



## Sino-Indian Rivalry and Security of Small States: The Case of Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

Bangladesh faces significant geopolitical challenges in maintaining strategic relationships with both China and India. The study deals with three pertinent questions: What is the nature of the relationship between India and China? Which underlying factors are most likely to escalate the rivalry in the near future? How does Bangladesh navigate this rivalry? The research analyses how the rivalry affects Bangladesh's foreign policy and security strategy employing secondary sources of data. Employing Blainey's model of the causes of war, it identifies seven factors that could fuel future conflict between China and India, using Moniruzzaman's framework on the security of small states to assess Bangladesh's strategic options. The paper concludes that Bangladesh's best option for safeguarding its security is non-alignment, avoiding direct involvement in the rivalry while preserving its national interests. Bangladesh should pursue a non-aligned foreign policy to maintain its security and influence in the region, given the potential risks of involvement in the India-China rivalry.

**KEYWORDS:** Sino-India rivalry, security issues, Belt and Road initiative (BRI), balance of power

### INTRODUCTION

The rivalry between China and India emerges as a significant and persistent geopolitical issue in Asia, arising from a complex interaction of historical conflicts, economic competition, and strategic goals (Mohan, 2012). China and India come out as

prominent powers in Asia and on the global stage, exercising substantial military, economic, and diplomatic influence (Tabata, 2015). This rivalry embodies a complex interplay of cooperation and conflict, marked by intense competition for regional dominance, influence in international organizations, and control over strategic territories. The growing economic power, advancements in technology, and military developments of China pose a considerable challenge to India, which is committed to protecting its regional interests and enhancing its global standing (Srinivasan, 2004). The rivalry between the two nations, often framed within the scope of their leadership positions in Asia, has far-reaching implications that influence global trade dynamics, security alliances, and international diplomatic relations. As China emerges as a significant global power, India has adopted a more cautious stance towards China's regional ambitions, leading to an intensified rivalry marked by disputes over resources, technology, and spheres of influence (Rowthorn, 2016). This persistent rivalry not only influences the strategic dynamics of Asia but also alters global power equilibria. Comprehending the origins and consequences of this dynamic relationship is crucial for evaluating modern geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific area.

Historically, India has maintained a prominent role in South Asia, whereas China's engagement has been relatively constrained. Over the past two decades, there has been a marked escalation in China's economic engagement in South Asia, which has included enhanced trade relations, increased aid, and substantial investments in mega-projects. This presents a significant challenge to India's influence over the smaller nations within the region (Ashlyn & Alyssa, 2015). Smaller nations may gravitate towards China due to a variety of factors, including economic prospects, infrastructure enhancement, diplomatic backing, absence of political constraints, global reach, and as a counterbalance to Western influence. China shares a border with India. Moreover, the megaprojects have generated significant apprehensions within India.

The rivalry between China and India poses significant challenges for international relations, particularly concerning Bangladesh. Throughout history, the two influential nations have engaged in conflicts concerning strategic, economic, political, and socio-cultural interests, resulting in an escalation of mistrust and security challenges. The growing disparities between India and China can be attributed to their developing policies in the realms of geopolitics, geostrategy, geo-economics, and national interests (Li, 2010). Both nations seek to enhance their dominance and sway over neighboring states, thereby intensifying existing tensions. This scenario presents significant security challenges for Bangladesh, considering its strategic positioning adjacent to China, India, and Southeast Asia, as well as its involvement in regional security dynamics in the 21st century (Pant, 2009). The geostrategic position of Bangladesh plays a crucial role in stabilizing the region through the integration of diverse areas. (Hossain & Islam, 2021). The findings indicate that the optimal strategy for Bangladesh is one of non-alignment, facilitating diplomatic flexibility while prioritizing national interests. This study analyzes Bangladesh's strategic partnerships within the framework of Sino-Indian rivalry and offers recommendations for policymakers aimed at enhancing diplomatic relations and bolstering national security.

## THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICAL TRENDS

China and India represent the two most ancient civilizations in Asia. The aim of this paper is not to disclose the comprehensive history of interactions between these two Asian powerhouses; rather, it highlights that their history has been marked by a blend of cooperation and conflict. During the establishment of the Christian era, India and China

engaged in cultural exchanges, complementing their pre-existing economic connections (Daniélou, 2003). Buddhism was transmitted from India to China (Stobdan, 2019). Throughout their history, conflicts have been a significant presence, especially during the 20th century. The emergence of conflicts can be attributed to the strategic actions of states, territorial disagreements, and the aspirations of China. Historically, the Chinese and Indians have utilized similar strategic concepts over the past two millennia. The foundational texts on strategic thinking in India and China include *Arthashastra* (Economics) written by Kautilya (Boesche, 2003) and *The Art of War* authored by Sun Tzu, respectively (Tzu, 2017). Both nations perceive their adjacent countries as possible rivals, likely influenced by the Indian interpretation of the 'mandala of circles' concept articulated by Kautilya, which posits that any area is at risk from its neighboring regions (Ghosh, 2022), alongside the Chinese commitment to the notion of 'concentric circles' as outlined by Sun Tzu (Malik, 2009). The rivalry between China and India poses significant challenges for both global and regional political dynamics, particularly impacting Bangladesh. Both nations seek to establish their dominance and sway over adjacent states, heightening tensions (Maini, 2015). Smaller nations like Bangladesh must carefully manage their foreign policies in the face of these two giants' conflicting interests in South Asia, which has become a critical arena due to the continuous struggle for regional dominance.

The ongoing rivalry between India and China is significantly shaped by their competing influences in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly with the Indian Ocean acting as a crucial nexus for global economic interactions linking the Atlantic and Asia-Pacific (Baruah & Mohan, 2018). Approximately 80 percent of global oil trade conducted by maritime routes transits through these critical passages, with 40 percent navigating the Strait of Hormuz, 35 percent traversing the Strait of Malacca, and 8 percent passing through the Bab el-Mandab Strait (Chaudhury & Chatterji, 2019). The Indian Ocean possesses considerable strategic importance (Dhruv, 2018). The South China Sea, often regarded as Beijing's strategic domain, serves as the initial arena for the manifestations of China's ascendancy. The Writer Bill Hayton, possessing considerable regional expertise, explores the high stakes involved for competing nations such as Vietnam, India, Taiwan, the Philippines, China, the US, Russia, and others (Bill, 2014), emphasizing that maritime supremacy and control of sea routes might determine the future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. This maritime competition has consequently heightened navy modernization and security collaboration among regional actors.

The expansion of China's maritime activities and its assertions of territorial sovereignty have elicited significant apprehension among neighboring countries. India has augmented its engagement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) by adopting a more protective posture (Onyango Ogutu, 2021). According to a report by Booz Allen Hamilton from 2004, China is implementing a strategy referred to as the 'string of pearls' aimed at strengthening its naval capabilities through the development of civilian maritime infrastructure that possesses dual-use potential (Marantidou, 2014). China's strategy in the Indo-Pacific integrates economic, diplomatic, and military dimensions to enhance its naval presence in strategic locations near its borders and in proximity to neighboring nations, such as India (Manhas, 2020). The Indo-Pacific region's security architecture is being more shaped by this escalating conflict.

China has developed a network of ports throughout the Indian Ocean, complemented by a fleet of 58 submarines, strategically positioning itself to encircle neighboring nations and enhance its proximity to critical Indo-Pacific chokepoints

(Boeke, 2023). The Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka represents a significant asset for China on the international stage, enhancing its strategic positioning in the Bay of Bengal (Sharma & Rasheed, 2015). Furthermore, its strategic location adjacent to the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) facilitates an alternative route to the Strait of Malacca (Lo, 2019). The strategic importance of Gwadar port is underscored by its proximity to India and the Strait of Hormuz. The strategic location of Dar es Salaam Port in Tanzania underscores its significance. The western Indian Ocean is significantly impacted by this influence, providing convenient access to abundant natural resources. (Edith, 2021). Through the strategic investment and management of these ports, China aims to enhance its influence within the broader Indo-Pacific region.

India's initiatives to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) reflect a strategic perspective that views the Indian Ocean as a critical maritime domain and a vital sphere of influence (Brewster, 2015b). It is a commonly held belief among Indian strategists that the designation of the Indian Ocean is appropriate and justified (Scott, 2006). To counterbalance the growing strategic and economic influence of China and to bolster India's own presence, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has instituted two interconnected foreign policies: the 'Act East Policy' and the 'Neighborhood First Policy'.

India's maritime strategy in the Indo-Pacific encompasses the establishment of a listening post in Madagascar, enabling the interception and monitoring of maritime communications. The 2018 Sabang agreement granted India military access to Sabang Port, which is strategically positioned at the northern entrance of the Strait of Malacca in Indonesia, serving as a key element of India's economic initiatives (Scott, 2019). India gains strategic advantages by utilizing Changi Naval Base in Singapore, positioned at the far end of the Strait of Malacca. In 2016, India made the strategic decision to allocate \$500 million towards the development of Iran's Chabahar port, with the aim of establishing a transportation corridor to Central Asia via Afghanistan, thereby circumventing Pakistan (Aliasgary & Ekstrom, 2021). Furthermore, in 2018, India secured access to Oman's Port of Duqm, providing a strategic entry point to the Strait of Hormuz. India has focused on the protection of its territorial integrity by creating a strong network of alliances aimed at effectively deterring China (Siddharth, 2023). The conflict between India and China is significantly influenced by economic growth. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to replicate the benefits of the Silk Road through the enhancement of trade and the exploration of new markets. India has proposed and actively participated in alternative connectivity initiatives such as the AAGC and INSTC to counterbalance the BRI. India is developing the India-Middle East-Europe corridor as a strategic initiative in response to China's influence.

China aims to protect its energy transit routes through the implementation of newly constructed pipelines in Russia, alongside deep-water ports in Southeast Asia and Central Asia. This strategy seeks to minimize transportation costs and lessen reliance on domestic infrastructure investment (Djankov, 2016). India has declined the BRI initiative in order to maintain its geographical integrity and sovereignty. The external affairs ministry expresses discontent regarding the incorporation of CPEC within the BRI. The infrastructure initiatives undertaken by China have resulted in considerable debt accumulation, elevated interest rates, and efforts to sway foreign policy via questionable incentives directed at political figures (Apurva, 2017), prompting concerns regarding China's long-term geopolitical objectives and the viability of its development model. These forces have fueled regional distrust and fostered alternative multilateral infrastructure collaborations.

Prior to 1975, the diplomatic ties between China and Bangladesh were less than favorable. In 1971, during the Liberation War of Bangladesh, also referred to as the East Pakistani Revolution, China provided support to Pakistan. China formally recognized Bangladesh in October 1975. Following 1975, the relationship between China and Bangladesh improved significantly (Yasmin, 2023). Leaders in Bangladesh characterize China as a steadfast partner across all circumstances. A former diplomat from Bangladesh asserted that the partnership between China and Bangladesh continues to be steadfast in the realm of international relations (Hossain & Islam, 2021). The strategic significance of the bilateral ties between these two nations is underscored by the deepening partnership, which is influencing the regional dynamics in South Asia.

In 2016, a visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping marked a pivotal moment in the enhancement of bilateral relations between the two nations. During Xi Jinping's visit, marking the first visit by a Chinese head of state to Bangladesh in three decades, a total of 27 agreements were signed, amounting to US\$24.45 billion. The substantial financial assistance extended to Bangladesh marks an unprecedented development since the nation's independence. The significance of defense cooperation between Bangladesh and China cannot be overstated. From 2008 to 2017, Bangladesh received \$1.86 billion in arms from China, accounting for 71.9% of its total military acquisitions (China Power, 2018). The F-7 interceptor of the Bangladesh Air Force is supplied by China. In 2017, the nation acquired two Chinese Type-035G Ming-class submarines at a cost exceeding \$100 million. Bangladesh has procured seven K-8W training aircraft, constructed by China, to enhance the capabilities of its Air Force (Azim, 2019). China's importance as a regional defense supplier and partner is strengthened by Bangladesh and China's growing strategic and military partnership.

During the Liberation War, India extended its support to Bangladesh. India facilitated training for freedom fighters from Bangladesh in their camps located near the Bangladeshi border (Haider, 2009). The Indian military engaged actively throughout the various phases of the conflict (Haque, 2013). Subsequent to 1975, the military regimes in Bangladesh redefined their foreign policies, thereby influencing diplomatic relations with India. The inauguration of Sheikh Hasina in December 2008 marked a significant enhancement in the relations between Bangladesh and India. During the resolution of maritime boundary delimitation in 2014 (Rajput, 2018), the ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015 significantly altered the dynamics between the two nations. A multitude of agreements were executed, covering areas such as investment, border management, connectivity, security, and development.

The June 2015 visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh culminated in the signing of 22 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) addressing a range of issues. Bangladesh plays a significant role in India's Act East and Neighborhood First policy (Chaudhury, 2020). The first "Bongopsagar" naval exercise took place in October 2019, with a subsequent exercise occurring in October 2020. Nonetheless, tensions emerged as a result of India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens, prompting Bangladeshi ministers to cancel their visit to India in protest against these policies. Sheikh Hasina emphasized the significance of India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

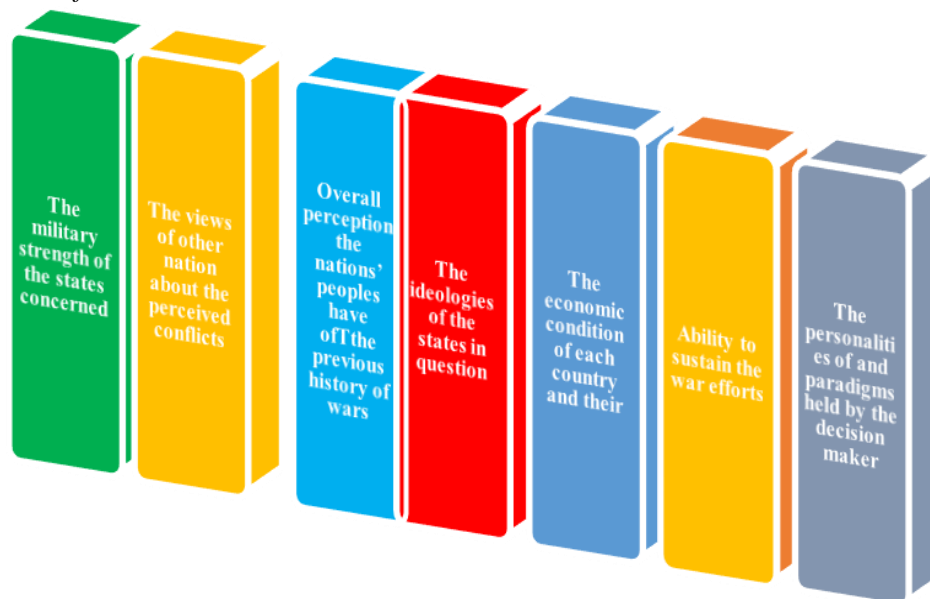
### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: 'CAUSES OF WAR' AND 'SECURITY OF SMALL STATES IN THE THIRD WORLD'**

This study employs two academic sources to construct its theoretical framework: Blainey's (1998) *The Causes of War* and Maniruzzaman's (1982) *The Security of Small*

States in the Third World'. Geoffrey Blainey's paper *The Causes of War* (1989) presents a theoretical framework that integrates aspects of realism and pragmatism in the examination of international conflict. Building on the foundational concepts articulated by Thucydides and Clausewitz (Wassermann, 1953). Blainey argues that the essence of war is fundamentally rooted in the political will of states, rather than being merely a result of coincidental external conditions or accidents (Leonard, 1967). His approach relies on the fundamental idea that conflict arises when a state perceives it possesses the military capability and political will to fulfill its aims through coercion, rather than pursuing a diplomatic solution. Blainey rigorously challenges alternative explanations for war, including those centered on civil unrest, economic influences, or unintended escalation. He asserts that wars are not the result of chance or misfortune, but rather stem from intentional political choices (Stretton, Turner, & Kennedy, 1974). This theory is a useful way to look at conflicts between states because it focuses on the political and strategic decisions that make states want to go to war.

In this section of his paper titled "The Causes of War," Blaney explores potential future conflicts that may arise between India and China. In the *Causes of War* (1989), Geoffrey Blainey presents a detailed framework for analyzing the emergence of conflict, pinpointing seven essential factors that lead to the outbreak of war. The elements under examination encompass the military capabilities of the states involved, as well as their capacity to deploy these capabilities effectively. Additionally, the perspectives of other nations regarding the perceived conflicts are crucial, alongside the general perceptions held by the populations of the nations in question towards each other. The historical context of prior wars also plays a significant role, as do the ideologies promoted by the states involved. Furthermore, the economic conditions of each country and their capacity to sustain military efforts are essential considerations, along with the characteristics and frameworks of thought held by the decision-makers (Haque, 2013). The author contends in his book that each of the seven factors possesses the capacity to instigate war, conflict, or peace.

**Figure 1**  
*The Causes of War*





The study seeks to formulate policy alternatives for Bangladesh in the context of the competitive dynamics between China and India. To ascertain the appropriate framework for policy options, it is essential to analyze the existing viewpoints regarding the alternatives accessible to a small state. Maniruzzaman, a scholar specializing in the security of small states, posits in his seminal work 'The Security of Small States in the Third World' that small states face two primary options regarding their security: neutrality and non-alignment (Maniruzzaman, 1982). The principle of non-alignment allows smaller nations to participate in global affairs while preserving their autonomy from dominant powers, thus reducing the likelihood of conflict. The principles of neutrality or non-alignment necessitate a consistent equilibrium of regional power to protect smaller states from being dominated by a singular authority. Smaller states demonstrate heightened susceptibility to the influence and actions of adjacent great powers.

Maniruzzaman posits that smaller states often forge alliances with larger nations, a strategy that is fraught with inherent risks. The onset of these hazards can be linked to the inherent instability of such alliances and the internal political challenges encountered by major states, especially in situations where borders are adjacent. According to Rickli, achieving non-alignment relies on maintaining autonomy in international relations, steering clear of provocations towards major neighboring states, and developing a strong defense system (Rickli, 2008). It addresses external threats while preserving autonomy and independence.

The strategic non-alignment policy offers considerable diplomatic benefits for Bangladesh, enabling the country to uphold an independent foreign policy. This policy enabled Bangladesh to cultivate balanced economic and military relationships with both India and China, thereby strengthening the country's diplomatic engagements internationally. In this context, Bangladesh adeptly utilizes economic markets and investments from both nations, while concurrently addressing the risks linked to military and geopolitical conflicts. In the context of the current tensions between India and China, Bangladesh is poised to face a series of complex challenges as it endeavors to protect its national interests, especially in relation to regional security and economic stability. Therefore, it is essential for Bangladesh to formulate a thorough foreign policy and security strategy that maintains strategic non-alignment, thus ensuring the protection of the nation's sovereignty and stability.

## **BLAINEY'S CAUSES OF WAR: RELATIONSHIP AND RIVALRY BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA**

Blainey's Causes of War: Analyzing the Dynamics of Relationship and Rivalry between India and China. Blainey (1989) outlines seven rationales for his nominal model in the Causes of War, including military might, the opposing nation's perspective on the perceived conflict, the collective perception of the peoples of the nations, historical precedents of war, ideological factors, economic conditions, and personality traits that influence decision-making. Each of these variables possesses the capacity to shape a nation's perception of its neighbors and its ability to sustain the conflict.

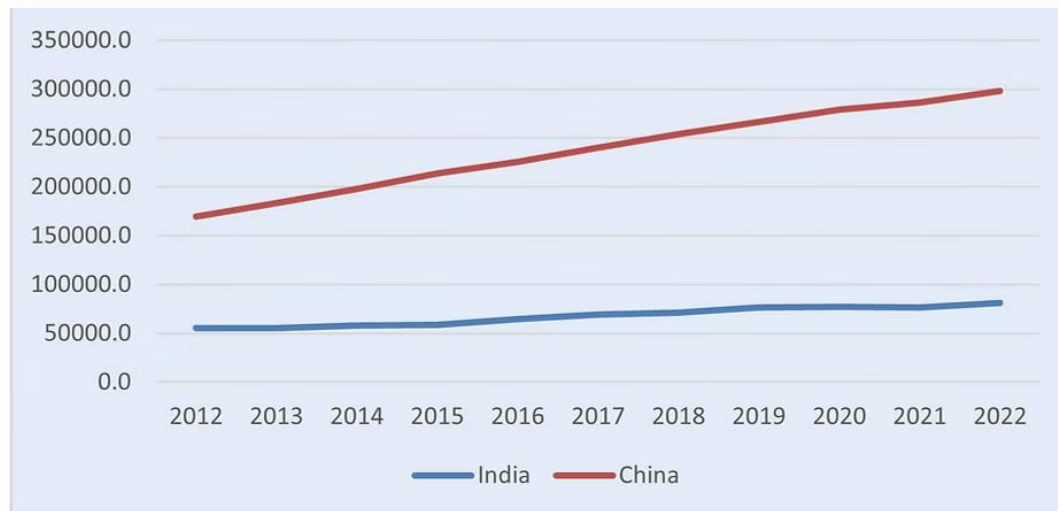
The military's strength and capability constitute the fundamental elements of Blainey's framework. The dynamics of Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region have undergone substantial evolution, akin to a contemporary Cold War scenario (Hossain, 2023). The Indian analysts such as Gurpreet Khurana and C. R. Mohan predict the emergence of a "rivalry arc" between China and India in the Indo-Pacific region (Pan, 2024). The Quad, consisting of India, Australia, Japan, and the USA, has notably

influenced regional geopolitics, attracting Bangladesh due to its strategic location. India aims to utilize the Quad as a strategy to mitigate China's expanding influence. The Quad criticizes China's coercive strategies, the militarization of trade routes, and non-transparent agreements that lead to debt traps and undermine the sovereignty of smaller nations (D'Ambrogio, 2021). Regional and global powers through alliances like the Quad will continue to affect Indo-Pacific geopolitics and security as this conflict increases.

The assessment of military power and capabilities in China and India will focus on their defense budgets, military doctrines, and initiatives aimed at modernizing their armed forces. Both China and India allocate substantial resources to their defense budgets. Over the past eight years, China has shown a consistent increase in its defense budget. India has demonstrated a consistent trend of increasing defense expenditures, with notable exceptions in the years 2014 and 2021. As a result, both nations possess the readiness and capacity to manage the financial implications of a conflict.

**Figure 2**

*Defense Spending of China and India*



*Source: Security Risk Research, 2024*

The People's Liberation Army Navy of China has developed sophisticated models of nuclear-powered submarines (Erickson, 2012). The proactive development and acquisition of indigenous submarines by China have positioned its submarines to compete with American submarines in terms of capability. Cole (2010) indicates that China's fleet is considerably outpaced by that of the United States, primarily due to a lack of submarines. The modernization of China's submarine capabilities indicates a level of advancement comparable to that of the United States (Cole, 2001). China plans to leverage the South Sea Fleet to support its forthcoming aircraft carriers (Rahman & Tsamenyi, 2010). China seeks to improve the launch capabilities of the PLA Navy and broaden its operational reach, covering areas from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and the eastern regions of Africa. By 2025, China is projected to have developed a long-range conventional precision strike system capable of global reach, alongside an expansion of its launch brigades (Pant, 2009). The increasing disparity in military strength between these two nations is becoming more pronounced in relation to India. (Heginbotham, 2012). This developing military imbalance not only intensifies strategic



tensions between China and India but also necessitates India to reevaluate and enhance its own naval capabilities in order to preserve regional security and deterrence.

**Table 1**

*China and India Naval Power*

S.N.	Country	Number of Warship	Number of Submarine	Military Spending	Navy Aircraft	Rank
1	China	730	59	292B	437	1st
2	India	295	17	81B	239	8th

*Source: Comprised by Authors*

The ongoing military modernization efforts in India are predominantly aimed at addressing the challenges posed by China (Marwah, 2019). India is enhancing its military capabilities in response to the military expansion of China in the vicinity of Tibet. India has achieved the successful launch of long-range ballistic missiles, namely Agni 4, which boasts a range of 3,500 km, and Agni 5, with an extended range of 5,500 km. This development is a strategic response to the increasing militarization by China in proximity to the Sino-Indian border (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2013). The range of these missiles extends to encompass the entirety of China's eastern coastline. India has also prioritized the enhancement of its naval capabilities over other military branches in anticipation of the increasing naval strength of China in the Indian Ocean (Singh, 2016). In 2004, the Ministry of Defense explicitly articulated that India's maritime strategy prioritizes the challenges posed by Chinese naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean. India is clearly prioritizing the enhancement of its naval capabilities in response to the growing maritime influence of China. India is in the process of modernizing its Air Force, which presently employs a diverse range of fighter aircraft. India is pursuing the acquisition of more advanced and state-of-the-art aircraft tankers to bolster the operational capabilities of its Air Force missions (Bain, 1994). India's comprehensive modernization initiatives reflect its strategic need to counteract China's rising military footprint and protect its land and marine interests.

The competition between these two Asian powers to augment their military capabilities is intensifying. The increase in defense expenditures suggests that both countries are likely to maintain their military initiatives, even while compromising on the allocation of resources for social programs. The emphasis placed by both nations on integrated warfare indicates a significant advancement in their military capabilities. In conclusion, based on the preceding analysis of China and India, Blainey highlighted military power as the key determinant shaping the future of India-China relations, suggesting a likely escalation in confrontational security dynamics.

The second rationale in Blainey's model pertains to the perceptions held by other nations regarding the conflict between the two states involved. Numerous small nations in South Asia depend on China for their economic stability, leading to a situation where, with the exception of Pakistan, there is a prevailing desire for a conflict between India and China (Xing, 2023). Pakistan has the potential to assert full dominance over Kashmir by leveraging the ongoing tensions between India and China. In contrast, the influence of China on India's neighboring nations, including Nepal and Myanmar, remains precarious, whereas the position of Bangladesh will be contingent upon the governing political party (Kristensen, 2019). Consequently, India should meticulously evaluate its choice to enter into conflict. The anticipated influence of China is likely to create instability in Nepal, Myanmar, and Pakistan, which may result in more unpredictable decision-making processes in India (Goh, 2007). Consequently, a comprehensive

evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks by Chinese and Indian policymakers is essential to prevent the escalation into conflict. Upon analyzing the interactions between the two nations through the lens of Blainey's second factor, it appears not probable that India and China will engage in conflict.

The third priority of Blainey's model pertains to the perceptions that individuals in each nation have of one another. Notwithstanding the robust economic ties that exist between the two nations, the populace in each country tends to harbor a negative perception of the other. In 2006, the Chicago Council of Global Affairs carried out a survey involving more than six thousand individuals from India and China. The findings revealed that, when asked about the military buildup between the two nations, 60 percent of Chinese respondents expressed a negative view, whereas 40 percent held a positive perspective. In India, 46 percent expressed a negative view, while 39 percent held a positive perspective (Holslag, 2009). Concerns have been raised among Chinese scholars regarding the swift modernization of the Indian Army and the growing naval presence of India in the Indian Ocean region. Chinese strategists perceive the increasing naval operations of India in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, along with India's involvement in multinational patrols in the U.S.-led Malacca Straits, as a possible threat (Schmidt, 2014). The analysis of the survey data reveals that individuals across various nations, encompassing intellectuals, scholars, and the general populace, possess unfavorable perceptions of each other. Ultimately, the future relationship between China and India may evolve into a more adversarial dynamic, as indicated by an analysis of both nations through the lens of mutual perceptions.

Blainey's fourth factor addresses the historical experiences of nations during previous conflicts. In 1962, India and China were involved in the First Sino-Indian War (Gupta & Lüthi, 2016). A territorial disagreement results in armed conflict. China achieved a decisive victory in the conflict with India (Eric, 2002). The territorial disputes between China and India, particularly concerning Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin, exacerbate regional instability and strain diplomatic relations (Rajeev & Stephenson, 2023). The strategic significance of India's "chicken neck" corridor is drawing increased scrutiny from China, potentially setting the stage for future confrontations. Disputes regarding the sovereignty of Arunachal Pradesh have emerged due to the conflicting interests of China and India in the northeastern region, as asserted by Prof. Kondapalli (Kondapalli, 2009). According to Malhotra, China employs a strategy characterized by "proxy war" tactics, which involves financing insurgencies in northeast India while also advancing its territorial ambitions, particularly regarding its claim to Arunachal Pradesh (Malhotra, 2020). It not only has these persistent disputes exacerbated mutual distrust, but it has also prompted both nations to increase their military deployments along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Consequently, the legacy of the 1962 war continues to cast a long shadow over current Sino-Indian relations, thereby increasing the volatility of the border regions and complicating the prospects for long-term peace. The border between India and China has witnessed a notable increase in tensions. Potential border tensions between China and India may arise in the regions of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Doklam in the near future.

The ideology of the states that are involved is the fifth aspect that Blainey considers. The most ancient civilizations in Asia are those found in China and India. This component is similar to the modern democratic peace theory, which holds that democracies do not fight each other. This indicates a likely impending conflict between China and India. China operates under a communist regime, whereas India functions as a democratic state (Destradi & Plagemann, 2022). This theory suggests that the United

States is supporting India while denouncing China, reflecting the stated ideological stance. The United States considers India's military modernization to be beneficial for security in Asia, whereas it regards China's modernization as harmful (Malone, & Mukherjee, 2010). The enhancement of military capabilities is likely to intensify the apprehensions of Chinese policymakers regarding India.

Blainey identifies a sixth reason, asserting that the economy's capacity to support the war pattern significantly influences the probability of conflict. In 2013, President Xi Jinping of China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative as a comprehensive initiative aimed at fostering economic development and enhancing infrastructure (McBride et al., 2023). The main aim of the Maritime Silk Road is to synchronize maritime pathways connecting China with areas including Southeast Asia, South Asia, Europe, and Africa, in addition to creating the Silk Road Economic Belt to promote economic and infrastructure integration between China and the Middle East and Europe (Hu, 2016). The creation of supplementary trade routes and a framework for addressing the Malacca conflict, as part of the BRI, underscores India's involvement in various outcomes (Lanteigne, 2008). New Delhi must maintain a profound awareness of its visible responses, balancing the necessity of public safety with the goal of sustainable economic growth. China seeks to strategically position itself around its rivals, including India, with the overarching objective of achieving both military and economic dominance over the United States. India and China hold the second and fifth positions in global economic rankings, respectively. The economic standing of each nation has the potential to improve through sustained economic development. Consequently, a constrained conflict may be sustained by both nations.

**Table 2**

*Comparison of Economic Capability between China and India*

Indicators	India	China
Economic Size of GDP	\$3,730 billion (Position-5)	\$17,786 billion (Position-2)
GDP growth	5.9%	5.2%
Per capital GDP	\$2610	\$12,540
Foreign currency reserve	\$9 billion(position-4)	\$3.1 trillion(position-1)
External debt	625 billion	2.45 trillion

*Source: Comprised by Authors*

The establishment of enhanced connectivity to China through the BRI, facilitating access to the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, may provoke tensions between India and China. Both nations have clearly articulated their determination to assert control over the Indian Ocean (Frankel, 2011). However, it appears that China is not overly concerned about the ascent of India (Grant, 2010). The perception of China as a powerful and assertive neighbor has indeed caused concern for India, primarily because of the direct threat it presents to its national security.

The final component of Blainey's framework is the paradigm and characteristics of the decision-makers. This component serves as the principal catalyst for the conflict; absent the engagement of decision-makers from both nations in hostilities, war would not arise, notwithstanding other contributing factors (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010). Should the authorities of both countries adopt a pragmatic approach, the probability of conflict remains considerable? In scenarios where both nations possess the capacity for limited conflict, a nation led by pragmatic leaders may exhibit a higher propensity to instigate warfare. Realists perceive the global system as inherently anarchic, underscoring the

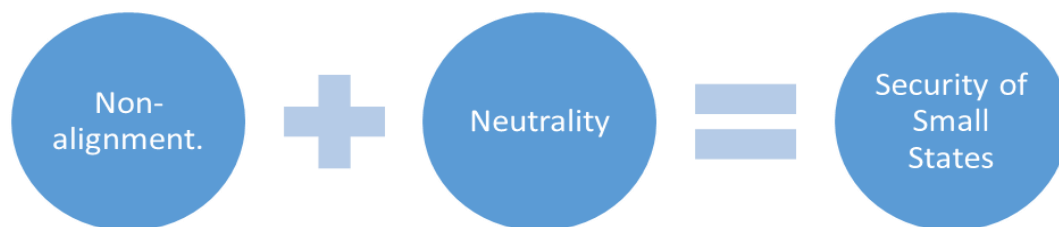
necessity for states to prioritize self-reliance. A nation requires power to achieve self-sufficiency and may need to be driven to obtain this power. Proponents of realism assert that authentic and lasting cooperation between the two nations is fundamentally unachievable. In the context of collaboration, there exists a prudent awareness of each party's comparative advantages, which may inadvertently precipitate the onset of hostilities. The nature and concepts of law play a crucial role in determining the likelihood of war or peace between two states.

### **SINO-INDIAN RIVALRY AND MANIRUZZAMAN'S SECURITY OF SMALL STATES IN THE THIRD WORLD: OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH**

This study aims to present policy alternatives for Bangladesh within the framework of the competitive dynamics between China and India. This section will elucidate the framework for developing policy alternatives and the consequent outcomes for Bangladesh. Investigating contemporary theories regarding the potential for a diminished state size is crucial for developing an optimal policy framework. This analysis will explore three primary options for Bangladesh: alliance, neutrality, and non-alignment. Initially, each alternative will be delineated, succeeded by a thorough examination of the advantages and disadvantages from the perspective of Bangladesh. Maniruzzaman posits that small states in the Third World are presented with two primary alternatives: neutrality or non-alignment.

**Figure 3**

*Small States in the Third World*



The smaller countries in South Asia depend on China for most of their economic growth and are worried about India's safety, so they probably won't join forces to balance China and India (Rizvi, 1986). Again, these countries won't be able to keep up the war effort against China or India because of problems in their own economies and governments. In the past, coalitions of small states have not worked well. Moniruzzaman, an authority on the safety of small states, examined the agreements among third-world nations classified as "small states." His findings indicate that a total of eleven treaties were executed by smaller nations in the Global South between the years 1945 and 1980. However, these agreements were never implemented. The primary factors contributing to this significant failure were the financial burden of the conflict and the opposition from the populace. Bangladesh should exercise caution in relying on defense agreements with other smaller South Asian nations, given the historical context.

In 1974, Alan Doughty conducted an examination of the safety of small states, analyzing 84 agreements established between small states and major powers (Doughty, 1974). Research indicates that fewer than fifty percent of the contracts were effectively executed. The future of a security agreement for a small state is contingent upon two primary factors: the strategic significance of the small state to the superpower and the

sentiments of the populace in both nations regarding the security arrangement. Cuba and Israel serve as pertinent examples of how smaller nations can enhance their significance to superpowers by assisting in the attainment of their objectives (Buzan et al., 1986). Small states receive more consistent and persistent protection from major powers through this strategic alliance. The small state's perceived trustworthiness and consistency as an ally also affects security commitments' depth and durability.

Due to its geographical distance from China, Bangladesh appears unlikely to assist the United States in implementing a policy aimed at physically containing China (Meredith, 2022). The United States appears to be unprepared to finalize an agreement with Bangladesh. The United States is likely to oppose Bangladesh granting China access to one of its ports, as this would enhance China's position as the preeminent power in the Indian Ocean, a region critical to China's strategic interests (Tareq et al., 2021). The United States is poised to increase its focus on India and is less inclined to obstruct India's initiatives aimed at resolving territorial and coastal disputes with Bangladesh. India possesses a strategic advantage in the region and stands to enhance its influence further; thus, the United States may prefer a Bangladeshi government that aligns with India rather than one that seeks to forge an alliance with China (Gilboy & Heginbotham, 2012). India, conversely, has the potential to leverage its relationship with the United States to enhance its influence over the internal dynamics of Bangladesh. Bangladesh may face challenges in maintaining its governmental autonomy.

Bangladesh is prepared to support India if it pursues a pragmatic strategy for addressing coastal and territorial disputes. Bangladesh's relationship with India is anticipated to receive increased endorsement from the United States and other democratic Western countries. India and Bangladesh can improve collaboration in resolving the aforementioned regional disputes (Sobhan, 2006). The alignment of Bangladesh with India may present potential challenges to its territorial integrity. Historical evidence suggests that significant nations or large states have assimilated smaller and adjacent states. Stalin incorporated adjacent smaller nations, justifying these actions by asserting the necessity for the USSR to gain strategic geographical depth. A similar event occurred in South Asia. In 1959, Tibet came under the control of China, while India asserted control over Kashmir between 1947 and 1949, and subsequently over Sikkim in 1975.

China and Bangladesh do not experience any territorial disputes, and China has refrained from intervening in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. In response to India's influence, Bangladesh has the potential to establish strategic partnerships with China. Pakistan, Myanmar, and Nepal surround India, each maintaining strong connections with China (Choudhury, 2023). The establishment of a seaport by China aims to bolster the capabilities of the People's Liberation Army Navy's forward base, reflecting its strategic aspirations to assert dominance in the Indian Ocean region. Bangladesh stands to gain from the establishment of this alliance, particularly in resolving its disputes with India, which center on issues of political autonomy and territorial integrity. This collaboration will enhance Bangladesh's capacity to tackle the Rohingya issue with Myanmar. Bangladesh has experienced an increase in Chinese investment as a component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (Plagemann, 2022). China's investment in Bangladesh has reached a total of US \$38 billion, marking the highest amount ever contributed by a single nation, alongside joint venture investments amounting to US \$13.6 billion. Should Bangladesh align itself with China, it is inevitable that its relations with Western nations, especially the United States, will face significant decline. The partnership between

democratic Bangladesh and officially communist China is expected to face challenges due to inherent ideological disparities.

Bangladesh shares a land border with India and is surrounded by India on three sides. India's significant influence on Bangladesh's policy is due to India's larger size in comparison to Bangladesh. Bangladesh will always maintain a pro-India foreign policy (Bhardwaj, 2003). If Bangladesh were to align with China, it could result in an indirect rivalry with India, which would present a considerable challenge to Bangladesh's national security.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's involvement in preventing insurgency in India's North-East illustrates its readiness to collaborate with India on issues of regional stability. Despite these efforts, Dhaka has not consistently attained equitable resolutions regarding critical issues such as the Rohingya crisis (Hazarika, 2022). India recognizes the humanitarian issue; however, its backing for the repatriation of Rohingya to Bangladesh is largely rhetorical. Bangladesh has engaged in pragmatic diplomacy by diversifying its alliances, notably through trilateral energy initiatives with Bhutan and Nepal, as well as economic collaboration with China. This balancing act aims to reduce reliance on India while achieving autonomy within the competitive geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

Integrity and impartiality represent separate and unique concepts. A neutral state maintains a position of detachment from international politics, whereas a non-aligned state engages in political relations within the system while refraining from establishing military alliances with major powers (Moniruzzaman, 1982). The principle of non-alignment guarantees the political autonomy of the state, enabling it to interact with superpowers to protect its national interests effectively. In principle, non-alignment represents the most advantageous strategy for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has the potential to address its territorial disputes with India and achieve political independence through the development of robust relationships with key global players and the implementation of a non-aligned policy. Historically, Bangladesh has struggled to maintain a stance of non-alignment. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman initially proclaimed a non-aligned foreign policy; however, he faced challenges in maintaining its implementation. Following the attainment of independence, Mujib formalized a 25-year defense partnership treaty with India, aimed at ensuring the withdrawal of the Indian Army from Bangladesh. Three decades later, Mujib's political party continues to be viewed as pro-India, largely due to its significant impact on public perception (Ray, 2011). Bangladesh has encountered difficulties stemming from its inability to maintain the principles of non-alignment. Should political parties exhibit a steadfast dedication to the interests of Bangladesh and maintain autonomy from external influences, the likelihood of encountering challenges diminishes significantly.

This paper seeks to highlight Bangladesh's strategic adoption of a balance of power policy amid significant power competition (Maimuna, 2022). Considering the political and socio-economic landscape of Bangladesh, the balancing strategy emerges as the most suitable option for the nation. Employing strategies centered on the balance of power can foster defensive relationships with allied major nations while maintaining neutrality and refraining from forming alliances with rival major powers. China and India are engaged in competition with major powers at a regional scale. What is the role of Bangladesh in this political mystery? Regarding Bangladesh's political approach of fostering amicable relations with all countries and steering clear of conflicts, it is imperative that the nation refrains from adopting any strategy that could undermine this position. Moreover, Bangladesh is a small and vulnerable entity within the global



political landscape. Structural realism recognizes the intricate choices that states face when navigating the dynamics between a rising great power such as China and a pre-existing one. In this context, Bangladesh faces a strategic choice: it can either align itself with the established great powers to counter the emerging power or forge an alliance with the rising power. Nonetheless, this principle may not hold relevance for most small states. It is imperative that they recalibrate their strategy. For example, they maintain a neutral stance regarding the positions of China and India. Establishing a partnership with one faction may provoke the opposing side, thereby jeopardizing the vital national interests of smaller nations. Bangladesh is a modest nation that maintains amicable relations with all significant global powers (Paul, 2019). Therefore, Bangladesh's careful balancing approach not only protects its security and sovereignty but also raises its diplomatic standing globally.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study explores the efforts of Bangladesh to maintain harmonious relations with both China and India. The analysis posits that Bangladesh has adopted a cooperative approach that emphasizes a commitment to friendship with all and enmity with none, aimed at enhancing its relations with both China and India. The article asserts that the factors contributing to the conflict between China and India are elucidated in the book *The Causes of War*. The book delineates seven factors contributing to the Sino-Indian conflict that may precipitate future hostilities between China and India. These factors encompass military capabilities, international perceptions of the conflicts, national identities, historical precedents of warfare, ideological differences, economic conditions, and the influence of key decision-makers. The seven factors delineated above possess the potential to incite conflict between two major economic and influential nations. Six of the seven factors in the Blainey model regarding the China-India conflict indicate a probable future conflict, with the exception of the second factor, which pertains to the perception of other nations. Furthermore, the article articulates that Moniruzzaman's work on the Security of the Small State examines the implications of the China-India rivalry on Bangladesh, a developing nation. This work presents a thorough analysis of three causal alternatives aimed at protecting the security interests of Bangladesh: non-alignment, neutrality, and alliance. Analyses indicate that non-alignment stands out as the most feasible option among key stakeholders to protect the security interests of Bangladesh.

The constraints imposed by the Sino-Indian rivalry could potentially impede regional cooperation and development, thereby hindering the progress of Bangladesh. This situation may compel Bangladesh to navigate the interests of these two major nations while striving for its own socio-economic development. Future research should prioritize the enhancement of Bangladesh's diplomatic influence, encompassing the refinement of selection processes, the provision of training, and the augmentation of diplomats' negotiation skills. Furthermore, investigations should examine the use of media to improve information capabilities and attain transparency within the framework of the flexible non-alignment policy. The decision-maker must possess a comprehensive understanding of the complex security dynamics in South Asia, particularly considering the potential conflict between China and India, to arrive at a well-informed conclusion. To cultivate constructive relationships with China and India, it is essential to implement a strategy of non-alignment, reduce economic dependence on these nations, and prioritize economic development with smaller countries or significant powers in South Asia. The anticipated tensions between China and India concerning their influence in

South Asia are likely to intensify in the forthcoming period. Bangladesh ought to prioritize the principle of balance to protect itself from this conflict.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

*We hereby wish to declare that We do not have any conflict of interests to disclose. However, we declare that the manuscript has not been published before and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.*

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

*We declare that this manuscript is originally produced by us.*

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