

SPRING SEMESTER 2022

How is the Indo-Pacific putting India and China into a power competition relation, and how is India trying to resist China?

SUSANE RADJARADJANE

INDO-PACIFIC CLASS
CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

Table of content :

Introduction:	2
I) Power Competition between India and China:	2
A) A fight for the Strait of Malacca and other strategically important regions	2
B) China's control and influence in India's neighboring countries and border tensions	4
C) OBOR: a Threat to India	6
II) India doing its best to counter China's influence in the Indo Pacific:	7
A) Member of the QUAD	7
B) Building strategic alliances	9
C) Act East Policy	10
Conclusion:	11
Bibliography:	13

Introduction:

China and India have a lot of common points, they both have different ethnicity with different dialects. They are also the two only countries to have a population of more than 1 billion people. Also, their current prime minister and the president are pursuing ethnic nationalism-oriented policies and attacking minorities and particularly Muslims. Although they have a lot of common points, tensions between the two countries have always been high. It has been almost one century since the two are fighting over the border since they did not negotiate their limitations. This border dispute resulted in a war in 1962, even though they did not enter a new war again since that year, their relations are unstable. As the two countries are pursuing their own interests and aiming at becoming global powers, it seems like they are ready to confront themselves in the Indo-Pacific. The concept of the Indo-Pacific had been used by strategic thinkers in India and Australia and started to be developed around 2005. Some disagreements have emerged over what are the limitations and who owns the Indo-Pacific.

As the Indo-Pacific is gaining more and more importance, many countries want to benefit from the potential advantages given by this strategic region. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific is becoming the new epicenter of the world economy. Representing 63% of the world's GDP and 38 countries, the Indo-Pacific is economically vibrant. More than 50% of the world's maritime trade occurs in this region. The Indo-Pacific is an interconnected space between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Whether it is France, the US, or even Germany have expressed wishes to interact and intervene in the Indo-Pacific region.

The OBOR project and the “String of Pearls” showed that China is interested in the Indo-Pacific. However, a lot of countries want to change their ties with China, as the latter is highly present in international relations and is often seen as aggressive. Indo-Pacific could be a way to escape from China's influence. The notion of Indo-Pacific is strategic for many countries as it is a way to counter China's influence in the world. Therefore, Asian countries, as well as Western countries, have adopted partnerships and policies to diversify their economic relations in order to contain China. The birth of the QUAD which does not include China is an example of how some countries want to counter the influence of China. Among the countries thinking that China is a hindrance to global peace and cooperation, stands India. India is the country in the Indo-Pacific region that is the most afraid of China and therefore has implemented policies but also made alliances with China's opponents to compete and resist China. The Indo-Pacific concept is crystalizing relations between China and India.

The question then stands: How is the Indo-Pacific putting India and China into a power competition relation, and how is India trying to resist China? First, the power competition between China and India through the fight for strategic regions, China's growing influence in India's neighboring countries as well as the OBOR project will be explained. Second, India fighting back against China's attacks with the QUAD, strategic alliances, and the implementation of the Act East Policy will be demonstrated.

I) Power Competition between India and China:

A) A fight for the Strait of Malacca and other strategically important regions

In increasing their presence in the Indo-Pacific, China and India are fighting for important regions. One of these regions is the Strait of Malacca, connecting the China sea and the Indian ocean.

The Strait of Malacca is one of the world's most important shipping lanes, both economically and strategically. The strait links major Asian economies such as India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. It is also the largest channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, the Strait of Malacca is important for trade and shipments since most of the European trade with China and Japan is shipped through this strait¹. Most of the energy requirements of Japan are dependent on oil shipments from the Gulf states and therefore pass through the Strait of Malacca².

While it offers a wide range of advantages, this Strait is also subject to political tensions. The Strait of Malacca is a source of rivalry between two Asian powers: India and China³. As a consequence of China's increasing interest in the Indian Ocean and its influence in the region, India has started to take measures to balance China and expand its influence from the east coast to the Strait of Malacca. Indian navy's presence in the Malacca Strait has been increased to counter the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) influence and presence there⁴. As a result, clashes between Indian navy and the PLAN are frequent with India deploying its navy into strategic points of the Malacca Strait like the South China Sea⁵.

China and India are not just fighting over the Malacca Strait but also over the Bay of Bengal. Indeed, China claims that its growing military presence in the Bay of Bengal but also its widespread infrastructure investments are part of the OBOR projects⁶. China's influence in the region is triggering India's concerns as Beijing is pursuing economic collaborations such as trade agreements with BIMSTEC countries⁷. As China's interest in the region is growing both the US and India are enhancing their maritime and economic presence. To fight China's

¹ China Power Team, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" *China Power.com*, August 2, 2017, Updated January 25, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

² DONALD B. FREEMAN, "The Geographic Importance of the Straits of Malacca », *McGill University Press*, 2003

³ ASL Seyedmohammad Seyedi, "Strategic importance of Strait of Malacca in Southern Asia", *ANKASAM.org*, July 31st 2022, <https://www.ankasam.org/strategic-importance-of-strait-of-malacca-in-southern-asia/?lang=en>

⁴ PUBI Manu, "Indian Navy: Navy steps up Indian Ocean Operations, strategic Malacca strait under close watch" *Economic.times.Indiatimes.com*, July 30th 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/navy-steps-up-indian-ocean-ops-malacca-strait-under-close-watch/articleshow/77227221.cms?from=mdr>

⁵ LENDON Brad, "India to deploy task force into South China Sea and beyond", *CNN.com*, August 3rd 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/03/asia/india-warships-south-china-sea-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

⁶ BREWSTER David, "The Bay of Bengal: The Maritime Silk Road and China's naval ambitions", *TheDiplomat.com*, December 14th 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/12/the-bay-of-bengal-the-maritime-silk-route-and-chinas-naval-ambitions/>

⁷ MOSTOFO Shafi Md, "BIMSTEC Gets a new lease of life", *TheDiplomat.com*, April 11th 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/bimstec-gets-a-new-lease-of-life/>

influence, India and the US brought back Japan as a security player in the Bay of Bengal⁸. Furthermore, Japan has been invested in infrastructure and communications across the Bay of Bengal to support India in the region. The Bay of Bengal is strategic for various reasons, one of these is the presence of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Indian Islands are becoming a source of rivalry between the two countries. Located at 885kms from the Strait of Malacca, the Indian islands are strategically important even though they have been ignored by the Indian government. The strategic location of the islands resulted in the growing interest of China in this area with the implementation of naval vessels⁹. Consequently, Modi is finally reacting to China's interests after years of ignoring its islands, through development investments and security collaborations¹⁰. As both countries are fighting for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Indian navy has ejected Chinese research ship from the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone after the *Shin Yan 1*, a Chinese research ship, was spotted near Port Blair¹¹. This battle for the Indian islands keeps increasing as Japan's development aid for the islands¹² may enhance hostilities between China and India. In accepting Japan's development assistance on its islands, India is eager to diversify strategies to counter China's influence and maintain its sovereignty on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

B) China's control and influence in India's neighboring countries/border tensions

The border dispute between the two Asian countries keeps getting further from years to years. India and China are disputing a 2,167-mile border also known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which the two countries have disputed since the 20th century¹³. This border dispute even led to a war in 1962 between the two countries. Since the border has never been officially negotiated both China and India claim this border as their own one in building infrastructure but also by sending troops on regular patrols.

While the region has been calm for a few years, tensions rose in 2020. In May 2020, Indian and Chinese troops engaged in a series of altercations along the border, spurred on by an Indian road construction project in the Ladakh region. While most of these skirmishes were not that serious, a large fight broke out in mid-June, resulting in the death of 20 Indian soldiers by Chinese troops¹⁴. This episode of violence was the first in decades. Moreover, Kashmir is disputed by China, India and Pakistan, the region of Aksai Chin is claimed by

⁸ BREWSTER David "Japan is back in the Bay of Bengal", *Lowy Institute*, September 10th 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/japan-back-bay-bengal>

⁹ RAMAN Sunil, "The Strategic Importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands" *TheDiplomat.com*, January 3rd 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/01/the-strategic-importance-of-andaman-and-nicobar-islands/>

¹⁰ PATKI Ashutosh.S, "The Andaman and Nicobar: New Delhi's Bulwark in the Indo-Pacific", *TheDiplomat.com*, December 1st 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/the-andaman-and-nicobar-islands-new-delhis-bulwark-in-the-indian-ocean/>

¹¹ PANDA Ankit, "Report: Indian Navy Ejected Chinese Research Ship from Indian Exclusive Economic Zone", *TheDiplomat.com*, December 4th 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/report-indian-navy-ejected-chinese-research-ship-from-indian-exclusive-economic-zone/>

¹² SINGH Supriya, MARTINEZ Eduardo, "Japan aid for Indian Islands carries China 'geostrategic overtone'" *JapanToday.com*, April 30th 2022, <https://japantoday.com/category/politics/focus-japan-aid-for-indian-islets-carries-china-strategic-overtone>

¹³ SANTORA Marc, "What is the "Line of Actual Control" border between India and China" *NYTimes.com*, June 16th 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/world/asia/india-china-border.html>

¹⁴ BISWAS Soutik, "India-China clash: 20 Indian troops killed in Ladakh fighting" *BBC.com*, June 16th 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53061476>

India as being part of the Ladakh while being fully controlled by China. Pakistan claims Jammu and Kashmir which is controlled by India. Aksai Chin is a source of tensions between China and India. As of 2022, the border dispute remains problematic for the two countries as India disapproved China's foreign Minister over remarks on Kashmir¹⁵.

Through its One Belt One Road project but also through the String of Pearls initiative, China has been massively investing in Asia, particularly in India's neighboring countries. First, Sri Lanka which is now facing its worst economic crisis has fallen into a Chinese debt trap¹⁶. Indeed, China has lent over \$7 billion to Sri Lanka, the latter hoping for better infrastructure, higher employment, income, and economic stability, thereby increasing the standard of living of the common people, completely ignored the risks involved in this heavy debt. As a result, Sri Lanka was so indebted to China that the country had to give up 70% of its Hambantota port to China for 99 years because the country cannot pay back its debt¹⁷.

Second, China has made significant investments in Bangladesh, particularly in the country's ports. In 2019, Bangladesh gave China access to two of its largest seaports, Chittagong and Mongla¹⁸. China also signed a deal to develop the Mongla port.¹⁹ China expressed interest and was going to build a deep seaport at Sonadia but it was later cancelled due to environmental concerns. Furthermore, China has relocated and built many of its clothing factories in the South-Asian country leading to Bangladesh surpassing China in terms of manufacturing²⁰. Through investment, China is shaping the financial architecture of Bangladesh. As China has been massively investing in Bangladesh²¹, concerns are being raised about a possible fall into a debt-trap.

Third, China is more and more investing and engaging with Nepal, Xi Jinping has been exploiting the anti-Indian sentiment rooted in Nepali elite²². The Nepali government is ready to engage with China as India failed to implement development projects. As a result, Nepal is more and more hostile to India and believes in China's commitment to implement development projects. In 2019, Xi Jinping pledged a \$500 million financial aid to Nepal

¹⁵ "India rebukes China's foreign minister over Kashmir remarks ahead planned visit" *REUTERS.com*, March 24th 2022,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/india-rebukes-chinas-foreign-minister-over-kashmir-remarks-ahead-planned-visit-2022-03-24/>

¹⁶ ANI "Sri Lanka succumbs to Chinese investment trap" *ThePrint.in*, March 22th 2022,

<https://theprint.in/world/sri-lanka-succumbs-to-chinese-investment-trap/883311/>

¹⁷ ABI-HABIB, "How China got Sri Lanka to cough up a port", *NYTimes.com*, June 25th 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>

¹⁸ GUANQUN Mei, "Much Potential to be tapped" *Chinadaily.com*, June 12th 2020,

<https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202006/12/WS5ee2bbd2a31083481725277f.html>

¹⁹ SAMSANI Sumanth, "China-Bangladesh strategic linkages", *Observer Research Foundation*, May 11th 2021,

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/china-bangladesh-strategic-linkages/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20Bangladesh%20gave%20China,to%20develop%20the%20Mongla%20port.>

²⁰ "China - Bangladesh "Made in Bangladesh" to overtake the "Made in China"" , *Asianews.it*, November 6th 2019,

<https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Made-in-Bangladesh-to-overtake-the-Made-in-China-47254.html>

²¹ Star Business Report "Chinese FDI in Bangladesh sees huge jump" *TheDailyStar.net*, September 31th 2021,

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/global-economy/news/chinese-fdi-bangladesh-sees-huge-jump-2186406>

²² "Nepal: Exploiting the Elite", *TheGatewayhouse.in*, February 7th 2018,

<https://www.gatewayhouse.in/chinese-investments-in-nepal/>

during a visit in the country, becoming the first Chinese leader to visit the country in 23 years²³.

Through these examples China's wish to influence and control India's neighboring countries is demonstrated. China is pressuring India in investing and creating strong ties with the latter's neighboring countries, leaving India isolated from other nations.

C) OBOR: a Threat to India

The One Belt One Road initiative was first announced in 2013 during a visit to Kazakhstan and was inspired by the ancient Silk Road. The "One Belt One Road" involves the building of a big network of railways, roadways, maritime ports, power grids, and oil and gas pipelines but also some infrastructure projects. The OBOR connects China to Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe but also links China to the Mediterranean, Africa, South-East-Asia, and Central Asia.

This One Belt One Road strategy has significant importance to Xi Jinping as it strengthens economic partnerships with other countries. Second, it opens markets for Chinese goods, boosts economic activity, and develops China's Western part... The "One Belt One Road" is more likely to elevate China's economic power. Indeed, through the New Silk Road, Xi Jinping is seeking to expand China's influence in the world including in the Indo-Pacific. This initiative serves as a means of surpassing the USA and becoming the 1st global superpower.

The OBOR has a lot of benefits for India, from infrastructure development, rising trade abilities, to stronger financial institutions to multilateral economic corridors. Even though India has a lot of opportunities in taking part in this initiative, the OBOR implementation can result in a conflict between the two countries. First, the "One Belt One Road" has the potential to lead India isolated from other countries²⁴. India has growing concerns that Xi Jinping's initiative will gain massive support²⁵ from other Asian nations involved in this initiative leading Modi all alone.

Second, as the OBOR initiative provides an economic corridor between China and Pakistan, it can lead an escalation of tensions between China and India. As Pakistan is bordering China at the Xinjiang province, China has invested more than \$46 billion in the CPEC²⁶. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the key elements proposed by the OBOR project, having the goal for mutual cooperation and development for both countries. The CPEC is connecting Kashgar in China to Gawadar in Pakistan through the construction of a network of highways, railways, agricultural farms, airports, energy-generating projects, a new telecommunication network, and pipelines. Through the CPEC, Pakistan can increase its job opportunities, infrastructure development, its energy potential, its healthcare access to all, and

²³ Al Jazeera Team, "China, Nepal sign trade, infrastructure and security deals", *AlJazeera.com*, October 13th 2019,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/10/13/china-nepal-sign-trade-infrastructure-and-security-deals/>

²⁴ HU Richard W, "China's "One Belt One Road" strategy: Opportunities and challenges for India", *SAGE Publications*, 2017

²⁵ BANERJEE Dipankar, "China's One Belt One Road: Indian Perspectives" Singapore, March 31st 2016, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2016_14.pdf

²⁶ AHMAS Moonis, "Strategic Meaning of The China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor" *Institute of Strategic Studies of Islamabad*, 2015,

overall economic performance. Indeed, India has always been in conflict with Pakistan, this CPEC is likely to further cooperation between China and Pakistan resulting in triggering India. India sees this CPEC as a threat to India's sovereignty. Indeed, in May 2017, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Gopal Baglay declined China's grand Summit invitation²⁷, criticizing the "unilateral nature" of the OBOR project, and the sovereignty threat regarding the CPEC.

Also, China investing in Pakistan would give access to Naval facilities and therefore access to the Indian Ocean. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor plans to go through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK)²⁸, this region is disputed by both India and Pakistan, the two countries are claiming the POK as their own. Building an infrastructure there would reinforce tensions in the region between China and Pakistan and India.

In November 2020, India refused to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) mentioning the CPEC passing through the POK²⁹.

With the OBOR project, India is fearing that China's influence in the Indo-Pacific will be increased. China's presence in the Indo-Pacific will be increased as Chinese companies will operate in the Gwadar port. Investments in this seaport will bring economic and strategic opportunities to China. The presence of China in the Gwadar port would give China a long-lasting naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. The presence of China poses a concern for India. Consequently, the latter invested in the Iranian port of Chabahar³⁰ to compete with China's control over Gwadar.

II) India doing its best to counter China's influence in the Indo Pacific:

A) Member of the QUAD

China has attacked and threatened India on various occasions, whether it is the border issue in Ladakh in June 2020, China's alliance with Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka but also through the Kashmir conflict. However, it seems like India is ready to fight back as Modi is trying to become a powerful actor in the Indo-Pacific region through the QUAD.

²⁷ The Wire Staff "It's Official now, India to stay away from China's Belt and Road Forum" *TheWire.org*, May 14th 2017, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-china-obor-belt-summit>

²⁸ GIRISANKER S.B, "Addressing India concern over the OBOR one belt one road initiative through a liberal perspective" *Diplomatists.com*, May 28th 2020, <https://diplomatist.com/2020/05/28/addressing-indias-concern-over-the-obor-one-belt-one-road-initiative-through-a-liberal-perspective/>

²⁹ HT Consultant, "India refuses to support China's Belt and Road project at SCO meeting" November 30th 2020, *HindustanTimes.com*, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-doesn-t-join-sco-members-in-endorsing-china-s-belt-and-road-project/story-CBH22ODWVImRFpwkkhehWI.html>

³⁰Economic Times Writers, "India's Chabahar port plan is to counter China's plan to develop Gwadar port: Media" *Economic Times*, July 12th 2018 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indias-chabahar-port-plan-is-to-counter-chinas-plan-to-develop-gwadar-port-media/articleshow/52633906.cms?from=mdr>

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a strategic grouping with the US, Japan, Australia, and India. While this informal partnership was initiated³¹ by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the US Vice President Dick Cheney and the Australian Prime Minister John Howard supported this initiative. The QUAD ceased in 2008 due to the withdrawal of Australia after Beijing pressures to Australian foreign minister³². It is only in 2017 that took place in the Philippines the first official talks under the QUAD.

The Quad leaders discuss views on modern global issues, such as emerging technologies, connectivity and infrastructure, cyber security, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance. These countries share the same objective, which is to ensure and support a “free, open, and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region but also free from political and military influence. Australia, Japan, India, and the US, also implicitly wish through this strategic grouping to contain China’s aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific. This alliance only includes countries that had conflict with China, especially Japan and the US. China tried to invade Japan twice in 1274 and in 1281³³ before the two countries engaged in multiple wars³⁴ in 1894-1895 and in 1937-1945. As of now, Japan is a strong ally to the US, moreover China and Japan’s relations are still conflicting. From both countries claiming the Senkaku islands³⁵, Japan denying the Nanjing Massacre during WWII³⁶ to Prime Minister Abe supporting Taiwan³⁷, it is clear that China and Japan are not in good terms. Japan being a member of the QUAD can foster tensions with China. Additionally, the US and China are the two competing superpowers, competing in technology, trade, land access and cyberspace. The two superpowers have also been in conflict regarding their ideology with the US condemning Beijing for human rights abuses in Tibet in March 1959³⁸ but also with the US ordering China to halt its land reclamation efforts in South China Sea in 2015³⁹. As of 2022, American Officials boycotted the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing before Biden pressured Xi Jinping for its support to Russia invading Ukraine.

Furthermore, during the QUAD summit of March 2021, US President Biden vowed to make Indo-Pacific a region “anchored by democratic values and unconstrained by coercion” and to obey by the rule of international law in the maritime domain in the East and South China

³¹ « The Evolution of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, (QUAD) » *Current Affairs Review*, July 15th 2021, <https://www.currentaffairsreview.com/evolution-of-the-quadrilateral-security-dialogue-quad/>

³² Indrani Bagchi, “Australia to pull out of ‘quad’ that excludes China” *TimesofIndia.com*, February 6th 2008, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/australia-to-pull-out-of-quad-that-excludes-china/articleshow/2760109.cms>

³³ CARTWRIGHT Mark “The Mongol Invasions of Japan 1274 & 1281 CE”, *WorldHistory.com*, July 2nd 2019, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1415/the-mongol-invasions-of-japan-1274--1281-ce/>

³⁴ JANSEN Marius B. , CHU Samuel C. , Shumpei Okamoto and OH Bonnie B. “The Historiography of the Sino-Japanese War”, 1979, Taylor & Francis LTD, *The International History Review*

³⁵ UI KHALIQ Riyaz “Japan rejects China’s claim over disputed islands” March 2nd 2021, *AA.com*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/japan-rejects-china-s-claim-over-disputed-islands/2161888>

³⁶ CHIN Josh, KOH Yoree, “Japanese Officials Denies Nanjing Massacre” *Wall Street Journal*, February 23rd 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203960804577238802680649914>

³⁷ Catherine Wong, “China-Japan tensions: Abe’s comments on Taiwan prompt Beijing threat to ‘reconsider’ bilateral relations” *South China Morning Post*, December 9th 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3158950/china-japan-tension-abes-comments-taiwan-prompt-beijing-threat>

³⁸ “Timeline: US Relations with China 1949-2022”, *cfr.org*, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>

³⁹ “Timeline: US Relations with China 1949-2022”, *cfr.org*, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>

Sea⁴⁰. Through this speech, Biden attacked China without naming President Xi, indeed the US has previously criticized China's maritime actions in the Indian ocean in 2017⁴¹. The US condemned "China's unlawful maritime claims", "China's threatening maritime shipping lanes" and China's violation to international law. Finally in stating "anchored by democratic values and unconstrained by coercion", it seems like the US president sent a subliminal message to Xi Jinping whose regime is known for violating democratic values.

In joining the QUAD, India took a significant step in the Indo-Pacific. By joining the QUAD, India is now able to advance its interests in East Asia. Aligning itself with countries having opposite views with China can be a strategy to compete with Xi Jinping. This move from India entails important consequences for its relations with China. The QUAD has been seen as too provocative to China, indeed, in February 2022, the foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian explicitly criticized the grouping by stating: "The so-called Quad mechanism is, in nature, a tool to contain and circle China, and preserve America's hegemony."⁴² The Foreign Ministry Spokesperson urged the countries to abandon the QUAD grouping by referring to the «outdated cold war mentality, correct their wrong approach of advancing group confrontation and playing up geopolitical games, and play a constructive role for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region."

B) Building strategic alliances

As China is a predominant actor of the Indo-Pacific, India is building strategies to increase its influence and compete with China, one of these being building alliances. Modi's 2018 Shangri-La defined India's priorities, concerns, and challenges for the Indo-Pacific region. As Modi expressed the main elements of India's vision of Indo Pacific, he also expressed that partnerships should be a central pillar in the Indo-Pacific strategy⁴³. In explaining its shift from isolation to active engagement with other nations, the Indian Prime Minister claimed the need to make "strategic partnerships" as opposed to "grouping of containment".

In this strategy of building partnership⁴⁴, India first surrounded itself with Australia, Japan, France and the US. While these countries became the pillars of India's Indo-Pacific partnerships, Modi did not forget about ASEAN countries, the African continent, the EU and island communities in the Indian Ocean. India directly attacked China by partnering with Japan, China's opponent for years. In 2016, Japan and India initiated the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor to counter China's One Belt One Road project. Established in 2017, this growth

⁴⁰ "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: The Spirit of the QUAD", *Whitehouse.gov*, March 12th 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>

⁴¹ "China's military aggression in the Indo-Pacific region" *US.State.gov*, 2021, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-military-aggression-in-the-indo-pacific-region/index.html>

⁴² SBS Staff, "China has slammed the QUAD alliance as a 'tool to contain' the country" *SBS*, February 12th 2022, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/china-has-slammed-the-quad-alliance-as-a-tool-to-contain-the-country/du6mr96w5>

⁴³ BARUAH, Darshana, "India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's theater of opportunities" June 1st 2020, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://www.istor.org/stable/resrep24919.7?refreqid=excelsior%3A1e9ab48901fc08ee463f983cee6c559d&seq=1>

⁴⁴ BARUAH, Darshana, "India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's theater of opportunities" June 1st 2020, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://www.istor.org/stable/resrep24919.7?refreqid=excelsior%3A1e9ab48901fc08ee463f983cee6c559d&seq=1>

corridor aims at boosting quality infrastructure in Africa while nurturing India and Japan collaboration.

India is also partnering with European nations such as Belgium, indeed in 2018, Brussels initiated a strategy to “strengthen cooperation and partnership” with New Delhi. Through this cooperation, Brussels understands India as a key player in building broader geopolitical interests. India has also been building relationships with African countries and Arab Gulf nations. As India sees the African coastline as a strategic destination, Modi increased its presence in the western Indian ocean through humanitarian aid projects and capacity building resulting in several Indian checkpoints from the Mozambique Channel in the south to the Bab-El-Mandeb strait in the north. Moreover, India has been engaging with Arab Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Island nations have long been ignored by other nations, however, they are now being recognized by India because of their strategic position. By holding summits in 2014, 2015, and 2019 for India and Pacific Islands cooperation, India showed its interest in interacting with Pacific Islands Developing States. India announced a line of credit of \$150 million for Pacific Islands countries for projects related to climate change, solar power, and other renewable energy. In engaging with Island nations, India is attempting to establish itself as a savior by providing solutions to their security-oriented problems regarding China.

Through building alliances, India’s motive is clear: Modi is ready to do everything in order to weaken China. These strategic alliances can be an efficient way for India to compete with China as it is a proof that India has support from China’s enemies but also from other nations.

C) Act East Policy

Before the birth of the Act East Policy, India implemented the Look East Policy. Made in 1992, this policy was aimed at both strengthening economic and strategic relations in Southeast Asian countries and at countering China’s influence in the region⁴⁵. The Look East Policy was a tool used by India to reassert itself on the regional scene. This Look East Policy had three major objectives: the first one was to institutionalize linkages with ASEAN and its affiliates. The second one was to strengthen bilateral relationship with member states of ASEAN. The third and last objective of this policy was the prevention of Southeast Asia from falling under the influence of any major power. The Look East Policy had also a security-oriented and military aims. Indeed, balancing China was a critical determinant of the predecessor of the Act East Policy. Furthermore, this policy aimed to control the sea lanes of communications that enter the Pacific Ocean through the strait of Malacca. This policy acted to solve the fear that India may no longer be able to compensate for China’s strengthening economic and political linkages with Southeast Asia.

The Act East Policy was implemented in 2014 by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the goal of strengthening India and ASEAN countries’ relationships. Since he came to power, Modi expressed his wish to contain China. This diplomatic initiative was made to promote economic, strategic, and cultural relations with Asian Pacific countries. His first visit out of South Asia was in Japan to visit Prime Minister Abe who is as scared of Xi Jinping as Modi.

⁴⁵ MULAY Vaishnavi, “India’s Act East Policy: But What about China?” LSE, November 27th 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2017/11/27/indias-act-east-policy-but-what-about-china/>

The Act East Policy has two goals. First, it serves as a means of increasing India's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Second, it also appears as a counterweight to the rising strategic influence of China. Indeed, as it is focused on ASEAN countries, it, therefore, excludes China. The Act East Policy is a successor to the Look East Policy. Through this successor, the Indian Prime Minister visited many East Asian countries such as South Korea, Vietnam, Japan or even Singapore.

In 2020, Modi radically modified the Act East Policy⁴⁶, with a larger focus on the BIMSEC, development projects in ASEAN countries, on SMEs to drive business networks across borders and even outreach programs. All these reforms are aimed at enhancing India's strategy in the Indo-Pacific while containing China even more than before. The Indian military has always been wary of Chinese troops however this behavior changed in recent years due to the Act East Policy. Indeed, in 2021 India deployed warships in the South China Sea as part of the Act East Policy⁴⁷ to strengthen security and counter China's influence.

Despite all these efforts regarding, the Act East Policy lacks efficiency with uncertainties in terms of policies' priorities. Furthermore, the Act East Policy is not successful in countering China in the Indo-Pacific as the latter's influence keeps increasing in the region. Adding to that is the fact that some countries are distancing themselves from India for instance Nepal and Sri Lanka⁴⁸, which are tilting toward China. The Ukraine war is more likely to push India to rethink its Act East Policy⁴⁹. Indeed, the non-alignment in India's foreign policy is seen as problematic as India has good ties with both Russia and the US. Finally, ASEAN has been the target of criticism for various reasons including Chinese assertiveness in the South China sea, the pandemic but especially for its neutral response to the Russia-Ukraine situation. As the Act East Policy is oriented to ASEAN countries, India might shift its policy particularly in case of pressure from Western countries including the US.

Conclusion:

Relations between China and India remains complicated as both countries want to become global powers and have different strategies. The growing importance of the Indo-Pacific has escalated hostilities between the two Asian countries and even led to a power competition between China and India. China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region scares other countries triggering their wish to reduce partnering with China. China's aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific allows India to ally itself with countries having like-minded values and goals of countering China. China already implemented strategies to foster its influence in the region, however, whether it is through the QUAD grouping, strategic alliances or policies India is

⁴⁶ DE Prabir, "India's Act East Policy is slowly becoming Act Indo-Pacific policy under Modi government" ThePrint.in, March 27th 2020,

<https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/india-act-east-policy-is-becoming-act-indo-pacific/389502/>

⁴⁷ Sanjeev Miglani, "India deploys warships in South China Sea as part of the 'Act East' Policy" REUTERS.com, August 4th 2021,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-deploys-warships-south-china-sea-part-act-east-policy-2021-08-04/>

⁴⁸ JAIN Juhi "Deteriorating India-Sri Lanka ties: The Way Out", TheGeopolitics.com, May 12th 2021,

<https://thegeopolitics.com/deteriorating-india-sri-lanka-ties-the-way-out/>

⁴⁹ BAJPAEE Chietigj, "Ukraine Wars Adds pressure points to India's 'Act East' Policy", TheDiplomat.com, March 17th 2022, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2022/03/ukraine-war-adds-pressure-points-to-indias-act-east-policy/>

doing efforts to resist China. Modi continues to be skeptical about China as it has banned more than 100 Chinese apps including TikTok, Tencent, Alibaba and NetEase in 2020 after the clashes at the border. It looks like India may continue to counter the influence of China in India as the country accused Xiaomi of violating foreign exchange laws by making illegal remittances⁵⁰ in 2022.

⁵⁰ MADHOK Diksha "India-China tensions: Xiaomi is the latest Chinese company to face the heat in India" May 2nd 2022, CNN.com, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/02/tech/india-china-xiaomi-accusations-forex-hnk-intl/index.html>

Bibliography:

- China Power Team, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" *China Power.com*, August 2, 2017, Updated January 25, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>
- ² DONALD B. FREEMAN, "The Geographic Importance of the Straits of Malacca », *McGill University Press*, 2003
- ³ ASL Seyedmohammad Seyedi, "Strategic importance of Strait of Malacca in Southern Asia", *ANKASAM.org*, July 31st 2022, <https://www.ankasam.org/strategic-importance-of-strait-of-malacca-in-southern-asia/?lang=en>
- ⁴ PUBI Manu, "Indian Navy: Navy steps up Indian Ocean Operations, strategic Malacca strait under close watch" *Economic.times.Indiatimes.com*, July 30th 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/navy-steps-up-indian-ocean-ops-malacca-strait-under-close-watch/articleshow/77227221.cms?from=mdr>
- ⁵ LENDON Brad, "India to deploy task force into South China Sea and beyond", *CNN.com*, August 3rd 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/03/asia/india-warships-south-china-sea-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>
- ⁶ BREWSTER David, "The Bay of Bengal: The Maritime Silk Road and China's naval ambitions", *TheDiplomat.com*, December 14th 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/12/the-bay-of-bengal-the-maritime-silk-route-and-chinas-naval-ambitions/>
- ⁷ MOSTOFO Shafi Md, "BIMSTEC Gets a new lease of life", *TheDiplomat.com*, April 11th 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/bimstec-gets-a-new-lease-of-life/>
- ⁸ BREWSTER David "Japan is back in the Bay of Bengla", *Lowy Institute*, September 10th 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/japan-back-bay-bengal>
- ⁹ RAMAN Sunil, "The Strategic Importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands" *TheDiplomat.com*, January 3rd 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/01/the-strategic-importance-of-andaman-and-nicobar-islands/>
- ¹⁰ PATKI Ashutosh.S, "The Andaman and Nicobar: New Delhi's Bulwark in the Indo-Pacific", *TheDiplomat.com*, December 1th 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/the-andaman-and-nicobar-islands-new-delhis-bulwark-in-the-indian-ocean/>
- ¹¹ PANDA Ankit, "Report: Indian Navy Ejected Chinese Research Ship from Indian Exclusive Economic Zone", *TheDiplomat.com*, December 4th 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/report-indian-navy-ejected-chinese-research-ship-from-indian-exclusive-economic-zone/>
- ¹² SINGH Supriya, MARTINEZ Eduardo, "Japan aid for Indian Islands carries China 'geostrategic overtone' " *JapanToday.com*, April 30th 2022, <https://japantoday.com/category/politics/focus-japan-aid-for-indian-islets-carries-china-strategic-overtone>
- ¹³ SANTORA Marc, "What is the "Line of Actual Control" border between India and China" *NYTimes.com*, June 16th 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/world/asia/india-china-border.html>
- ¹⁴ BISWAS Soutik, "India-China clash: 20 Indian troops killed in Ladakh fighting" *BBC.com*, June 16th 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53061476>
- ¹⁵ "India rebukes China's foreign minister over Kashmir remarks ahead planned visit" *REUTERS.com*, March 24th, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/india-rebukes-chinas-foreign-minister-over-kashmir-remarks-ahead-planned-visit-2022-03-24/>
- ¹⁶ ANI "Sri Lanka succumbs to Chinese investment trap" *ThePrint.in*, March 22th 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/sri-lanka-succumbs-to-chinese-investment-trap/883311/>
- ¹⁷ ABI-HABIB, "How China got Sri Lanka to cough up a port", *NYTimes.com*, June 25th 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>
- ¹⁸ GUANQUN Mei, "Much Potential to be tapped" *Chinadaily.com*, June 12th 2020, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202006/12/WS5ee2bbd2a31083481725277f.html>
- ¹⁹ SAMSANI Sumanth, "China-Bangladesh strategic linkages", *Observer Research Foundation*, May 11th 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/china-bangladesh-strategic-linkages/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20Bangladesh%20gave%20China,to%20develop%20the%20Mongla%20port.> ²⁰ "China - Bangladesh "Made in Bangladesh" to overtake the "Made in China"", *Asianews.it*, November 6th 2019, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Made-in-Bangladesh-to-overtake-the-Made-in-China-47254.html>
- ²¹ Star Business Report "Chinese FDI in Bangladesh sees huge jump" *TheDailyStar.net*, September 31th 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/global-economy/news/chinese-fdi-bangladesh-sees-huge-jump-2186406>

- ²² “Nepal: Exploiting the Elite”, *TheGatewayhouse.in*, February 7th 2018, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/chinese-investments-in-nepal/>
- ²³ Al Jazeera Team, “China, Nepal sign trade, infrastructure and security deals”, *AlJazeera.com*, October 13th 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/10/13/china-nepal-sign-trade-infrastructure-and-security-deals/>
- ²⁴ HU Richard W, “China’s “One Belt One Road” strategy: Opportunities and challenges for India”, *SAGE Publications*, 2017
- ²⁵ BANERJEE Dipankar , “China’s One Belt One Road: Indian Perspectives” Singapore, March 31st 2016, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2016_14.pdf
- ²⁶ AHMAS Moonis, “Strategic Meaning of The China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor” *Institute of Strategic Studies of Islamabad*, 2015,
- ²⁷ The Wire Staff “It’s Official now, India to stay away from China’s Belt and Road Forum” *TheWire.org*, May 14th 2017, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-china-obor-belt-summit>
- ²⁸ GIRISANKER S.B, “Addressing India concern over the OBOR one belt one road initiative through a liberal perspective” *Diplomatists.com*, May 28th 2020, <https://diplomatist.com/2020/05/28/addressing-indias-concern-over-the-obor-one-belt-one-road-initiative-through-a-liberal-perspective/>
- ²⁹ HT Consultant, “India refuses to support China’s Belt and Road project at SCO meeting” November 30th 2020, *HindustanTimes.com*, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-doesn-t-join-sco-members-in-endorsing-china-s-belt-and-road-project/story-CBH22ODWVImRFpwkkkehWI.html>
- ³⁰ Economic Times Writers, “India’s Chabahar port plan is to counter China’s plan to develop Gwadar port: Media” *Economic Times*, July 12th 2018 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indias-chabahar-port-plan-is-to-counter-chinas-plan-to-develop-gwadar-port-media/articleshow/52633906.cms?from=mdr>
- ³¹ « The Evolution of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, (QUAD) » *Current Affairs Review*, July 15th 2021, <https://www.currentaffairsreview.com/evolution-of-the-quadrilateral-security-dialogue-quad/>
- ³² Indrani Bagchi, “Australia to pull out of ‘quad’ that excludes China” *TimesofIndia.com*, February 6th 2008, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/australia-to-pull-out-of-quad-that-excludes-china/articleshow/2760109.cms>
- ³³ CARTWRIGHT Mark “The Mongol Invasions of Japan 1274 & 1281 CE”, *WorldHistory.com*, July 2nd 2019, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1415/the-mongol-invasions-of-japan-1274--1281-ce/>
- ³⁴ JANSEN Marius B. , CHU Samuel C. , Shumpei Okamoto and OH Bonnie B. “The Historiography of the Sino-Japanese War”, 1979, Taylor & Francis LTD, *The International History Review*
- ³⁵ UI KHALIQ Riyaz “Japan rejects China’s claim over disputed islands” March 2nd 2021, *AA.com*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/japan-rejects-china-s-claim-over-disputed-islands/2161888>
- ³⁶ CHIN Josh, KOH Yoree, “Japanese Officials Denies Nanjing Massacre” *Wall Street Journal*, February 23rd 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203960804577238802680649914>
- ³⁷ Catherine Wong, “China-Japan tensions: Abe’s comments on Taiwan prompt Beijing threat to ‘reconsider’ bilateral relations” *South China Morning Post*, December 9th 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3158950/china-japan-tension-abes-comments-taiwan-prompt-beijing-threat>
- ³⁸ “Timeline: US Relations with China 1949-2022”, *cfr.org*, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>
- ³⁹ “Timeline: US Relations with China 1949-2022”, *cfr.org*, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>
- ⁴⁰ “Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: The Spirit of the QUAD”, *Whitehouse.gov*, March 12th 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>
- ⁴¹ “China’s military aggression in the Indo-Pacific region” *US.State.gov*, 2021, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-military-aggression-in-the-indo-pacific-region/index.html>
- ⁴² SBS Staff, “China has slammed the QUAD alliance as a ‘tool to contain’ the country” *SBS*, February 12th 2022, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/china-has-slammed-the-quad-alliance-as-a-tool-to-contain-the-country/du6mr96w5>
- ⁴³ BARUAH, Darshana, “India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi’s theater of opportunities” June 1st 2020, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://www.istor.org/stable/resrep24919.7?refreqid=excelsior%3A1e9ab48901fc08ee463f983cee6c559d&seq=1>

⁴⁴ BARUAH, Darshana, "India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's theater of opportunities" June 1st 2020, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*,

<https://www.istor.org/stable/resrep24919.7?refreqid=excelsior%3A1e9ab48901fc08ee463f983cee6c559d&seq=1>

⁴⁵ MULAY Vaishnavi, "India's Act East Policy: But What about China?" LSE, November 27th 2017,

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2017/11/27/indias-act-east-policy-but-what-about-china/>

⁴⁶ DE Prabir, "India's Act East Policy is slowly becoming Act Indo-Pacific policy under Modi government" ThePrint.in, March 27th 2020,

<https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/india-act-east-policy-is-becoming-act-indo-pacific/389502/>

⁴⁷ Sanjeev Miglani, "India deploys warships in South China Sea as part of the 'Act East' Policy" REUTERS.com, August 4th 2021,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-deploys-warships-south-china-sea-part-act-east-policy-2021-08-04/>

⁴⁸ JAIN Juhi "Deteriorating India-Sri Lanka ties: The Way Out", TheGeopolitics.com, May 12th 2021,

<https://thegeopolitics.com/deteriorating-india-sri-lanka-ties-the-way-out/>

⁴⁹ BAJPAEE Chietigj, "Ukraine Wars Adds pressure points to India's 'Act East' Policy", TheDiplomat.com, March 17th 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/ukraine-war-adds-pressure-points-to-indias-act-east-policy/>

⁵⁰ MADHOK Diksha "India-China tensions: Xiaomi is the latest Chinese company to face the heat in India" May 2nd 2022, CNN.com,

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/02/tech/india-china-xiaomi-accusations-forex-hnk-intl/index.html>