

India-China Rivalry and its Implications for BRICS and AUKUS Expansion



INDIA-CHINA RIVALRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BRICS AND AUKUS EXPANSION

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ABSTRACT

India and China are engaged in a multifaceted interplay of cooperation and competition, marked by increasing trade and evolving strategic rivalry respectively. The emerging power struggle is fuelled by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's expanding strategic outreach, impacting regional security, global stability, and multilateral frameworks like BRICS and AUKUS. This paper argues that despite the challenges posed by India-China rivalry, economic interests often supersede political differences in the BRICS. Moreover, while this rivalry largely influences India's reluctance to join AUKUS, it is mainly driven by India's pursuit of strategic autonomy and self-reliance. This paper further finds that given the South Asian regional dynamics, BRICS and AUKUS expansion have certain implications for Pakistan. While BRICS expansion calls for immediate focus on Pakistan's greater role and inclusion in economic organisations, AUKUS expansion has long-term security implications. This paper concludes with policy recommendations for Pakistan to navigate challenges and leverage opportunities arising from the intricate India-China rivalry.

Keywords: India, China, BRI, BRICS, AUKUS, Pakistan

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1. INTRODUCTION

China and India, with their progressive economies, assertive foreign policies, and increasing military capabilities, are engaged in a complex and multifaceted power struggle. The genesis of India-China rivalry can be traced back to territorial disputes, contrasting ideologies, and quest for regional dominance. Currently, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India's expanding strategic and geopolitical outreach, and increasing US-China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific underline the evolving rivalry between the two. The dynamics of India-China relationship do not only shape their respective trajectories but extend far beyond borders to exert considerable influence on emerging multilateral groupings and regional alliances such as BRICS and AUKUS, respectively.

The BRICS grouping, established in 2009, aims to promote South-South cooperation in order to counterbalance Western dominance in the international financial institutions and reshape the core-periphery relations from dependence to interdependence.¹ However, the deep-rooted rivalry between India and China has often tested the weight and unity of this grouping. Nevertheless, despite divergences in their economic models, political systems and regional aspirations, India and China are focused on extracting mutual economic benefits from BRICS, as evident from the recent BRICS expansion to include six new members. India and China are willing to push their differences to the backseat when economic opportunities are at hand.

¹ Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 1.

Simultaneously, the impact of India-China rivalry extends to AUKUS, especially now that the US and UK are open to the idea of Indian participation in AUKUS Pillar II to foster deeper technological cooperation with their Indo-Pacific partners.² However, India's major interests include upholding strategic autonomy, focusing on defence diversification, and avoiding direct participation in the Indo-Pacific great power competition. Due to BRICS and AUKUS expansion being recent and contemporary phenomenon, there is a classic literature gap, which this paper aims to cover. This paper argues that the India-China rivalry might restrict BRICS from functioning to its full potential and restrain India from joining AUKUS but has a profound impact on the changing regional and geopolitical dynamics.

In this context, there are certain implications for other regional actors, particularly Pakistan. The complex interplay between India-China rivalry, BRICS and AUKUS do not pose any immediate threats to Pakistan but have far-reaching, long-term implications. BRICS expansion offers an opportunity to Pakistan to expand its economic partnerships and work towards economic diversification. Similarly, the prospects of AUKUS expansion propel Pakistan to focus on security diversification, rebuild relations with the US, strengthen security ties with China, and acquire new military technologies.

Firstly, this paper explores India-China contemporary contestation in relation to BRI, Western Indo-Pacific strategy, and India's expanding strategic outreach. Secondly, it analyses how India-China mutual interests in BRICS expansion undermine their differences. Next, it explores reasons why India is unlikely to join AUKUS. Further on, it

² Derek McDougall, "AUKUS: A Commonwealth Perspective," *The Round Table* 112, no. 6 (November 2, 2023): 567–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2023.2286841>.

provides policy recommendations for Pakistan to mitigate challenges and grab opportunities that India-China rivalry has to offer.

2. INDIA-CHINA RIVALRY

While increasing globalisation allowed greater economic integration and shared interests, strategic rivalry gradually unfolded between India and China along a variety of dimensions. The significant ones include military and naval capabilities, struggle for regional hegemony, competition for resources, economic and infrastructure development initiatives, interaction in international institutions, and a difference of conception with respect to the liberal international order.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has progressed economically and geopolitically. However, when compared to China, India remains a small economy and a gradually rising regional power. As of 2022, China's nominal GDP stood at \$17.96 trillion while India had a nominal GDP of \$3.42 trillion.³ Moreover, although the India-China bilateral trade increased to \$136 billion in 2022, India's trade deficit with China rose to \$101.02 billion, mainly due to Indian exports comprising of low value-added products while Indian imports from China include massive technology-intensive products.⁴

³ World Bank, 'Data for China, India', <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=CN-IN>

⁴ The Wire Staff, 'Trade Between India and China Declines For First Time After Record High in 2022', *The Wire*, July 14, 2023, <https://thewire.in/trade/india-china-trade-decreases-for-first-time-in-over-two-years>.

According to Bernstein's research report, India is 16.5 years behind China in terms of economic growth.⁵ While India surpassed China to become the world's most populous nation in April 2023, there are no quality employment opportunities in India to sustain such a large population.⁶ Moreover, India's manufacturing sector largely remains dependent on raw materials from China.⁷ In the military domain, the gap between India and China is also quite wide. China has the second most powerful military in the world. While China's defence budget stands at \$224.8 billion in 2023, India's defence budget is only \$72.6 billion.⁸ Also, China has a larger number of military personnel, a greater number of aircraft and submarines, and better military technology than India.⁹

In order to cover such an enormous gap, India is actively fast-pacing its economic development, strengthening its regional position, and developing its strategic clout. For that, it has aligned closely with the US since the early 2000s as both countries developed a strategic partnership. In 2012, the Obama administration launched the Pivot to Asia policy, referring to India as the regional anchor of the US in the Asia-

⁵ Surajeet Das Gupta, 'India's Economy 16.5 Years behind China's, Says Bernstein Research Report', *Business Standard*, September 3, 2023, https://www.business-standard.com/economy/news/overall-india-is-at-a-median-16-5-years-behind-china-economically-123090300495_1.html

⁶ Graham Allison, 'Will India Surpass China to Become the next Superpower?', *Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/24/india-china-biden-modi-summit-great-power-competition-economic-growth/>.

⁷ Damien Ng, "Assess the Proposition That India Will Become the next Superpower," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 58, no. 7 (2022): 1307–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084255>.

⁸ The State Council Information Office, "China's 2023 Defense Budget to Rise by 7.2%, Remaining Single-Digit for 8th Year," March 6, 2023, http://english.scio.gov.cn/chinavoices/2023-03/06/content_85146919.htm; Malik Qasim Mustafa, "INDIAN DEFENCE BUDGET 2023-24: AN ASSESSMENT" (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, February 23, 2023), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IB_Qasim_Feb_23_2023.pdf

⁹ Damien Ng, "Assess the Proposition That India Will Become the next Superpower," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 58, no. 7 (2022): 1307–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084255>.

Pacific.¹⁰ Subsequently, in 2015, the US former defence secretary, Ash Carter, called India the “anchor of global security” as the two countries signed the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative.¹¹

Given increasing US emphasis on India’s role as a counterweight to China, India reformulated its maritime strategy in 2015 to *Ensuring Secure Seas, Indian Maritime Security Strategy*. In the new maritime strategy, India called itself a “net security provider of the Indian Ocean Region” and also expanded its areas of interest in the wider Indo-Pacific.¹² Additionally, as the Trump administration came to power, India became a significant stakeholder in the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.¹³ It is also a part of the Quad, a strategic security dialogue to uphold the Western conception of the Indo-Pacific region and function as a regional balancer.¹⁴ These developments highlight India’s quest of projecting itself as a great power and stride towards a multipolar order in the region following liberal international rules with India as one of the key power centres.

Moreover, India’s sceptic view of China’s BRI is a major integrant of India-China rivalry. India asserts that the BRI threatens India’s strategic interests and the wider

¹⁰ Sobia Hanif and Muhammad Khan, “US Security Strategy for Asia Pacific and India’s Role,” *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2018): 1–20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48539119>.

¹¹ Terri Moon Cronk, “Carter Calls U.S.-India Defense Partnership ‘Anchor of Global Security,’” U.S. Department of Defense, December 10, 2015, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/633727/carter-calls-us-india-defense-partnership-anchor-of-global-security/>.

¹² Indian Navy, “Ensuring Secure Seas, Indian Maritime Security Strategy” (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015).

¹³ U.S. Department of State, *A FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC: Advancing a Shared Vision*, (Washington DC, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

¹⁴ Aditi Malhotra, ‘Engagement, not Entanglement: India’s Relationship with the Quad’, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, May 1, 2023, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/05/01/engagement-not-entanglement-indias-relationship-with-the-quad/>.

liberal international order.¹⁵ India views BRI through a revisionist lens, calling Chinese capital investment merely a means to encircle the neighbouring countries and acquire hegemony over the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).¹⁶ India is especially anxious of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), believing that believes that the CPEC provides China a strong opportunity to maintain a sustained presence in Pakistan to exercise wider geopolitical influence. Given adversarial relations with Pakistan, it is a common perception within Indian political circles that CPEC might evolve into a bilateral military alliance against India.¹⁷ India also maintains that the CPEC can provide a transit for insurgents like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which threatens India's national security.¹⁸

Under these threat perceptions, India is now attempting to expand its geopolitical influence and economic footprint. India used its G20 presidency as an opportunity to host the G20 Summit in September 2023 to demonstrate its increasing global outreach. With China's absence from the summit, India garnered attention towards its multi-alignment foreign policy with the announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).¹⁹ The IMEC aims to connect India to Middle Eastern states,

¹⁵ Lucio Blanco Pitlo III and Amruta Karambelkar, 'India's Perception and Response to China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative: Views From Indian Mainstream Media', *Asian Politics & Policy* 7, no. 4 (2015): 668, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12214>

¹⁶ Lucio Blanco Pitlo III and Amruta Karambelkar, 'India's Perception and Response to China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative: Views From Indian Mainstream Media', *Asian Politics & Policy* 7, no. 4 (2015): 668, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12214>

¹⁷ Jeremy Garlick, 'Deconstructing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Pipe Dreams versus Geopolitical Realities', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27, no. 112 (2018): 519.

¹⁸ Mala Sharma, 'India's Approach to China's Belt and Road Initiative—Opportunities and Concerns', *The Chinese Journal of Global Governance* 5, no. 2 (2019): 147, doi:10.1163/23525207-12340041.

¹⁹ Carla Freeman and Sameer P. Lalwani, 'At G20, India Tests Geopolitical Clout Amid Xi's Absence', *United States Institute of Peace*, September 7, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/09/g20-india-tests-geopolitical-clout-amid-xis-absence>.

and eventually to Europe.²⁰ This trade and investment initiative seeks to increase economic integration through energy infrastructure, maritime connectivity, roads and railways, and high-speed cables. However, whether this economic venture can overcome practical challenges remains to be seen.

Moreover, India is a major defence and security partner of the US in the region. Over the past decade, the two have signed several defence and technological agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communication, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).²¹ The defence trade between the US and India surpassed \$20 billion in 2020.²² In 2023, the two countries also announced a new joint space venture along with the UAE and Israel.²³ The increasing nuclear and technological cooperation between India and the US serves the primary mutual interest of countering China, ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific, and shaping India as the leader of the Global South. China is apprehensive of the growing Indo-US defence and tech cooperation as it poses significant threats to regional stability.²⁴

²⁰ Debasish Das, "Revisiting the Contours of the Evolving Middle Eastern Order through the India-Middle East-EU Corridor: Mapping India's Scopes and Limitations," *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 2024, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2024.2322498>.

²¹ Muhammad Ali Baig and Alyan Waheed, "Issue Brief on 'LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA in India's Foreign Calculus,'" ed. Dr Arshad Ali (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, July 22, 2022), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/IB_Ali_Baig_and_Alyan_July_22_2022.pdf.

²² Sergei Vladimirovich Uyanaev, "India-US Relations: The Current State and External Consequences," *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 92, no. 7 (2022): 590, <https://doi.org/10.1134/S101933162213010X>.

²³ U.S. Department of State, 'The I2U2 Group Announces Joint Space Venture', September 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-i2u2-group-announces-joint-space-venture/>.

²⁴ Rida Tariq and Dr. Iram, "Developing of US- India Strategic Relations and Its Implications on China," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2022): 47–66, <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v5i2.419>.

While India is currently on the trajectory of economic and geopolitical rise, it is important to note here that there are several inherent weaknesses which can potentially downplay India's ascendance. Most significantly, the Hindutva policy of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and consequent majoritarianism are resulting in the stifling of democratic spirit in India, the so-called world's largest democracy.²⁵ Moreover, the treatment of minorities in India highlights ethnic hatred and human rights violations against Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, and is strengthening the secessionist movements in the Seven Sister states of India.²⁶ Recently, the diplomatic turbulence between India and Canada over the murder of a Sikh activist and the US unveiling of an Indian plot to kill another Sikh leader in New York City have stirred trouble on India's internal and external fronts.²⁷ These factors can potentially impede India's current rise and steer the country towards decline and reshape regional dynamics.

Overall, the above discussion highlights that India-China relations can be characterised in terms of conflict, competition, cooperation and containment. The ideological, historical, geopolitical and strategic differences define their complex relationship which is one of the major characteristics of contemporary geopolitics. This way, the India-China rivalry has a profound impact on the emergence, expansion and success of multilateral economic and security groupings such as BRICS and AUKUS.

²⁵ Debasish Roy Chowdhury and John Keane, *To Kill a Democracy: India's Passage to Despotism* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 175.

²⁶ Debasish Roy Chowdhury and John Keane, *To Kill a Democracy: India's Passage to Despotism* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

²⁷ Michael Kugelman, "The India-Canada Rift Deepens," *Foreign Policy*, October 25, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/25/india-canada-rift-trudeau-modi-sikh-separatists-diplomats/>

3. IMPLICATIONS OF INDIA-CHINA RIVALRY ON BRICS

According to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, BRICS countries make up 40% of the global population, 1/4th of the global economy and 1/5th of global trade, amounting to \$162 billion in 2022.²⁸ In the 15th BRICS Summit convened in August 2023, BRICS announced the expansion of the bloc with 6 new entrants including Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Following the expansion, BRICS will make up 47% of the world population and 36% of global GDP.²⁹ Moreover, the BRICS share of global oil production and global exports will also increase.

Despite such promising projections, many Western observers believe that there will be little to no implications of an expanded BRICS due to a variety of reasons. Firstly, BRICS include all the countries from the global south which have diverse interests given their national priorities, economic conditions, and political situation. Secondly, each member differs in the degree of engagement with the major powers which might add to divergence of interests. Thirdly, as BRICS follows a consensus-based model, differing interests of developing countries lead to lesser cohesion of the group, adding to the possibility of BRICS turning into a theatre of contestation itself.³⁰

²⁸ Cyril Ramaphosa, 'Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the BRICS Business Forum Leaders' Dialogue', The Presidency Republic of South Africa, August 27, 2023, <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/speeches/address-president-cyril-ramaphosa-brics-business-forum-leaders%27-dialogue>.

²⁹ Wandiswa Ntengento, 'BRICS GDP to grow by 36% following expansion', *Africa News*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/08/25/brics-gdp-to-grow-by-36-following-expansion/>.

³⁰ Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Why BRICS Is No Threat to the Post-War Liberal World Order," *International Studies* 57, no. 1 (December 2, 2019): 51–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881719884449>.

3.1 Chinese and Indian Interests in BRICS Expansion

China's interests in the BRICS expansion revolve around win-win cooperation. China views BRICS as a multilateral grouping of emerging economies which can collectively restructure the global economy and strengthen international financial institutions. With the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2015 and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2016, China and other countries of the Global South may have a reliable alternative to the World Bank for infrastructure development loans. Since its inception, the NDB has financed 90 infrastructure projects worth US\$32 billion in its member states.³¹

Moreover, China has furthered its agenda of economic integration through BRICS and has significantly benefitted from the intra-BRICS trade. While China's main exports to BRICS countries include electrical and mechanical goods, Chinese imports consist of raw materials, mining products and agricultural goods to meet China's increasing energy and industrial needs.³² Additionally, China finds BRICS as a strong tool to enhance its role and influence in global governance by strengthening its economic relations with other emerging economies which share China's perception of the Global South's poor representation and lack of decision-making power in the Western-dominated international financial institutions.³³

³¹ Chris Devonshire-Ellis, 'China's Trade and Development with BRICS: Analysis and Opportunities', *China Briefing*, August 23, 2023, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-trade-development-with-brics-analysis-and-opportunities/>.

³² Valdir Bezerra and Zaiguan Lin, "The Welcomed Rise of China: An Overview of Beijing's Relations with Brazil and Other BRICS Countries," *BRICS Journal of Economics* 4, no. 3 (2023): 335–46, <https://doi.org/10.3897/brics-econ.4.e110895>.

³³ Bas Hooijmaaijers, 'China, the BRICS, and the limitations of reshaping global economic governance', *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 1 (2021): 37, doi:10.1080/09512748.2019.1649298.

This furthers another crucial interest: a shift from a US-led unipolar world to a multipolar world. According to Indian analysts, BRICS expansion is a strong indication that the world is moving past the Western global order to a multipolar world order.³⁴ India's multi-alignment foreign policy which it outrightly played in the Russia-Ukraine war by maintaining neutrality and enjoying energy concessions from Russia despite Western pressures is a strong evidence of decreasing US influence.³⁵ In addition to India, a number of other developing countries adopted a neutral position. This highlights an emerging trend in global politics – countries from the Global South pursuing strategic autonomy and only aligning with the US when it serves their interests.

Moreover, India already maintains close trade and strategic ties with the Arab states. India has a crucial strategic interest in Iran's Chabahar Port which enhances Indian connectivity with Central Asia and the Middle East.³⁶ Moreover, India-Iran relations have warmed after the Iranian foreign minister visited India in June 2022, focusing on mutual interests. Similarly, Saudi Arabia is an important trade partner with Saudi exports to India now crossing \$25 billion. Saudi Arabia is the third largest oil exporter of India with import volumes estimated to be approximately 7,50,000 bpd from January 2023 to September 2023. Additionally, India has made huge investments in Saudi Arab's non-oil sectors, with the total Indian investment amounting to about \$2

³⁴ K Thangjalen Kipgen and Sukalpa Chakrabarti, "The Politics Underpinning the BRICS Expansion," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Institute for Research and European Studies - Bitola* 8, no. 3 (2022): 449, <https://doi.org/10.47305/jlia2283445k>.

³⁵ Shubhrajeet Konwer, "India's Response to the War in Ukraine," *The RUSI Journal* 168, no. 3 (2023): 60–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2023.2220762>.

³⁶ Ali Omid and Gauri Noolkar-Oak, "Geopolitics of Chabahar Port for Iran, India and Afghanistan," *South Asia Research* 42, no. 1 (2021): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280211055981>.

billion.³⁷ With the inclusion of Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Arab states in BRICS, it offers a significant opportunity to India to further deepen its relationship with these strategically important actors.

Therefore, even if India and China are at odds in some areas, particularly territorial differences and great power ambitions, both have increasingly adopted geoeconomic interests as their main foreign policy determinant. This allows BRICS to survive the negative implications of the India-China rivalry and emerge as a strong multilateral grouping focused on mutual economic interests.

4. INDIA-CHINA RIVALRY AND AUKUS EXPANSION

The US-China competition, and subsequent India-China rivalry, are not only impacting multilateral groupings and initiatives in the geopolitical and geoeconomic dimension but also in the security and technological domains. One such example is AUKUS, a trilateral security arrangement between the United States, United Kingdom and Australia in the Indo-Pacific region. Established in 2021, it has two pillars. Pillar I aims to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines built using British design and American technology. These SSN-AUKUS submarines are planned to be operational in late 2030s. Meanwhile, the US will sell 3-5 US Virginia class SSNs to Australia by 2035 and by 2027, the US and UK plan to deploy their nuclear-powered SSNs in the Indo-

³⁷ Sumant Kumar, "India's Relations with Saudi Arabia and UAE under the Modi Government," *Malaysian Journal of International Relations* 11 (2023): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.22452/mjir.vol11no1.1>.

Pacific.³⁸ Overall, Pillar I will largely change the geopolitical and defence dynamics of the Indo-Pacific.

On the other hand, Pillar II focuses on greater technological cooperation and information sharing on advanced capabilities and is usually referred to as the 'tech component' of AUKUS. It aims to enhance interoperability and development in several technological domains such as robotics, artificial intelligence, quantum physics, cyber capabilities, electronic warfare, and hypersonics.³⁹ The US and allies are making remarkable progress in materialising Pillar II through trial runs, interchanging AI models for aerial and ground vehicles between the three nations, and AI-enabled assets jointly operating to track targets.⁴⁰ Thus, Pillar II has significant chances of expansion to include other Western allies as evident from the UK's House of Commons Defence Select Committee's call for India and Japan to be included in AUKUS.⁴¹

4.1 China's Perception of AUKUS

AUKUS is largely perceived as the Anglo-Saxon alliance in the Indo-Pacific. It is seen as the US attempt to strengthen security cooperation in the region to counterbalance China's increasing defence capabilities. The 2023 report of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) highlights that China holds an upper hand in

³⁸ Lauren Kahn, 'AUKUS Explained: How Will the Trilateral Pact Shape Indo-Pacific Security?', *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 12, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/aukus-explained-how-will-trilateral-pact-shape-indo-pacific-security>.

³⁹ Louisa Brooke-Holland, "AUKUS Pillar 2: Advanced Capabilities Programmes" (House of Commons Library UK Parliament, November 9, 2023), <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9842/CBP-9842.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Lauren Kahn, 'AUKUS Explained: How Will the Trilateral Pact Shape Indo-Pacific Security?', *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 12, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/aukus-explained-how-will-trilateral-pact-shape-indo-pacific-security>.

⁴¹ Andrew Sharp, "Morrison Says 'Premature' for AUKUS Expansion to Include Japan," *Nikkei Asia*, February 17, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Morrison-says-premature-for-AUKUS-expansion-to-include-Japan>

19 of the 23 technologies that fall under AUKUS Pillar II.⁴² As China aims to become the leading superpower in science and global technology, there is now serious competition and a new race in the area of military technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, 5G, quantum computing, biotechnology and green energy.⁴³ AUKUS Pillar II encourages the US, UK and Australia to focus on the challenge of increasing technological competition with China.

While China characterised Quad as 'Asian NATO', its security analysts view AUKUS as a "path of error and danger" on the part of the US and its allies.⁴⁴ China believes that AUKUS does not promise regional security but threatens regional stability and leads to an intensifying arms race in the region. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on alliances and exclusive blocs generates the perception in Chinese political circles that the US is pursuing the "Cold War zero-sum mentality".⁴⁵ As China-Australia relations have been on a downward spiral since AUKUS, other Indo-Pacific middle powers like Japan and India are now largely wary of Chinese reaction in response to their potential AUKUS participation.

⁴² ASPI, "AUKUS RELEVANT TECHNOLOGIES: Top 10 Country Snapshot " (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2023), <https://ad-aspi.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2023-06/PB69-CriticalTechTracker-AUKUS%20relevant%20technologies%20top%2010%20country%20snapshot.pdf>.

⁴³ John Christianson, Sean Monaghan, and Di Cooke, 'AUKUS Pillar Two: Advancing the Capabilities of the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia', CSIS, July 10, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/aukus-pillar-two-advancing-capabilities-united-states-united-kingdom-and-australia>.

⁴⁴ Jamal Din Aulia and Ahmad Sahide, "Regional Stability Rivalry in the Indo Pacific Region: China's Interests in Responding the AUKUS Trilateral Pact," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 9, no. 9 (2022): 412–23, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i9.4149>.

⁴⁵ Anthony Wende, "Emergence of AUKUS Pact as a Regional Bloc and Its Implications in Asia Continent," *Jurnal Diplomasi Pertahanan* 8, no. 1 (2022): 50.

4.2 India's Perception of AUKUS and its Response to AUKUS Expansion

While other Western allies such as Canada and New Zealand are eager for inclusion in AUKUS, India's response has been mixed.⁴⁶ India faces a dilemma i.e., whether to assume the responsibility of balancing China's rise through Western alliances or pass the buck. There are two important factors why India might resist joining AUKUS. Firstly, India has a long-standing policy of non-alignment under which it avoids participation in any multilateral security alliance.⁴⁷ Under this very policy, India seeks to uphold strategic autonomy. Joining AUKUS would outrightly put India in the Western bloc, undermining its independent growth trajectory.

Maintaining an autonomous position allows India to diversify its defence relations.⁴⁸ For instance, India already maintains close military and defence relations with Russia and is one of the top importers of Russian weapons and a close partner in nuclear technology. Joining AUKUS undermines India's relationship with Russia. Moreover, India is seeking to expand and diversify its defence and security relations with important European powers. In July 2023, India and France signed a cooperation agreement for joint manufacturing of three diesel-electric Scorpene submarines.⁴⁹ While

⁴⁶ Manoj Harjani, "Is an AUKUS Expansion on the Cards?" (Singapore: RSIS, 2023), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IP23041.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Rahul Mishra, "From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment: Assessing India's Foreign Policy Shift," *The Round Table* 112, no. 1 (2023): 43–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2023.2165367>.

⁴⁸ Rahul Mishra, "From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment: Assessing India's Foreign Policy Shift," *The Round Table* 112, no. 1 (2023): 43–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2023.2165367>.

⁴⁹ 'India France Sign MoU for Construction of Three Scorpene Submarines', *Business Standard*, July 15, 2023, https://www.business-standard.com/news-ani/world/india-france-welcome-mou-for-construction-of-three-scorpene-submarines-123071500048_1.html

India has already acquired 36 Rafale fighter jets from France, India's Defence Ministry approved the purchase of another 26 Rafale jets in July 2023.⁵⁰

Secondly, the India-China rivalry largely impacts AUKUS expansion. On one hand, China is currently the biggest trading partner of India. On the other hand, the 2020 Ladakh standoff has put India in a security dilemma. Although India is a close strategic partner of the US with several strategic agreements like BECA, LEMOA, and COMCASA in place, India understands the cost of direct participation in a security alliance and prefers to maintain a stable relationship with China in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Moreover, given the Chinese perception of AUKUS as an anti-China defence alliance, India prefers to avoid participation and prevent military escalation in the region. Thus, as India is already engaged in tech cooperation with the US and UK through multiple other platforms and so, does not want to incur a negative impact on its relations with China by joining AUKUS formally.

5. POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

India and Pakistan share a complex history of territorial disputes and political tensions, resulting in adversarial relations. On the other hand, the Sino-Pakistan relationship can be well characterised as an “all-weather friendship” as the two are close strategic allies.⁵¹ These dynamics make Pakistan an important actor in the Sino-

⁵⁰ Shuriah Niazi, “India to Buy 26 More Rafale Fighter Jets from France,” *Andalou Agency*, July 13, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/india-to-buy-26-more-rafale-fighter-jets-from-france/2944932>

⁵¹ Xi Jinping, ‘Building a China-Pakistan Community of Shared Destiny to Pursue Closer Win-Win Cooperation’, (speech, Parliament of Pakistan, April 21, 2015), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/2015zt/xjpdjstjxgsfwbfydnxycxyfldrhyhwlyh60znjnhd/201504/t20150423_704885.html.

Indian rivalry. Not only this but the status of South Asia as the subregion of the wider Indo-Pacific further adds to Pakistan's strategic significance.⁵²

When it comes to BRICS, this multilateral grouping is of great significance to Pakistan. BRICS follows the South-South cooperation pattern and is a growing hub of emerging economies. As Pakistan applies for BRICS membership, there is an increasing debate on whether it will be included in the grouping given that the BRICS follows a consensus-based model and Pakistan's inclusion largely depends on India putting aside its differences to let BRICS be an independent economic grouping free of bilateral animosities.⁵³ Pakistan, being the victim of stringent conditions of the IMF, can explore new economic opportunities in BRICS as NDB and AIIB offer alternatives to Western-dominated IMF and World Bank.

Moreover, all BRICS countries enjoy an FTA with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Interestingly, China has also proposed a BRICS FTA to further strengthen economic ties between BRICS members.⁵⁴ This way, Pakistan's inclusion in BRICS can help the country resolve its balance-of-payment crisis, find new markets for its exports, and increase its bilateral and multilateral trade with other developing nations.⁵⁵

⁵² Masood Khalid, *Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment*, (Institute of South Asian Studies, 2021), <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/pakistan-china-relations-in-a-changing-geopolitical-environment/>.

⁵³ K Thangjalen Kipgen and Sukalpa Chakrabarti, "The Politics Underpinning the BRICS Expansion," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Institute for Research and European Studies - Bitola* 8, no. 3 (2022): 453, <https://doi.org/10.47305/jlia2283445k>.

⁵⁴ Orange Wang, "A BRICS Free-Trade Deal? China Floats Idea as US Rivalry Heats Up," *South China Morning Post*, June 23, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/article/3182816/china-floats-brics-free-trade-deal-while-russias-putin-calls-alternative-us>.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Taimur Fahad and Ahmed Naeem Salik, "BRICS and Pakistan: Assessing Opportunities and Challenges" (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, October 12, 2023), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/IB_Taimur_Oct_12_2023.pdf.

In November 2023, Pakistan formally filed the applications for BRICS membership as this group of emerging economies is set for its expansion with six new members under Russia's presidency in 2024.⁵⁶ According to Muhammad Khalid Jamali, Pakistan's ambassador to Russia, Pakistan seeks to be included in this important organisation and is counting on Russian support in the membership process after Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov underlined that under Russian chairmanship in 2024, BRICS would focus on expanding the "circle of friends."⁵⁷ Thus, BRICS expansion has a significant impact on Pakistan in highlighting the need to expand its economic partnerships to secure its national interests.

When it comes to AUKUS, it does not pose any immediate threats to Pakistan but might have long-term implications. As India continues to expand its strategic outreach through security and technological partnerships, Pakistan's political space is shrinking. However, Pakistan's strategic significance with respect to its geographical location, strategic ties with China, and a roller-coaster relationship with the US underscore that it cannot be isolated from the regional dynamics.

Nevertheless, India's expanding role in the regional power play and its acquisition of modern technologies for rapid military developments within or outside the AUKUS framework raises security concerns for Pakistan. India's strategic agreements with the US add to Indian deterrence capabilities in the IOR which puts Pakistan in a

⁵⁶ Abid Hussain, 'Pakistan seeks BRICS membership, despite India roadblock', *Al-Jazeera*, November 24, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/24/pakistan-seeks-brics-membership-despite-india-roadblock>.

⁵⁷ 'Pakistan plans to join BRICS next year', *The Express Tribune*, November 20, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2447642/pakistan-plans-to-join-brics-next-year>.

disadvantageous position.⁵⁸ Moreover, India's aspiration to become the "blue water navy" adds pressure on Pakistan to enhance its naval fleet capabilities to maintain a strong defence.⁵⁹ In the current economic landscape, Pakistan appears weak to be doing so.

Overall, BRICS and AUKUS expansion are a clear indication for Pakistan to reshape its foreign policy posture, avoid bloc politics, and forge stronger ties with its traditional partners and emerging powers in political, economic, security and technological domains.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Strengthen Strategic Partnership with China

Pakistan must deepen cooperation and strengthen its strategic partnership with China, particularly through the CPEC. With the beginning of CPEC Phase II, Pakistan should accelerating development in Gwadar. Through improved road and rail connectivity, smart city technologies, sustainable energy infrastructure, and human capital development, Gwadar Port can become a significant chokepoint in global trade. This will largely transform Pakistan into a hub of connectivity and maritime trade in the Indo-Pacific region, and add to its strategic value against India.

6.2 Avoid Bloc Politics

Pakistan is in dire need to ensure that it does not become a part of bloc politics

⁵⁸ Chunhao Lou, "Geopolitical 'Entanglements' and the China-India-Pakistan Nuclear Trilemma," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 2 (2022): 281–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2156252>.

⁵⁹ Abeer Iftikhar Tahirkheli, "India's Strategic Force Modernisation and Its Implications on Strategic Environment of Pakistan," *Strategic Thought* 4, no. 1 (2022): 155–71, <https://strategicthought.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/83>.

once again. Policymakers and decision-makers need to work towards forging comprehensive ties and broad-based relations with the US. Pakistan should also strengthen its politico-economic and security relations with other traditional and emerging middle powers of the Indo-Pacific region. This is important to avoid entrapment in the power rivalry unfolding between the US, its allies like India, and China in the Indo-Pacific.

6.3 Actively Pursue BRICS Membership

As Pakistan has already applied for BRICS membership, policymakers must actively pursue the agenda to ensure Pakistan's inclusion into the bloc. It will further enhance Pakistan's relationship with China and developing countries of the Global South, revive traditional linkages with Saudi Arab and other Gulf states, and reduce its dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions. If BRICS successfully establishes its own FTA, it will be highly beneficial for Pakistani markets if Pakistan is already a member of BRICS by the time an FTA materialises.

6.4 Diversify Security Partnerships

In order to counter long-term security implications of AUKUS, Pakistan needs to focus on security diversification to enhance its naval and military capabilities and work towards self-reliance. Pakistan has a number of potential defence partners such as Russia, the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc. Pakistan has recently renewed the CISMOA agreement with the US. Turkey has invited Pakistan to officially join its fifth-generation national fighter aircraft programme. This makes Turkey a potential and reliable security partner. Moreover, after the successful execution of the JF17 programme with China, Pakistan should also pursue Chinese J-35 stealth aircraft to

compete against India's growing military capabilities.

7. CONCLUSION

India and China are mired in a complex relationship due to territorial disputes and ideological differences on one hand, and economic cooperation on the other. Facilitated by the US Indo-Pacific strategy, which identifies India as a “key security provider” in the region, India is striving to expand its geopolitical clout and economic footprint. However, despite the political, defence and technological support of the US, there remains huge power disparity between India and China which, exacerbated by domestic threats and weaknesses, might take India a longer time to fill than anticipated.

The ongoing rivalry between India and China has profound implications for regional and global stability as well as for the minilateral alliances and multilateral groupings taking shape. India and China, being the founding members of BRICS, exert a great deal of influence over the functioning and future of this group of major emerging economies. Despite the power struggle between India and China, both realise the importance of shared economic benefits and hold mutual interests in an international system free of Western domination.

Similarly, when it comes to AUKUS and its expansion, India is unwilling to become a pawn in the great power contestation through direct alignment with the US. India is widely interested in gaining concessions from both sides, and diversifying its economic and security relations with Russia, France, and other regional and extra-regional powers. Furthermore, India is not willing to antagonise China by becoming a part of AUKUS II when it already has military, technological and nuclear cooperation

agreements in place with the US. Due to all these reasons, India has not offered any response to the UK's call for AUKUS II expansion for inclusion of India and Japan.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, its strategic significance and nuclear capabilities make it an important actor in regional politics. To expand its strategic clout and improve its economic conditions, Pakistan needs to actively work towards BRICS membership while focusing on other economic groupings such as ECO, GCC, ASEAN, etc. It should also revive its traditional partnerships with Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arab and Gulf states. Moreover, Pakistan must work towards security diversification and swift adoption of emerging technologies for self-reliance and better preparedness to counter any security challenges that might arise in the near or distant future.

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