

## INDIA'S STRATEGIC RISE: SHAPING POWER DYNAMICS IN ASIA-PACIFIC POLITICS IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

*This article aims to determine how India's strategic rise has approached and redefined the power relations of the Asia-Pacific region. Asia-Pacific is an important region for the world because it implies confrontation of world actors – these are the powers that bear the struggle for domination of the region. India, on the other hand, is trying to ensure its dominion influence into the region through economic development, military personnel reforms and forming of partnerships. India enjoys the role of contribution to a new form of a multi-polar regional order. This paper entails dynamics of India's rise and her influence on the stability and security of the region as well as participation in regional organisations, defence and trade partnerships. A qualitative study is done on the bilateral relations of India with US, Russia, China and UK. It will clarify that the emergence of India has not only affects security cooperation but it also affects the economic cooperation and multilateralism.*

**Keywords:** *India's Strategic Ambitions, Power Dynamics, Asia Pacific, Power Politics*

### INTRODUCTION

Beyond national boundaries, international politics includes

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relationships between states. These coalitions are formed by governments to protect their interests, frequently at the price of moral, ethical, or human considerations. According to power politics theory, these connections are seen as attempts to gain influence and authority. States logically make alliances with strong nations to increase their chances of surviving. This dynamic is best illustrated by the Asia-Pacific region, which is a representation of both international politics and power politics theory (McDougall, 2007). The Asia-Pacific region is vital to world politics because it has so many pressing challenges. China, Japan, and the US have all historically controlled the area; during the Cold War, the US's hegemony increased even further after World War II. As an example of how regional groupings are frequently state creations employed to achieve certain goals, the term "Asia-Pacific" was initially utilized in the 1960s and 1970s. East Asian countries and Western Pacific powers are both geographically included in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are among the Western nations in Southeast Asia, which also includes nations like Brunei, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore; and Northeast Asia, which includes China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Mongolia, and Taiwan. Since the end of the Cold War, the US and other Western Pacific nations have been more influential in the Asia-Pacific region. The US and the USSR dominated bipolar world politics throughout the Cold War. To survive, nations have to back one of these superpowers. Even though the US remained the only superpower with the fall of the Soviet Union, China's military and economic expansion created a new polar division (Dirlik, 1998).

The Asia-Pacific political environment is complicated by China's competition with India and the US, as well as the US influence in the region. China still maintains tight ties with Pakistan, while India has a history of shifting its allegiance between the US and the Soviet Union. These short-lived coalitions remind us that international politics are shaped by state objectives and interests, not by enduring friendships or hostilities. Conflicts over religion, philosophy, and

territory pose problems for India, which borders China and Pakistan. Despite these problems, India has grown stronger and, especially after 2000, its political, economic, and military might has expanded dramatically. Over the past 20 years, India's per capita growth rate has stayed close to 4%. India has one of the largest populations in the world, and because of its strategic importance, the US supports it in Asia as a counterbalance to China. India has taken an assertive stand on the Kashmir issue as a result of its economic growth and enhanced international standing (McDougall, 2007).

India started peace negotiations with Pakistan and outlawed Hizbul Mujahideen in 2000 in response to claimed Jihadist attacks. But following the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, tensions increased, and both sides began to build up their military. Many people died during the 2002 election campaign, and the Indian army encountered resistance from both militants and civilians between 2005 and 2008. Significant events that triggered military reactions and raised tensions included the 2008 Mumbai Lashkar-e-Taiba attacks and the 2016 Uri base attack. Following the 2019 attack on the Pulwama convoy, which resulted in airstrikes in Pakistan, India saw further turmoil. When Pakistan returned an Indian pilot it had captured, tensions calmed. The BJP administration later that year repealed Articles 370 and 35A, stripping Kashmir of its unique status and enforcing harsh restrictions like curfews and house arrests. This action sparked outrage around the world and increased tensions in the region (Bardhan, 2012).

### **Statement of the Problem**

India's rise to prominence in Asia-Pacific politics, which is being driven by strategic military reforms, economic growth, and foreign policy changes especially since 2000, has altered the region's power dynamics and impacted both its bilateral and international ties.

### **Objectives of the Study.**

- To look into the primary factors driving India's growing Asia-Pacific military, economy, and politics since 2000.

- To assess how India's rise has impacted the regional power dynamics, with a focus on its ties with China, the US, and ASEAN nations.

### **Research Questions**

- In what ways have India's relations with Asia-Pacific states evolved since 2000, and how do these developments impact the broader geopolitical landscape of the Asia-Pacific region?
- What are the primary areas of collaboration and conflict of India with Asia-Pacific states and what impact do these have on the power dynamics and security architecture of the Asia-Pacific region?

### **Limitations of the Study**

- The study's primary focus on India's role in the Asia-Pacific may cause it to overlook the wider global ramifications of India's ascent or its relationships with other areas.
- Some information may be restricted because it is confidential, particularly when it comes to diplomatic negotiations and military planning.
- Long-term estimates regarding India's involvement in the region are difficult due to the potential impact of ongoing geopolitical events and shifting international dynamics.
- The research may not fully reflect the latest developments by the time it is released because international relations is a dynamic field.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Harsh V. Pant (2007) examines the evolution of India's Pacific foreign policy in recent years. When the shifting Asia-Pacific power dynamics are examined in the context of the theoretical debate around the subject, a broad assessment of the role that India hopes to play in the

region will be possible. The relationship between India and the three major Asian-Pacific powers—China, Japan, and the United States—is then looked at. Finally, some opinions about how Indian foreign policy in the area might develop going forward will be discussed. In his article, he described how the centre of world politics has shifted from Europe to the Asia-Pacific in recent years due to a number of factors, including the rise of China and India, Japan's gradual military profile assertion, and a significant change in the US global force posture in favour of Asia-Pacific.

As Pardhe (2024) noted that almost all of the major nations have started to refocus their policies toward the region. India has also embraced the Indo-Pacific architecture since it expands its area of interest to encompass the Pacific. India must inevitably reconfigure its priorities in light of the new spatial construct's fresh orientation in order to address the many traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the extended neighbourhood and respond to the evolving regional balance of power equations. India must thus adopt a more pragmatic approach if it is to participate in the region successfully without jeopardizing its interests as a nation. The analysis lacks focus on India's evolving defence collaborations and economic initiatives in response to Indo-Pacific power shifts.

The concept of the Indo-Pacific region, how world leaders reacted to it, the geopolitical interests of these countries in the Indian Ocean, the goals of their policies, the specifics of their approach to accomplishing these goals, and their interactions are all covered in the study by Luo Yanchao and Xu Jun (2024). These issues are examined using comparative, comparative-historical, and systemic analysis, as well as a geopolitical approach to the study of international relations. The different forms of cooperation that are developing in the region—many of which are either explicitly anti-Chinese or forced to be pro-Chinese—are contributing to an increase in tension between the countries. The report doesn't discuss India's special role as an Indo-Pacific balancing power or how it promotes neutral cooperation in the face of escalating regional tensions.

Enrico Fels (2017) investigates if there has been a shift in power in the Asia-Pacific region after the end of the Cold War. By carefully examining how power relations have evolved in the Asia-Pacific region, it refutes the notion that a wealthier and militarily more powerful China is automatically tipping the scales in its favour. With an emphasis on Sino-US competition, the book explores the alleged relationship between national power, the regional distribution of relevant material and immaterial capabilities, and the often-discussed regional power shift. It also develops a theory of middle power that explains the significance of middle powers during times of major shifts in power. India's strategic position as a middle power that shapes the power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region and its relationships with other middle powers is ignored in the analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study employs a qualitative method, looking at scholarly articles, policy papers, diplomatic documents, and Sino-US, Sino-Russian, Indo-French, and Indo-UK interactions to understand their complexity. Through comparative analysis, the contribution of each connection to India's strategic position in the Asia-Pacific are evaluated.

According to Realists, one of the major theoretical pillars of International Relations, the world politics is essentially a harsh and a cut-throat phenomenon because major actors—states— operate in an anarchic world devoid of overarching lawsuits exercising authoritative control over their behaviours. It is especially so timely for understanding India's emergence in the Asia-Pacific region where countries are growing more competitive and power relations are shifting. Realism contains several principles but, first of all, state-centrism, the notion implying that states act only for their own benefit and try to dominate others. Therefore, it could be postulated that the key aspects of India's foreign policy, which include the military expansion and the system of strategic partnerships, stems from this

concept of national interest (Mearsheimer, 1994).

States are forced to prioritize their security and survival through self-help mechanisms due to the anarchic structure of the international system, which focuses on power dynamics. India's increasing alliance with the United States, for example, can be seen as both countries attempting to offset China's growing power; the US sees India as an important ally in preserving regional stability, while India gains access to American military hardware and financial assistance. However, since both states balance their national interests, this relationship is tense with rivalry. Similar to this, the rivalry between China and India is a prime example of realist principles since both nations develop their armed forces and make territorial claims, especially along their disputed border. This illustrates the security conundrum in which one state's defensive actions are viewed as threats by another (Morgenthau, 1978).

Furthermore, due to the similar economic priorities of energy security and defence cooperation, historical relationship between India and Russia serves as a model of how alliances are formed rather instrumentally regardless of their ideological positions. The same can be claimed about the relations of India with France and UK because the latter also sees an outlet toward improving its status in international relations while diversifying the partners. Such affiliation provides India's involvement in experiments in defences and get hold of modern defence mechanisms, which enhances its status as regional power that is capable of contributing to world security. The realism paradigm is therefore a sound theoretical basis that can be used to examine India's place in the Asia-Pacific theatre of Great Power struggle, concentrating on how power shapes state-to-state relations, and explain India's strategic decisions and alliances with major countries (Camisão, 2018).

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### India Ascending on the World Stage

India's economy, foreign policy, and standing in world affairs have all improved over the last 20 years. Since 2000, India has become a global leader thanks to advancements in economic policy, foreign direct investment, and strategic partnerships abroad, especially with the US. India has become a hub for numerous international corporations because of its vast population, cheap labour costs, and investments in manufacturing, education, and information technology. India's GDP has grown significantly over the past 20 years, putting it ahead of the UK and France in a number of economic indexes. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) ranks India's economy as the fifth largest in the world based on its nominal GDP. India's GDP has grown at one of the quickest rates in the world over the last 10 years, averaging between six and seven percent every year. Growth has spurred urbanization and technological innovation, leading to higher levels of efficiency and production. India soared to fifth place in the 2019 IMF World Economic Survey, surpassing the UK, France, Italy, and Brazil, after coming in ninth in the 2010 report. India's nominal GDP has grown by almost 700% since 1995 (Myers, 2020).

The World Bank emphasises that India is committed to achieving more fair and sustainable growth in the future. The nation is adjusting its social security and infrastructure development programs in an effort to combat poverty, which persists as a major issue in spite of its economic progress. In India, approximately 25% of people still live in poverty, 50% of people defecate in the open, and 39% of rural dwellers have access to sanitary facilities. India's policy reforms aim to address these social challenges and boost the country's economy. India's military might is another factor that has aided in its development. Despite the continuous wars with China and Pakistan, especially in the Kashmir area, India spends \$55.9 billion, or around 2.5 percent of its GDP, on military expenditures. With an army of about 2,140,000 active members and 1,155,000 reserves, India has

expanded its military to sustain its power in the area. Among its military hardware are 4,426 tanks, 5,681 armoured fighting vehicles, 290 self-propelled artillery pieces, and 292 rocket artillery units. 323 fighters, 329 multirole aircraft, 220 attack aircraft, and 725 helicopters make up the Indian Air Force's total of 2,216 aircraft. Two aircraft carriers, eleven destroyers, fifteen frigates, twenty-four corvettes, and fifteen submarines make up India's fleet (Myers, 2020).

### **India and the US: From Strategic Partners to Global Allies**

After the Cold War ended, the US and India's ties quickly strengthened. Washington's nuclear containment strategy, India's strong links to Moscow, and US policies toward Pakistan all significantly increased the tension that remained throughout the Cold War. In spite of these problems, there was no significant bilateral confrontation between the two countries, which facilitated the development of stronger relations once the Cold War's strategic split was settled. The 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India were merely a temporary setback. As Washington recognized India's potential as a global power, the seriousness of the nuclear problem, and the security challenges it faced, relations rapidly improved. Following President Clinton's visit to India in 2000, relations considerably improved (Aziz, 2000). President Bush has stressed the value of strengthening ties with India since the beginning of his campaign. A major change occurred when his administration decided to assist India in becoming a major force in the twenty-first century. The fundamental respect that both nations have for one another and their common goals—which include a dedication to democracy, fighting terrorism, halting the spread of nuclear weapons, and preserving a stable balance of power in Asia—have guided relations. Along with growing defence and economic ties, the approximately four million wealthy and educated Indians also made significant contributions. In July 2005, the most significant deal was signed (Blackwill, 2005).

While US trade volume with the rest of the world fell by more than one percent in 2019, US trade volume with India climbed by more than five percent to \$92.08 billion. With a \$23.3 billion trade surplus

in 2019, India remained the ninth-largest trading partner of the United States. When the BJP was elected to power in 2014 and Narendra Modi was appointed prime minister, ties between the US and India were strengthened. President Obama lifted the visa ban imposed on Modi while he was Gujarat's chief minister in the wake of the 2002 murder of Muslims in Gujarat and extended an invitation for him to visit the White House. Prime Minister Modi and President Obama came to an agreement later that year when Modi travelled to the US as prime minister, and the US agreed to provide India \$1 billion. Additionally, no other state held the distinction of being India's largest defence partner, which President Obama bestowed upon it. India now has access to US defence capabilities and benefits as an ally after the US renewed and extended the ten-year military agreement in 2015. In a similar vein, bilateral ties in the fields of defence and the economy were greatly improved following the election of President Trump (Parpiani, 2023).

During his February 2020 visit to India, President Trump committed to spending \$3 billion on attack helicopters and other military hardware. A security cooperation with the second-largest arms supplier in the world gave rise to the strategic partnership between the United States and India between 2010 and 2014. The US and India signed the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative, lifting a three-decade US embargo on nuclear energy exports with India. (Jha, 2009). In return, India consented to safeguard all of its civil resources under the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) jurisdiction and to segregate its military and civilian nuclear installations. In October 2008, Congress approved the US's commitment to pursue full civil nuclear cooperation with India. In 2019, India bought more than \$641 million worth of weaponry from the United States (Aziz, 2000).

### **Are India and China Rivals, Partners, or Both?**

China and India are regarded as the two biggest and liveliest Asian societies in the modern era. They have changed the face of international relations and established new standards for global politics. William Clay, an American politician, famously remarked

that there are only perpetual interests in politics, not everlasting foes or allies. This idea can be used in international politics when a state's main objective is to safeguard its interests. Since China gained its independence in 1949, the two countries' relations have been strained at best. The India-China relationship was viewed as a growing cooperative partnership founded on peaceful cohabitation at the beginning of the 1950s (Singh, 2005). However, the 1962 war between the two nations caused this situation to rapidly worsen and turn hostile. China's close ties to India's fiercest adversary, Pakistan, have exacerbated anger even more. A new era of improved relations began in 1988 when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China and a Joint Working Group was formed to ease tensions and maintain peace between the two countries.

China and India's relationship progressively improved after the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union fell apart. Their mutual interests improved their relationship despite the fact that the controversial boundary dispute was only partially resolved. Both nations recognized one other's potential and strengthened their trade and economic relations in spite of China's worries about India's Tibet policy and India's worries about Sino-Pak military ties. China has been India's primary trading partner since 2008, following the signing of a defence exchange agreement in 2006. China referred to its relationship with India as the century's most important alliance in 2012. India is China's seventh-largest importer (Clay, 2020). Numerous institutional frameworks, including the Joint Working Group for problem-solving, the Joint Business Council for trade and commerce, and a joint forum for research and technology collaboration, link China with India. Additionally, they have a free trade pact to lower tariffs and frequently meet to protest trade restrictions. To foster mutual trust, the two nations organized military drills in 2007 and took part in counter terrorism training in 2008 in addition to their economic connections. Since 2009, defence cooperation has grown, improving commerce and coordination for the mutual advantage of both sides. In an effort to build mutually beneficial platforms for cooperation and overcome the trust gap,

India has stated that their economies are complimentary rather than competitive. Building long-lasting relationships between countries requires trade and economic cooperation. China is well renowned for its dedication to rapid economic expansion and recovery. In the meantime, India has concentrated on economic conditioning, expanding its worldwide presence and competing with China in the Asian market (Jain, 2024).

Natural and human resources are abundant in China and India, the two largest developing nations. They both have to deal with issues like reducing poverty, eliminating economic inequality, and raising living standards. They granted each other Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in 1984 after signing an economic cooperation deal, but this was revoked following the war in 1962. To promote trade and business, the Joint Working Group and Joint Business Council were formed. To further increase the advantages of mutual trade, they negotiated a trade agreement in the 1990s to prevent double taxation. 2017 was a difficult year for India-China ties since China rejected India's attempt to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group and vetoed India's UN recommendations. However, the Chinese Minister's visit to New Delhi brought about a good change in the situation as both sides recognized the significance of preserving border peace and fostering better connections (Siddiqui, 2012). Economic ties have been reinforced through strategic economic dialogue and bilateral negotiations for free trade agreements.

Over a ten-year period, bilateral trade increased from \$38.02 billion to \$71.45 billion, although it has stalled recently. Although there have been obstacles to economic investment in the past, these have recently been resolved. China announced in 2014 that it will invest \$20 billion over five years in India, with plans that included industrial complexes in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Haryana. Just 0.49% of the \$1.67 billion in foreign direct investment inflows into India between April 2000 and June 2017 came from China. However, China has been investing more in Indian manufacturing, especially in the automotive and technology sectors. Large sums of money have been invested in

Indian start-ups, as seen by the \$5.2 billion spent in 2017 alone by corporations including as Alibaba, Fosun, Baidu, and Tencent. Alibaba and its affiliates invested over \$1.7 billion in Indian businesses, including Big Basket and Paytm (Baloch, 2019).

- China is now one of the world's top exporters of weapons after achieving self-sufficiency in the production of munitions. (Durdana, 2018)
- India wants to be involved in this business, even though it is not yet on level with China. Due to Pakistan's joint military drills with China, which have created a strategic rivalry, India often buys its weapons from Taiwan and Russia and avoids Chinese vendors.
- Why India decided against buying weapons from China for a number of reasons, including:
  - 1) Rivalry: The long-standing rivalry is the main cause. Despite their close trade ties and ongoing border issues, India manufactures its weaponry primarily to counter potential threats from China and Pakistan, making it difficult to obtain weapons from China.
  - 2) Trust: India has access to a large number of military suppliers because it is a nonaligned country that is not a member of NATO or other alliances. But worries about the dependability and caliber of Chinese weapons are made worse by India's ban on Chinese electronics, particularly cell phones.
  - 3) Quality: Since Chinese weaponry are usually seen as being of lower quality than those made in the West or Russia, India is discouraged from considering purchasing them (Arora, 2018).

### **Indo-Russia Ties in a Changing Global Order**

Russia provides India with a significant portion of its military hardware, and the two nations have a unique and exclusive strategic alliance that is mostly focused on defence cooperation. Through

regional and international groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the G20, and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), they are collaborating on space technology and economics. India and Russia decided in 2014 to concentrate their trade on energy, technology and innovation, and industrial commerce. Information technology, petrochemical operations, space and defence collaboration, scientific development, and oil and gas resources are significant areas of shared interest. Both economies gain from trade in these areas. Although Russia overtook it as India's leading arms supplier in 2014, it continues to supply a substantial amount of military equipment to the nation (Kapoor, 2020). A number of agreements, including the sale of the S-400 air defence missile system to India, helped to resurrect the defence cooperation in 2016. This cooperation is motivated by a common strategic goal of preventing any conflicts that could obstruct economic growth. The two nations' military cooperation has significantly increased in the last few years. Interestingly, they held combined military drills in Rajasthan and Vishakhapatnam in 2005 (Bakshi, 2006).

### **India and the UK Building a Future Together**

Among other aspects, a common legal system, language, and culture have bound India and the UK together throughout their lengthy history. These linkages, as well as close investment and educational relationships and the 1.45 million Indian-born people in the UK, show how closely the two countries are linked. The complex relationship between the UK and India encompasses a number of factors, including trade and investment, the Indian diaspora, social and cultural ties, innovation and technology, security and military, and more. The UK is prioritizing its connections with India over those with Pakistan, as evidenced by the Foreign Secretary's admission that the two countries' relationship has not yet developed to its full potential despite having similar ideals. India has been crucial to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Global Britain goals, as evidenced by the recent short visits of British prime ministers to New Delhi. The UK-India relationship is anticipated to strengthen in part

because of the anticipated decrease in the influence of the predominantly Labour-leaning Pakistani diaspora following Brexit.

Notably, two of the top three Cabinet positions in the UK are held by British Indians. Four Conservative MPs with Indian ancestry are either Cabinet Ministers or attend Cabinet sessions. The long history of trade between India and the UK throughout the British colonial era was primarily driven by the East India Company. After independence, this partnership was strengthened by commercial opportunity and mutual trust. However, after the UK joined the European Union, commerce between India and the UK started to diversify, which resulted in a drop in trade volume. India's export share to the UK fell from 21.56% in 2000–01 to 20.27% in 2004–05 throughout the early 2000s. India has a long history of importing items from the UK, particularly capital goods during its early industrialization. Despite this, the UK's share of imports fell from 29.77% in 2000–01 to 18.69% in 2004–05 as India found new sources of imports (Bhatia, 2011).

India is one of the biggest buyers of the weapons and security gear that the UK continues to export to the world. The Indian and British military have a long history of working together on joint exercises, such as the yearly Konkan naval exercises, the biennial Ajeya Warrior army exercises, and the Indradhanush aerial exercises. The Defence Consultative Group (DCG) has been holding an annual conference since 1995. 2015 saw the creation of the Defence and International Security Partnership (DISP). Despite being the second-largest importer of weapons in the world, India has only purchased a small number of weapons from the UK, mostly 123 BAE Systems Hawk Advanced Jet Trainers (Shafi, 2011).

Through the 'Make in India' campaign, the Modi administration in India supports indigenous industry and cutting-edge technologies. To promote foreign direct investment in defence, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have created defence industrial corridors and modified their defence procurement processes (Bhatia, 2011). The 2007 Defence Equipment Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (DEC

MOU) was expanded through bilateral talks in April 2019 to look at defence and security capabilities. An agreement to cooperate in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy was signed by the UK and India on November 13, 2015. This agreement covers nuclear and non-nuclear materials, technology, equipment, and human training. The UK's energy policy seeks to lessen India's dependency on coal by boosting the proportion of nuclear power in its energy mix, given India's need for nuclear energy to reach its low-carbon growth target and the UK's technological leadership in this area (SCOTT, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Growing capabilities of India in the Asia-Pacific have strategic implications for order and balance in the region. As India improves its defence capability and is also enhancing its partnership, mainly with the USA, it serves as a countermeasure to China. At the same time, it can bring a multi-polar world which, if properly regulated, may enhance stability in the world arena. Such competition-based relations, however, are also viewed as causing tensions to increase, especially with China and Pakistan that might view India's growth as a direct threat to their security. Besides, India also balances an alliance with other powers like Russia and France in the context of multiplicity but the nature of this process contributes to the emergence of tension in the existing power relations. Hence, there may be an opportunity for change through enhancing partnership and economic development in India, however it is also about how India should handle such relation in a way that it does not result in conflict where stability of the regions are of paramount interest to the relevant interest of India.

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