



## EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

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TOPIC: INDIA & NEIGHBOURS

### Understanding India's China conundrum

#### 1. Change in China's Approach Under New Leadership

- China's foreign and military policies have undergone a dramatic shift, especially after Xi Jinping took over leadership in 2013.
- It has adopted a more aggressive and assertive approach near its borders, moving away from the earlier period of relative calm and diplomacy.
- China's leadership increasingly refers to historical grievances and past frontiers, especially during the Qing dynasty era, to justify current territorial claims.
- This revisionist stance has alarmed many neighbouring countries, especially India, which shares a long and disputed border with China.

#### 2. Pattern of Border Skirmishes with India

- India and China have witnessed multiple military confrontations in the past decade:
  - **2013 – Depsang Plains standoff** in eastern Ladakh.
  - **2016 – Demchok incursion** where Chinese troops reportedly entered Indian territory.
  - **2017 – Doklam crisis**, involving a face-off near the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction.
  - **2020 – Galwan Valley clash**, resulting in casualties for both sides.
- These incidents reflect a broader pattern of Chinese assertiveness, interspersed with short-lived diplomatic engagement.
- Despite gestures of friendship and dialogue, the underlying tensions remain unresolved, suggesting that India must be wary of relying solely on diplomacy.

#### 3. Signs of De-escalation in Late 2024

- By the end of 2024, signs of temporary de-escalation emerged:
  - Adjustments were made in the patrolling patterns at certain contested points along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
  - These adjustments came just before a high-profile international summit, possibly to project a more cooperative image.



- A new agreement on border patrolling was reportedly signed, though many of its clauses remain undisclosed or vague.
- While border tensions slightly eased, the military build-up and mistrust persist on both sides.

#### 4. Military Preparations and Strategic Imbalances

- Early 2025 saw continued uncertainty:
  - One side (possibly China) claimed that “normalcy” had returned following high-level discussions.
  - However, long-term peace will depend on **clear, verifiable, and transparent agreements**.
- Budget and deployment disparities:
  - China announced a **7.2% hike in its defence budget**, while India continues to spend under **2% of its GDP on defence**.
  - **Over 100,000 troops** remain stationed in the Himalayan frontier, heavily equipped with artillery, vehicles, and support systems.
- China's growing nuclear arsenal:
  - Reports suggest an addition of **around 100 nuclear warheads**, escalating security concerns for India.

#### 5. Technological and Military Superiority of China

- China has a clear technological edge in several critical military domains:
  - **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**: Used for surveillance, battlefield simulation, and autonomous weapons.
  - **Cyber warfare**: China has advanced offensive and defensive cyber capabilities.
  - **Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons**: Poses a threat to India's space assets and communication systems.
  - **Quantum technology and digital battlefield systems**: Enhances coordination, data security, and electronic warfare.
- These advancements suggest that India cannot afford to rely solely on peace dialogues and must modernise its own defence infrastructure.

#### 6. China's Expanding Diplomatic and Strategic Footprint in India's Neighbourhood



- China is steadily increasing its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region:
  - **Bangladesh:** Investments in infrastructure, defence cooperation, and loans.
  - **Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives:** Similar patterns of engagement using the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.
- Africa and energy implications:
  - China's expansion in **Africa's nuclear energy sector** may challenge India's ambitions and access to clean energy partnerships.
- India's foreign policy challenge:
  - As India builds strategic ties with Western nations (like the US, France, Japan), it must **not ignore its immediate neighbours**, lest they fall into China's strategic orbit.

## 7. Conclusion: Strategic Outlook for India

- India must maintain **military preparedness and policy flexibility** to respond to any sudden geopolitical changes.
- While both India and China share **ancient civilizational roots**, historical goodwill is no substitute for **modern strategic planning**.
- The current scenario demands a **dual approach**: engaging diplomatically wherever possible, but also **enhancing defence readiness and regional partnerships**.

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