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**NYAYAVIMARSHA**

## The Dragon's Shadow: Assessing India's China Policy Amidst Contemporary Governance Challenges

### Introduction

A better approach at understanding the contemporary circumstances necessitates one to understand the very historical causes and roots that have evolved into what we find today between the relations between India and China. The two countries – India and China have been historically and culturally rich with each one with its own civilisation and historical past. Both the countries were also colonized by the Europeans who found the region as a source of wealth to suffice their individual as well as the national demands. This caused them to drainage of massive amount of resources from the region along with plundering the labour, resources and historical structures of the countries. While the difference does lie in the political stability where it is by and large evident that China has had a stable form of political order which was centrally run. It was never colonized over majority of its territories. However, in the case of India the point reverses. There was no authority which has ruled over the whole of India extending from the present day Afghanistan to Myanmar. "China's problem, unlike that of India, was the multiplicity of foreign powers gnawing at its sides with no single hegemonic ruling ideology as India had with liberal democracy from Britain. It had German, Japanese, American, French and British jostling not so much for rule over Chinese minds as over their cash boxes."<sup>1</sup> These political and historical legacies shaped the direction for both political and economic circumstances today.

The geopolitical scenario of India is shaped by its strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region. The region is of pivotal global significance due to innumerable reasons like global significance of trade routes and political dynamics. As India is expanding its wings in the economic and political domain it finds itself at the crossroads of competing political influence, particularly by the very close neighbour - China. The recent few decades have explicitly shown China's growing assertiveness not only across the globe but also in the very region of Indo-Pacific through political, economic and military interventions. The history tells us that the relations between the two countries - India and China were marked by cooperation to much extent till the War of 1962. "However, the relations began deteriorating after the demonstration of China's aggressive policy of territorial dominance through military might during the 1962 war. Since then, both nations have engaged in diplomatic efforts, but the relationship remains strained due to unresolved border disputes and China's strategic maneuvers in South Asia. China sweeping claims of sovereignty over the sea—and the sea's estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas."<sup>2</sup>

An aggressive shift in India's policy towards China is observed with the emergence of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy—a combative and nationalistic stance that departs from its previous

<sup>1</sup> Desai, M., 2003. *India and China: An essay in comparative political economy*. Paper presented at IMF Conference on India/China, Delhi, November.

<sup>2</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, 2024. *Territorial disputes in the South China Sea*. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>, 15 September 2024.

restrained diplomacy. It is named after a Chinese action movie which involves assertive and often confrontational behavior by Chinese diplomats, defending China's interests vigorously while challenging criticism. For India, this shift was the need of the hour due to various attempts by China to aggravate the situation on Line of Actual Control (LAC) by deploying large number of troops along with construction of critical infrastructure along its borders. Also, another reason for the assertive posture that has been attained by India is due to the increasing influence of China in its very neighbours like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Also its aggressive trade policy too compels the countries like India to think twice before making any commitments with China.

### **India-China Relations - Pre 2000s**

"It is to be noted that on December 30, 1949 India was the second non-communist nation to recognize the People's Republic of China after its proclamation on October 1, 1949. On May, 15, 1954 India and China signed the Panchsheel document."<sup>3</sup> However, since then there have been repeated violations of the agreements be it the case of inclusion of a portion of India's northern frontier on the official map of China or intrusion of Chinese troops in the Indian territory. The early 1960s period was marked by 1962 Sino-Indian war which strained the relations between the two countries. During mid-1970s both the nations sought to restore the diplomatic relations and as a result there were numerous high-level visits and signing of the agreements aimed at managing border issues. However, all these attempts did not normalize the border issues till late 1990s.

### **India-China Relations - Post 2000s**

By the late 1990s and the early 2000s, China became India's largest trading partner. While along with this both the nations attempted at building confidence in the relations by reopening the Nathu La pass and starting boundary talks. But the friction in the relations continued due to the continues attempts of incursions by the Chinese troops into the Indian territory. In 2017, India became a part of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation however declined to be a part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative due to issues over sovereignty. The recent years have been more volatile due to the recent Galwan Valley clashes in 2020 due to the death of soldiers on both sides. Despite the decades long attempts to negotiate, sign treaties and high level visits, the relations regarding border disputes are not resolved leading to a strained relations impacting both the countries.

### **Wolf Warrior Diplomacy: A Threat or a Challenge?**

"Wolf warrior diplomacy has become the shorthand expression for a new, assertive brand of Chinese diplomacy. In the past, Chinese diplomats tended to keep a lower profile and to be quite cautious and moderate in the way that they interacted with the outside world. Recently,

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<sup>3</sup> Livemint, 2017. *India and China: A timeline of how ties have unfolded over the years.*  
<https://www.livemint.com/Politics/X2JQZHZEDEPGNBpMjLqCl9I/India-and-China-A-timeline-of-how-ties-have-unfolded-over-t.html>, 15 September 2024.

however, they have become far more strident and assertive.”<sup>4</sup> This policy was building up slowly since 2008-09, however it saw an exponential acceleration after the beginning of Xi Jinping's tenure in 2013. It is however a point to analyse that although prima facie it might seem as an aggressive policy however, it is also seen as a defensive policy.

When it comes to the impact of Wolf Warrior diplomacy on the relations between India and China, it has been noticed that it has exacerbated tensions on multiple fronts including territorial disputes along the India's border region of Line of Actual Control (LAC) along with influencing the South Asian geopolitics.

The culmination of the Wolf Warrior diplomacy and growing assertiveness of Chinese military was the Galwan Valley conflict of 2020 which led to deaths of military soldiers on both sides. The instances of repeated incursions, increased patrols and increase in the accumulation of the military hardware near the region of Line of Actual control (LAC) exhibit how the Wolf Warrior Diplomacy has translated into more provocative actions on ground. This has resulted in India's economic and diplomatic steps to counter the negatively growing influence of China. Economically, India started reducing its dependency on Chinese goods by banning Chinese apps and slowing down the Chinese investments in the key sectors of the Indian economy. Also the policies like 'Make in India' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' do support India in its attempt to reduce its dependency on China, especially in the phase when China is exerting its influence in India along with the Indian surrounding extensively.

Diplomatically, India after being a part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, decided not to be a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is the result of the skepticism of China's regional intentions and has led to deepening distrust. Moreover, the rhetorical attacks by China in pursuance of its Wolf Warrior diplomacy reflects a confrontational stance rather than the stance of reconciliation.

China has very tactfully used its Wolf Warrior diplomacy to expand its influence in the geopolitics of the South Asia. The As a result, much of the geopolitics of South Asia this day revolves around China. Moreover, china has also used this policy to deepen its ties with India's neighbours like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal by often leveraging economic investments through its Belt and Road Initiative. One of the example here is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which runs from Gwadar port in Pakistan to Kashi in the Xinjiang region of China. It has helped China to deepen its strategic ties with Pakistan and thus challenging India's regional influence. Along with this, China has been increasingly influencing Nepal through its diplomatic engagements and investments which has coincided with increasing tensions between Nepal and India. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the increased assertiveness of Nepal in relation to border disputes with India is partially attributed to China's influence and backing.

Added to it there has been a significant impact of China's Wolf Warrior diplomacy in the diplomatic tensions that have erupted in multilateral forums. Due to this assertive policy,

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<sup>4</sup> National Bureau of Asian Research, 2021. *Understanding Chinese Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*.  
<https://www.nbr.org/publication/understanding-chinese-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>, 15 September 2024.



China has repeatedly misused its power of veto and blocked India's attempts to secure a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and along with that opposed India's membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

### **India's Response**

Anticipating many upcoming repercussions to unfold and the issues to deal at the present India has started working on its military preparedness, security policy, strengthening border defenses, strengthening strategic alliances, diplomatic initiatives, multilateral engagements, restricting Chinese investments, decoupling from China-dependent supply chains by promoting local industries and various other strategies in alignment to counter the Wolf Warrior diplomacy of China.

The acceleration in the efforts in defense manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, projects like Tejas, BrahMos and naval assets are prioritised to have less reliance on foreign imports and enhance military self-sufficiency. Moreover procuring military hardware like S-400 missile defence system from Russia as well as the Rafale fighter jets from France have added to India's capabilities to match China's formidable military strength. Along with this signing defense agreements with the United States like "LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) and BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement)"<sup>5</sup> allows India for greater interoperability, logistical support and intelligence sharing between the two militaries.

India has perfectly attempted to counterbalance the exponentially growing power of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) by growing its presence and leadership in the forums like the Quad in which India has partnered with United States, Japan and Australia. Added to this, the schemes such as Atmanirbhar Bharat, Production Linked Initiative (PLI) scheme and Strategic Supply Chain Resilience (SCRI) have helped India significantly to reduce its dependence on china and along with that countering its Wolf Warrior diplomacy.

### **Future Outlook**

After analyzing the niceties of the Wolf warrior diplomacy India must aim towards implementing and executing a long term policy towards China which should be built around a balanced approach that integrates military preparedness, economic autonomy and at the same time it must also aim for proactive diplomacy. In order to execute the same India must continue modernizing its military with cutting-edge technology available and focus more on in-house manufacturing rather than depending extensively on foreign imports. It is right time to counterbalance the Chinese aggression by incorporating changes in India's "No First Use Policy".

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<sup>5</sup> Times of India ePaper, 2024. <https://epaper.indiatimes.com>, 15 September 2024.

Also investment in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence will further aid India in countering china and its policies. The successful landing of Chandrayaan 3 on the South pole of the lunar surface is another testament of India’s capability to outperform if directed properly. India must also adopt a policy to reduce its dependency on Chinese imports especially in key industries. It should also be attempted to discover and diversify global supply chains. While the recent years have shown incredible decisions in policies towards strategic diplomacy and alliances, India should continue engaging multilaterally with key global partners like African Union (AU), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and European Union (EU).

Along with this, India must attempt to be a global player and especially a leader in the region of Indo-Pacific. This can be in manifold ways like providing and promoting alternatives to the China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by promoting the framework projects like Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). Along with this India must deepen its ties with Asian neighbours and members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) by promoting capacity-building programmes, humanitarian aids and supporting through developmental investments. One such remarkable aspect was the inclusion of the African Union(AU) in the G20 as the twenty first member during India’s presidency of G20 in 2023.

### **Summary**

India and China have shared rich cultural and civilisational histories. However, the colonials experiences of both the countries have vastly influenced their modern day relations not only with each other however with the world at large as well. The relations more or less have always had a friction due to China’s policy of territorial domination. While trade relations grew but the issues of incursions like 1962 war, Doklam issue, Galwan issue and many others always strained the relations. Added to it the recent years witnessed an increasing assertive diplomacy of China which has heightened the tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) along with straining the South Asian geopolitics. However, India has accurately assessed and implemented appropriate strategies and policies to counter the growing influence of China.

However, the need of the hour is a long term policy implementation along with emphasis on military modernisation, economic autonomy and proactive diplomacy. Along with this maintaining regional leadership in the Indo-Pacific would be another pivotal aspect to counter the Wolf Warrior diplomacy. It can be fairly concluded that currently India’s approach requires managing its relationship with china in a more dynamic, multi-faceted strategy that would appropriately balance the growing aggressiveness of China’s Wolf Warrior diplomacy. India’s goal should not be limited to maintaining its own sovereignty but also to strengthen its leadership in the Indo-Pacific and other regions of the globe, offering an alternative to China’s growing dominant influence.