



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Geopolitical Implications of the Russia-China Nexus: Power Dynamics and Regional Impact on South Asia (2003-2023)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper gives a detailed analysis of South Asia's shifting geopolitical landscape, focusing on the strategic interaction between Russia-China's developing alliance and the United States. China and India emerged as economic superpowers in the new world. China and Russia's deepening strategic coordination has far-reaching ramifications. Pakistan's strategic location is critical to the broader geopolitical conflict. The regional power dynamics are rapidly changing. Hence, this alliance may disrupt the Indo-US partnership. It considers both regional power dynamics and global rivalry, which have consequences for the future of South Asian geopolitics. A mixed-methods research approach was adopted. Content analysis demonstrates South Asian attitudes toward economic and strategic gains. These impressions shape regional foreign policy decisions. Case studies and statistical analyses highlight important trends and patterns. These patterns demonstrate robust relationships throughout the study period, from Realism to Economic Statecraft and Regional Security Complex Theories. Hence, this study provides important insights on South Asian geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics & Alliance-Making, Regional Power Dynamics, Russia-China Nexus, Security Complex, South Asia Economic Statecraft, Strategic Alliances

**Introduction**

Changes in alliance formation procedures have had an impact on South Asia's geopolitical landscape. The United States (US) has had a prominent role in shaping alliances. These partnerships were formed with military, economic, and diplomatic backing. However, traditional alliance arrangements are being restructured. Domestic interests, particularly economic concerns, have become fundamental to foreign policy decisions. This change is accelerated by the growth of the Russia-China nexus. The Russia-China nexus provides an alternate means of geopolitical and economic collaboration. This calls into question long-standing regional alliances led by the US (Batool & Muzaffar 2024).

Pant and Joshi (2015) say that India's foreign policy evolution reflects this trend. For decades, India maintained strong ties with the Soviet Union. Later, these ties transitioned into a more complex relationship with Russia. In the post-Cold War era, India moved closer to the United States, which is particularly evident after the 2005 US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement. The alliance was motivated by shared strategic goals. Its main purpose was to counteract China's growing influence in Asia. However, India's foreign policy currently requires a delicate balancing act. India regularly engages in global platforms such as the collective economic forum of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Both Russia and China play important roles in these platforms.

According to Fair (2014), Pakistan's foreign policy reorientation from a primarily US-centric alliance to a stronger partnership with China underscores the shifting dynamics in South Asia. For decades, Pakistan was a close ally of the United States, receiving

substantial military and economic aid, particularly during the Cold War and the War on Terror. However, in recent years, the strategic calculus in Islamabad has shifted decisively towards Beijing, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This \$62 billion investment in CPEC has transformed Pakistan's infrastructure, energy sector, and overall economic landscape, making China Pakistan's largest trading partner and the primary source of foreign direct investment (Small, 2015; Yaseen, et. al., 2017; Wazir, 2020).

Bangladesh's foreign policy trajectory emphasizes regional realignment. Historically, it had strong relations with India and the United States. These connections were based on development aid and military collaboration. Bangladesh has recently stepped up its commercial engagement with China. This includes considerable infrastructure investments (Motaher & Khaled, 2022). The United States has noted this trend and is attempting to reengage Bangladesh. Initiatives to promote Indo-Pacific security are among the efforts made. Nepal and the Maldives have also turned their attention toward China. Nepal has joined the BRI for Economic Development. This raised periodic tensions with India, particularly during the 2015-2016 blockade (Rawal, 2019). The United States has responded by increasing diplomacy and development assistance. These activities seek to counterbalance China's expanding influence.

The Maldives has experienced a significant shift in its foreign policy orientation, moving closer to China in recent years. Chinese investments in infrastructure, particularly in airports and housing projects, have bolstered bilateral ties. The construction of the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, the first-ever sea bridge in the Maldives, exemplifies the deepening economic relationship between the two countries. However, this increased reliance on Chinese economic assistance has raised concerns among traditional allies like India and the US about China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region, which is strategically important for global trade routes (Bowen, Zubair, & Altinay, 2017).

South Asian countries' increasing engagement with the Russia-China nexus has profound implications for the traditional role of alliances, particularly those involving the US. As these countries prioritize economic interests, their reliance on US-led alliances diminishes, leading to a realignment of regional power dynamics. The US has responded with initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific strategy, aiming to counter China's influence in the region by strengthening ties with key regional players like India, Japan, and Australia (Campbell & Doshi, 2021). However, the efficacy of these initiatives is unknown. The Russia-China connection continues to entice South Asian nations. These countries aim to maximize development opportunities while navigating a multipolar global context.

This study investigates the current evolution of alliance-forming systems. It concentrates on internal issues, notably economic ones. The study presents a novel idea of strategic realignment. It investigates how states adjust to changing global dynamics. Furthermore, it examines how South Asian countries shape their foreign policies. These approaches entail regional alliances linked to the Russia-China axis. The study also examines the impact of these shifts on the traditional role of alliances, particularly those led by the United States, offering insights into how these changes are reshaping regional stability, power dynamics, and international relations.

## **Literature Review**

### **Balancing vs. Bandwagoning**

Walt (1988) investigates two major theories, balancing and bandwagoning. Balance is important to structural balance-of-power theory. It proposes that lesser strong governments band together to resist a menacing force. Bandwagoning argues that weaker governments join forces with dominant countries for mutual advantage. This dispute has

significant implications for both international and American foreign policy. It frequently justifies operations that aim to preserve global alliances.

Walt dislikes the balance-of-power idea because it has faults. He believes that states should balance against numerous threats, not just power. He recommends for expanding the concept to better understand alliance dynamics. These discoveries help us understand how global alliances emerge. The balance-of-power and balance-of-threat theories describe how nations interact in coalitions. The balance-of-power theory focuses on the allocation of capabilities such as military and economic power. It proposes that governments form alliances to oppose bigger forces. However, it disregards elements such as geography, offensive capabilities, and intent.

The balance-of-threat theory goes beyond this by taking into account a variety of elements. These include proximity, offensive capability, and perceived purpose. It explains why states may strike a balance with weaker but more threatening forces. Alliances also change as dangers adapt. Historical examples include World Wars I and II, as well as Cold War-era Western Europe. Despite the Soviet Union's military supremacy, nations in this region sided with the United States.

### **The Changing Nature of Military and Permanent Alliances**

Permanent alliances are losing significance because to rising expenses of technological improvements and the need for ongoing negotiation within multilateral institutions. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) mission has broadened to include strategic duties such as peacekeeping and counterterrorism, although its prominence in large military operations may decline. The European Union (EU) is formulating its own security and defence policies. This may diminish its dependency on NATO. The US faces obstacles in foreign decision-making. It also prefers ad hoc coalitions over permanent alliances in order to maintain its forces under its direct command. In response to US policy, countries such as Russia and China are creating new alliances or expanding old ones. NATO is expected to remain the premier multinational alliance, adjusting to new duties while maintaining significance in peace support and deterrence (Tertrais, 2004).

Military alliances have evolved since the early post-September 11 world and the early Cold War era, driven by idealistic values and pragmatic calculations. The US has historically maintained alliances offering security guarantees, shaping global defense structures. Post-September 11 events have reinforced existing alliances and spurred new ones, while straining traditional US alliances. The September 11 attacks tested the resilience of US alliances, and the changing global security environment has led to a growing emphasis on ad hoc and bilateral alliances.

### **South Asian Priorities for New Alliance Mechanisms**

Lankowski (2003) says that South Asian countries are reassessing their alliance strategies in response to the China-Russia nexus, which has led to increased cooperation between the two major powers. This shift in global geopolitics has significant implications for regional security dynamics and prompts them to create new alliance mechanisms that align with their domestic interests.

South Asian countries desire regional power balance and economic development. India promotes improving economic ties with the United States and promoting regional security cooperation. Pakistan is working to strengthen commercial connections with China and identify new chances for economic growth. Sri Lanka seeks Chinese investment while preserving links with Western countries for development funds. Bangladesh is working on infrastructure development in tandem with Chinese and US economic

assistance. Nepal is seeking to strengthen ties with India and China in order to promote balanced development and stability.

Theories like realism and neorealism influence how they balance power and protect their interests. The Regional Security complicated Theory (RSCT) helps to navigate complicated security dynamics. For example, India exploits its alliance with the United States to address regional power shifts. Economic development encourages coalitions, while geoeconomics emphasizes the strategic use of economic resources. Regional plans continue to prioritize security and counter-terrorism measures. Multilateral and bilateral approaches are based on Institutionalism and Complex Interdependence. In an integrated global landscape, these policies ensure sovereignty while still fostering progress.

The Russia-China nexus is redefining South Asian geopolitics, shifting the regional power balance and influencing internal and international policy in countries such as India and Pakistan. This relationship calls into doubt the US longstanding supremacy in South Asia, raising concerns about the relevance and efficacy of existing alliances. Research gap included a lack of awareness for Realism and Neorealism theories when investigating the Russia-China axis' influence on South Asian geopolitics. Similarly, the RSCT's importance in assessing how Russia-China relations interact with South Asian security dynamics was underestimated.

Furthermore, geoeconomics and economic statecraft theories had not been thoroughly investigated in order to better understand how Russia and China's economic ambitions influence regional alignments. The nexus's impact on South Asian countries was also underexplored. More in-depth research was required for India's strategic move toward the Quad and Pakistan's growing relationship with the US. Bangladesh's growing involvement in the Russia-China axis, and its implications for US interests, has received little attention. Furthermore, the erosion of US hegemony in South Asia, spurred by growing Chinese and Russian investments and military collaborations, required further analysis to better understand the region's shifting alliances and power dynamics.

## **Material and Methods**

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. It examined the Russia-China nexus and its impact on South Asian alliances from 2003 to 2023. The goal was to propose a new theory of alliance formation and assess regional power shifts. Data were gathered from academic literature, policy papers, government reports, and international organization publications. Peer-reviewed articles and books provide qualitative findings. Quantitative data were obtained from databases that track economic, military, and diplomatic indices.

Content analysis and visual tools, such as charts, revealed South Asian trends and patterns. The qualitative study investigated how South Asian countries perceive the geopolitical and economic advantages of aligning with the Russia-China axis. Case studies showed how collaboration influenced alliances and power dynamics. Statistical analysis found trends spanning two decades. The research was guided by ethical guidelines. The study aims to contribute to discussions regarding South Asian geopolitics without advancing political agendas. To ensure objectivity and reduce prejudice, publically available data was used. The findings were presented honestly, with regard to the consequences for regional stability and international relations.

## **Results and Discussion**

South Asia is made up of countries with various economic landscapes. Afghanistan's economy, plagued by political instability, is primarily agricultural. Bangladesh has emerged into a major textile exporter. Bhutan's primary sources of income

are agriculture and tourism. India is grappling with regional conflicts and infrastructure issues. The Maldives is heavily reliant on tourism and faces the threat of rising sea levels. Agriculture, tourism, and remittances drive Nepal's economy. Political unrest and natural disasters jeopardize Nepal's prosperity. Pakistan is grappling with political instability, security concerns, and economic reforms. Agriculture, tourism, and textiles drive Sri Lanka's economy.

China and Russia play significant roles in South Asia. The BRI has made China a major investor. Russia and China seek to counterbalance India's influence in the region. The US, China, and Russia shape South Asia's political alignment and development.

### **China-Russia Strategic and Economic Realignments**

China's rise as an economic powerhouse impacts South Asia's geopolitical landscape. Its partnership with Russia challenges US dominance in the region. South Asian countries must navigate the power dynamics between China-Russia and the US. China's economic growth has expanded into South Asia, mainly through the BRI. This has boosted China's relations with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. The CPEC is crucial to rebuilding Pakistan's infrastructure. It also deepens Pakistan's strategic connections to China. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are key components of China's Indian Ocean strategy. China invests heavily in Bangladesh's infrastructure. Sri Lanka is also important for China's strategic position in the Indian Ocean.

Russia-China relations are altering South Asian geopolitics. It presents both opportunities and problems for India and Pakistan. India should achieve a balance in its relations with Russia and the United States. India confronts threats from China as a result of border issues. It must also compete with China's growing military power. Smaller countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh must navigate shifting power relations. Sri Lanka also has the problem of protecting its interests in the face of growing Chinese and Russian influence.

### **China's Multilateral Tactics of Collaboration in South Asia**

China's South Asia strategy is centered on economic diplomacy and strategic relationships. China's BRI funds infrastructure and development initiatives. It strengthens commercial and investment links and participates in bilateral agreements and regional organizations. China also provides military support and organizes joint drills to foster strategic relationships. Diplomatic activities include high-level visits, cultural exchanges, and educational programs. These activities seek to balance US influence and achieve geopolitical advantages.

China has been using economic means to pursue foreign policy goals under President Xi's regime. This involves using economic investment and coercion to constrain the development of Special Economic Regions (SAR) countries or facilitate trade and financial flows to influence their policies. China's flagship BRI project aligns SAR countries' economic goals with China's strategic interests. For example, between 2006 and 2019, Chinese infrastructure investment in Sri Lanka amounted to \$12.1 billion.

**Table 1**  
**Chinese funding for Sri Lanka**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cumulative Value (USD million)</b>	<b>Key Projects/Notes</b>
2006	455	Norocholai Power Station
2007	1000	-
2008	2000	Hambantota Port
2009	3000	-
2010	4000	Mattala International Airport
2011	5000	CICT – Colombo Port

2012	6000	Lotus Tower
2013	7000	Start of Post-BRI Period
2014	8000	Port City Colombo
2015	9000	-
2016	10000	Southern Expressway
2017	11000	-
2018	12000	Katana Water Supply Project
2019	12130	-

Source: <https://cenjows.in/chinas-influence-operations-in-the-south-asian-region/>, and made by the authors.

Table 1 shows of following the 2013 BRI announcement, Sri Lanka's infrastructure projects under Chinese investment increased significantly from pre-BRI periods. The case study revealed that Chinese investment accounted for 15% of Sri Lanka's total GDP, a figure lower than Maldives' 20% and Pakistan's 25%, which are both SAR countries with Chinese investment.

**Table 2**  
**Trade shares between China and South Asian nations (2013-2020)**

Year	Sri Lanka Imports	Sri Lanka Exports	Nepal Imports	Nepal Exports	Bangladesh Imports	Bangladesh Exports	Maldives Imports	Maldives Exports
2013	15%	3%	2%	0.5%	20%	2%	1%	0.2%
2014	16%	3.5%	2.5%	0.5%	21%	2.2%	1.2%	0.3%
2015	17%	4%	3%	0.5%	22%	2.5%	1.5%	0.4%
2016	18%	4.5%	3.5%	0.6%	23%	2.8%	1.7%	0.5%
2017	19%	5%	4%	0.6%	24%	3%	2%	0.6%
2018	20%	5.5%	4.5%	0.7%	25%	3.2%	2.5%	0.8%
2019	21%	6%	5%	0.7%	25.5%	3.5%	3%	0.9%
2020	22%	6.5%	5.5%	0.8%	26%	4%	3.5%	1%

Source: <https://cenjows.in/chinas-influence-operations-in-the-south-asian-region/>, and developed by the authors.

Table 2 shows that China's influence in the South Asian region has been primarily driven by economic and financial factors. The country has signed Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with Pakistan and Maldives, but its trade with other countries in the region is significant, with an asymmetric pattern of economic partnerships. For example, China is Bangladesh's top trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding United States Dollar (USD) 25 billion in 2021. Over the last five years, Chinese exports to Bangladesh have increased by 88% per annum. China's motive for signing FTAs with countries in the SAR is driven by geostrategic interests and expanding political influence over the countries. The heavy dependence of South Asian countries on Chinese products and China's importance as a large market make confrontation with countries in the SAR not in their economic interest. Additionally, China's increasing embrace of regional trade liberalization is a major reason for its rapid rise in the global economy.

Corporations in China play a crucial role in enhancing the country's economic engagement. The unique structure of China's party-state apparatus allows Beijing to gain leverage over these entities to shape the policies of the target country. The relationship between Chinese companies and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is different from that of Western companies and their government system. The concept of 'Guanxiwang', a social network between business entities and political spheres, helps firms reciprocate Chinese goals. Despite conflicts of interest between Chinese companies and their foreign policy goals, research shows that even Chinese business entities are the primary forces behind investments under China's grand project BRI.

**Table 3**  
**China's Military presence and investments in South Asia (Port information in South Asia)**

Country	Location	Status	Use	Facilities	Types of Ship
Bangladesh	Chittagong	Operational	Military Civilian	Container Port, Largest Navy base, Logistic bunkering facilities	Small and Medium Warships
Pakistan	Gwadar	Operational	Civilian Military	Deep water Port, Signal intelligence (SIGINT) facility	No data available
Sri Lanka	Hambantota	Operational	Mostly Civilian but Military Capabilities	Deep Sea Port, Bunkering facilities	Military Vessels, Possibly Nuclear Submarines

Source: Adapted from Karim (2020), and developed by the authors.

The table 3 shows that India's growing influence in South Asia, particularly through infrastructure development and strategic port investments, has raised concerns about China's expansion of naval capabilities and investments in strategic locations like Chittagong, Gwadar, and Hambantota. China's navy is rapidly expanding, with the projected acquisition of 73 warships and 78 submarines, including 12 nuclear-powered ones. Concerns have been voiced by the US and high-profile officials about the potential for these ports to serve military purposes. China views military cooperation with South Asian countries as normal part of international diplomacy and aims to enhance its strategic presence through defense exchanges and equipment supplies. The BRI has sparked skepticism due to its perceived impact on India's sovereignty and regional security.

### **China's Response to the US Strategy**

China's strategic counterbalance in South Asia challenges the US policy of containing China, focusing on economic diplomacy and multilateral engagements instead of direct military confrontations. This approach contrasts with the US containment strategy, which aims to curb China's influence through alliances and regional realignments. China's economic strategy leverages its industrial capabilities to influence global markets through investment and development initiatives, integrating global markets with its rapidly growing industrial base. This strategy, often criticized as "positive sanctions," attracts international businesses seeking to cut production costs and benefit from China's advanced manufacturing capabilities (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017; Shahzad & Khan, 2022).

### **South Asian Geopolitical Shifts: China, Russia, Pakistan, and India Interactions in a Multipolar Universe**

After the end of the Cold War, Russia hoped to be embraced by the West as a natural partner. However, the West's focus on a unipolar world order led to a 'Cold Peace', which eventually evolved into a new Cold War. Tensions resurfaced, with the US and Russia identifying each other as primary adversaries. In 2016, US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter identified Russia as a major strategic threat, followed by China, North Korea, and Iran. Russia's updated National Security Strategy of 2015 framed NATO's encroachment as a security threat to Russia. Western sanctions strengthened Russia's pivot towards China, with President Vladimir Putin declaring their bilateral relations had reached a historical peak. Both nations share a vision of a multipolar world and regard the United Nations as central to global governance. Russia has aimed to strengthen

multilateral groupings such as BRICS, SCO, and the Russia-India-China (RIC) mechanism (Yaseen, et. al., 2023; Ferdinando, 2016).

Since Pakistan's founding, the United States of America (USA) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been close allies. However, Pakistani trade has also been impacted by the recent trade spat between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Empirical evidence suggests that China's shipments of commodities subject to tariffs have decreased by 39% as a result of US tariffs imposed on the country. Pakistan's exports to the US fell by 3%.

The trade relationship between Pakistan and Russia/USSR from 1950 to 2020, reveals a slow growth from 1950 to the late 1980s. Post-Soviet, there was a modest increase in trade after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. However, from the early 2000s, there was a noticeable increase in trade, with imports from Russia to Pakistan growing faster than exports. In 2010, a significant spike in both imports and exports occurred, indicating a growing trade relationship with Russia. From 2015 to 2020, imports reached new highs, reaching close to 600 million USD. This suggests that Pakistan's imports from Russia/USSR have outpaced exports, resulting in a growing trade imbalance. The sharp growth in imports likely reflects increasing economic cooperation between the two countries in sectors like energy or defense (Clary, 2022).

Pakistan export to and import from China 2003–2016" shows Pakistan's trade data with China over the years. Exports to China have grown due to China's increasing demand for goods like textiles, agricultural products, and raw materials. Imports from China have increased significantly, especially after the China-Pakistan FTA came into force in 2006. A growing trade deficit in favor of China is likely a key feature, with Pakistan's imports far outweighing its exports, indicating deepening economic ties and dependency on Chinese goods.

**Table 4**  
**Bilateral trade between Pakistan and the United States in US Dollar Thousand**

Year	Exports	Imports	Balance of Trade	Total Exports of Pakistan	% Share in Total Exports	Total Imports of Pakistan	% Share in Total Imports
2017	3,565,800	2,846,399	719,401	21,911,598	16.3	57,518,651	4.95
2018	3,826,257	2,957,855	868,402	23,778,621	16.1	60,391,133	4.89
2019	4,042,271	2,614,705	1,427,566	23,818,817	17.0	50,134,812	5.21

Source: Keeryo, Mumtaz, & Lakhan (2020), and developed by the authors.

Pakistan's bilateral trade relationship with the US is significant, with the US being Pakistan's top export destination. The US remains a key trading partner, with 134 tariff lines under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which has facilitated economic growth for Pakistan. From 2017 to 2019, Pakistan's exports to the US increased, while imports remained stable. This indicates a favorable trade balance for Pakistan, highlighting its reliance on the US market for economic stability and growth. The share of Pakistan's total exports to the US increased from 16.3% in 2017 to 17.0% in 2019, indicating the growing importance of the bilateral trade relationship. Pakistan's trade with the United States is projected to remain strong, with a trade balance that benefits Pakistan.

The relationship between Russia and Pakistan has shifted considerably as a result of changing geopolitical realities and economic goals. Russia's growing engagement with Pakistan, particularly in the defense and energy sectors, is considered as a geopolitical effort to counterbalance the US presence in South Asia and align Pakistan with India. This transformation is most obvious in the defense industry, where Russia's long-standing ties with India have been adjusted to reflect its growing partnership with Pakistan. Russia sees Pakistan as a key player in addressing regional security concerns, particularly in the fight against terrorism (Trenin, Kulakov, Malashenko, & Topychkanov, 2014).



Afghanistan remains a central point of concern for both India and Russia, but their approaches have diverged in recent years. India has invested heavily in Afghanistan's infrastructure and political stability as a counterbalance to Pakistan's influence, while Russia has sought to bolster the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hub for terrorism. In Central Asia, India and Russia share overlapping strategic interests, but geopolitical shifts have led to a divergence in their approaches. Russia's concerns over Chinese sensitivities and growing Sino-Pakistani cooperation have constrained India's outreach in the region. The broader India-Russia relationship has undergone significant changes since the end of the Cold War, with Russia adopting a more multilateral approach to global affairs and India pursuing deeper engagements with major powers (Muzaffar, et. al., 2016; Sibal, 2016).

India and Russia have maintained a strategic balance, with India's nuanced stance on the 2014 Crimean Peninsula crisis reflecting its strategic balance. Economic engagement between the two nations has historically been low, with bilateral trade being just \$10 billion in 2014. However, efforts have been made to enhance their economic partnership, including the potential India-Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Defense cooperation between India and Russia has maintained strong ties, with Russia accounting for 75% of India's total arms imports between 2009 and 2013. Russia has sought to recalibrate its military partnerships, including enhancing cooperation with countries like Pakistan, without compromising its core defense relationship with India (Joshi & Sharma, 2017).

South Asia's regional dynamics are marked by interstate conflicts, crises, and warfare due to India's perceived dominance in security matters and its flawed partition of the region. South Asian states adopt multilateral approaches to protect their sovereignty from India's influence. India's grand strategy focuses on securing its northwest frontier, resisting foreign influence, and maintaining control over the Indian Ocean. Bhutan and Nepal heavily depend on India for trade, while Pakistan seeks foreign assistance from China, the Gulf States, and the US, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh pursue external economic cooperation with China to maintain autonomy from India. Russia's primary concern in South Asia is security, particularly within its "Siloviki" structure, and its emerging ties with Pakistan are driven by counterterrorism and anti-narcotics efforts. (Imran, Mustafa, & Nagra, 2019).

The Indo-Pacific concept has significantly influenced South Asia's geopolitical landscape, with Indonesia and India highlighting the importance of Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) role in developing Indo-Pacific cooperation. India's growing strategic role in this expanding geopolitical concept extends the traditional Asia-Pacific concept to include the Indian Ocean, reflecting China's increasing influence and the need for regional powers like India to play a more active role in maintaining regional security. This aligns with India's foreign policy goals, including the Act East Policy. The Indo-Pacific region, traditionally dominated by US-led alliances, is now considered a broader and more inclusive understanding of the maritime world. India's involvement in the Indo-Pacific is a response to China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific region, seeking stability in its maritime domain while countering China's expanding influence through strategic partnerships with Japan and the US. India's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific framework is due to its strategic capabilities and geographic location, ensuring the security of vital maritime trade routes (Bhattacharya, 2017; The Hindu, 2018).

### **United States' Hegemonic Role in the South Asian Region**

South Asia has served as a strategic battleground for global powers, with China, Russia, the United States, and India competing for influence and control. The Soviet Union and Russia were critical in preventing a full-scale war between these nuclear-armed

countries. However, as US influence in the area has waned, China has been able to pursue a more assertive agenda, aided principally by tight connections with Pakistan. This has heightened tensions with India, which is now trying to strike a balance between its traditional ties with Russia. It must also manage its strategic collaboration with the US and its complicated relationship with Beijing. Russia is preparing to fill South Asia's strength deficit. This could lead to new partnerships with several regional governments in the region. Russia's return is seen as a move to support regional stability. It also backs India's goals for regional dominance.

The US has had a significant geopolitical impact in South Asia. It has made significant investments in geostrategic projects such as the Afghanistan Ring Road and the Afghanistan National Power Grid. China's influence in South Asia has increased significantly. The BRI and CPEC are essential components of its strategy to dominate regional trade and economic development. This relationship exemplifies the evolving power struggle in South Asia. Countries must manage many global agendas in order to maintain their position in an increasingly multipolar world.

## **Discussions**

### **South Asia's Repercussions from Russia-China Military Modernization and Alignments**

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the First Gulf War exposed vulnerabilities in China's military capabilities, highlighting the need for significant reforms. During this time, Russia and China established a strong military alliance. Russia sought financial assistance, while China wants to modernize its military. Russia became a critical supplier of advanced military hardware, while China improved its indigenous weapon manufacturing capabilities, reducing its dependence on Russian imports. The Russia-China military nexus has significant implications for South Asia, challenging US dominance and reshaping regional power dynamics. China's strong military relationship with Pakistan has enhanced its capabilities, particularly in its defense strategy against India. China's military engagements with other South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, further complicate the regional security landscape (Motaher & Khaled, 2022).

The growing military ties between Russia and China reflect broader geopolitical shifts affecting South Asia. China's expansion of military reach through exports and strategic alliances positions it as a counterbalance to US influence. The SCO is exemplified by this strategic alignment aimed at enhancing regional stability and countering Western influence. China's modernization, bolstered by Russian technology, has enabled Beijing to assert its influence more aggressively in the region, leading to an expansion of its naval presence in the Indian Ocean and increased involvement in regional conflicts. The Russia-China nexus marks a shift in regional power relations. South Asian countries, particularly India, must negotiate a complicated security environment shaped by these two superpowers.

### **China's Rise and the US's Decline: Implications for South Asia**

The US economy experienced a recession in the early 1990s as a result of federal banking restrictions and growing worldwide oil costs. However, it recovered within three years, owing to new job, income, and consumer demand prospects. President Bill Clinton's economic efforts made a big contribution to the recovery. The US is still the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment and second-largest exporter of goods and services, with Canada and China serving as significant trading partners.

Free trade accords, like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), have been beneficial. The US also has a significant presence in international economic

institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The US dollar's dominance in global transactions cements its position as the world's principal reserve currency. The US national debt, which hit \$19 trillion in 2010, is expected to rise dramatically, potentially reaching \$89 trillion by 2029. Despite this, the United States has continually maintained a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate, cementing its status as the world's economic leader since World War II. Emerging countries like China, India, and Russia are rapidly challenging US dominance (Roberts, 2011).

The growth of China and the fall of US hegemony in the Indo-Pacific area, particularly South Asia, have far-reaching consequences for regional dynamics. China's rapid development to become the world's second-largest economy has transformed the geopolitical landscape, with programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative increasing its influence in South Asia. Strategic cooperation between China and Russia has expanded their overall influence in South Asia, providing a strategic counterbalance to US goals. The Sino-Russian partnership has a significant impact on regional stability. It opposes US-led policies while developing bilateral relations with South Asian countries.

China is modernizing its military, focusing on naval development. Alliances with Pakistan may affect regional security. The BRI has boosted China's trade networks in South Asia. This has strengthened its economic ties with regional groups. The US economic downturn and strategic shifts have resulted in realignments, with the country strengthening its alliances to oppose China's dominance. The continued battle between the US and China, as well as the strategic influence of the Russia-China relationship, will shape the future of South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Impact of Russia-China Nexus on South Asia's Strategic Dynamics**

The Russia-China nexus has greatly impacted South Asia's geopolitical landscape. Both countries have become key players in the region's strategic environment. China's growing influence is clear in its efforts to dominate key maritime and land routes, especially evident through the BRI. South Asia is affected by China's operations in the South China Sea and on Taiwan. The United States and India are working to curb China's influence.

India is boosting its military and alliances. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a significant asset. India supports regional trade and diplomacy. It participates in worldwide forums to maintain its status. Meanwhile, China and Russia concentrate on strategic investments and security cooperation. They employ trade-aid and diplomacy to influence smaller South Asian countries. India is becoming increasingly apprehensive about China's growing dominance. South Asia's increasing economic and strategic relationships are challenging India's longstanding dominance (Karim, 2020).

Russia's involvement, although less pronounced than China's, remains significant. Cooperation between China, Russia, and India, particularly through mechanisms like the SCO, offers a platform for addressing mutual concerns and ensuring regional stability. Bangladesh, as a South Asian nation, is significantly influenced by the geopolitical dynamics of major global powers like the United States, Russia, and China. The Russia-China nexus has shaped Bangladesh's development trajectory, with China's BRI and Russia's strategic interests playing pivotal roles. China's response to the Myanmar crisis illustrates its ability to navigate regional dynamics to protect its economic interests while simultaneously challenging Western influence (Aung & Lwin, 2022; Pande, 2022).

**Table 5**  
**China's responses to its economic interests in Myanmar**

Category	Percentage
Anti-China	19.64%
Belt and Road Initiative	13.39%
Smashed	13.39%
Anti-China Forces	9.82%
Punish the perpetrators	9.82%
Chinese-Funded	8.04%
Burnt	8.04%
Looted	7.14%
Anti-China Sentiments	5.36%
Vandalism	5.36%

Source: Adapted from Aung & Lwin (2022), and developed by the authors.

Table 5 shows a significant focus on anti-China sentiment, especially in geopolitical or social contexts. The BRI, China's global development strategy, is a significant part of discussions around Chinese influence or policy. The term "smashed" may refer to incidents of violence or destruction, possibly involving Chinese assets or investments. Anti-China Forces (9.82%) and Punish the Perpetrators (9.82%) suggest that discourse is focused on opposing groups or entities, as well as calls or actions taken to retaliate or punish individuals involved in anti-China activities. Chinese-funded projects or assets may be targeted or destroyed, reflecting the risks China faces in foreign investments, especially in volatile regions.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been a significant driver of Indonesia's economic development, particularly in sectors like infrastructure, manufacturing, and services. Singapore and China have been the leading sources of FDI, accounting for 30% of total FDI as of 2021. China's influence has been significant since 2016, with its involvement in large-scale infrastructure projects driving Indonesia's development agenda. Hong Kong has also seen an increase in FDI during the pandemic, reaching 15% in 2021. Japan has maintained a stable presence as a major investor in Indonesia, focusing on sectors like automobile manufacturing, energy, and electronics (Fajari & Negara, 2022).

The US's share of FDI in Indonesia has decreased, accounting for only 8% of total FDI in 2021. This decline is a result of Southeast Asia's diminishing economic influence, with countries like China and Japan pursuing more aggressive investment opportunities. Indonesia's infrastructure development, manufacturing, and services sectors have been significant contributors. However, challenges like regulatory hurdles, infrastructure gaps, and geopolitical risks need to be addressed. Streamlining regulatory processes is crucial for attracting and retaining FDI, while addressing infrastructure gaps is vital for long-term economic growth.

### **Internal trade in Southern Asian Countries**

In 2022, Southern Asia has seen a significant shift in its trade dynamics, with a 13.5% increase in merchandise exports to \$564.3 billion and a 22.2% surge in imports to \$956.4 billion, resulting in a widening trade deficit. This suggests an increasing dependency on imports, potentially affecting regional economic stability and trade relations. The deficit could impact Southern Asia's trade policies and strategies, as countries may seek to balance their trade through strategic partnerships with China and Russia. Intra-regional trade accounted for 8.3.1 billion, with main export destinations including Europe, Northern America, Western Asia and Northern Africa, and Eastern Asia. China's role is crucial in Southern Asia's trade dynamics, with a high percentage of imports from Eastern Asia. The growing trade deficit may cause Southern Asian countries to reassess their trading strategies. They could explore new economic alignments to address

the growing trade deficit. Russia's role in energy exports and regional security could indirectly shape trade patterns (Chi, Bungenberg, & Bjorklund, 2022).

### **The Rise of Minilateralism and the Shift in Australia's Strategic Approach**

The Asia-Pacific's security structure has grown unstable since the Cold War. ASEAN struggles to adapt to global and regional challenges. Australia, once a firm multilateralist, now emphasizes military expansion and innovative security partnerships. The rise of non-ASEAN security initiatives, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, QSD, (Quad) and military security partnership by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS), poses a significant challenge to ASEAN's centrality in regionalism. The US, driving these initiatives, shares Australia's preference for result-oriented mechanisms and skepticism towards ASEAN's inclusive approaches. This decline in ASEAN centrality could diminish its influence and relevance, potentially leading to a resurgence of great power competition in Asia (Bisley, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The geopolitical landscape in South Asia is changing. It is shifting away from classic international relations theories and alliances. Domestic interests and regional balancing tactics promote this development. It is not only about power politics. Traditional alliance-making theories, such as Realism and Neorealism, emphasize power balance and military alliances. These theories put security and military strength first. However, new ideas such as constructivism and geoeconomics are emerging. These address identity, conventions, and economic statecraft.

South Asian countries are now focusing on collaboration with Russia and China. This change is motivated by commercial interests and regional balancing. It is not just about military alliances. The region is moving towards Economic Statecraft and Regional Security Complex Theory. These theories consider domestic and regional factors more prominently. The Russia-China Nexus is deepening. Both countries seek to resist the US hegemony. This threatens the US global and South Asian dominance. The US fiscal restrictions have limited its capacity to form long-term military alliances. The region's lean toward Russia and China reflects a bigger shift in global politics. In response, the US places a high priority on the Quad and Indo-Pacific policies. These initiatives offer strategic and economic support to confront China and Russia's expanding power. The Quad seeks to enhance partnerships and support a free and open Indo-Pacific.

### **Recommendations**

South Asian countries must create balanced strategies. They should make economic and strategic alliances with Russia and China. This can help to reduce the impact of US hegemony by encouraging regional stability and economic cooperation. This opens up new paths for growth, decreasing reliance on old military alliances.

South Asian nations should enhance ties with Russia and China to ease tensions and address strategic issues. This can reduce rivalries and foster mutual understanding. The US's influence on regional security is crucial. South Asia must prepare for shifts in US policies and pursue greater autonomy in foreign relations. By following these steps, the region can balance major powers while promoting stability and growth.

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