

## INDIA'S STRATEGIC CHOICES: CHINA AND THE BALANCE OF POWER IN ASIA

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India is a rising power, but its transformation is occurring in the shadow of China's even more impressive ascent. Beijing's influence will almost certainly continue to grow and has already upset Asia's geopolitical balance. India must decide how to secure its interests in this unbalanced environment by choosing among six potential strategic options: staying unaligned, hedging, building indigenous military power, forming regional partnerships, aligning with China, or aligning with the United States. A closer alignment with Washington likely represents India's best chance to counter China, while efforts to foster regional partnerships and cultivate domestic military capabilities, although insufficient by themselves, could play a complementary role.

### Challenges Posed by China's Rise

- China is a direct military threat to India, particularly in light of the two countries' border disputes. Though India has considerable military power, China's forces are already stronger and better-funded; Beijing's outsized wealth will likely allow it to outspend New Delhi for the foreseeable future.
- Beijing's influence in both established international organizations like the United Nations and in new institutions China is setting up, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, gives Beijing opportunities to hamper Indian interests and goals in multilateral forums, especially when it comes to reforming these institutions and giving India a greater voice in global affairs.
- China's alignment with Pakistan and deepening relations with other South Asian countries represents a significant challenge to India's position in the region, which New Delhi has dominated for decades. Beijing's ability to provide financial assistance and balance against New Delhi may tempt India's smaller neighbors to play one power against the other, undermining India in its own backyard.
- China's economic power allows Beijing to spread its influence around the world, which could be used to India's detriment.

### India's Potential Policy Responses

- A strategy of nonalignment, hedging, or alignment with China likely would not serve India's interests because China's power, geographical proximity, and policies already represent a clear danger to India's security and global interests.
- A closer alignment with the United States, further along the same policy path that India is already pursuing, represents the best way to meet the challenge of China's rise, because the United States is the only power that is stronger than China. Further, New Delhi and Washington share a common interest in balancing Beijing.
- Among India's other strategic options, efforts to build indigenous military power and forge regional partnerships are necessary and complementary means of countering China, but are by themselves insufficient, because China is already wealthier and stronger than India or any combination of other Asian powers.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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