

China-India Brief

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Guest Column

China and India's Roles in Providing Development and Peacebuilding Assistance in Africa

By Agnieszka Paczyńska

Over the past two decades the global development and peacebuilding assistance landscape has undergone significant changes. Emerging donors, and in particular China and India, are now playing much more prominent roles. Their growing prominence is especially visible in Africa where their footprint has rapidly expanded. The **2023 BRICS summit** held in Johannesburg, South Africa, further underscored emerging donors' commitment to supporting African peace efforts and locally-led development.

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AND GLOBALISATION

The *China-India Brief* is a monthly digest focusing on the relationship between Asia's two biggest powers. The Brief provides readers with a key summary of current news articles, reports, analyses, commentaries, and journal articles published in English on the China-India relationship. It features a Guest Column weighing in on key current issues in China-India relations.

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What has motivated Chinese and Indian expansion on the continent? What do their approaches to development and peacebuilding assistance look like and how have they changed over time? Finally, how has this expanding presence in Africa shaped China's and India's standing regionally?

China and India's Expanding Presence in Africa

China and India's expanding presence in Africa has been driven by their interest in the continent's growing consumer market, its natural resources, and increasingly in gaining political support from African states in various international forums as both countries have sought to play more prominent global roles. At the same time, as their footprint on the continent and global aspirations grew, they have come to play more prominent roles in United Nations' peacekeeping operations, expanding their collaborations and support of the Africa Union Peace Architecture and, especially in the case of China, engaging in conflict mediation.

By 2022, African countries signed more than **\$170 billion** in loan commitments from China in addition to loans extended to **African state-owned enterprises**. Chinese **foreign direct investment (FDI)** in Africa also increased, soaring from \$75 million in 2003 to \$5 billion in 2021, surpassing investments coming from the United States. Like China, Indian trade and investments in Africa has expanded significantly.

By 2020, India became the continent's third largest trading partner after China and the United States, and the fifth largest investor, with more than **\$70 billion** invested in oil and gas, mining, and other natural resources, information and communication technology, railway and auto industries, and textiles.

As trade and investment has expanded, China's and India's development assistance grew as well. **Emerging donors**, including China and India, frame their development assistance in the language of solidarity, mutual benefit, and South-South collaborations with emphasis placed on respect of state sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs of recipient states. This means that unlike Western donors, they do not attach conditionalities linked to governance to their aid. Both India and China's assistance is demand-driven, based on **Africa's own prioritisation of its needs**.

Since 2000, China has been rapidly expanding its foreign assistance, with 45 percent going to Africa, much of it focusing on infrastructure construction, agricultural and mineral sector development, livelihoods support and bolstering state capacity. Since 2018, China has coordinated its development assistance through the **China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)** which took over responsibilities from various ministries that used to disburse aid.

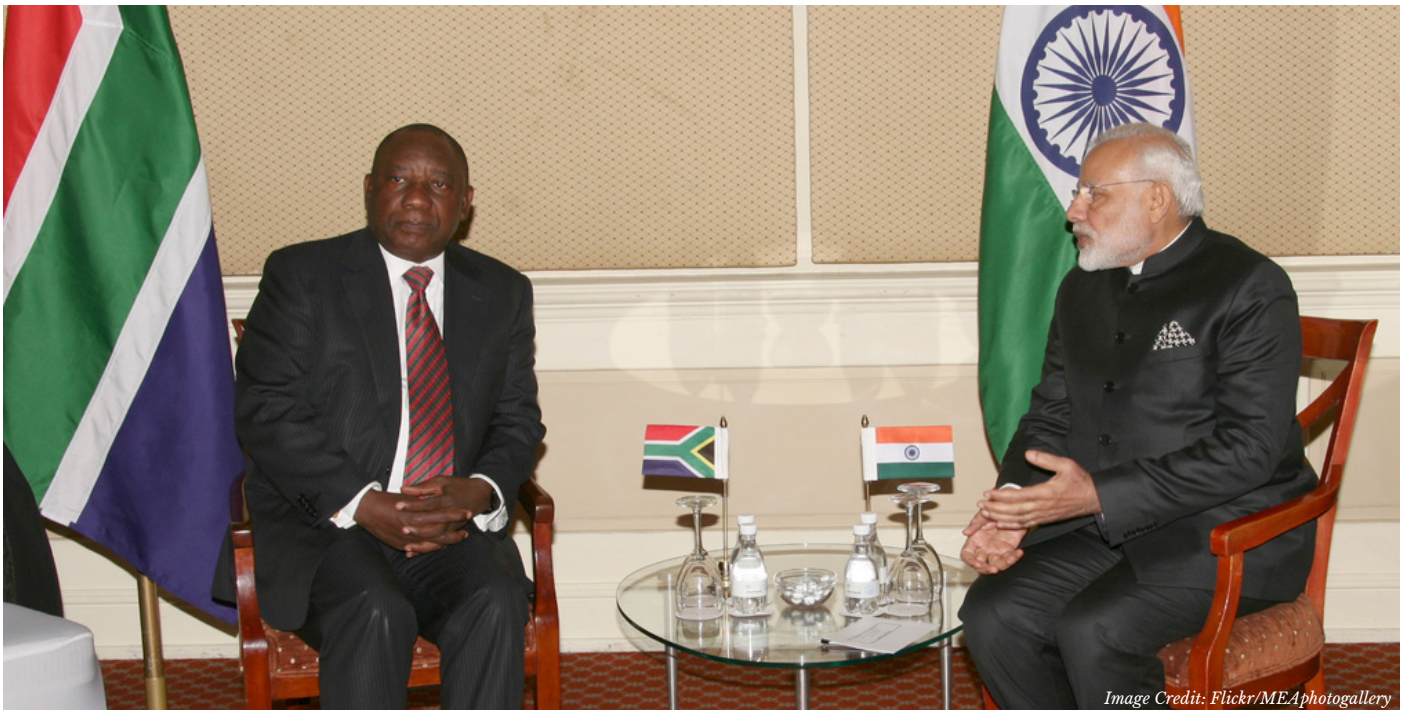


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CIDCA also oversees **China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund** which was established in 2015 at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit and is responsible for forging cooperative agreements with various multilateral organizations such as the World Food Programme and the World Health Organisation. Since 2013, China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** has supported infrastructure and investment projects all over the world, including in **fifty-three African countries**. At the **October 2023 Belt and Road Forum**, President Xi Jinping announced an additional \$100 billion in funding for physical and green energy infrastructure projects, with Africa as one of its key recipients.

One of the primary institutions for Chinese-African collaborations has been the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), one of the many multilateral institutions that China has launched as an alternative to the current global order.

Established in 2000, the FOCAC gained prominence in 2006 when China announced the creation of the \$5 billion **China-Africa Development Fund**. FOCAC meets every three years at the heads-of-state level and releases a joint plan that guides their relations in between summits. China has also released three white papers that guide its national strategy on the continent in 2006, 2015, and 2021. The 2021 white paper was released in the lead-up to that year's FOCAC summit held in Senegal and titled, *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals*. The white paper underscored the importance of cooperation and mutual development, and noted that the "greatest good in China–Africa relations is to closely combine Africa's independent and sustainable development with China's own development, and reject the zero-sum game and actions driven by a narrow pursuit of profit." Digital and green energy development cooperation also became more central to the relationships between China and African states.

While smaller than China's, India has also significantly expanded its development assistance in recent years. The primary vehicles through which Indian assistance is disbursed are concessional finance, lines of credit, grants, capacity building and technology transfer programs, with the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program (ITEC) playing a central role. By 2020, India had completed **194 development projects** in thirty-seven African states with an additional seventy-seven projects still ongoing, worth \$11.6 billion—making Africa the largest recipient of the **ITEC program**. Since 2012, bilateral development cooperation has been overseen by the Development Partnership Administration within India's Ministry of External Affairs. The India Export-Import Bank is also a key player, with half of its international funding for technical aid and trade going to Africa.

India's assistance to Africa, like China, is focused on strengthening state capacity. In 2008, the first India-Africa Forum Summit was held, resulting in the signing of the **Africa-India Framework for Cooperation**, focusing on strengthening economic development, including in agricultural, small and medium-scale enterprises, and industrial sectors; and enhancing technology cooperation, trade and financial collaborations, in addition to promoting good governance.

Unlike China's BRI, India has channeled \$70 billion for public project financing through the African Development Bank.

Additionally, the framework underscored the importance of peace and security in the relationship between India and African countries. The 2011 **Africa-India Framework for Enhanced Cooperation** reaffirmed these commitments to long-term and mutually beneficial partnership. India has also placed emphasis on development partnerships framed as "together as equals" with initiatives such as the **Solar Mamas** program that aims to make electricity access more reliable, and has been extended to thirty-six African countries. This growing focus on Africa was reinforced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his **address** to the Ugandan Parliament in 2018, in which he outlined ten principles guiding Indian engagement with Africa and designated the continent as a priority for Indian diplomatic and economic investments.

The COVID-19 pandemic further expanded and deepened the India-Africa relationship, as Prime Minister Modi's government set out to make Africa one of India's key global partners. In particular, India's investments in Africa's public health infrastructure, and pharmaceutical and vaccine production capacity expanded, placing these sectors at the center of the **new development model** and emphasising the importance of public-private partnerships. The newly created India-Africa Entrepreneurship Forum serves as a space where these partnerships can be nurtured.

Security and Peacebuilding

Alongside expanding development assistance, China and India have intensified their focus on issues of security and multilateral peacebuilding in Africa. For China, a turning point came at the 2012 FOCAC meeting where it strengthened cooperation in these areas with African states. This new phase in the relationship between China and Africa was reflected in the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security (ICACPPS). The initiative aimed to bolster the continent's security and peacebuilding capabilities, through the strengthening of Chinese assistance to the Africa Union (AU), the Africa Stability Force, the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises, and the **African Peace and Security Architecture**. Simultaneously, China increased its contributions to UN peacekeeping operations on the continent, expanding these contributions to include the provision of combat troops. The latest **FOCAC Summit** held in 2022, reiterated the essential role that peace and security played in promoting development in Africa.

One of the more significant changes over the past decade has been China's greater involvement in conflict mediation. The uptick in these efforts coincided with the launching of the BRI and China's growing concerns about its investments and nationals being impacted by **violent conflict**.

Not only have Chinese conflict mediation efforts intensified, but unlike in the past when such mediation efforts were undertaken out of the public limelight, today the Chinese government is publicising these efforts. China has been involved in **conflict mediation** in a number of African countries, including in convincing the Sudanese government to accept UN-AU peacekeeping troops in Darfur, and working on South Sudanese and Libyan conflict mediation and reconciliation processes, among others.

Like China, as India's footprint expanded in areas affected by violent conflict, it has also expanded collaborations in areas of peace and security with African states, and those issues became more central to discussions during the India-Africa Forum Summits. The first **India-Africa Strategic Dialogue** conference was held in 2011 and focused on how best to ensure stability in Africa. For many years, India had been a key contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping operations on the continent. The Dialogue further expanded India's commitments to these issues by focusing discussion on peacebuilding, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, and considering how India could best support the AU's efforts in establishing conditions that would prevent reoccurrence of civil wars. Later Strategic Dialogues also explored issues of fighting terrorism, preventing violent extremism and bolstering maritime security.



Image Credit: Flickr/EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

The Lucknow Declaration signed in 2020 by India and fifty African states, further deepened collaboration in areas of security and peacebuilding. The **Declaration** underscored that New Delhi welcomed “the AU vision for peace and security in Africa that coincides with India’s vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).” The Declaration signatories committed to working on conflict prevention, resolution and management, peacebuilding and enhancing the role of women in peacekeeping, as well as fighting terrorism. By bolstering the AU, as well as individual African state’s capacities, the **Declaration** pledged to expand the “exchange of experts and expertise, training programs and capacity building, enhance support toward peacekeeping and post conflict reconstruction in Africa.” There has also been a shift in India’s approach to democracy promotion.

Historically, it has been reluctant to do so because of its commitments to non-interference principles. However, as its competition with China for influence in Africa has grown, India has moved towards providing more assistance to **election management** and good governance issues.

Conclusion

Overall, African political elites and populations have welcomed the growing role of China and India on the continent. Engaging with both Beijing and New Delhi does not come with the colonial baggage associated with cooperating with European powers; in fact, their past support for African independence movements continues to be appreciated even today.

Furthermore, for many governments, the greater diversity of donors providing development and peacebuilding assistance is a welcome change as it affords them greater choice in choosing which donors to work with. Most importantly, Chinese and Indian aid do not come with strings attached.

This is not to say that the relationships are always smooth and tension-free. For instance, there are **concerns** in some African countries about indebtedness to China that have accompanied various large infrastructure projects, as well as apprehensions over environmental impacts of Chinese investments, and labour rights violations.

At the same time, Africa has become one of the key places where the global competition for influence among between the United States and China is playing out, with some referring to the shifting power dynamics and donor landscape as a “**new scramble for Africa.**” Yet, the views among African leaders of this global competition are more complex. For instance, in the **2022 Perceptions of China Overseas Development Survey** that asked about perceptions of China, France, Russia, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States, African leaders indicated that they preferred to work with different donors depending on which sector these donors were seen as having a comparative advantage.

While China was the preferred partner in energy, transport, infrastructure, other countries like the United States, France and the United Kingdom were favoured in areas of governance and the rule of law. Other **surveys** have found similar preferences among African leaders. **Public opinion surveys** indicate similar views among the general public in Africa which sees Chinese, Indian and the American influence on the continent more positively.

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India-China Maritime Competition in the Indian Ocean

By Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury

The last few months has seen India strengthen its position vis-à-vis China in their maritime competition in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi has bolstered infrastructure development in the region, increased military partnerships with like-minded nations in Southeast Asia and hosted its biennial flagship naval exercise, Milan 2024. These developments reflect India's intent to augment its regional capabilities and position itself as the linchpin to maintaining freedom of navigation and security in the Indian Ocean. Challenges, however, remain for India as China's successful overtures in South Asia and expanding Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean continue to be of concern.

Infrastructure

On March 6, 2024, the Indian Navy **commissioned** a new naval base, the INS Jatayu, in the strategically located Lakshadweep archipelago off the country's south-western coast. Situated on Minicoy, the southernmost island of Lakshadweep, it was formerly a temporary establishment before it was converted into a full-fledged base. Assets and personnel will also be permanently based on Minicoy which was not the case earlier.

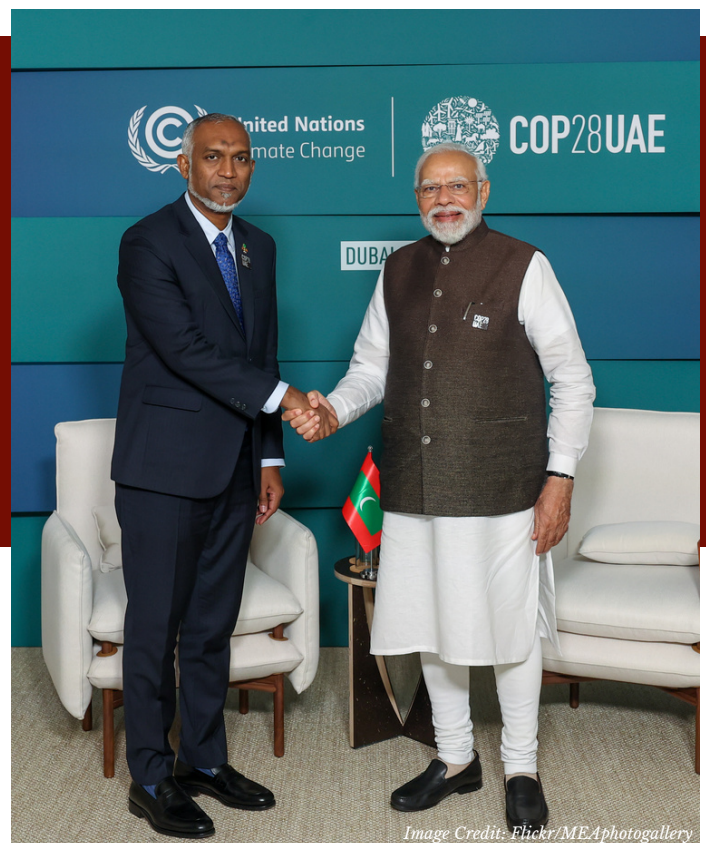


Image Credit: Flickr/MEAphotogallery

This will be the second naval base in Lakshadweep after INS Dweeprakshak on Kavaratti island further north.

The establishment of INS Jatayu will further India's maritime interests and extend the Indian Navy's operational reach in the Indian Ocean and Western Arabian Sea. The Lakshadweep islands lie around 130 km north of the Maldives, and together with the Andaman islands off the country's eastern shore, play an important role in maritime security, surveillance and intelligence collection, and power projection capabilities. An **official statement** said the base would facilitate anti-piracy and anti-narcotics operations as well as "augment [the] Indian Navy's capability as a first responder in the region." The statement reflects not just India's confidence in its growing capabilities, but also its willingness to assume the role of a leading power in the Indian Ocean.

In its competition with China, several **actions** taken by New Delhi have reinforced its image as a first responder, as well as a key regional and security player. This includes measures taken amidst the tensions in West Asia, such as deploying Indian warships to the Arabian Sea to conduct anti-piracy patrols and also providing assistance to ships struck by Houthi drones and missiles. The timing of this announcement is also important given deteriorating relations between New Delhi and Malé. India is **replacing** its military personnel present in the Maldives with civilian technical staff under a directive from the new Maldivian leader, President Mohamed Muizzu, who had campaigned on an anti-India platform. At the same time, the Maldives **signed** a defence pact with China on March 4, 2024, further fuelling Indian concerns over growing Chinese influence over its archipelagic neighbour.

A week earlier, on February 29, 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritian counterpart, Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, remotely inaugurated an airstrip and a jetty built with Indian assistance on Agaléga island in Mauritius on the western end of the Indian Ocean. The island, with an area of just 25 sq km, is strategically located between Mauritius and Seychelles and to the northeast of Madagascar. As the Indian Ocean is increasingly viewed as a strategic zone, the importance of its small-island nations has increased manifold.

Although India has historical links with the Western Indian Ocean, China's **increasing** presence has led to an Indian refocus towards the region.

India began constructing the facilities in 2015 to help Mauritius **enhance** its maritime security capabilities and was **suspected** of building a naval base on the island. During the inauguration, Jugnauth condemned allegations of relinquishing sovereignty to allow an Indian naval base on the island. Nevertheless, given the closer security relations between the two countries, the establishment of these facilities on Agaléga will play a role in furthering the Indian Navy's operational capacity. India could also deploy its own naval assets to monitor Chinese vessels and seek to balance the increasing Chinese naval presence in the region. Overall, it will **increase** India's ability to deploy to and sustain a presence across the vast Indian Ocean.

Partnerships

The second set of developments India has undertaken in the recent past has been a renewed interest in military engagements with countries in Southeast Asia which lie at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region. Relations between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were **elevated** to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in November 2022. And in May 2023, the inaugural multilateral ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME) was held in the South China Sea (SCS)—an important step in India's security engagement with Southeast Asia.

Previously, the only multilateral exercise that India conducted with regional members was the Singapore-India-Thailand Maritime Exercise (SITMEX), though it did hold regular bilateral exercises with some individual states. Between 2021 and 2023, India was the **fourth most frequent partner** for joint military exercises with Southeast Asian states after the US, Japan, and Australia.

India, along with ASEAN countries, have shared concerns about China's aggressive actions—along the Himalayan border and grey zone activities in the SCS—which have driven them closer together. Five of these nations—Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam—share overlapping claims and maritime territorial disputes with China.

With ASEAN being a crucial partner in India's Act East and Indo-Pacific policies, New Delhi has focused on expanding its strategic engagement in Southeast Asia led by an increased naval presence in the region. The Chinese reaction to the exercise was also noteworthy. According to **reports**, Chinese maritime militia boats and a research vessel "moved towards" the exercising navies in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone. Since AIME 2023, India has continued to conduct maritime exercises and deploy its navy to the region. A few months earlier in February 2023, an Indian Kilo-class conventional submarine made a first-ever port call to Indonesia, highlighting the reach of Indian naval assets and the extent to which defence relations have expanded.

Amongst several other developments on the broader maritime front, India **announced** in June 2023 that it would give a naval warship to Vietnam, for the first time explicitly **called** for adherence to the 2016 arbitration award that had struck down China's territorial claims in South China Sea, and **established** the post of a Defence Attaché in Manila. Ultimately, China's aggressive posturing has led to an increasing convergence of interests between India and ASEAN members that is strengthening New Delhi's position in the region.

Exercise Milan 2024

The third element that has augmented Indian capabilities in the Indian Ocean and projected an image of the country as being central to security in the Indian Ocean is the Indian Navy's Milan 2024 multilateral exercise that is held every two years. Held in Visakhapatnam in February 2024 in its largest iteration, it included participation from more than fifty countries that included Indian Ocean states, the Quad, ASEAN member states, European nations as well as African states. It was **aimed** at allowing the military personnel of the countries involved to gain experience in large force operations at sea, as well as furthering military-to-military relations. The exercise included large force manoeuvres, advanced air defence operations, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare operation, and tactical manoeuvres off India's eastern coast.

The Milan exercise, while traditionally being seen as an Indian Ocean littoral naval exercise has broadened its scope with the advent of the Indo-Pacific framework. The rapid expansion of the exercise from thirty-nine countries just two years prior in 2022, displays India's convening power and helps cement its profile as a security provider and first responder in the region, able to tackle both traditional and non-traditional threats. More significantly, it indicates India's growing leadership role in the Indian Ocean as the preferred security partner. The exercise also consolidates a multinational force at a time when the safety of sea lines of communications is coming under increasing strain.

Conclusion

As India regards the Indian Ocean as a pivotal arena for both strategic and economic pursuits, its efforts to fortify its position vis-à-vis China in this region have entailed various measures. These include investments in infrastructure projects with potential military utility and heightened diplomatic engagement with ASEAN as a collective entity and its constituent nations driven by shared apprehensions over China's conduct. Additionally, India has underscored its significance in Indian Ocean maritime security by hosting the multinational Milan naval exercise. For New Delhi, these developments contribute to maintaining a secure and stable Indian Ocean. As the country's defence minister

recently **emphasised**, India is dedicated to safeguarding the region against hegemonic economic and military influence, hinting at China's growing military strength. Such developments, therefore, will continue to be an important aspect of India's strategy regarding China.

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News Reports

Bilateral relations

India, China hold fresh round of diplomatic talks with no tangible breakthrough

Hindustan Times, March 28

No new breakthroughs were made, though both sides agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels.

India, China need to find ways to return stability to disputed border: Foreign minister Jaishankar

The Straits Times, March 24

Dr. Jaishankar said India is “today trying to find a way”.

A high-altitude tunnel is latest flashpoint in India-China border tensions

CNN, March 22

A tunnel constructed high in the mountains of northeastern India has become the latest flashpoint in a simmering border dispute between New Delhi and Beijing.

China says more Indian troops at Himalayan border won't ease tensions

Reuters, March 8

India has freed up a contingent of 10,000 soldiers, previously deployed at its western border, to strengthen its disputed border with China, according to several media reports.

China and India in the Region

India expresses support for Philippines amidst South China Sea tensions

The Economic Times, March 26

Jaishankar has reaffirmed India's commitment to helping the Philippines maintain peace and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region.

Amid China-India rivalry, Nepal's political shift tips scales in favour of Beijing

South China Morning Post, March 22

China's influence in Nepal's economy and defence has grown significantly in recent years, marking a shift in traditional ties between Nepal and India.

US wades into India-China spat, says border state belongs to New Delhi

Nikkei Asia, March 21

Washington opposes encroachments over boundary that Beijing insists is not decided.

China forges defense ties with India neighbors Maldives, Sri Lanka

Nikkei Asia, March 20

Military envoys also court Nepal as border row simmers.

Trade and Economy

India open to joining trade blocs with China if its economy is WTO compliant, trade minister says

The Straits Times, March 28

India is open to being a part of trading blocs which include China if Beijing ensures its economy is open, transparent, and complies with the rules of the WTO.

Morgan Stanley says India cannot match the 8-10% growth China pulled off in past

Business Times, March 18

The South Asian nation is also far from replacing its bigger rival as a global manufacturing hub, Morgan Stanley added.

China's exports jump thanks to demand from India, Russia and other emerging markets

CNN, March 7

China's economy is battling a number of headwinds, including weak consumer and investor confidence, high youth unemployment and a long-running real estate crisis.

China sets GDP 2024 target of 'around 5%', plans to issue 'ultra-long' special bonds for major projects

CNBC, March 4

China plans to target an urban unemployment rate of around 5.5%, the creation of 12 million new urban jobs and a consumer price index increase of around 3%.

Energy and Environment

Asia crude imports surge as China, India snap up Russian oil

Reuters, March 28

Asia's imports of crude oil are expected to rise to the highest in 10 months as heavyweights China and India lifted arrivals from Russia.

China goes big on green hydrogen using renewable energy surplus

Nikkei Asia, March 5

Production facilities and pipelines being built in country's vast inland regions.

Sri Lanka awards energy deal to India after scrapping tender won by China

Firstpost, March 1

Indian renewables company U-Solar from Bengaluru had been awarded the building contract.

Analyses

Can India Become the World's 'China Plus One' in Tech Manufacturing?

Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, March 20

By Deeplina Banerjee, Research Scholar with the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

There has been a “tectonic shift” in the global manufacturing landscape, with multinational corporations like Apple and others seeking to ‘de-risk’ from China.

China's Indian land grab has become a strategic disaster

Nikkei Asia, March 22

By Brahma Chellaney, Professor of Strategic Studies at the independent Center for Policy Research in New Delhi

Xi Jinping faces dilemma in resolving crisis without losing face.

China and India's Intense Contest for Influence

The Diplomat, March 14

By Jabin T. Jacob, Associate Professor at Shiv Nadar University

India has kept a close watch on China's activities and responded strongly where its security was directly affected.

How China and India are handling Myanmar's crisis three years on

Think China, February 29

By Rishi Gupta, Research Fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute, New Delhi

Myanmar's northern border with China has become an economic and strategic challenge to Beijing's interests, while India is faced with the biggest humanitarian and security crisis.

Books and Journals

Fighting monopolies: the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, India, and the competition for the marketplace of international development

Asia Pacific Business Review 30, no.2 (2024)

By Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies; and Preeti Bhogal, a PhD candidate at Kansas State University

Employing insights provided by the theory of monopolistic markets in economics and Great Power behaviour in the discipline of international relations, this paper aims to provide an alternative understanding of India's refusal to join the BRI beyond the immediate bilateral security, domestic politics, and economic considerations in Sino-Indian relations. We argue that BRI is an effort by China to position itself as the leading firm in the market for international development – a space for long dominated by Western development providers. The paper argues that India's efforts to contest the BRI can be seen as a natural outcome of other rising powers resisting China's efforts to monopolize the development market. In doing so, it provides a template of why rising powers compete with each other in providing developmental aid even when cooperation may create mutual benefits.



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OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

- *Partnership or Polarization? Southeast Asian Security between India and China* edited by Evan Laksmana and Byron Chong (Contemporary Southeast Asia, 2023)
- *Asian Conceptions of International Order: What Asia Wants* edited by Kanti Bajpai and Evan Laksmana (International Affairs, 2023)
- *How Realist Is India's National Security Policy?* edited by Kanti Bajpai (Routledge, 2023)
- *Deterring Conflict and Preserving Peace in Asia* edited by Drew Thompson and Byron Chong (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, 2022)
- *What Can the United States Learn from China about Infrastructure?* by Selina Ho in *The China Questions 2* (Harvard University Press, 2022)
- *India Versus China: Why they are Not Friends* by Kanti Bajpai (Juggernaut Books, 2021)
- *Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose* by Drew Thompson (Strategic Forum, 2021)
- *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations* edited by Kanti Bajpai, Selina Ho and Manjari Chatterjee Miller (Routledge, 2020)



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