino-Indian relations as it shattered the 1988 consensus of keeping border disputes apart from broader relationships and enhancing diplomatic and economic relations (Banerjee, 2022). Along, this event has raised a question mark in the past achievements of improved and prospered economic and diplomatic ties along with its future relationship ahead.

4.10 Sino-Indian Border Dispute and its Geopolitics

Sino-Indian relations since the independence of India in 1947 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 have gone through several twists and turns and the relationship has been determined by several factors where the chronic unsolved issues of border dispute are the prime reason which has played a huge role in the shaping of the Sino-Indian relations in South Asia region. Sino-Indian border dispute thus should be understood and analyzed through the lens of geopolitics which has a significant role in the political, economic and strategic development in the whole South Asian region. Sino-Indian relations have confronted a series of upheavals since the 1962 war coming to the 2020-2021 Galwan Valley confrontation.

If we compare and analyze the history of Sino-Indian relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1950, followed by the 1962 Sino-Indian war to the present time, the current Galwan Valley clash in 2020 is worse than the 1962 war and 72 days long Doklam stand-off of 1967. They are at the worst diplomatic relations as of now. The already deteriorating relationship has been worsened by this event of clash. The frequent occurrence of border clashes and stand-offs seems like a kind of normal incident in the Himalayan regions because the Line of Actual Control has not been demarcated. Thus this unsolved riddle of LAC always welcomes the situations of confrontations between the countries. The Galwan clash, Demchok issue, Pangong Lake and Nathu La disputes are the outcomes of non-other than the unresolved demarcation of LAC. Xi Jin Ping's foreign policy is seen in aggressive form in the context of border confrontation. The speculations regarding the Chinese aggression at the border can be outlined in some points. For instance, India's Article 370 abrogation changed the status of Ladakh. Similarly, the affinity between India and the United States and along with the relational improvement between India and Taiwan can be analysed as the reasons for Chinese border aggressions (Singh, 2021).

In this scenario, it seems that China as a stronger military power has tried to show India her place. It is also observed that whenever there is a domestic issue, China possesses risk-taking behaviour to distract people from their problems. In this case, China was being criticized in the coronavirus pandemic. It seems that China manifested its aggression in the border issue. As a reaction to this incident, India in retaliation banned fifty-nine Chinese applications like PubG and Tiktok which were widely popular. China asked India to separate boundary disputes from business in which India clearly stated that until the status quo is not restored, there is no possibility of returning to normalcy between the countries. Furthermore, to reduce the country's dependence on China, India tried to initiate the task by calling it 'atmanirbharta' (self-reliance). India said that investment from China should be discouraged to show that India may be militarily weak compared to China but can hurt China economically. The Galwan Valley clash in a way has motivated India to develop close and stronger relationships with Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, France and the United Kingdom (Singh, 2021).

Likewise, China on the other side has also developed a stronger relationship with Pakistan, a big Indian rival to pressurize India in return. Gilgit-Baltistan was a part of

Pakistan-administered Kashmir which has been the point of dispute between India and Pakistan since the 1947 partition. But in September 2020, Pakistan elevated Gilgit-Baltistan's status as a full-fledged province (Singh, 2021). This decision has a significant impact on Sino-Pak relations. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through Gilgit-Baltistan. Hence, it legalises the Chinese activities undertaken in the CPEC region. Further, China initiated a stronger affinity towards Nepal as Nepal-India are undergoing a bitter relationship since the 2015 economic blockade by India in Nepal and the Kalapani and Limpiyadhura border issue in the west of Nepal. China was successful to grab this huge opportunity of dampening relations between India and Nepal through historical trade transit agreements with Nepal as well as involving Nepal in its ambitious Belt and Road Initiatives. China has also loaned one billion dollars to Sri Lanka as a part of economic assistance. These actions resemble China's endeavours in appealing to India's neighbours to pressurize the Indian counterpart.

The border clash between the two most powerful nations of Asia is a serious matter regionally and globally as well. This contention has motivated and compelled them to adopt coercive diplomacy. While China on one side is approaching the small states of South Asia through BRI and other economic aids, on the other side, India is also developing new diplomatic relationships. For instance, India has been invited as a 'guest country' for a G-7 Summit (Singh, 2021).

The recent Galwan Valley crisis as a serious issue resembles a significant incident that has played a huge role in destroying and changing the course of Sino-Indian relations in the last 70 years. The clash has played a prominent role in determining the relation from a very different perspective. The Galwan clash created shockwaves across China and India and obviously in South Asia. As a result, India has moved closer to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), commonly known as QUAD (Shivamurthy, 2022). It has focused on military modernisation and cooperation. The rivalry has intensified and the relationship between them is also being polarised thus, the starting struggle for power and status is taking a course in the Indo-Pacific region as a pivot of geopolitics where the status as well as the role of South Asia has become more strategic.

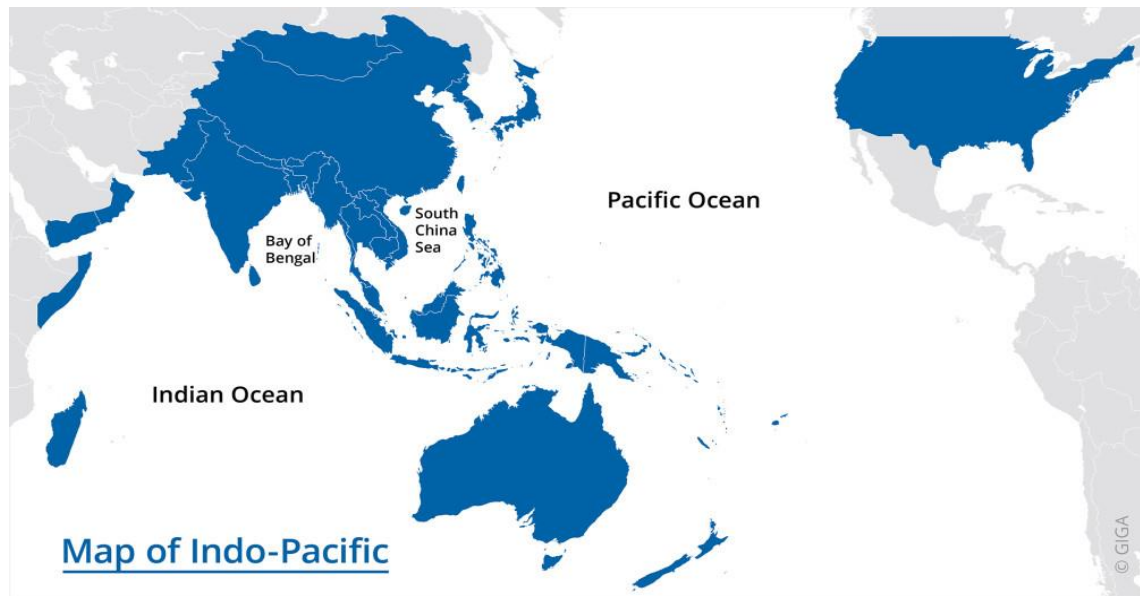
Both India and China are concentrating towards exerting their influence in the immediate region of South Asia, South East Asia and the entire Indo-Pacific region. South Asia region and the Indian Ocean are the first lines of defence for India regarding

the status of 'regional power'. India is also focusing on investing in various connectivity projects to counter the diplomatic and economic influence of China. On the other hand, as China has progressed immensely in military, economic and political aspects, it has been looked up as an emerging world giant after the United States. Thus, China is focusing to solidify its status as a power in Asia. For this objective, it is actively working to approach South Asian countries. It is aiming at gaining access to the vast resources of the Indian Ocean by encircling the Indian Sub-continent and securing crucial Sea Line communication. Hence, China has adopted the Belt and Road Initiatives as an ambitious tool to achieve these goals through the nexus build-up in the entire South Asia (Shivamurthy, 2022).

IPS, BRI and South Asia

Indo-Pacific is a vast biogeographic region on the earth that comprises the Indian Ocean, and the Western and Central Pacific Oceans. It is a vast region rich in biodiversity and with ecological significance. Later, the term Indo-Pacific started in use in the academia of geopolitics. Hence, this term geopolitically covers all nations and islands surrounding the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean. Karl Haushofer, a German geopolitician used the term "Indo-Pacific" for the first time in the 1920s in his several works on geography and geopolitics. The term "Indo-Pacific Strategy" was for the first time was used by Gurpreet S. Khurana in 2007 who was a marine strategist and executive director of the New Delhi Marine Foundation (Dingding, 2018).

Figure 9 Indo-Pacific Region



Source: eas.org

Similarly, the former Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe used the term while addressing the Indian parliament in 2007. Later on, former US President Donald Trump used the term in terms of strategy. Indo-Pacific Strategy as stated by the United States is the strategic concept committed to an Indo-Pacific which is free and open, connected, prosperous, secure and resilient (The White House, 2022). United States through Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) has five objectives that it will pursue in the Indo-Pacific each with collaborations, allies, partners and regional institutions. The United States through the Indo-Pacific Strategy works at advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific, building connections within and beyond the region, driving regional prosperity, bolstering Indo-Pacific Security and building regional resilience to transnational threats. The strategic means of IPS according to The White House are the modernized alliances, flexible partnerships including empowered ASEAN, strong and reliable Quad, engaged Europe, economic partnership, new U.S. defence diplomacy and foreign assistance (The White House, 2022).

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a key theatre of engagement. It is because of its significance geopolitically as the world powers like the US, China and Europe are focused in the region. The region is strategically very important with the engagement of great power competition. China's growing capability and influence across the Indo-Pacific provoke pressing questions for the US strategy in the region. Asia is

undergoing a major power transition along with military advancement shifting the offense-defense balance in the region. In this circumstance, the United States and its allies respond differently. The Indo-Pacific used by the U.S. signifies the allies of Asian democracies i.e. Indian, Australia and Japan with the United States in the new framework of growing cold war-like influence aiming fundamentally at curbing China in south and southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific region as a whole (Dingding, 2018).

China's emperor Zhang Qian assisted in the initiation of the Silk Road in around 114 BCE which was a network of trade routes that connected China with Central Asia and the Arab world. Silk was China's most important export thus derived the name of the route Silk Road. The route was historically significant that fostered the progress of the entire region for centuries. Once again in 2013, Xi Jinping, the current president of China envisioned the re-establishment of a modern version of the Silk Road that would diminish the borders between China and Central Asia, West Asia and parts of South Asia (Poudyal, 2019). To sum up, BRI is the strategy initiated by the People's Republic of China that seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe through land and maritime networks aiming at improving regional integration, increasing trade and economic growth. It was referred to as One Belt One Road (OBOR) in the past.

Figure 10 Belt and Road Initiatives with its land and maritime route across the globe



Source: beltroadresearch.com

Like IPS, BRI also has proposed its five priorities which include policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and connecting people. BRI is dedicated towards the development of infrastructure like ports, roads, railways, airports, power plants and telecommunication networks with large investment programmes. It is an important umbrella mechanism of China's bilateral trade with its partners (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2023). By December 2022, 148 countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China to be part of the Belt and Road Initiatives (Wang, 2022).

"South Asia" and "Indian Subcontinent" are the two terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. South Asia is the southern subregion of Asia in both geographical and ethnic-cultural forms. This region consists of the countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. South Asia is dominated by the Indian Subcontinent and defined largely by the Indian Ocean in the south, and the Himalayas, Karakoram and Pamir mountains in the north. South Asia is bounded by Western Asia, Central Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic cooperation organisation established in 1985 that includes all eight nations comprising South Asia (Yefremov et al., 2023). There are currently nine observers to SAARC including the world powers United States, China and along with the European Union. The main objectives of SAARC include promoting the welfare of the people of South Asia improving their quality of life, accelerating economic growth, promoting and strengthening collective self-reliance, promoting and contributing to mutual trust and collaboration along with strengthening cooperation with other developing countries.

Figure 11 South Asian region



Source: freepik.com

South Asia comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% (US \$ 2.9 trillion) of the global economy. It is the world's most densely populated region and one of the most fertile areas. This region shares common traditions, culture, language, religions and political aspects including common problems like poverty, illiteracy, natural disasters, internal conflicts, terrorism, industrial and technological backwardness with poor economic conditions (Drishti, 2019). Moreover, this region holds a geopolitical significance being situated between the Indian Ocean in the south and the Himalayan range in the north. India as a member of South Asia is a big regional actor. Thus, South Asia is geopolitically very important and sensitive as well.

Chinese scholars believe that the rise of China along with the geopolitical changes brought by its rise is considered the major reason the US is devoting its efforts to boosting the Indo-Pacific alliance (Dingding, 2018). They argue that IPS is solely intended to hedge against China's foreign policy and security level. The US as a leader and its ally members Japan, Australia and India along with Southeast Asian countries play significant roles in the Indo-Pacific strategy. These countries are actively devoted

towards the strategy. More importantly, India has always been a country with big ambitions regarding the economic and regional power in South Asia and the entire Asia region. That is the reason India advocates the concept of Indo-Pacific Strategy as it is a crucial tool for India to counter its rival China. Likewise, Southeast Asia is the key area that cannot be ignored because this is a key location that links the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Indonesia and Singapore are supporters of IPS. It is obvious that the smaller countries of Southeast Asia are caught between China and US and they are afraid of regional order change by the rise of China but also do not want to lose the advantages brought about by China's economic development. It is also clear that by isolating China and its vigorous emergence in the world, the U.S. and its allies via IPS are aiming at creating hegemony in the region by counterbalancing China. India as a major stakeholder of IPS has key geopolitical significance in countering China in different respects (Dingding, 2018).

Likewise, China has initiated its ambitious BRI strategy across the globe but there are questions and a lot of suspicions regarding the objectives and motives of this strategy in the Western media. Is it a nexus of railway tracks, roads and other infrastructures interconnecting Asia and the rest of the world or is it just China's disguised strategy to tempt countries with investments to create a paradigm shift to the multipolar world order? This is the line created in the world relating to the reality and authenticity of the objectives of BRI by the West. Unlike the five principle objectives of IPS that include security alliance in the Indo-Pacific region as a key priority, the BRI of China does not have included security-based issues. It is completely free from security-related goals rather its five principle priorities are completely dedicated towards infrastructure development, trade and finance and connecting people. It aims at constructing a massive global platform for economic collaboration including policy coordination, free trade, and financial cooperation along with socio-cultural partnerships in the region (Poudyal, 2019). To date, 148 countries are members of BRI while India has not participated in it. Entire South Asia besides India and Bhutan has been connected with BRI. It is thus clear that South Asia is a sensitive and fragile region geopolitically. India along with IPS is standing on one side while China and its BRI are standing on the other side which resembles the geostrategic significance of South Asia.

Sino-Indian Border Conflict and Indo-Pacific Strategy

The long run and yet unresolved riddle of the China-India border conflict across LAC has intensified the relationship in multiple aspects and increasingly becoming sensitive in the region. It is sensitive in the sense that it is a battle of power between two big giants of Asia with nuclear arms and huge economies as well. The conflict influences the Indo-Pacific region because of its proximity. In such circumstances, the United States has a strategic interest in what happens between India and China.

US policymakers are prepared for a potential India-China border crisis in future in which the US should position itself diplomatically and militarily to prevent the possible conflict as well as to react to any potential outbreak of hostilities. The US has spent a great deal of time and resources wargaming potential Indo-Pak war but has not paid sufficient attention to similar wargaming related to the India-China conflict (Curtis & Grossman, 2023). In the present world order the US as a superpower has the biggest rivalry with China as China is a rapidly emerging global power. In such a scenario, the United States and India's alignment is obvious. It is seen in the strategy of the US regarding the Sino-Indian border crisis of 2020. For instance, National Defense Strategy briefly stated the Pentagon's intent to support India in the border crisis against China though it was not mentioned by the Biden administration's National Security Strategy (Curtis & Grossman, 2023). US attention was less consumed in the India-China border dispute as compared to its attention to Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. However, the intensified situations of the Galwan Valley and Tawang incidents are the indicators of intense conflict between India and China that resemble the significance of US concerns and engagement in its goals of the Indo-Pacific region.

For the United States, one implication of intensified border friction between New Delhi and Beijing is a further hardening of India's position on China and a compatible deepening of its partnership with increasing affinity with the US. India believes that China is trying to contain India by forcing it to divert its resources to defence mechanisms in border issues of the western border with Pakistan and the eastern border of China. As a result, China could weaken India's willingness to challenge Chinese regional hegemony (Curtis & Grossman, 2023). The Line of Actual Control (LAC) crisis of 2020 has brought India's clear view in its strategic approach towards China which has ultimately aided the US in converging India in its way. However, India and the US differ

in defence-related activities. For instance, though the US is eager to enhance defence planning and coordination among the four member nations of the Quad, India seems reluctant to focus Quad cooperation on defence-related activities along with a large reluctance to speak against Chinese aggression towards the Taiwan issue. But the hardening Indian position on China undoubtedly facilitates enhancing Indian affinity towards the Indo-Pacific strategy in the form of Washington's "integrated deterrence" strategy of IPS against China. Likewise, another potential way to deter China from further encroaching on Indian territory is through deterrence by Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. For instance, with the help of ISR, Chinese activities across the border can be monitored and revealed to the public which could help to prevent China with its aggressive military plans which seems challenging but of course, could help the US in its strategy against China. However, the armed conflict between China and India is a new challenge for the US but not because of possible threats of nuclear war but because of the higher possibility of engagement of Pakistan which could be a more complicated challenge because of potential tripartite nuclear power confrontation.

The aggressive border actions of China can be analyzed relating it with the ISP and India's active participation in the US relations. It seems that China had a strategic objective of pressurizing India to back away from its growing security ties with the US and it's actively growing involvement with Quad. China views the Quad as hedging and containing China. Similarly, it can be understood that China wanted to demonstrate that it was consolidating its control over Aksai Chin similar to the Article 370 abrogation and consolidating its hold over Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh by India in August 2019 (Curtis & Grossman, 2023).

India and China have made continued tries to shelter the disagreements over their shared border issues along with the issues of Dalai Lama, China's security cooperation with Pakistan, trade, and the entire geopolitics of South Asia and Asia as a whole. But no remarkable achievements have been obtained yet which is because of the 2017 Doklam crisis and the 2020 Galwan Valley crisis. China's policy towards India has shifted in the past two to three years. Besides the Sino-Indian border crisis, Beijing fears an emerging India-U.S. tie as a part of Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Chinese scholar Yun Sun (2020) says that China believes in power politics and its superiority whose vision for

Asia is strictly hierarchical with China at the top and not considering India as equal. According to him, China has recognized India as a country with historical influence in South Asia with the capability as a regional power and its potential to rise globally. Hence, China's policy towards India is largely based on the pattern of balancing India in South Asia by supporting Pakistan and developing ties with small countries in the region. In addition, China tends to prevent an India-U.S. alignment in Asia by trying to build a coalition with India on a global level as a member of the Global South. Xi and Modi both are ambitious leaders which is a reason that has somehow elevated the stress in bilateral relations. Xi through his Belt and Road Initiatives and Modi with his Modi doctrine is trying to expand their influences which have created bilateral chaos in recent years.

Sun (2020) argues that India is not China's primary threat and South Asia is also not China's primary theatre. According to him, China would prefer to save on costs and minimize its military and strategic resources on India. Moreover, China is not interested in having conflict with India over the border issues because if China thinks that even if China could defeat and contain India through war, the payoff for China would be minimal because it wouldn't address China's major external security challenge in the Indo-Pacific region. Instead, the breakdown in ties with India would further expose China in its primary theatre with the United States. So that China's best strategic goal is to avoid confrontation with the United States along with India.

Apart, another factor for China to distrust India is the expanding India-U.S. ties through Indo-Pacific Strategy which was released three months after the Doklam stand-off. The strategy seeks to secure India in its larger Asian position. The role, assistance, alignment and power status offered by the U.S. to India has created a situation of serious threat for China in the immediate region of the Indo-Pacific (Korkmaz, 2020). China's policy towards India has been mostly determined by the U.S. factor at present. In such circumstances, facing the American military along with the Indian military at sea and southern border respectively becomes more threatening and dangerous with the defence cooperation between India and the United States. Such cooperation will damage the security and stability of China's southern border which will have an intense impact on China's strategic policy towards entire South Asia besides India.

Despite the official elevation of Sino-Indian relations to an unrivalled level, China and India both have distrust and hostility towards each other because of their

incompatible interests on the key issues as they both are powers with regional hegemonic ambition and potential. Until and unless they both find a mutually agreeable compromise on their issues, their structural conflict cannot be made compatible. In such circumstances, there are different prospects for each country's endeavours towards their power balance, power exhibition and creating influence in South Asia and Asia as a whole. The Indo-Pacific region is depicted as one of the most critical regions for world powers U.S., China, India and other countries as well. Notably, 60% of the global maritime trade goes through this region. As such, the US strategy shows that India is a key country in containing China (Korkmaz, 2020). In addition, India will like to see the US on its side in military and diplomatic support in its dispute with China but is likely to avoid staying between the two emerging powers as well. Hence, it seems to be a tremendous geopolitical mess. It is so because China on one side is attempting to expand its influence in the region but does not want to face India. Similarly, India wants to align with the US but does not want to welcome a superpower being involved in its region.

BRI and Sino-Indian Conflict

China's Belt and Road Initiatives can be seen as a revival of economic and political integration through infrastructure, trade and diplomacy and no doubt locating China in the centre of trade and geopolitics by demonstrating China's roots in the history of the Silk Road. The ancient Silk Road encouraged not only trade connectivity but accessed China in gaining imperial power. BRI has promised the prospects of infrastructure development and trade connectivity to foster economic growth and of course, the reality of Chinese dominion in the world economy in a neo-colonial manner cannot be denied as it is the centre of this strategy of BRI. Many Western scholars including the liberals indicate BRI as a key tool to neo-colonialism that uses no military force to exert control but deploys the economic means to acquire power. The important thing about the criticism of BRI by the West or say United States has no ethical or logical ground because the U.S. itself along with Europe are guilty of tactics of global market and economy through several means like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) etc. (Murray, 2022). In such a case, there is no thematic difference between the Chinese BRI module of expansion and U.S. and Europe's globalisation concepts.

BRI has had significant impacts in South Asia which has proved South Asia as a fragile ground for BRI and IPS. If it is considered economic, it has been proven

important means in the South Asia region. For instance, the Sino-Pak economic corridor (CPEC) shows the capability of BRI to stimulate economic growth for a country. Pakistan has experienced significant improvements in the energy industry as well as transport infrastructure. From 2013 to 2020, 24 energy projects were completed increasing the country's overall capability by 11%. BRI has remarkably contributed to poverty reduction by improving in Pakistan. However, BRI has been highly criticized as a debt trap. Though Pakistan cannot be labelled as a victim of so-called China's neo-colonial tactics and debt-trap diplomacy, Sri Lanka is the best example of a debt trap that has experienced significant consequences of BRI loans following the failure to complete debt payments. Due to this reason, Hambantota port of Sri Lanka was forced to be leased with 70% of stakes going to China. Though BRI claims to promote infrastructure development, in the case of Sri Lanka it has been proved wrong (Murray, 2022).

While discussing BRI, considering the United States is obvious. It is so because the success of BRI would greatly impact the effectiveness of US-led trade blocs and their global position in markets. Exposure to BRI will pose a considerable threat to US and EU trade. In return to counter this, the US has also announced numerous rival initiatives to create desirable alternatives. For instance, The Blue Dot Network (BDN) is a collaborative financial institution from US, Japan and Australia to develop infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region. Similarly, The Small And Less Populous Islands Economics (SALPIE) was announced which was aimed at assisting economic growth and security in the Caribbean and Pacific region. Unfortunately, these approaches of the US have not yet provided significant infrastructure schemes that can level up the alternatives to BRI which ultimately has been a catalyst for BRI to flourish in the world economy (Murray, 2022).

India-China relations along with their long run border dispute have key significance in the BRI strategy of China. China-India rivalry has a big impact on the initiative. India is yet not a member of BRI whereas it is an ally of US-led IPS. In this sense, the non-participation of India in BRI holds a big resemblance to the Sino-Indian border conflict and its consequences. Hence, the perceptions of India regarding BRI should be understood within the broader context of India-China relations. They both are more or less nervous about each other's rise in the region. Many scholars say that India-China relations consist of four Cs: Conflict, Competition, Cooperation and Containment.

The Indian government has neither fully rejected the initiative nor endorsed it. But they have opposed CPEC activities (Sachdeva, 2019). There are two folds of BRI that India has concerns about. The first one is the CPEC which has sovereignty-related issues due to the disputed territory involved and the second is the maritime Silk Road which has strategic considerations. Some academic discourses are sceptical towards its goals while some feel that in a rapidly evolving global and Asian order, India must initiate in balancing between short-term gains and long-term interests. Many scholars focusing on economic issues see BRI as an opportunity for India as India could take advantage of China's infrastructure investments in Asia. So India instead of opposing it, should integrate some of BRI initiatives into its connectivity plans which significantly help India to access Eurasia. Some argue that it is very useful not only for India but also for the entire South Asian region because almost all economies in the region are closely integrated with the Indian economy. Thus, India can play a leading role in the South Asia region in infrastructure and economic integration (Sachdeva, 2019).

In the context of changing scope of BRI, India's perceptions are also evolving. The narratives on BRI are diverse. India seems liberal regarding BRI but at the same time cannot accept CPEC as a sovereignty-related issue. Moreover, most importantly, the Doklam crisis of 2017 followed by the Galwan Valley crisis of 2020 has completely changed the Indian perceptions towards BRI by opposing it and diverting towards the Indo-Pacific alignment and becoming active in Quad-related activities. Except for India and Bhutan, the rest of all South Asian countries have participated in BRI. In such a situation, India seems to lose its influence over other countries in South Asia. Also, the alignment with Indo-Pacific Strategy has significant impacts in the South Asia region. The Galwan crisis and CPEC are distancing factors between India and BRI while the Doklam issue has played a major role in the reluctance of Bhutan towards BRI. This resembles that BRI and IPS have conflicting interests in South Asia which is fundamentally determined by the Sino-Indian border dispute in recent years.

Sino-Indian Border Conflict and South Asia

South Asia as a region has China as one of the giants of Asia as its neighbours share their boundaries with India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bhutan. Therefore, it is logical that the importance of this world's emerging largest populated nation which has large manpower and military might, a technological base and political institutions is immense

which has an extraneous effect in the region of South Asia. Thus, the role of China as extra-regional power in South Asia is very important (Yadav, 2015).

India is an emerging giant in Asia and is the largest country in South Asia geographically and economically. India counts itself as a rival of China. It is thus clear that the relations between China and India in several ways determine the condition and status of South Asia. So, South Asia is situated in a deep geostrategic condition amidst multidimensional factors of Sino-Indian relations. South Asia is a region which shares identical socio-economic, political and cultural along with geographical features. It has common problems and challenges of poverty, poor infrastructure and a backward economy with several socio-political challenges. Nevertheless, it holds an immense prospect of economic prosperity with its rich natural resources, manpower and more. Unfortunately, in the geopolitical aspect, this region is a vulnerable zone. It has geo-strategic challenges being a region where world giant state actors are concentrating their priorities. As a superior power, India is a prominent actor in South Asia while China in the north as extra-regional power is equally contending in the region. The United States cannot be undermined which is by default engaged in the region in the titles of US-China rivalry and US-Indo ties in the Indo-Pacific region and other several issues of power exercise and influence. The United States and China both see South Asia as an important geopolitical priority. They recognize South Asia's strategic geography, the growing population, nuclear power and terrorism risks and the natural resources as well. It is a key area regarding Washington's goal of building a free and open Indo-Pacific and Beijing's revising the Eurasian political and security order and becoming the leading Asian power through its ambitious economic influence of Belt and Road Initiatives (USIP China-South Asia Senior Study Group, 2020). Emerging of Sino-American strategic competition is likely to influence US and Chinese engagement in South Asia.

Different relational equations have existed in the region of South Asia in the titles of different motives and strategies. In the first place, India itself as a major actor and emerging regional power is the reason which makes him responsible for the external powers' involvement in the region. India's rise is directly proportional to China's involvement with the United States. India's rivalry with China has different impacts that create different scenarios. For instance, India's rivalry with China has welcomed the US-India ties in the title of Indo-Pacific strategy. Similarly, India's relationship with Pakistan

has immense impact on the region. Thus, there are multiple factors of relationship equations. India-United States ties, Indo-Pak conflict, Sino-Indian rivalry, Sino-Indian border conflict and Sino-American rivalry of superpowers are the relational equations that hugely determine the structure and condition of South Asia. Thus, multidimensional factors play a role in the shaping of the South Asian region.

There is a clear contradiction between US and China regarding their involvement in South Asia. There is US-China bilateral competition and confrontation along with cooperation in certain issues of the region. Both countries have a mutual interest in countering violent extremism, strategic stability, crisis management between India and Pakistan and promoting economic development of the region. But both countries' bilateral tensions and suspicions of each other have heavily restricted the prospects of cooperation in the region. In the Indo-Pak relation crisis, there is complete alienation between the US and China where China is mostly taking Pakistan's side and the United States is taking the side of India (USIP China-South Asia Senior Study Group, 2020). Moreover, the US-China tussles and Indo-Pak crisis provoke the Sino-Indian border conflict and vice-versa. The recent crisis of Doklam and Galwan Valley has directly or indirectly fueled the already worsening relationship of India-Pakistan along with India's strong tie with the US in Indo-Pacific Strategy and Quad as well. Similarly, worsened Sino-Indian relationship has deep impacts on the rest of the small countries of South Asia which are experiencing a situation of being trapped in between the clashes of rivals. As compared to India, the other members of South Asia are economically, militarily and strategically far behind. In such circumstances, they are vulnerable to political and economic instability followed by threats of sovereignty between the two giants with the additional involvement of external world powers.

The impacts of Sino-Indian rivalry and border disputes in South Asian countries can be analyzed based on individual countries and their impact on them from different perspectives.

Pakistan

In the South Asian region, Pakistan plays a significant role geopolitically and geostrategically lying in between the great-power competition i.e. Sino-Indian relations. So the South Asian strategic dynamics can be analyzed within the frame of India as a

major defence partner of United States which is a counterweight to China and its all-weather friend, Pakistan. Pakistan's relationship with India cannot be defined in a single dimension as their relationship in history is full of conflicts and chaos with very little affinity since the 1947 partition. They have a complex and largely hostile relationship rooted in a multitude of historical and political events. So India's biggest threat is not only China's increased aggression in the region but also its relationship with Pakistan. The strong friendly relationship between Pakistan and China resembles a geopolitical significance in the region. The two countries find themselves hedging the power of India in South Asia. Former Pakistani ambassador to U.S. Hussain Haqqani once said that for China, Pakistan is a low-cost secondary deterrent to India and for Pakistan; China is a high-value guarantor of security against India (Fazli, 2022).

In the past decade, China and Pakistan have fostered their relationship wide and deep with immense economic, military and strategic cooperation. The two countries inaugurated the BRI flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015. China is the largest export partner of Pakistan. The security affairs of Pakistan are also continuously in partnership with China in the form of joint and multinational military exercises and purchasing of key defence equipment. Interestingly, the surprising rise of the Sino-Pak relationship is occurring parallel to the decline of the US-Pakistan difficult relationship (Fazli, 2022).

The recent crisis in the Sino-Indian relationship has had significant impacts on the relationship with Pakistan. The current dispute is entirely dependent upon the aims of China. India claims that China wants a unipolar Asia. And it seems approximately true as China is getting closer to other countries by offering them bilateral benefits. For instance, CPEC is the best example of China's initiative which aims at the development of roads and infrastructures in Pakistan for economic upgradation. Pakistan provides its land for the construction of the infrastructures where trade and economic activities are initiated and implanted by China. Pakistan may or may not have direct involvement or relations in the Sino-Indian dispute but it is clear that their disputes have a direct impact on Pakistan-China relations and Indo-Pakistan relations individually in different aspects. The overall impacts of Sino-Indian border disputes are linked with the Sino-Pak relationship, its impactful CPEC, the Agreement of 1963 Sino-Pak relations, and its strong alliance. In addition, as China, Pakistan and India all three countries share a tri-junction border in

Karakoram Tract; the Sino-Indian border dispute has a significant impact on Pakistan and its relations.

More or less, Pakistan has got involved directly or indirectly in the India-China border conflict. The first convincing reason behind it is the prominent Sino-Pak friendship. India has its eyes always on Sino-Pak relations and is always cautious about their relations. Pakistan has always supported China in many aspects and same from the side of China to Pakistan. When Pakistan was having a serious conflict with India on Jammu & Kashmir dispute, China was standing beside him and while China got into a war with India in 1962, Pakistan took the first place to stand beside him as a trustworthy and strong friend. CPEC is the best example of their strong relationship which is a significant partnership in which China is investing billions of dollars in infrastructure development in Pakistan. But India perceives this economic tie and friendship as a serious threat towards its territorial integrity as Pakistan allowed China in its administered Kashmir region to initiate its CPEC initiative. Hence, these instances resemble the impacts of the Sino-Indian border conflict as geopolitically significant tripartite relationships in fragile South Asia (Fazli, 2022).

Bangladesh

The Doklam crisis and the Galwan confrontation have invited new diplomatic challenges in South Asia because of the widening gap between the two Asian powers that is manifested in the military, economic and diplomatic tensions. Amidst these challenges, Bangladesh is determined to pursue a balanced relationship with both countries with the policy of friendship to all and malice towards none. Bangladesh values its relations with both India and China and wants to remain engaged with them based on its considerations. Geographically, Bangladesh does not border with China as it is bordered by India from three sides terrestrially and the southern part has maritime linkage with the Indian Ocean through its Bay of Bengal. Geostrategically, China is in the north of Bangladesh and India can be considered in the east and west. The country has experienced remarkable socio-economic progress in the past decade. Regional initiatives like BRI and other several initiatives have put a spotlight on Bangladesh due to its growing geopolitical significance. Besides BRI, other major initiatives include Japan's Bay of Bengal Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative, Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Act East Policy of India (Hossain, 2022).

Sino-Indian competition visibly influences Bangladesh's foreign policy and strategy. The country is dedicated towards proactive and deepening bilateral relations with both China and India while considering their rivalry in a measured manner. Both China and India are the leading trade and development partners of Bangladesh in which China comes first as the largest trade partner followed by India in second place of trade partnership. Besides economic engagements, Bangladesh enjoys remarkable trust and confidence on the political and diplomatic fronts with both of them. Bangladesh has been always assisted by China in terms of providing arms and equipment under bilateral arrangements and India on the other side has always collaborated and cooperated with Bangladesh on security issues like border security, cross-border terrorism and border management. The Land and Border Agreement (LBA) 2015 was signed on 6th June 2015 in Bangladesh which is the historic agreement that has resolved the long run India-Bangladesh border issues. Likewise, on the multilateral front, Bangladesh works with both India and China. For instance, Bangladesh is engaged with India in regional organisations like SAARC, and the Bay of Bengal Initiative of Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Similarly, Bangladesh mutually engages with both countries through Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) along with Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) grouping.

Considering the Bangladesh-China relations, analysts and experts in Bangladesh argue that amidst the rivalries between world powers, Bangladesh should not confine itself to BRI but rather engage in other initiatives that could serve its national interest. Besides, possible threats and challenges of relations with China include the 'debt-trap' fear which is observed in the case of Sri Lanka as well as the Rohingya crisis in which China is shielding the Myanmar regime in the U.N. Similarly, the trade deficit of Bangladesh is challenging the mutually beneficial economic partnership with China. Bangladesh-India relations have elevated over a decade with a historical resolution of long-disputed land and maritime border issues in 2015. However, some issues relating to sharing and management of water resources along with drug trafficking, cross-border terrorist links, border-linking human trafficking etc. are big challenges which are yet unresolved. The issues related to India's National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have created concerns amongst Bangladeshi people.

Rohingya issue is also a problematic issue which has impacts on bilateral relations (Hossain, 2022).

The overall view of Bangladesh's relations with China and India is balanced and devoted towards cooperation. However, the Sino-Indian conflict of borders may hamper the overall collaboration in South Asia amidst the big powers' rivalry.

Bhutan

Bhutan as a small state residing in between two emerging world powers is in a geostrategic location. Bhutan has always been in a friendly, enduring and mutually beneficial relationship with India from the very beginning time of the British Rule era. China's Tibet annexation in 1950 brought Bhutan even closer to India to resist the Chinese expansionist endeavour and retain its sovereignty. In contrast, despite the shared culture and religion, the relationship between Bhutan and Tibet could not flourish. Tibet and Bhutan have a history of confrontation in the 17th century due to the Tibetan invasion of Bhutan. So they did not have a cordial relationship. After the Chinese annexation of Tibet, Bhutan recognised Tibet as a part of China. Bhutan got exposure in the external world quite late in 1971 after its membership in United Nations. Bhutan is strongly adhering to the norms of the UN and advocates national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Bhutan is a sovereign Himalayan Kingdom who have a history of never being colonised but has always been an Indian protectorate. Bhutan's security matters are largely dependent upon India. Bhutan's relationship with India can be analyzed through the perspective of the Indian protectorate. Bhutan and China do not maintain official diplomatic relations and their relations are historically tense while territorial disputes are major issues between them. Still, they have a good relationship while they perform trade and economic activities where Chinese imports of consumer goods and materials have grown in Bhutan though Bhutan has negligible exports to China. However, geopolitically Bhutan is located in a challenging position between big rivals. In addition, its relationship with China in recent years has shifted since the Doklam crisis of 2017. The Doklam plateau issue in its boundary region is the most significant factor that determines the Sino-Bhutanese relations along with the impacts of Sino-Indian conflicts. There are three interrelated issues which fundamentally describe and determine Sino-Bhutanese relations. They are the status of Indo-Bhutanese

relations, diplomatic relations between Beijing and Thimpu and the demarcation between the two countries (Bhandari, 2022).

Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 2007 has governed the relationship between India and Bhutan. Article 2 of the Treaty has a provision which says that the two governments shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interest and neither government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other. The friendship of Bhutan with India is beneficial in various aspects. With the limited resources and expertise in Bhutan, India is assisting Bhutan in building up its security largely based on its Friendship Treaty. Bhutan itself has cooperated with India in the protection of its territory. The geographical orientation of Bhutan is naturally to the south. Due to its harsh geographical features in the north with high mountains and terrains, it is easier for landlocked Bhutan to trade with India along with connecting to the rest of the world through Indian transit using the ports of Kolkata (Bhandari, 2022). Bhutan is a young constitutional democracy. India has helped him to strengthen its independence and sovereignty and its national security. India has helped Bhutan in the wide field of economic development and remains its largest development partner.

Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic relationships with other powerful nations including all permanent security council members of the UN. Experts argue that behind this condition, India's hegemonic behaviour over Bhutan in the name of a protectorate is the main reason. But it necessarily does not mean that Bhutan cannot have a friendly relationship with them. However, the relations between Bhutan and China in recent years especially since the 2017 Doklam confrontation are facing challenges in their relationship. The two countries share a 764 km long border along the Himalayas. Despite several rounds of discussions and meetings, border dispute resolution has not been accomplished. The Doklam issue has put Bhutan in a difficult and awkward position. Though it does not want to antagonize the relations with either of them, its whole security cooperation is largely India-dependent. Thus, Bhutan's dependence on India is obvious and he wants China to understand it and accept it. The Bhutan-China border issue can be linked with India-China border issues. It is thus clear that the Sino-Indian border has a direct impact on Sino-Bhutanese relations. Experts argue that China wants to obtain more concessions from India by taking a tough stance with Bhutan and trying

to push Bhutan for an agreement on opening diplomatic relations. Besides these border issues, Bhutan as a landlocked country has concerns regarding its maritime outlet for trade beyond the region. It resembles the geostrategic position of Bhutan regarding the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal as well. As Bhutan has no diplomatic relations with China, it has not participated in China's BRI as well. So Bhutan is concerned about the rivalry between China and India along with the involvement of the United States in the region with its Indo-Pacific Strategy. Bhutan does not want to see any great power rivalry in the Indian Ocean. So it had supported the idea of the Indian Ocean as a 'Zone of Peace' since the 1970s (Bhandari, 2022). Hence, overall, Bhutan is in favour of Sino-Indian cooperation with border dispute resolution which ultimately resolves its border issue with China. Thus, they can enhance their prominence in the global arena to contribute towards balancing the power play in the world order.

Nepal

Nepal has always been anxious regarding the crisis of the Indo-Chinese relationship in the South Asia region. Like Bhutan, Nepal is also situated in a very sensitive geostrategic location between two emerging world powers. There are several geopolitical challenges for Nepal in the context under which China and India are in a violent confrontation in the name of the unresolved border dispute. Though some analyse that Nepal could benefit from the rivalry of India and China as they compete for investment space in Nepal, it is not that easy to analyze the economic aspect with complete avoidance of political and strategic challenges that Nepal could face residing in between two big powers of Asia. There are big challenges in front of Nepal in maintaining a balanced and mutually cordial relationship with centuries-long old very good friends (Bhattarai, 2022).

Nepal has always been highly dependent on India for its economic affairs, trade, transit and other development projects and investments. It is a fact that Nepal has never been free from the political hegemonic attitude of India in its domestic political affairs. But the scene has changed and shifted since the economic blockade of 2015 by India in the issues of promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal which has severely impacted the fundamentals of the historical relationship. The country experienced a pathetic economic crisis during the blockade which caused a deep economic downturn in Nepal. As an effect of this blockade, Nepal was forced to turn to China for trade and transit. Nepal and

China signed a historical Transit and Transport Agreement in March 2016 (Nepal Trade Information Portal, 2017). Similarly, Nepal has witnessed China's presence, influence and power in recent years from the Himalayan frontier to the South China Sea and Indian Ocean including the South Asia region. On 12th May 2017, Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of the framework agreement on the BRI (Xinhua, 2017). The agreement aims at developing and strengthening the China-Nepal relationship through road connectivity, infrastructure development and vibrant economic affairs for mutual benefit. Moreover, China's President Xi Jinping's remarkable visit to Nepal in 2019 after a gap of 23 years of a Chinese president's visit, has taken the bilateral relationship to a new phase (Bhattarai, 2022).

Since the BRI agreement, there has been the commencement of several projects though there has not been remarkable progress as expected. But regardless of their satisfactory implementation and remarkable progress in the projects, these are viewed by India as a threat as he is viewing Nepal-China ties as a threat where he assumes that Nepal is being out of its influence. India's desire of enveloping Nepal in its larger security framework to maintain its status in the region is seen. So India is actively trying to engage itself in Nepal through economic, trade and investment affairs to retain its influence in this Himalayan state, bordering with its rival China.

Nepal, being located between China and India forms "the geopolitical heartland of Asia" (Dahal, 2022). Thus Nepal has been destined to face multidimensional geopolitical phenomenon. Nepal has huge responsibilities to maintain a mutual and cordial relationship with both nations amidst their rivalry along with its bilateral relations with both of them. There are significant challenges for Nepal regarding the exertion of external influence in its domestic political affairs. Nepal has sour relationship with India since the 2015 economic blockade and territorial disputes regarding Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura in 2020. Amidst such situations, the Parliament of Nepal adopted a new political map proclaiming around 400 sq. km of land in Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura, and Kalapani as previously shown as part of Indian territory. Another major issue is the evolving competition of India and China where the United States has been added to the mix. Primarily, the US has the priority of containing China in the Indo-Pacific. The growing tension between India and China has reached Nepal in the new form of the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC) which is widely referred to and argued as a

part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States rather than any development grant. MCC had been a stuff of big debate of threat and suspicion regarding its authenticity and intentions for Nepal's sovereignty. Amidst long debate and several protests at the public level against its ratification, Nepal's Parliament ratified the MCC compact on 27th February 2022. China had referred to MCC as coercive diplomacy of the US stating whether it was a gift or Pandora's Box. There were also conspiracy theories like "placing American troops on Nepalese soil". These instances resemble the geostrategic status of Nepal between the world powers tussling in the region. India and China are capable of being a constructive force for global progress (Bhattarai, 2022). At the same time, they hold the potential of creating conflict, chaos and friction not only in South Asia and Asia but in the global area as they are emerging giant economies with military might. In such circumstances, Nepal situated in such a geopolitical hotspot has significant impacts. Hence, Nepal's primary concern is to safeguard its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Nepal should have serious concerns regarding the recent Sino-Indian border dispute and act accordingly through its strong and balanced foreign policy to maintain cooperation with a completely non-aligned status. In the sphere of the power struggle between these world powers, Nepal should survive by safeguarding its domestic politics from its coercive influence. Otherwise, political and economic instability and backwardness of the country are inevitable in the sphere of world power rivalry in the region (Bhattarai, 2022).

Maldives

Maldives, an island nation which comprises 26 atolls spreading over 90,000 square kilometres is located in the central position in the Indian Ocean, southwest of Sri Lanka and south of India. It is one of the most geographically dispersed countries in the world. The significance of the country is steadily increasing in South Asia and more specifically in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent years, the geostrategic significance of the country has increased (Mitra, 2022). It is a small strategically located archipelagic nation in the Indian Ocean which has emerged as a key battleground for India and China for the competition in South Asia. Like other South Asian states, it has also a substantive relationship with Beijing and New Delhi (Kugelman, 2021).

The positioning of this small island state is significant with the 'Strait of Malacca' and between the 'Gulf of Hormuz' and the 'Gulf of Aden'. It lies amidst strategic oil

transportation and trade routes. These salient characteristics of the geographical location of the country have geostrategic importance to the great powers of South Asia such as India, the regional hegemon and China, the regional influencer. The geostrategic location has attracted both India and China to the country. China tries to counter the dominance of India by advancing its global military goals. China has tried to make Maldives an integral part of its strategy in the Indo-Pacific region by expanding its influence through diplomatic and economic assistance. If we analyse it from a historical perspective, India has better relations with Maldives. Unfortunately, India's coercive role in South Asia and reluctance to make SAARC work have made it somewhat unpopular. Beijing's foreign policy looks at Maldives as a key component for concentrating its interests in the South Asian region with the hopes of promoting regional peace and stability with its inherent desire of peacefully rising to prominence. However, China's goal of expanding influence in the region is not that easy because it has to counter not only India but has to confront the significant attention of the United States. The United States on the other side is prominently extending its Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Indo-Pacific region which is fundamentally aimed at countering China's influence in the world. Both the US and India do not want China to have increased influence over the Indo-Pacific region. In such circumstances, Maldives has become a key battleground for the Sino-Indian competition (Shabbir, 2021).

India has always prioritized the importance of Maldives as the important player in the Indian Ocean. China on the other side has stepped up its engagement with the Maldives in recent years prioritizing the importance of Maldives in the Indian Ocean as a part of the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century which is part of ambitious strategic Belt and Road Initiatives (Mitra, 2022). The Maldives-India relationship has a historical significance that dates back to the pre-colonial era. India was one of the first countries to recognize Maldives by establishing diplomatic ties with it in 1965. Historically, Maldives had an India-first policy allowing India's approval before making certain decisions (Shabbir, 2021). Particularly, India and Maldives have an extremely close relationship in the sphere of defence. India has supported Maldives in diplomatic, economic and infrastructure development. India helped the Maldives handle a coup against the then President Maumoom Abdul Gayoom in 1988. Gayoom maintained friendly relations with India, but he also suddenly deviated towards China. Later, during

Mohammed Waheed Hassan and Abdulla Yameen's time in power, the relations between India and Maldives soured because both leaders favoured Beijing (Mitra, 2022).

Similarly, China established bilateral relations with the Maldives in 1972. Since then, China has gradually increased its investments and maintained cordial relations with the Maldives. The entry of Abdulla Yameen into power in 2013 created a turning point in the Sino-Maldivian relationship. In the same year, Xi Jinping became the President of China and launched an ambitious BRI after a few months. In 2014, Xi visited Maldives and encouraged Maldives to join the Maritime Silk Road. Maldives thus joined BRI and signed a free trade agreement. Maldives in the Indian Ocean with its proximity to Diego Garcia has geostrategic significance. So, the United States has also come to recognise this strategic value of Maldives. In 2020, the US and Maldives signed a defence agreement which was welcomed by India due to the closeness between India and the US. Maldives also has a close relationship with Japan, thus Maldives welcomed the developments-related initiatives of Quad (Mitra, 2022). For more than four decades since its independence, Maldives was under the sphere of Indian influence. But in recent years, China-India competition has emerged in Maldives. Until 2018, the Yameen government was pro-China while after the 2018 election, pro-Indian President Ibrahim Mohammed came into power. It resembles the active India-China competitive geopolitical tussle in the country (Shabbir, 2021).

Sino-Indian intensifying rivalry in Asian geopolitics since the deadly clash between them in Galwan Valley in 2020 has had significant impacts on the China-Maldives-India triangular relations. The Sino-India border clashes have intensified their rivalry in the South Asian region. They are aggressively trying to extend their influence in the region through their strategic alienation and initiatives. China is actively attempting the extension of influence in Maldives through its Belt and Road Initiatives. At the same time, India along with the US is trying to influence through Indo-Pacific Strategy and Quad initiatives. Great powers, the US, China and India are aggressively trying to create greater influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, Maldives located in such a geostrategically important region has significant importance. The recent Sino-Indian clashes have intensified their rivalry which has direct impacts in the South Asian and Indo-Pacific region. Their growing competition and unresolved border disputes have

major impacts which have serious concerns about regional stability in the Maldives and the entire South Asia and Indo-Pacific (Shabbir, 2021).

Sri Lanka

Like Maldives, Sri Lanka is also an island nation located in the Indo-Pacific region. It is located amidst the strategically and economically important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean. Thus, the country is not free from the impacts of Sino-Indian competition in the region. The Sino-Indian rivalry has largely been driven by their economic rise and rapid associated growth in the seaborne trade and imported energy much of which has transited through the Indian Ocean. Thus, Sri Lanka is located at a significant geostrategic point amidst the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region (Attanayake, 2022).

Both India and China are emerging Asian giants in the economic powers. They have high GDP growth and increasing geopolitical influence. Some analysts predict that India will rank the world's second-largest economy in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms by 2050 behind only China by overtaking the US. The rapid growth in economic and military power has elevated the capabilities of China in the world. The entry of China into the Indian Ocean has changed the dynamics of Beijing with New Delhi. China's entry has been a serious concern for India. It is because India regards the Indian Ocean to be India's Ocean. Sri Lanka has historical relations with both India and China. Sri Lanka-India relations have a long history of cultural, linguistic and religious interactions. India's involvement and interference in domestic politics and protracted conflict in Sri Lanka have often raised concerns in Sri Lanka. But they have still maintained close ties. Similarly, China-Sri Lanka relations date back to the era of the ancient Silk Road trade network. During the colonial period, this relationship faced drawbacks but revived soon after the new nation-states were formed. Historically, China and India, none of them were hostile to each other's presence in Sri Lanka. This has remarkably changed after the increasing engagement of China in Sri Lanka in the past decade. The involvement of China increased in the Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka in parallel. It has increased the Sino-Indian competition regarding the influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Due to this, they have competed to gain a strategic presence in this island state. Trade, development aid and investment are the domains of competition.

The competition and conflict between them have significant impacts on the Sri Lankan economy as well as security issues in the region of world powers' rivalry. Economic competition between them might have economic advantages for Sri Lanka. It is because both countries exhibit their economic might in Sri Lanka to gain influence in the country. For instance, after the increment of Chinese investments in Sri Lanka's port industry, India also started its interests in the same sector. Before Chinese investment started in the country, India was not interested to invest in the port industry. As soon as China initiated its investments, India instantly started showing keen interest in the investments. Hambantota Port is the best example. India was first offered the opportunity to construct the port for which India showed no interest. It was then provided to China thus opening the entrance for Beijing to have a strong foothold in the country (Attanayake, 2022). India, observing all these started investing in the country. In 2021, India invested in the Western Terminal of the Colombo Port.

At present, the country is hit hard by the economic crisis. It started with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The economic crisis reached an extreme level which resulted in domestic political unrest. Sri Lanka is trapped in the debt of China and India. Both India and China provided loans and credit to the country. In March 2020, China offered a concessional loan of US \$ 500 million and another US \$ 90 million in September 2020. In March 2021, China approved a US \$ 1.54 billion currency swap deal. Later, China Development Bank extended a US \$ 500 million loan to the country. Likewise in 2022, New Delhi extended a US \$ 400 million currency swap under the SAARC Framework. India's assistance is beyond providing loans and is actively supporting diplomatically. India's active support and increasing involvement resemble the changing geopolitics in the region. China's BRI has been criticized in recent years for the narratives of debt trap diplomacy of China through its BRI. This debt trap theory arose from the Sri Lankan experience. China lent money to Sri Lanka to build a major port at Hambantota. Later, Sri Lanka could not pay the loan. It drowned in the deep economic crisis. This allowed China to take actions that forced China to seize the port in exchange for debt relief (Jones & Hameiri, 2020). India argues that China is using BRI to pursue strategic ambitions in South Asia. BRI debt issue is not the sole reason behind the economic failure of Sri Lanka. Political failure and rampant corruption in the country played a major role in the crisis.

Sri Lanka has been a significant part of geopolitical affairs in the sensitive region of the Indo-Pacific. China's involvement in the country has compelled India to rethink its approach. Indo-Pacific Strategy involving primarily the US and India has made Sri Lanka more open and sensitive to India's strategic and security concerns. On the other side, BRI has a prominent influence in the country. The world powers' rivalry has deep geopolitical concerns in the Indo-Pacific. In recent times, since the Sino-Indian border conflict of 2020, their relations have intensified animosity in terms of diplomacy and economy. Thus, this conflict and competition have deep impacts on the region as their competition to influence Sri Lanka has also elevated. This may affect the domestic politics and economy of Sri Lanka along with the diplomacy and bilateral relationship with both countries (Attanayake, 2022).

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a landlocked country which is located in the heart of South-Central Asia with almost all important trade routes connecting southern and eastern Asia to Europe and the Middle East (Allchin et al., 2019). Thus Afghanistan is referred to as the heart of Asia. Afghanistan is the poorest nation in the world having a history of very long unresolved political instability, transitions, invasions and terrorism. The geopolitical significance of Afghanistan is remarkable as it lies in such a location which can play a vital role as a bridge connecting South Asia with the Middle East and Europe. The history of the country resembles its geopolitical significance since the Soviet invasion in the 1980s followed by the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government. India does not have geographical proximity to Afghanistan as they do not have a land border connection. But China and Afghanistan share a 92-kilometre-long narrow international border which begins at the tripoint of both countries with Pakistan and ends at the tripoint of both countries with Tajikistan.

The relations of Afghanistan are quite cordial with both India and China. Both countries have assisted Afghanistan to a large extent in economic development and humanitarian aid. Relations between India and Afghanistan received a major boost in 2011 with the signing of a strategic partnership agreement. But later on, after the Taliban take over Afghanistan, the dynamics of their relations changed as India does not recognise the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan though it reopened its embassy in Kabul in June 2022 (BBC, 2011).

China is Afghanistan's largest foreign investor. China has increased its economic aid and investment in Afghanistan since 2010. China has also lent millions of dollars in aid several times. China and Afghanistan both are willing to cooperate in the economic partnership through the ambitious initiatives of BRI. They both agreed to build the BRI together and issued a joint statement in 2016 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2022). They believe that the initiative will provide an opportunity for Afghanistan to once again become an Asian transit and trade route connecting South Asia to Central Asia and East Asia to West Asia. Afghanistan has also expressed interest in joining China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and both Pakistan and China seem open to the possibility. This has the prospects of strong China – Pakistan-Afghanistan tie in which Sino-Pak strong relations; their CPEC initiatives and Sino-Afghanistan geographical proximity have played a vital role. As Beijing advances economic policies in the region, Delhi has initiated its Connect Central Asia Policy to enhance and extend its influence in the periphery. It aimed at increasing political, economic, security and cultural connections between India and Central Asia with the pipeline such as Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI). But it has not been effective. India has no border with Afghanistan and it has to rely on Pakistan to open its regional and trans-regional economic policies which is a challenging task for India due to the Indo-Pak animosity (Muzalevsky, 2021).

The US as a power rival of China is also looking at this region with a big concern in the present. The US can expand its influence in the region through India to balance China's advances. So, the US always backs the Indian approach towards Afghanistan through its Connect Central Asia policy. At present, the Sino-India border conflict has various implications in the region. It has multi-dimensional factors with complex equations. Sino-Pak strong relations and Indo-Pak extreme animosity are major factors that could impact the Sino-Indian influence in Afghanistan. The Galwan Valley crisis has various geopolitical implications regarding the South Asia-Central Asia-Europe connections. However, no major strategic endeavours are seen from either of them in the region since the 2020 Sino-India border conflict (Yachyshen, 2020).

China, India, Pakistan and Dysfunctional SAARC

The regional organisation SAARC was established in 1985 with the core objectives of promoting peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through the

adherence to the Principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-Alignment. The cooperation among the eight member countries of South Asia is entirely based on the respect of the five principles- sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of the member states and mutual benefit.

The summits of SAARC are usually held biennially and hosted by a member state. In the history of SAARC since its establishment, 18 summits were conducted. The 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu on 26th-27th November 2014 is the last summit (SAARC, 2020). It has been nine years since there has not been a SAARC summit. The 19th summit was scheduled to host by Pakistan in November 2016. Less than two weeks before the scheduled date of the 19th summit, the incident of terrorist attacks happened on the Indian army base in Uri, Kashmir. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided that India would boycott the summit. He alleged the member state Pakistan for the incident and announced the boycott by stating the increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in the region and growing interference in the internal affairs of a member state by other member countries (Miller & Gopalaswamy, 2016). It was the first time that India had boycotted the summit citing Pakistan's support for terrorist groups as the reason. SAARC summits, this way have been cancelled several times in the past. Later, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan also followed India's decision to boycott. As such, humiliated Pakistan was forced to cancel the summit. It has been nine years since there has not been a regional SAARC summit which indicates the dysfunction of SAARC. India's boycott of the 19th SAARC Summit for the first time in the history of SAARC has been analysed as a significant incident. It has been analysed in various aspects. Critics argue that this attempt by India is completely an endeavour of sidelining Pakistan in the region. They also analyse that the decision was a death blow to an already dysfunctional organisation (Miller & Gopalaswamy, 2016). The objectives and future of SAARC have numerous questions to be answered. Multidimensional factors are playing a role in the functioning of the organisation. The major reason that has played a vital role in the almost failure of the organisation is none other than the Indo-Pak rivalry. The relationship of animosity between the countries has a long unresolved history since the 1947 Partition. These two states have a complex and largely hostile relationship that is rooted in numerous historical and political events. The Indo-Pak border is one of the most militarised international borders in the world. They have fought wars and several

border skirmishes since the partition with the major disputes over the territories of the Jammu & Kashmir region which is the tri-junction of China, India and Pakistan. Thus, the region has significant geopolitical implications regarding the diplomatic, military and strategic aspects. Jammu & Kashmir issue is a very long unresolved issue which has caused protracted conflict between India and Pakistan. In such circumstances, the truth is that the SAARC's future is closely tied to the gravity of conflict and cooperation between India and Pakistan. The ongoing rivalry between them has been the reason for the failure of an organisation that has a nearly 38 years old history.

Likewise, political instability and terrorism have seriously hit Afghanistan for a very long time. Foreign invasions and Taliban rebellion are serious challenges in Afghanistan. The political unrest in Afghanistan is one of the factors that impact the security and stability of South Asia. The Taliban takeover of the country in 2021 has a significant impact on SAARC and the region as a whole. For instance, due to the Taliban government not being recognised by the SAARC member countries, it delayed the appointment of new secretary-general in 2023. The other members excluding Afghanistan later decided to replace Afghanistan's turn to be nominated as per alphabetical order by nominating the secretary-general from Bangladesh (Giri, 2023).

SAARC's progress has been largely hindered by lingering regional issues. Its ineffectiveness is entangled in the South Asian regional security complex. It has been 38 years of its establishment but it could not learn to benefit from its geostrategic location in the world arena. It has remained the poor's club and continuously showed downward trends. Indo-Pak rivalry and India's politics to isolate Pakistan in the SAARC region are prominent causes of the downfall of the organisation. India seems to be promoting the sub-regional grouping through The Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) intending to distance Pakistan from other countries within SAARC. In BIMSTEC, there are both SAARC and non-SAARC countries. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka are from SAARC while Myanmar and Thailand are from Southeast Asia. Maldives, Pakistan and Afghanistan are not included in the organisation. BIMSTEC has been a mixed organisation of SAARC from South Asia and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) from Southeast Asia. Another initiative including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) could be a possible formal sub-SAARC grouping (Rafiq, 2018).

The sub-regional grouping by India and other SAARC member countries can be considered as the reason for reducing the efficacy of SAARC. Since 1947, India and Pakistan remained in a state of enmity due to the Kashmir dispute. Despite the various initiatives to resolve the issue, their relationship has not been normalized. Their hostile relationship is continuous. As such, India has a greater share of responsibility in their relations. It is because India is the largest country in South Asia and the largest political player. It dominates the economic, technological and military sectors as it is the largest geographically and demographically as well. Except for Afghanistan, India has a border connected with the rest of the countries through land borders and maritime borders. Unfortunately, India has played games using SAARC for its influence as a regional hegemon in South Asia by undermining the position of Pakistan. Moreover, the hegemonic attitude of India in the South Asian region has many geopolitical implications in South Asia and SAARC as well. The ineffectiveness of SAARC has another dimension of Indo-Pak rivalry that includes Sino-Pak relations and Sino-Indian relations in the background. China is a major rival of India in economic and military competition. China is located in the North bordering most of the SAARC members that include India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan. China is an observer member of SAARC who had once interested to be a SAARC member. Sino-Indian rivalry is backed by their border conflicts and war in history. In such circumstances, China's attempts to enter South Asia and influence the member countries cannot be endured by India. It is because India is trying to be the regional power by countering China and Pakistan (Rafiq, 2018).

China and Pakistan are enjoying a strong and bilateral relationship with remarkable economic partnership through CPEC and other Belt and Road Initiatives. At the same time, India is simultaneously struggling with both Pakistan and China. The Galwan Valley crisis in 2020 is an issue which has extremely intensified Sino-Indian relations. In such situations, the tie between Pakistan and China is strengthened by the Sino-Indian border conflict. This conflict has played the role of catalyst for Sino-Pak strong bonding. The heightening Sino-Indian conflict has distanced India from both China and Pakistan. This condition has provoked India to aggressively take steps to distance Pakistan from the rest of the South Asian countries. China, on the other side, is trying to influence the rest of the South Asian countries through its ambitious BRI strategy. This is a challenging situation for India to counter China along with Pakistan.

China, India, and Pakistan and their complex relations fueled by Indo-Pak rivalry and Sino-Indian rivalry have resulted in the dysfunction of SAARC. India is the major actor in a tripartite relationship which is simultaneously fighting against Pakistan and China to retain regional hegemony by sidelining Pakistan from SAARC. Hence, by promoting other sub-regional organisations and grouping, like BIMSTEC, India is attempting to end the worth of SAARC and ultimately sideline its rival Pakistan from the rest of the South Asian region. It has thus played a crucial role in the dysfunction of SAARC.

4.11 Sino-Indian Rivalry and the Power Balance in South Asia

Since the Independence of India, the relationship between India and China has been hardly smooth which can be usually considered as a combination of cooperation, competition and confrontation. Since the rise of Narendra Modi in India and Xi Jinping in China, the competition between the two Asian giants has become fiercer due to certain policy adjustments based on the long-term strategy of the two countries. Both India and China are looking bold and more determined in their goals of attaining influence in South Asia (Nga & Thuong, 2021).

It has been labelled the 'Peaceful Rise' of China's grand strategy between 1990 and 2010. This peaceful strategy implies achieving global power status via economic instruments and not alarming the international order unnecessarily. Chinese scholars argue that China has no intention of challenging the international order, but would like to emerge as a major market in the world through capitalist instruments. China's military strategy and alignment behaviour do not symbolise the intense hard balancing policy of China. The 2015 White Book on China's Military Strategy defines 'actively defensive' strategy as the doctrine of the Chinese military. 'Actively defensive' implies that China would not initiate offensive war against others but if China comes under attack then it can use offensive means to counter the offensive activities of the antagonists. After nearly two decades of depending largely on the soft power of hedging, China is moving towards a hedging strategy through the means of limited hard power. China was usually lying low on territorial disputes but has suddenly decided to excite things up in response to moves by regional states. Its foreign policy has shifted from a low-profile strategy to more proactive and assertive policies (Han & Paul, 2020). The ambitious Belt and Road Initiatives have been analysed based on economic and political pros and cons. From the

economist's perspective, BRI is an ambitious plan to facilitate economic growth and international trade. But from the political perspective, it is considered a means of geopolitical competition. The BRI has emerged as a major source of infrastructure development and investment in the region. But it is a strategic initiation in which Beijing uses BRI as an economic instrument to prevent a balancing coalition from emerging in the Indo-Pacific region. China has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure development and economic growth in the BRI countries. The smaller states of South Asia; Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives benefitted through BRI and other economic and infrastructure aid that China offered. India is wedged in the region due to BRI. So India is forced to offer those small states of South Asia economic support to prevent them from falling into Beijing's orbit. BRI has helped to solidify the hard-balancing coalitions of China and Pakistan. But China has not shown any signs of pressuring the smaller states of South Asia to form a military coalition. The economic assistance may buy some loyalty but forming a balancing coalition is heavy and full of challenges. The smaller states are disinterested in forming balancing coalitions with the US, India or Japan. It has ultimately helped BRI and its flourishing in the region through the soft power of economic assistance. This strategy has helped China to prevent the hard balancing coalition.

The relationship between India and China remained a limited and managed rivalry. Unlike the strong traditional bonding of China and Pakistan, both India and China have never engaged in intense hard balancing activity. They both have strong interests in cooperating on the issues like global development, technological cooperation and other global economic order reforms. In such circumstances, hard balancing is not appropriate for the Sino-Indian complicated relations. The limited hard balancing that comprises soft balancing and regular diplomatic engagement seems to be happening in this relationship (Han & Paul, 2020).

Since the 1990s, the economic growth of India has increased the capabilities of New Delhi to pursue a limited hard balancing strategy. India has become a nuclear power after its successful nuclear tests in 1998 and has gradually built up its military power. In 2013, India has been the world's largest arms purchaser. In the external hard balancing strategy, the US-India relationship has significantly improved in recent years. But India has not yet adopted a full-fledged alliance with the US to balance against China. The

security cooperation i.e. Quadrilateral cooperation (Quad) between the US, India, Japan and Australia is often seen as an alliance to balance China. But India has not understood the cooperation as a formal alliance against China as long as China does not pose serious threats to India in the future (Han & Paul, 2020).

The essential elements of India's policies towards China involve soft balancing, strategic hedging and engagement. India has been using several international institutions like the mechanisms of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the trilateral frameworks of the Russia-India-China (RIC), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and its membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as the instruments of its soft balancing to constrain China. The membership of India in SCO is seen as an effort by India and Russia to balance China's increasing dominance of the organisation. In 2017, during the Doklam Plateau standoff, India maintained its communications with China through the mechanism of BRICS. Ajit Doval, an advisor to the National Security Council of India attended the BRICS National Security Summit in Beijing in July and discussed the possible solutions to the crisis with the President of China. The discussions resulted in the agreement to disengagement of the frontier troops and restore the border status a week before the BRICS Xiamen Summit in September 2017. The threat of pulling out of the summit by the Prime Minister of India has been a factor that changed the dynamics of the conflict. It is an instance that the soft balancing through international institutions has played a vital role to constrain China's behaviour. India's partnership with China highlights strategic hedging and engagement tactics. Some scholars argue that the Sino-Indian relationship can be best defined as an 'enduring rivalry'. Nevertheless, India and China established a 'Strategic and Cooperative Partnership of Peace and Prosperity' in 2005 which was later developed into a 'Closer Development Partnership' through Xi's visit to India in 2014. Even though they have many conflicting interests, the partnership relations have allowed them to cooperate to some extent while leaving disputes aside.

From India's perspective, the strategic choices of India and the balance of power in South Asia can be analysed in different dimensions. India is a rising power economically and militarily but its transformation is being shadowed by China's even more impressive rise. Certainly, Beijing's influence has continuously grown which has a significant impact on the Asian geopolitical balance. India seems entangled in its

strategic endeavours to pose its presence in the South Asian arena as a prominent power balancer. India has the strategic options of staying unaligned, hedging, building indigenous military power, forming a regional partnership, aligning with China or aligning with the US. As discussed previously, India is adopting soft power balancing through regional partnerships. Apart from this, military power is some extent an adopted strategy where India has remarkably progressed with nuclear power. The alignment of India with China seems unrealistic because of their several conflicting interests and their enduring rivalry for a very long time. And it is also obvious that the power balancing in the South Asia region is hard in such situations where India-China alignment is almost impossible to form in exceptions if any. A closer alignment of India with Washington likely represents India's best way to counter China in the region. China is a militarily stronger state than the Indian military. If the border disputes are considered, the Chinese military is a big threat to India. India has considerable military power but China's military power is already stronger and better funded. Similarly, Beijing's influence in established International organisations like the United Nations (UN) or Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank allows Beijing to hamper India's interests and goals in multilateral forums. Moreover, China's alignment with Pakistan and deepening relations with the rest of the South Asian countries are significant challenges to India's position in the region (Rajagopalan, 2017).

However, the Indian government has not explicitly announced any of its strategies that were adopted to balance the rise of China but above discussed strategic endeavours are indications of India's initiation of possible strategic attempts for the purpose. The soft power approach adopted by India is based on a series of new initiatives framed in the concepts of 'non-reciprocity', 'connectivity', and 'asymmetrical responsibilities' that indicate the use of economic attractiveness rather than coercive military capabilities. China has border disputes with many states around that including ASEAN countries and Japan over small islands in the South China and East China Seas, and the patrolling, intrusions and standoffs with India in different regions of the Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas. China has not engaged in active military conflict with its neighbours in nearly three decades. It has managed to settle its 17 border disputes except for India and Bhutan. The 2017 Doklam crisis and the 2020 Galwan Valley crisis were serious crises. These incidents have shifted the relations into another dimension. China intensified its relations with India and engaged in the infrastructure development

of countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka which has both economic and security implications in the region. The construction and development of deep-sea ports in Pakistan and Sri Lanka and border area roads in Nepal and Myanmar have been parts of BRI along with the establishment of Confucian Institutes in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the form of soft power (Paul, 2018).

In Nepal, China has increased its economic and infrastructure development support, especially in hydropower and road construction sectors. After joining the BRI, Nepal gained considerable investment for the development of infrastructure, roads, rails and air links. China has promised other infrastructure developments including the Kathmandu-Lhasa rail link while India's support remains much less, although Nepal depends on India in various aspects. The transportation linkage in the North means that India will no longer have the ability to place hard economic sanctions as it did in 2015 and on some occasions previously. In response to China's increased influence in Nepal, India excitedly initiated its support for Kathmandu in various economic sectors. In recent years, Nepal has been somehow successful in maintaining the relationship of equilibrium rather than complete alignment. Nepal is not giving in to either of them in the military cooperation sector. Moreover, it benefitted economically from both sides. In the issue of the Doklam crisis, Nepal attempted to remain neutral (Paul, 2018).

In Sri Lanka, China has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure development including roads and ports. China acquired the Hambantota Port on the southern side of the island state in a 99-year lease which was built with Chinese assistance. China has other infrastructure projects including Colombo Port City. Moreover, Sri Lanka is encouraging India to invest in the country. India remains the largest trading partner of Sri Lanka and India has offered billions of dollars in investment in recent years. Sri Lanka has been successful in harnessing resources from both India and China without substantially alienating either of them.

Similarly, Bangladesh has played a delicate balancing game between China and India. Bangladesh has joined BRI and has been promised by China considerable economic assistance. In 2016, Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding with China for a US \$ 24.45 billion bilateral assistance for some 34 projects and other various sectors. Including all other sectors, Bangladesh received a total of US \$38.05 billion in Chinese assistance while much smaller Indian assistance of US \$ 2 billion from India for

socio-economic projects. Although Chinese investment is larger, India is still the largest trade partner of Bangladesh. Thus, for Bangladesh, both countries have equal contributions to economic and infrastructure development. Bangladesh has declared that it has no interest to be a part of any geopolitical alliances and wants to maintain good relations with everyone. Due to the pressure of a possible China-Bangladesh active partnership, India had already softened its stand towards Bangladesh. They signed a border settlement agreement in 2011 which was ratified in 2015. This historical agreement has resolved the border dispute between them for a long time.

Border connectivity and hydropower generation are also part of Indian pledges to Bangladesh. In addition, India is also actively leading the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) grouping that is parallel to SAARC which is almost inactive due to the Indo-Pak rivalry. This grouping of BIMSTEC consists of India, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. Likewise, Maldives has also been favoured by both China and India and has tried to maintain somewhat equidistance in the relations of security and strategy concerned issues while being benefitted via financial assistance from both countries.

From the larger geopolitical and geo-economic perspective, Belt and Road Initiatives have been initiated with the ambitious objectives of connecting South Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe with China's mainland through land connectivity as well as maritime linkages. Pakistan and other South Asian countries are linked to it while India is significantly absent. India has raised concerns that the selective trade and maritime relationships may cause geopolitical rivalry on the surface more prominently. BRI is seen relatively successful in extending its initiatives in most of the South Asian region while India seems somehow lagging in this regard. In the geopolitical competition between China and India in South Asia, China has been more successful in creating a wedge between India and the smaller states who were traditionally close to India because of their geographical proximity and sociocultural factors. However, the relationship between these smaller states is not mature enough to be completely aligned or alienated from either side. These countries are somewhat neutral between China and India. But if the intense rivalry between China and India arose, in such, there is a possible challenge of being entangled between China and India diplomatically and strategically (Paul, 2018).

One of the key reasons for the smaller states' strategic exercise is the absence of an intense balance of power game between China and India. This situation has created an environment in which these smaller states play off both India and China. Both India and China are unable to maintain their possible strong influence in the region due to the lack of strong and explicit policies. They are competing with each other and indulging in their rivalry by persuading and provoking the smaller states. Due to the reasons of possible future threats and geopolitical challenges, these states are bound to entangle in the chaos of the Sino-Indian power-balancing struggle. They cannot align easily with either of them which has strategic threats. To manage themselves and make concrete positioning in the region amidst the two emerging giants is a complex task for them to pursue.

The strategies of the smaller states in the region have limitations. Even though they receive the economic offerings of China, they are unlikely to align militarily with China. Exceptionally, Pakistan as a nuclear state is the only South Asian country which has strong alignment and bilateral ties with China. Thus the Sino-Pak relations can be a full-fledged economic, strategic and military partnership. Besides Pakistan, other South Asian member states are unable to align with China in this way. If they do so, there is a maximum probability of Indian annoyance. India as a dominant power in the region cannot withstand the military alliance of its immediate neighbours with its rival, China. On the other hand, the US is always present there with its strong naval power in the Indian Ocean. China-US rivalry is the key factor that has a significant role in the South Asia region in terms of balancing power. India alone could never succeed to balance the rise of China in the region and the Indo-Pacific. China has aggressively extended BRI in South Asia along with Indo-Pacific. To counter China, the United States has come up with the Indo-Pacific Strategy along with India as a key ally of the region. Indo-Pacific Strategy is the tool of the US and its allies to restrain the power of China in entire South Asia and Indo-Pacific. In this circumstance, China has to tackle the global power, the US and the regional power, India. In this context, the smaller states of the region are unable to form any kind of alignment neither with India nor with China. They are embroiled in the power rivalry between India, China and the US in the fragile and geostrategically sensitive region of South Asia. China's South Asian Policy has been always guided by strategic and security concerns especially relating particularly to the possible risks of interference by external powers wanting to revoke its communist revolution. This is also one of the major factors that inspired China in pursuing the hard balancing strategy. It is

because of the trade and military rivalry with the US. As such, the tussle between Indo-Pacific Strategy and Belt and Road Initiatives is elevating in the region. These are the instruments of both China and US-India power-balancing endeavours.

The Sino-Indian power rivalry is highly influenced or say, guided by their border disputes in the Line of Actual Control. In recent years, the Doklam plateau crisis and Galwan Valley standoffs have fueled their dampened relations. This crisis of relations has also boosted the Indo-Pacific strategy along with the aggressive extension of Belt and Road Initiatives, Sino-Pak active CPEC initiations and the rapid influence in the South Asian smaller states. The border dispute between these two is a hard and challenging task to settle down. Undoubtedly, it is evident that none of them is seriously dedicated towards its resolution. They are competing in the disputed region through their power exhibition and possessions. And notably, their souring relations work as a catalyst to enhance the Sino-Pak tie while Pakistan is another strong rival of India. New Delhi wants to safeguard its interests in a relatively balanced situation in the region with Beijing. In contrast, the US through its Indo-Pacific strategy wants to balance the power by creating dominion in the entire Indo-Pacific and containing China (Gang, 2019).

South Asia region has been encircled by the multifaceted geopolitical and geostrategic phenomenon that includes the power rivalry of world powers. India, China and the US are the key actors who are active in the region and are continuously trying to counter and contain each other in the region through their strategic instruments in multiple ways. To resist each other's power, they are actively involved in the individual bilateral relationship with the smaller states through their economic means. Nevertheless, they have not yet formed any such intense hard-balancing coalitions in the region. They all are restraining themselves to form military alliances. No explicit policies and strategies are adopted in power balancing. But they are usually guided by soft power balancing and hedging strategies. Indo-Pacific strategy, Belt and Road initiatives, Quad, BIMSTEC or SAARC, or any other institutions are more or less the instruments and means via which they are continuously trying to create and manifest the power balancing endeavours in different forms aiming at restraining each other's influence and retain their hegemony in the fragile South Asian region.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

China and India are two gigantic countries within an adjoining area having an intriguing dynamic relationship. These both countries are emerging powers in Asia with their vibrant and rapidly growing economies and military might. In the world order, China and India are seen as new contenders who are capable of changing the traditional world order that was centred in the West. The concept of globalisation since the 1980s has opened the doors of prospects of Asia emerging as the centre of the world power in which China and India are the prominent state actors who are on the way to becoming a powerhouse of Asia.

Both countries have an unfinished border dispute in several regions of the Himalayan range from east to west across the Line of Actual Control. They share the longest disputed border in the world. Since the Independence of India in 1947 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the border and territorial dispute between them has existed and is yet unresolved. From the 1950s to the present, the Sino-Indian relationship has witnessed numerous events, incidents and confronted a lot of relational upheavals. India's independence, the rise of the Communist party in China and Tibet annexation by China are the key factors that contributed to the paradigm-shifting of this historical relationship. Since then, they have been involved in several territorial disputes along with border skirmishes. The intense crisis in their relations regarding the border conflicts resulted in a violent war in 1962. The warfare took place across the India-China border in the east of Bhutan in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and the west of Nepal in the Ladakh region. The Chinese military action was intense and aggressive which resulted in the defeat of India with the loss of thousands of lives during the war.

The border conflict between the countries is in the Himalayan frontier of Line of Actual Control which is an imaginary demarcation line that separates Indian-controlled territory from the Chinese-controlled territory. LAC has been divided into three sectors: Western Sector, Middle Sector and Eastern Sector. The Western Sector lies between Ladakh of India and Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous regions of China. Aksai Chin is the geographical location of this sector which is the prominent region of the Sino-Indian

border conflict. It is administered by China since it was captured in the 1962 war which is claimed by India as a part of its Leh district of Ladakh Union Territory. In June 2020, Indian and Chinese troops confronted violently at Galwan Valley near Ladakh in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed with an unidentified number of Chinese soldiers. It was the most violent clash at the border in the last 45 years with human casualties. This clash is a significant incident in Sino-Indian relations which has multifaceted impacts.

Similarly, in 2017, they had two months of long face-off in the high-altitude Doklam region of Bhutan which is a tri-junction of China, India and Bhutan. Likewise, the eastern sector consists of Arunachal Pradesh administered by India which is claimed by China as part of its Tibet region. There are several incidents of confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops in the region. To summarise the overall conflict between them in the territorial dispute, the Galwan Valley crisis of 2020 and the Doklam confrontation of 2017 are the two prominent incidents that have multidimensional impacts on the bilateral and diplomatic relations between them. These are the key incidents because they are the violent clashes in the last four decades. Post-Cold War era, world politics and power exercise has been evolved significantly and is defined from different perspectives in international studies. The fall of Soviet Communism with the rise of the globalisation concept in the world has introduced new dimensions in world politics. It is evident that Asia is the new powerhouse of the world political order. The power of the West is being shifted to Asia. Asia is emerging as a world economic and trade hub with immense potential for economic growth and prosperity with large human resources and natural resources. China and India are geographically, demographically, militarily and economically powerful and rapidly growing countries. They are the emerging world powers who are challenging the superpower, the United States in power competition.

In the era of globalisation through capitalist measures, economic prosperity is the most important aspect. In this circumstance, the border conflict between the emerging world powers has significant impacts in Asia, specifically in the South Asia region. Hence, the recent violent standoffs between them have serious and sensitive implications in the geopolitics and geostrategy of the immediate region which includes South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The Sino-Indian border conflict has driven the attention of not only the South Asian countries but the entire world. The United States and the rest of the West have deep concerns regarding the political and economic affairs of Asia because the

emergence of India and China in the global power arena cannot be undermined. The relationship between India and China comprises competition, cooperation and confrontation. Their relations have been dynamic which includes economic partnership and cooperation, geopolitical and strategical competition and territorial disputes and confrontation. Their intriguing relations have been determined by multiple factors. The power shift in Asia plays a vital role in the shaping of geopolitical structure. The rapid rise of China with strong and assertive foreign policies with the inclination towards hard balancing of power is a key determinant of the geopolitics of South Asia. Likewise, India's rapid economic growth with considerable military might have the desire of creating hegemony in its traditional Indian Subcontinent. In Asia, India and China are the two contenders for global power competition. Though there are countries like Japan, Australia and other ASEAN nations who have immensely progressed in the economic aspect but comparatively they are behind China and India in multiple aspects. China and India have a high potential for growth and rise as a giant in the region. As such, the extraneous power is likely to be interested in the region. The US has been monitoring the region i.e. Asia is under the radar of the US. So the direct or indirect involvement of the US in the region is obvious.

India-China relationship and their border conflict have multiple linkages as well as several power equations including the possible alignment and alienation in South Asia. This region has been a geopolitically and geostrategically important region where besides India and China, external powers like the US have keen interests. The Sino-Indian conflict has welcomed the external power attention which has led to the formation of different power equations in the region. India and Pakistan have had a long history of complex and largely hostile relationships since the 1947 partition. Their relationship is almost full of animosity due to the territorial disputes in the Jammu & Kashmir region. The crisis in the China-India relationship encourages the bonding in China-Pakistan relations. There is an inverse relationship between the bilateral and diplomatic relationship of these countries. There are three relational equations involved in the Sino-Indian border conflict; Sino-Indian relations, Sino-Pak relations and Indo-Pak relations. India has animosity with both China and Pakistan; however, the intensity of Sino-Indian animosity is much lesser than Indo-Pak hostility. The intensified border conflict resulted in the elevation of Sino-Pak relations. China and Pakistan have strongly maintained their bilateral relationship and economic and strategic partnership. The China-Pakistan

Economic Corridor is the best example of their strong bonding and collaboration. So, the rivalry between China and India followed by border confrontation has fueled the dampened relationship which has catalysed the Sino-Pak relations to enhance and degrade the already worsen Indo-Pak relations. All three countries are bordered by each other and the major disputed region of Aksai Chin is also located near the tri-junction of the countries. Due to the geographical proximity in the disputed region, there is the probability of more intense conflict between them.

Similarly, the interest of the US in the region is very likely as the US and China are power rivals in the present world order. They are constantly and proactively engaged in the trade conflict and the struggle for power in the global arena. The US does not want any state actors to be near him as a power rival. As such, China's rise in the world as an economic giant has disturbed the US. So, it wants to retain its world supremacy by strongly restraining the rise of China. Aiming at doing this, the US has initiated an ambitious Indo-Pacific strategy in the geopolitically, strategically and economically significant Indo-Pacific region. The only objective of the strategy is to resist the aggressive expansion of China's influence in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region. It wants to counter the Belt and Road Initiatives and its rapid economic expansion. Through IPS and Quad initiatives, the US aims at encircling China. It aims at stopping the vigorous economic expansion of the Chinese. BRI, on the other hand, seems remarkably successful in the extension of trade linkages and connectivity across Asia, Africa and Europe. It aims to connect the rest of the world in its mainland through economic instruments rather than any power exhibition and coercive military alliances. Although, in recent years, China's soft power policy has seemed to be gradually shifting towards an assertive hard balancing of power policy. It is seen in the aggressive BRI expansion and engagement in the domestic politics of other states including the aggressive presence in the border conflicts and Tibet issues. More specifically, the active engagement of China is significantly increasing in the domestic politics of neighbouring states like Nepal, Sri Lanka and others which indicates China's desire of expanding its strategic and diplomatic influences.

China has immensely increased the economic activities in the South Asian countries. It has initiated investments in a large number of projects for infrastructure development and economic prosperity through its BRI and other economic programmes.

Except for India and Bhutan, the rest of all South Asian countries have participated in the BRI and other partnership programmes of China. In Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, China has initiated large projects of infrastructure development and trade partnership through land connectivity while it has initiated its connectivity and linkages with Sri Lanka and the Maldives through maritime linkage. Apart from economic affairs, China is actively involved in politics. Nepal and Sri Lanka can be considered as instances of its political engagement besides the economic affairs in recent years. In such circumstances, the active engagement of India and China in the border conflict has adverse impacts on the region. The unresolved dispute has played a key role in increasing the distance between China and India. It has provoked China to aggressively expand its BRI and economic influence in South Asian smaller countries. Infuriated India on the other side took aggressive steps via its active initiations in the Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad activities. As India is a key actor of IPS after the US, it has tried to engage actively aiming at resisting BRI in its immediate region of South Asia. It also started to engage in the countries of South Asia via economic affairs that includes economic aid, investment and trade partnership to compete with China aiming at constraining Chinese influence in those countries. Moreover, Sino-Indian deteriorating relations remarkably affected the Indo-Pak relations. India's annoyance towards Sino-Pak affinity resulted in sidelining Pakistan from the rest of South Asia. India wants to alienate Pakistan from SAARC as well. The long-time inactive SAARC is almost dysfunctional. India is continuously discouraging the functioning of SAARC. Instead, it is endorsing BIMSTEC with vigour. The failure of SAARC and the promotion of BIMSTEC are two different phenomena but are related to each other. It simply indicates the Indo-Pak hostility fueled by the Sino-Indian conflict where India does not want China and its allies to influence the rest of the South Asian countries. Both are actively competing in South Asia through economic and diplomatic measures. The South Asian countries are somehow successful in maintaining their equidistant relations between them and benefitting from both sides in economic aspects. But in case of extreme conditions in Sino-Indian relations, there are significant challenges and threats to these smaller countries. Amidst the chaos of big powers rivalry, it is a relatively challenging task for those countries to pursue balanced survival tactics in the region in the absence of explicit foreign policies.

All three powers including Pakistan are nuclear-powered countries with strong military might. As such, their tussle in the region has adverse impacts on the geopolitics

of South Asia. Engagement of nuclear-powered countries in the region has significant impacts which may in extremities if any, lead this region to the prospect of another world war. However, the positive side is, they are not yet involved in any sort of military alliances and coercive attempts. To maintain the power balance and flourish in economic prosperity, mutual coexistence with fraternity and cooperation is the essence which can be attained through the permanent resolution of the territorial dispute. For this, dedication and resolution are key factors in addressing the problems from both sides. The adoption of explicit foreign policies regarding the South Asia region is essential for all nations in the region. Moreover, China and India should take bigger responsibilities for the resolution of their long territorial dispute and maintain balanced relations with other smaller states of the region with effective diplomatic endeavours. In addition, they should be conscious and stand strong to resist the extraneous power encroachment in the region. Then only, peaceful coexistence, mutual economic growth and power balance are possible in South Asia.

In conclusion, the Sino-Indian border dispute has had far-reaching consequences for South Asia, affecting both political and economic stability in the region. While there have been some attempts at resolving the dispute through diplomatic channels, a lasting solution remains elusive. Unless the two countries can find a way to resolve their differences peacefully, the dispute is likely to continue to have a negative impact on South Asia for years to come.

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