

Role Of Us, Europe, And Indo-Pacific Partners In India's China Strategy

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1. Abstract

The rise of China and its rapidly changing geopolitical environment have prompted India to re-evaluate its foreign policy approach towards the Red Dragon. This paper sheds light on India's engagement with the US-led QUAD initiative, its growing relations with European nations, and its transcend to regional partners like Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries. It examines diplomatic ties, security alliances, economic cooperation, and regional initiatives in detail to illuminate how these connections impact India's efforts to maintain a firm and balanced stance toward China. This study focuses on the intricate interplay of interests, problems, and opportunities that determine the changing face of global geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region through an analysis of India's relationships with its key allies.

Keywords: India-China, USA, Europe in Indo-Pacific, China strategy, Indo-Pacific region

2. Introduction

India and China, the two most populous rising global powers, have a complicated relationship that is marked by a mix of rivalry, cooperation, and conflict. India's current geopolitical concerns focus on the risks involved with a China-dominated unilateral Asia. Not only does China simply stand over its Asian neighbors, but it also strives for dominance in the region. The relentless pursuit of disputed territory claims, forceful economic intimidation, and bargain hunting have all contributed to the intensifying of the China challenge.

India's foreign policy is at a turning point as China's influence grows worldwide. India's China strategy is based on the understanding that it must respond to China's assertive actions and growing influence in an integrated and planned manner. China's assertive activities in territorial conflicts, its developing military might, and its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, all intensify India's strategic responsibilities. To protect its national interests and maintain regional peace, India has taken an integrated approach that includes partnerships for security, economic cooperation, and diplomatic engagement with nations with similar values. India's growing engagement with the US is the most important of these alliances. Moreover, India has taken a more active stance in its diplomatic endeavors to broaden its scope and strengthen its strategic outreach to European nations, which provides India with valuable links in a variety of areas.

In efforts to balance China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific, India has worked to strengthen its relations with other nations in the region, such as Japan, Australia, and ASEAN. Through programs like QUAD and bilateral security talks, India seeks to promote greater strategic alignment and collaboration with countries that share common values, for a more stable and rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

3. Historical context

After gaining their independence, China and India—two rising nations in the post-colonial era—had cordial relations at first. This unity was embodied in the Panchsheel Agreement of 1954, which placed a strong emphasis on the values of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and respect for one another. But as tensions over unresolved boundary disputes grew in the early 1960s, relations between the two countries deteriorated and resulted in the Sino-Indian War in 1962. Both countries worked to strengthen their bilateral relations and promote economic cooperation after the end of the Cold War. Despite the implementation of steps aimed at fostering confidence to tackle border concerns, trade imbalances and territorial conflicts kept hampering the complete normalization of relations. The relationship remained unstable despite efforts to patch things up, made worse by occasional clashes near the border.

China's aggressive moves in the region have demonstrated the growing complexity of its strategic conflict with India in recent years. Two notable examples are the Doklam Standoff in 2017 and the Galwan Valley conflict in 2020, both of which led to casualties and worsened tensions between the two nations. In particular, the Galwan Valley incident acted as a trigger for India to reevaluate its strategic alignment with China.

India has taken a more assertive policy approach in reaction to China's assertiveness, aiming to strengthen its strategic relationships, especially with the United States and Western governments. Through programs like the Quad, India improved diplomatic relations with nations including the US, Japan, Australia, and Vietnam. To counterbalance China's military presence, India has made investments in modernizing its armed forces, acquiring advanced weapons, and enhancing its air force and navy capabilities.

Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's minister of external affairs, emphasized that India is prepared to handle its relations with China in the Indo-Pacific area and stressed the need to use alliances to balance China's dominance.¹

¹ Basu, T. (2020). Sino-US Disorder: Power and Policy in Post-COVID Indo-Pacific. *Journal of Asian Economic Integration*, 2(2), 159–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631684620940448>

The changing nature of the relationship between China and India highlights the difficulties and complexities involved in maintaining bilateral relations between two significant regional powers. The strategic balance is still changing as both countries strive for dominance in the Indo-Pacific due to conflicting national interests and geopolitical realities. In navigating this complex landscape, India's strategic partnerships with the US, Europe, and other Indo-Pacific allies emerge as crucial pillars of its China strategy, aimed at safeguarding its security interests and promoting regional stability.

4. Role of US

China is a strategic challenge to both the US and India. Although China is far from the US mainland, Beijing's expansionist intentions, border disputes, and geographic proximity make China a real challenge to India. China's growing regional and global influence is causing concern for both Washington and New Delhi, despite their official claims that China has little influence in this new alignment. As a key component of the US "**Pivot to Asia**" strategy², the strategic alliance between the US and India remained largely intact during the administration of Barack Obama. With New Delhi given even more importance and an increasing number of efforts targeted at strengthening Indo-US defense capacity in the region, Washington's approach to the region gained additional momentum under the Trump administration and was officially rebranded as an Indo-Pacific policy. Furthermore, in October 2021, the Biden administration led the creation of the West Asian Quad, sometimes known as I2U2³. The key element of this framework for cross-regional cooperation is India. Signed by the United States, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was accepted by India on May 23, 2022. The US-India partnership has been strengthened by strategic cooperation on topics ranging from maritime security to counterterrorism. Through joint exercises and technological transfers, military cooperation has deepened, strengthening India's defense capabilities. In addition, economic cooperation has expanded, with the US acting as a crucial trade and investment partner for India by providing a counterbalance to China's economic hegemony.

Due to mutual concerns over China's military modernization and aggressive stance, India and the US have greatly increased their military cooperation in recent years. Enhanced collaboration and interoperability between the armed forces of the two nations have been made possible by the signing of defense accords like the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)

² It was one of the Obama Administration's central foreign policy initiatives. The pivot is meant to be a strategic "re-balancing" of U.S. interests from Europe and the Middle East toward East Asia.

³ I2U2 stands for Israel, India, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates

and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)⁴. Furthermore, India's defense capabilities and deterrence stance against China have been strengthened by cooperative military drills, high-level defense discussions, and defense technology collaborations. The US's backing of India's defense modernization initiatives, which includes the transfer of technology and the sale of advanced military gear, highlights the strategic alliance between the two nations and strengthens India's capacity to protect its interests against Chinese aggression.

Additionally, the two nations have signed the Helicopter Cross Decking Agreement (HOSTAC) and the Industrial Security Annex to the GSOMIA, which permits the US to share sensitive data with Indian defense businesses. India's application for Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 (STA-1) was granted by the US in 2018, reducing barriers to the sale of cutting-edge US military and aerospace components. The two nations' organizational coordination has grown as a result of their enhanced cooperation. For example, amid a crisis at the India-China border in 2020, the Trump administration deployed two intelligent surveillance drones and cold-weather clothing for Indian forces.

India's rivals are strongly countered by the growing strategic cooperation between the US and India, primarily through defense ties. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA, 2002), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA, 2020)⁵—which encourages interoperability between the two militaries and provides provisions for the sale and transfer of high-end technologies—are examples of the increased engagement between New Delhi and Washington. Above all, the improved ties have resulted in a significant increase in India's military power, particularly in terms of targeting targets with precise accuracy—a crucial aspect that India must closely monitor

Another important factor guiding India's China strategy is the economic relationship with the US. While China attempts to increase its economic influence through programs like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India considers the US as a major partner for trade, investment, and technological collaboration.

⁴Reviewer. (2021, March 8). *The quad factor in the Indo-Pacific and the role of India*. Air University (AU).

<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2528182/the-quad-factor-in-the-indo-pacific-and-the-role-of-india/>

⁵Reviewer. (2021, March 8). *The quad factor in the Indo-Pacific and the role of India*. Air University (AU).

<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2528182/the-quad-factor-in-the-indo-pacific-and-the-role-of-india/>

Additionally, joining the Blue Dot Network offers New Delhi a compelling response to China's BRI and will also enable India to address the pressing issues brought by China's growing commercial, military, and maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

China over the years has emerged as one of India's largest trading partners; despite the economic benefits, India's reliance on Chinese markets poses several challenges and concerns such as strategic vulnerabilities, and dependence on critical supply chains dominated by Chinese firms. India hopes to lessen its reliance on the Chinese markets and lower the dangers related to China's coercive economic policies by strengthening its relations with the USA and also with the "Make in India" campaign, for example, and the restriction of Chinese apps, India was able to lessen its reliance on China economically. Another example is 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' which counters China's influence by reducing India's economic dependency on Chinese imports and promoting domestic manufacturing, thus enhancing India's economic resilience and strategic autonomy. Sagarmala⁶ is another key initiative taken up by the government of India, its main objective is to lower logistics costs and increase India's competitiveness in the international market. With a focus on the port-led infrastructure development, the project involves significant infrastructure spending, with the US investment this initiative can move ahead far more quickly and forcefully. To support its China containment policy, The United States wants a strong and stable India, which can only be achieved when these initiatives are implemented properly. India and the United States have the potential to determine the course of regional geopolitics and maintain the values of an international order based on norms through cooperative efforts and shared interests.

⁶ Air University (AU). (2023, April 24). *Limited hard balancing: Explaining India's counter response to Chinese*.

<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3371481/limited-hard-balancing-explaining-indias-counter-response-to-chinese-encircleme/>

5. Europe's contribution

Despite the US's current dominance in India's Indo-Pacific strategy, New Delhi is well aware of the importance of expanding the scope of its strategic alliances. India is also associated with the fact that the West is not limited to the United States. Europe is often seen as expanding the region's strategic choices as the US and China's growing rivalry begins to put pressure on Southeast Asia. India's approach towards China is influenced by Europe's stand on matters like international law, democracy, and human rights. With concerns about China's aggressive policies in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, India is trying to use European support to lobby for an international order based on regulations and safeguard basic concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A new chapter in bilateral relations was marked by the first-ever security and military meetings between the EU and India, which took place in Brussels in June 2022.⁷ In June 2022, the EU and India resumed negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement, along with the establishment of the Trade and Technological Council, a bilateral body that signifies a new stage in bilateral cooperation. This is primarily because of the Sino-Russian alignment's mirror effect, as India is attempting to lessen its reliance on both Russia and China for imports and military supplies, while the EU seeks to reduce its reliance on China.

India's worries about China's military aggression and regional aspirations have become more aligned with Europe's evolving security and strategic goals in the Indo-Pacific region. France, Germany, and the UK are among the European nations that have reinforced their support for a rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific region and have strengthened their security cooperation with India.

The strategic alliance between France and India has been a major driver of progress in the EU-India relationship. This is not like any other relationship— in some respects, it surpasses that with the United States. France has become a potential key partner for India in areas of defense and security, enhancing maritime security and technology transfer.

Europe has a dynamic and complex role in India's China strategy, consisting of diplomatic, economic, and security facets. Europe provides India with invaluable support and collaboration prospects as it navigates the difficulties of its relationship with China.

⁷ Cogo, P. (n.d.). *Unlocking the potential of EU-India relations: the 'China factor.'* Chinaobservers. <https://chinaobservers.eu/unlocking-the-potential-of-eu-india-relations-the-china-factor/>

6. Indo-Pacific Partners

With the rise of China and growing interests in the Indian Ocean and the subcontinent, as well as India's growing presence in the Pacific, the concept of Indo-Pacific has gained traction. According to some, India's Indo-Pacific strategy illustrates the "evasive balancing"⁸ approach because it pursues a reassurance strategy to persuade Beijing that India is not balancing China, while also displaying contradictory elements of balancing China through partnerships with regional and US powers.

6.1 Japan - India partnership

Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, suggested that Japan, the US, India, and Australia establish a democratic coalition to jointly defend the global public goods, particularly the freedom of navigation, in reaction to China's aggressive actions in Asia.

In a highly praised speech delivered in 2016, Abe reintroduced this concept by referring to a "union of two free and open oceans and two continents."⁹ This vision of Japan for the Indo-Pacific matches with that of India. Reducing reliance on Chinese supply chains has become essential post-pandemic as the disengagement discussion picks up pace in Indo-Pacific nations. Partial detachment is a possibility, while complete detachment could not be attainable shortly. For example, the debate over the "China Plus One" model is not new in Japan. Increased communication about supply chain diversification and possible alternatives is required between the US, Japan, and India as economies look for ways to lessen their reliance on China. The economies of Southeast Asia continue to be favored. However, since 2016, Japanese manufacturing companies have ranked India as their top destination over China, according to the most recent annual poll conducted by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (IBIC).

⁸ Basu, T. (2020). Sino-US Disorder: Power and policy in Post-COVID Indo-Pacific. *Journal of Asian Economic Integration*, 2(2), 159–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631684620940448>

⁹ Heiduk, F., & Wacker, G. (2020). From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, implementation and challenges. *SWP*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020rp09>

Foreign and defense ministers from Japan and India began a regular "2+2" dialogue in October 2018¹⁰, demonstrating the expansion of bilateral cooperation in security and defense policy. With the potential to involve other nations like the US, talks on an Acquisition & Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) were started in 2018. The goal of the ACSA is to make it easier for both parties to use military sites for joint operations and logistical needs.

Additionally, India - US- Japan promotes an international maritime system based on norms and respects the law of the sea as an integration of maritime democracy.

It is our shared duty to protect the vital sea lanes as public goods and worldwide commons so that they can serve as the main routes for trade and energy, thereby boosting the Indo-Pacific region's economy. A strong agenda for maritime cooperation between the US, Japan, and India has been supported by strategic departments in US-Japan, India-US, and India-Japan security ties. This collaboration aims to enhance maritime domain awareness and create capacity.

As a whole, India's China policy is greatly influenced by Japan's strategic alliance, which provides diplomatic backing, economic collaboration, and security cooperation.

6.2 Alliance between Australia and India

India and Australia share a similar vision for the Indo-Pacific region, as expressed in Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. The foundation for improved diplomatic cooperation is laid by both nations' support of an international order based on rules, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, and peaceful conflict resolution.

As part of Canberra's Pacific Set-up plan, Australia is looking toward India and other possible partners to enhance infrastructure in the Pacific Islands through developmental projects, particularly in light of China's growing influence in the area.

¹⁰ Heiduk, F., & Wacker, G. (2020). From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, implementation and challenges. *SWP*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020rp09>

China's territorial assertiveness, maritime expansionism, and military modernization are challenges for both countries. As a result, through collaborative defense technology, defense discussions, and joint exercises, Australia and India have strengthened their defense ties. One concrete example of bilateral security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is the yearly AUSINDEX naval drills between Australia and India¹¹. Furthermore, Australia strengthens India's defense capabilities and strengthens its deterrence stance against China by transferring technology and defensive equipment to the country.

Australia is one of India's main economic partners, especially in the energy, mining, and agricultural industries. The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) negotiations between Australia and India is one initiative that aims to strengthen economic connections and encourage bilateral trade and investment. Opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with India are presented by Australia's capabilities in fields including digital innovation, renewable energy, and infrastructure development. India aims to lessen its reliance on supply chains that are focused on China and increase its economic resilience by utilizing Australia's assets and expertise. Australia establishes itself as a trustworthy ally and partner while India works through the difficulties in its relationship with China and defends its interests in the Indo-Pacific area. India maintains its place as a major actor in the changing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific by utilizing Australia's economic might, diplomatic status, and security capabilities to advance prosperity, peace, and stability in the area.

6.3 ASEAN and India's Act East Policy

India's "Look East" policy, which evolved into the "Act East Policy," highlights strategic ties with nations like Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore, which share India's concerns about China's assertiveness. To strengthen maritime security and advance stability in the Indo-Pacific area, these partnerships include defense cooperation, cooperative marine patrols, and capacity-building programs. The AEP, which was made public in 2014, is India's most recent attempt to interact with East Asian countries and its neighbors to the east. It expands on the LEP to give India's relations with those areas more vigor and resolve. There are important security and strategic implications to this new strategy for India's eastward involvement.

¹¹ Reviewer. (2021, March 8). *The quad factor in the Indo-Pacific and the role of India*. Air University (AU). <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2528182/the-quad-factor-in-the-indo-pacific-and-the-role-of-india/>

China's geopolitical incursions into the region are a source of anxiety for New Delhi, which drives India's security and strategic alliances with nations in Southeast Asia. Although the AEP was first centered on trade and economic ties between India and Southeast Asian nations, China's growing assertiveness and growth in the area, especially about the South China Sea issue, has forced New Delhi to reevaluate its geopolitical strategy. China's incursion into what New Delhi regards as India's "extended neighborhood" is a source of concern for India. India's security and strategic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, both bilaterally and multilaterally, has thus been highlighted in the LEP and AEP. India is making an effort to hinder China's regional expansionist actions with this policy.

Another crucial component of India's Act East policy is ASEAN. In 2002, India joined ASEAN at the summit level, and ten years later, the strategic partnership between the two countries was established. There were several exchanges between India and Southeast Asia during the Eastward Focus period of Indian foreign policy. India and ASEAN conducted a thorough assessment of their strategic alliances across a variety of fields in 2020. They approved a new five-year action plan that covers counterterrorism, maritime security, and trade cooperation. Also, through its involvement in ASEAN-led processes, India may express its worries over China's forceful actions in the South China Sea and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

India aims to lessen its reliance on supply chains that are centered on China and expand its international trade links by strengthening its economic ties with ASEAN. Furthermore, India's investments in connectivity projects, capacity-building efforts, and infrastructure projects support ASEAN's economic growth and secure India's position as a major player in the area. ASEAN has a significant influence on how India views China and how it implements its "Act East Policy." Through diplomatic, economic, and strategic engagement with ASEAN member nations, India aims to challenge China's increasing influence in the area while advancing its objectives. India stands by its commitment to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that is supported by respect for international law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity as it continues to expand its engagement with ASEAN under the "Act East Policy."

7. India's multifaceted approach

An optimistic India seems more than capable of enduring the pandemic's shocks and marching on to interact with a world dominated by trade conflicts and ideological rivalry. There's no space for hopelessness. India can and must lead the way in uniting the world to embrace a new kind of multilateralism that prioritizes the interests of mankind as a whole over limited national interests, despite its difficult circumstances. In the post-COVID-19 world, multilateralism offers India a strategic chance to become an independent powerhouse.

New Delhi's strategy in the China–India power competition focuses on limited hard balancing. This strategy calls for a moderate development of the military as well as unofficial coalitions, such as strategic partnerships, that permit cooperative projects and the sharing of resources but do not involve preventive warfare or coordinated military operations. India's limited resources and China's expanding alliance with Pakistan, which has further surrounded India, have constrained New Delhi's ability to respond to China's massive Belt and Road Initiative. India has therefore taken a strong critique of the BRI, stressing strong normative norms, as a result of the power disparity. India has carefully expressed its reservations about the BRI, claiming that it threatens "the rest" and has a colonizing tendency.

China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean is countered by India's geographic and geopolitical prominence in the Indo-Pacific region. China's encirclement policy through port facilities in India's neighborhood, especially Gwadar and Hambantota, and the desire to maintain and protect open and free sea lanes of communications against concerns regarding China's choke point in the South China Sea and increasing maritime presence in the Indian Ocean under the guise of anti-piracy operations are the main driving forces behind the need for such a counterbalance. India, the United States, and Japan have all expressed their individual approaches to the Indo-Pacific region and have different perspectives on Indo-Pacific issues, including perceptions of order, China strategy, quad consultation, ASEAN importance, and trade multilateralism.

New Delhi has rejected Beijing's standard operating procedure (SOP) policy in favor of the strategic offensive doctrine—which holds that "offense is the best defense"—and has started crafting its own "necklace of diamonds" plan. By growing Indian naval bases and forming alliances and partnerships with strategically placed countries in the Indian Ocean region (IOR), this strategy—also referred to as the counter-encirclement policy—aims to encircle China.

Any outside influence is seen as a danger to national security by New Delhi, which regards India as the region's net security provider. In response to China's actions in the IOR, New Delhi has partnered with strategically positioned IOR nations and built naval bases. India's primary goal was to create a foothold close to the Strait of Malacca, a vital strategic crossing. Furthermore, India's contribution to the construction of Indonesia's Sabang port is seen as a counterbalance to China's regional aspirations. Additionally, India and Singapore signed a bilateral agreement that permits the Indian Navy to be stationed at Changi Naval Base. India is developing strategic and marine ties with China's neighbors, including Japan and Mongolia, in addition to Singapore. India's goal in the Indian Ocean is to deter China's growing naval might and influence. Some Indian officials have stated that India prefers to establish connectivity through cooperation rather than a solitary way. During the Covid pandemic, before China's supply reached the region, India started its vaccination campaign in South Asia. Hence, India proposes that instead of supporting China, additional minor states adopt its example. India is also regarded as one of the world's new "preferred"¹² investment destinations as nations look to move their production out of China. India is a popular option because of its sizable market and, most crucially, its low labor costs. Notably, South Korea's Samsung has halted operations in China and moved production units to India, and Apple has collaborated with Foxconn to develop a manufacturing base in India. India is locating pieces of land throughout the nation in response to these changes to fund their planned investments. This strengthens India's position in the global supply chain network.

Despite all this, to resolve points of concern and foster confidence, India has actively promoted communication and engagement with China on several bilateral and international forums. To properly manage their relationship, both nations have maintained high-level diplomatic exchanges despite disagreements on matters like territorial disputes and regional security. People-to-people contacts and Track II diplomacy have also been used to promote improved mutual understanding and collaboration between the two countries.

¹² Reviewer. (2021, March 8). *The quad factor in the Indo-Pacific and the role of India*. Air University (AU).

<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2528182/the-quad-factor-in-the-indo-pacific-and-the-role-of-india/>

India's diversified approach to China reflects the complexity of their relationship and the range of issues that it poses. To protect its interests and advance stability and collaboration in the region, India combines economic involvement, military preparedness, diplomatic engagement, and cultural endeavors. India's ability to adjust to changing conditions and make full use of its advantages will determine how successful its China policy is as both nations navigate changing geopolitical forces and continue to evolve.

The shift in the power dynamics within Asia has resulted in a distinct ideological framework for India's external security strategies. India has been looking for counterbalance tactics that incorporate more engagement with the West. India and the US have never had a closer relationship than they do now.

Military and security cooperation with the United States is expanding. India, which has historically avoided political associations with the West, is now prepared to join small-scale organizations like the US and its allies. It has joined the US, Australia, and Japan in the Quadrilateral Forum in the East.

8. Recommendation

1. India as a manufacturing hub: India can become Asia's leading manufacturing hub, especially when it comes to utilizing international technology transfers and encouraging the creation of jobs with added value. India can enhance aviation connectivity by increasing infrastructure projects like building new airports and renovating old ones. Businesses that depend on technology can expand by investing in digital infrastructure, such as data centers and broadband networks. Additionally, projects such as the National Optical Fiber Network can improve rural areas' internet connectivity, fostering digital inclusion and facilitating the expansion of e-commerce. Expanding the network of industrial corridors can also draw in investment and promote regional industrial development. One example of this is the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor. Implementing online portals for business licensing and registration, similar to Singapore's "Business Grants Portal," can strengthen regulatory changes by streamlining processes and increasing clearness. Concerning skill development, sector-specific skill gaps can be addressed by setting up industry-specific training programs and partnerships. Lastly, facilitating access to finance can involve setting up dedicated SME financing institutions and promoting peer-to-peer lending platforms to diversify funding options for small businesses.

2. India's role in The Blue Dot Network: India has the chance to promote regional connectivity projects like the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor that fit the goals of the Blue Dot Network¹³. While India has made advances in regional connectivity and public-private partnerships, there is room for development. For a start, improving project execution efficiency is critical to avoiding delays and maintaining investor confidence. For example, bureaucratic roadblocks have hampered the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. Second, ensuring infrastructure quality is critical; for example, preserving the Chabahar Port's long-term sustainability necessitates investments. Third, promoting inclusive development will ensure that projects such as the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor benefit local populations by providing skill development and employment opportunities. Finally, including sustainability in infrastructure initiatives, such as renewable energy investments, can help India meet its climate targets while also improving connectivity.
3. Defense capabilities: India's military capabilities need to be strengthened to prepare for the possibility of conflict with China, this includes investing in advanced technologies UAVs, cyber warfare capabilities, etc. India must boost domestic military manufacturing, raise defense spending to 3% of GDP, and enhance cooperation between public and private sector organizations as well as between government agencies and defense research groups. This means increasing modernization funding, offering incentives to homegrown defense contractors, and setting up specialized channels for information exchange and communication. Moreover, improving the purchase process is essential to the timely completion of defense programs.
4. India's role in IORA: India may prioritize inclusive development, increase environmental sustainability measures, and implement effective project management methods to solve the shortcomings in its regional cooperation efforts in the Indian Ocean Rim region. To improve project implementation efficiency and community engagement, for example, lessons can be learned from projects such as the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City and the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. Additionally, India may prioritize environmental sustainability in its development ambitions by taking inspiration from environmentally friendly projects like Kurnool Ultra Mega Solar Park and the Kochi Metro Rail. India can enhance its attempts at regional collaboration and accomplish more sustainable and equitable development outcomes in the Indian Ocean Rim region by utilizing these techniques and examples.

¹³ The Blue Dot Network is an international project that aims to promote sustainability, transparency, and the development of high-quality infrastructure. These initiatives are meant to promote economic cooperation, trade, and investment both inside and outside of the Indo-Pacific area.

9. Conclusion

Preventing China from taking the lead in the Indo-Pacific is the primary objective of Indian policy. Experts view India's strategy as a crucial part of a counterbalance to China, even as the Indian government is simultaneously indicating that it is eager to work with its neighbor. This is illustrated, among other things, by its membership in institutions that China helped form or shape, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the BRICS group of governments with development banks. To oppose China's authoritarian influence, India needs to advance democratic principles and human rights throughout the Indo-Pacific area. India, for instance, can support civil society organizations and enhance freedom of speech and expression in nations where China is influencing politics or the economy. Finding a balance between cooperation and confrontation with China—that is, between upholding India's credibility with its real Indo-Pacific allies and at the same time fostering positive relations with China—remains the fundamental challenge facing Indian foreign policy.

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