

An Appraisal of Power Balancing between India and China

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Abstract

According to the realist logic of the balance of power theory, if China emerges as a superpower and builds a powerful military force through strong economic power, neighboring countries will ultimately seek to balance against China by aligning with a military coalition led by the United States to contain China in the same way that Western European countries, Japan, South Korea, and even China joined the security alliance led by the United States to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War. If so, is India, China's neighbor, also shifting to a balancing strategy against China? This study argues that India's various strategic actions toward China can be regarded as typical characteristics of a balancing strategy, suggesting that the neorealist balance of power theory remains able to explain the relationship between India and China in the 21st century.

Keywords: India, China, United States, balancing, bandwagoning

1. Introduction

With regard to China's rise, the main concern of neighboring countries and Western powers is, "Will China's rise be peaceful?" In order to resolve the distrust and concerns of neighboring countries and Western powers about China's intentions, the Chinese government has used conciliatory diplomatic discourses, such as "peaceful development," a "harmonious world," the "community of common destiny for mankind," and "multilateralism." However, many still believe that the rise of China will not be peaceful, because as China grows rapidly economically, it will likely follow the US expansionist strategy, which gradually rose from a regional hegemon to a global hegemon, and ultimately challenge the US hegemony, increasing the possibility of an all-out clash between the United States and China and causing great instability in the regional and global order (Mearsheimer 2010, 2014; Pillsbury 2015; Allison 2017).

Indeed, since the inauguration of President Xi Jinping in 2013, China has set out to realize the "Chinese Dream," which means "the revival of the great Chinese empire," and promoted strong "nationalism" and "military prowess" as a way to achieve it (Park 2021, 76). Currently, China ranks second in terms of defense spending after the United States, and third in military power after the United States and Russia (SIPRI 2021; Armstrong 2022). At the same time, China has been actively implementing a strongly aggressive hegemonic strategy through various strategic means, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NDB), and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). In February 2012, on a visit to the United States as vice-president, Xi officially proposed to the Obama administration to forge a "new type of Sino-US great power relations," and in 2014 publicly declared that "Asia's security ultimately must be protected by Asians," a clear announcement of China's intention to exclude the United States and establish a Chinese-led Asian security system in the Indo-Pacific region. Since then, China has been strengthening its strategies to counter US rapid intervention in future Taiwan Strait crises and in the South China Sea dispute, while strengthening its capabilities to carry out the "Anti-Access, Area Denial (A2/AD) Strategy" to stop US forces from entering the Western Pacific (Kim & Kim 2019).

After losing sovereignty over Hong Kong in the first Opium War of 1842, China experienced a "century of disgrace" as a semi-colonial state of the Western powers and Japan. This 100-year historical experience of national humiliation has resulted in the "nationalism of inferiority," causing China to overreact to external circumstances and even implement very aggressive foreign strategies (Mearsheimer 2010, 2014; Pillsbury 2015; Allison 2017). China has not hesitated to implement strong warnings and retaliatory measures against external movements deemed as undermining its interests, as shown in its economic retaliation (or "wolf warrior diplomacy") against a number of countries, such as Japan, Norway, the Philippines, South Korea, and Australia. China has also been rapidly expanding the conceptual scope of its core interests in the Indo-Pacific region beyond the existing Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang Uyghurs to the South China

Sea and the East China Sea, thereby heightening territorial disputes with almost all neighboring countries in the region. Since 2010, China's territorial disputes with Japan have intensified as its warships have frequently entered the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese), which Japan has effectively controlled. China has also built artificial islands in the South China Sea and turned them into military bases despite the opposition of the international community. After unilaterally incorporating the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, under effective control by Vietnam and the Philippines, into its administrative divisions, China showed highly aggressive behavior in territorial disputes with Vietnam and the Philippines. Thus, China's increasingly aggressive hegemonic strategy in the Indo-Pacific region is deemed to threaten neighboring countries by force or economically and violate their sovereignty, thus causing great instability in the regional order. In particular, for India, another regional power, which shares a 3,488km-long border with China, China's rapid rise and aggressive expansionist strategies undoubtedly pose a very serious challenge to its national security. Even after war with China over a territorial dispute in 1962, India has continued to experience border conflicts with China. In June 2020, for example, 20 Indian soldiers were killed in bloody clashes between soldiers of the two countries at the Galwan Valley in Aksai Chin near the India-China border. These facts are the main cause of serious fear of China's ultimate intentions underlying the Chinese dream among neighboring countries in reality, despite China's efforts to show good intentions externally.

In relation to China's increasingly aggressive expansionist strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, this study analyzes India's strategy toward China, and discusses the theoretical implications that the analysis holds. This study comprises six sections. The following section presents theoretical discussions of national strategies. Sections 3 and 4 examine the current issues between India and China, focusing on the border disputes between the two countries and China's BRI. Section 5 examines the changes in India's strategy toward China. Finally, Section 6 presents a summary and theoretical implications of this study.

2. Conceptual Discussions of Balancing, Bandwagoning, and Hedging

Balance of power theory, regarded as a core tenet of the realist and neorealist theory, was developed to explain the formation of alliances between states. In fact, the study of alliance formation dates back to the time of ancient Greece. However, it is the realist and neorealist school that systematically perfected the theory of national security strategy for the analysis of international relations. The realist and neorealist school basically assumes that the international system is anarchy, that the international political actor is the state, and that the state is a rational actor (Waltz 1979). The realist concept of anarchy implies that in the international system there is no central authority of government higher than states capable of governing states. Therefore, states feel infinite fear because they cannot know with certainty the ultimate intentions of other states, which makes states put their own survival and interests above all else in the environment of anarchic international system.

In the study of international relations, the strategies that states adopt to survive in the anarchic international system are usually classified as "balancing," "bandwagoning," and "hedging." Of course, debate continues over the definitions of these three strategies, but the term balancing is generally used when a state allies with other states against a stronger, adversarial power to secure its own national security and survival. Conversely, bandwagoning occurs when a weak state aligns with a stronger, adversarial power rather than resisting it (Waltz 1979, 126). In the meantime, Walt (1985, 4; 1987, 17) put forward the "balance of threat theory," contending that the formation of state alliances is determined by the threats they perceive from other states rather than their power; therefore, balancing consists of forming an alliance with other states against an external threat, while bandwagoning involves forming an alliance with a state that poses a threat instead of resisting it. Lastly, hedging is an intermediate concept between balancing and bandwagoning, and can be classified as a third strategy (Goh 2006, 2007; Choo 2021, 243).

Balancing can be further classified into two types: "internal balancing" (or hard balancing) and "external balancing" (or soft balancing) (Waltz 1979, 118; Mearsheimer 1990; Elman 1996; Vasquez 1997; Kang 2009, 5). Internal balancing refers to mobilizing internal resources to counter an adversary's threats and forces, e.g., increasing defense spending, conducting military mobilization and enhancing military capabilities, maximizing economic growth, and pursuing smart strategies. External balancing refers to relying on external resources to counter a stronger power, e.g., establishing, strengthening, and expanding defense alliances with other states to counter an adversary's threats and forces, or weakening or reducing an adversary's alliances.

Sometimes, for a very weak state to resist the demands of a stronger, adversarial power is not very meaningful or effective, especially when the weak state is geographically too close to the great power or geographically far from its potential allies. Therefore, the weak state usually opts a bandwagoning strategy that favors a stronger, adversarial power through military alliance or economic and diplomatic cooperation. In this respect, bandwagoning can be seen as a strategy chosen by a weak state in a situation where it has to face the hostile strong power alone. The bandwagoning strategy may mean surrender or submission to a great power, but on the other hand, it is also regarded as a kind of

strategic choice in that it can eliminate the direct security threat posed by the great power and provides a relative benefit through cooperation. In general, states balance by forming alliances against perceived threats, but very weak states are more likely to bandwagon with the rising threat for their own national security and survival (Walt 1987, 17). However, Walt contends that in general it is more common for states to balance than bandwagon (Walt 1987, 5). That is, balancing is the basic strategy of choice for most states facing an anarchic international system (He 2009, 116).

Finally, hedging is used to refer to ambiguous signals or behaviors that are neither balancing nor bandwagoning (Goh 2006, 2007). It is a passive strategy promoted through multiple processes of blending and convergence between balancing and bandwagoning. It is a strategic action employed primarily by states that find themselves in a weak position in a situation where the outcome of conflicts of interest between great powers is uncertain or they have to express their position on important issues. Hedging is a concept originally borrowed from international politics as a method of diversifying risks to minimize losses in asset investment or management. While balancing and bandwagoning are alternative strategies to cooperate with one particular power at the expense of the relationship with another, hedging is a third strategy that maintains all possible policy options, cooperating selectively with multiple great powers and taking a neutral position to avoid the dilemma of choosing sides between the opposing great powers. If this is applied to the context of current US-China competition, hedging is a strategy to maintain friendly relations with both sides rather than selecting just one superpower, either the United States or China, and offering it unconditional support.

3. India-China Border Disputes

India and China have not established an exactly defined border since the 1962 war. They still insist on different borders, claiming sovereignty over territories both claim. Recently, as competition in the border area intensifies and as various infrastructure such as military bases, roads, and communication facilities have been built along the border, the large-scale military of both sides, including 300,000 Chinese and 120,000 Indian soldiers, are in sharp confrontation with each other along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (Paik et al. 2019, 70–71). This means that soldiers from both sides run into each other at various points along the unclear LAC, and accidental clashes between them can easily occur. In fact, since 1959, the two countries have experienced frequent bloody clashes along the border from Aksai Chin in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east. Direct conflicts at the border and competition for political and military influence over neighboring countries are now playing a decisive role in turning India's perception of China into a negative direction (Paik et al. 2019, 70–71).

In fact, in the early 1950s, when India and China were new nation-states, relations between them were so friendly that then Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited New Delhi and Beijing alternately. India recognized China's communist government ahead of other states, and virtually accepted China's annexation of Tibet in 1950. In October 1954, the two countries also signed a bilateral trade agreement, and participated in the first Asian-African Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, together in the following year. Relations between the two countries until the first half of the 1950s can be summarized in the Hindi slogan as "*Hindu-Chin bhai!*" (Indians and Chinese are brothers!).

The friendship between the two countries, which lasted from their independence until the Bandung Conference, began to deteriorate rapidly in 1956 when it was revealed that China had been building a highway in Aksai Chin linking Tibet and Xinjiang without India's knowledge. Located east of Kashmir and Ladakh, Aksai Chin was a territory claimed by India at that time. After the Tibetan uprising in 1959, Tibet's leader, the Dalai Lama, fled to India, which also had a negative impact on the bilateral relations. In 1959, India claimed the border line based on the McMahon Line based on the Simla Agreement, which was signed during the British colonial period, while China did not recognize the Simla Agreement and the McMahon Line at all. From 1959 to 1962, just before the war, China's top policy makers, such as Zhou Enlai, had tried to make a diplomatic compromise with India to demarcate a border, but as India opposed the border set by China, tensions between the two countries rapidly heightened (Kim 2020, 165).

China's military behavior became more aggressive as India rejected China's diplomatic efforts, and finally on October 20, 1962, China attacked both Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. The battle between the well-prepared Chinese and unprepared Indians ended in a unilateral victory for China. In this war, the Chinese forces suffered less than 800 casualties, while the Indian forces suffered massive losses, including 1,383 killed, 1,047 wounded, and 1,696 missing (Kim 2020, 165). On November 21, 1962, 31 days after the war, China finally ended the war, returning Arunachal Pradesh among the occupied territories to India and unilaterally declaring Aksai Chin to be Chinese territory. The Indian government effectively recognized China's victory by deciding to withdraw its troops completely from Aksai Chin.

Since then, the two countries have clashed along the border area in various ways. In 1967, military clashes broke out between the two countries along the two mountain passes of Nathu La and Cho La, linking the Tibet Autonomous Region of China and Sikkim, which was then a kingdom and protectorate of India, resulting in a second all-out war

between the two countries. More than 150 Indian and 340 Chinese soldiers were killed in this war, and India won by destroying the Chinese fortress at Nathu La and pushing the Chinese back further into territories near Cho La. In 1975, Chinese forces crossed over into the Indian territory at Tulung La in Arunachal Pradesh, killing four Indian soldiers on patrol (Shukla 2020). In 1987, the Indian army accidentally surprised the Chinese army during emergency maneuver training, and the Chinese army immediately moved into the LAC in response. However, further military clashes were avoided as the leaders of both countries acted quickly to prevent the possibility of an all-out war.

In November 1996, the two countries signed an agreement calling for partial demilitarization of disputed borders, stating that neither side shall use force or seek unilateral military assistance against the other by any means (CNN 1996). Since then, soldiers on both sides have been required to carry magazines on their backs at the border even if they have firearms. As a result, whenever there was a border conflict between the two sides, fistfights and scuffles took place instead of gunfights.

In the summer of 2017, the two countries fell into a military standoff for another 73 days over China's unilateral construction of a road in Doklam, a region claimed by both China and Bhutan. Bhutan, India's ally, turned to the Indian government for help under the Bhutan-India Mutual Defense Treaty, as Chinese forces equipped with construction vehicles and road-building equipment began to extend existing roads south into the Doklam area. Upon accepting the request, India immediately protested strongly to the Chinese government on behalf of Bhutan. The reason India was so sensitive to this area even though it was not its own territory was that if China built a road there, it would be easier for China to access Doklam, putting the very narrow "Siliguri Corridor" (about 22 kilometers wide), called the "Chicken's Neck," linking the northeastern states of India with the rest of the country, at risk (Panda 2017). Siliguri, located in the Indian state of West Bengal, is very important to India as it connects the northeastern state of India with the rest of the country. Given that the loss of Siliguri would separate northeastern India from the rest of the state, a unilateral Chinese military intrusion to the region was completely unacceptable for India. On September 5, 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping discussed the issue for an hour at the BRICS summit, after which they agreed to work together to prevent a recurrence of a situation like the Doklam standoff (Chaudhury 2017).

In June 2020, border clashes between the two countries resurfaced in a bloody battle between about 600 Indian and Chinese forces armed with iron poles, clubs, and stones at the Galwan River Valley in Aksai Chin, killing more than 60 soldiers on both sides, including 20 Indian soldiers. It was the first bloodshed since the 1975 border conflict.

The origin of the India-China border disputes can be traced back to the 1914 Simla Agreement. In 1914, Britain, then the colonial power ruling India, concluded the Simla Agreement with Tibet in Simla, located in northern India, establishing the "McMahon Line" as the border line between Tibet and British India. Based on the Simla Agreement, India has so far asserted that the 890km-long McMahon Line crossing the Himalayas is the official legal border between India and China, but China has rejected both the Simla Agreement and the McMahon Line altogether, arguing that Tibet was not even an independent state capable of signing inter-state treaties at the time.

There are three major border areas where India and China have been in sharp confrontation. The first area is Aksai Chin, located in the western part of the Kunlun Mountains in the northwest of the Tibetan Plateau between Kashmir, Xinjiang, and Tibet, which has been the subject of territorial disputes between India and China since the late 1950s. Since the Chinese military occupied the area during the border dispute between India and China in 1962, China has been in de facto control, while India continues to claim sovereignty over the region as part of its union territory of Ladakh. There was also a bloody clash between the two countries in the summer of 2020 in the Galwan Valley located west of Aksai Chin and east of Ladakh. In fact, Aksai Chin is easily accessible from China, but difficult to access from India due to high mountains. With a total border line of 600 kilometers and an area of about 38,000 square kilometers, Aksai Chin has an extremely cold and dry climate, with an average elevation of over 5,000 meters above sea level and a winter temperature of -40 degrees below zero, making it almost uninhabitable. Currently, China controls the region as part of the Xinjiang Uyghur and Tibet Autonomous Region, and it is highly unlikely that China will give it up. Currently, the highway linking the Xinjiang Uyghur and Tibet Autonomous Region passes through the region, which is strategically very important to China. In addition to a huge amount of water resources, there are also large reserves of rare mineral raw materials and uranium, a nuclear fuel, in the region. However, as India continues to claim sovereignty over it, there is always a possibility of border dispute in this region.

Second, border clashes between the two countries are also frequent in Sikkim, a state in northeastern India between Nepal and Bhutan, which is 400 kilometers long and has an area of 2,000 square kilometers.

Third, Arunachal Pradesh, located in the Himalayas in the northeastern tip of India, covering a total area of 84,000 square kilometers and a length of 650 kilometers, is another area where frequent border clashes between the two countries occur. Arunachal Pradesh, with a population of about 1.3 million, is now effectively controlled by India, but the Chinese claim that it was their territory in the past.

Combined, the three conflict zones are 124,000 square kilometers, which is larger than the area of the Republic of Korea. Given the continuous increase in power of both sides near the border in recent years, the possibility of another border dispute between the two countries remains high.

4. China's BRI: Implications for India's National Security

The BRI consists of the "Silk Road Economic Belt," a transcontinental passage connecting China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe by land, and the "21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," a maritime route connecting the coastal regions of China to Southeast Asia and South Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East and East Africa, and Europe. Currently, many European countries, such as Greece, Portugal, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, and Russia, are participating in the BRI project, and China has already invested billions of dollars to build basic infrastructure in several South Asian countries, such as Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. As of March 2022, a total of 147 countries had joined the BRI by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with China (<https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/>). If successful, the project will help reshape much of the world's economy around China.

Of particular concern to India is the Maritime Silk Road. As part of the BRI, China has steadily expanded its political and economic influence into the Indian Ocean region over the past several years. Under the Maritime Silk Road initiative, China has been developing a new production and distribution chain in the region by establishing closely interconnected ports, infrastructure, and special economic zones in Southeast Asia and the North Indian Ocean region, allowing China to tie the countries of the Bay of Bengal and northern Indian Ocean much closer to its economy.

The main reason China has been so keen to advance into the Indian Ocean region is the Malacca Strait (Desai 2021), a 930km-long narrow strait located between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. About 80% of China's crude oil imports from the Middle East pass through this strait. The problem is that the US 7th Fleet has effectively taken over the strait. Therefore, if the US military blocks the strait in the event of a military or diplomatic conflict between the United States and China, it could be a fatal blow to China. Former Chinese President Hu Jintao once described this situation as the "Malacca Dilemma."

Against this backdrop, China has been highly active in building a network of naval bases linking Sihanoukville in Cambodia, Sittwe in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Gwadar Port in Pakistan to station its naval forces on the Maritime Silk Road. China has even built its first overseas military base in Djibouti, located in northeast Africa. In addition to providing a high level of economic and military support to small countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan, and Bhutan, which were under Indian influence, China has been exporting the latest strategic weapons to them, rapidly expanding its influence in South Asia. In 2012, the Chinese Navy began to deploy maritime intelligence gathering vessels in the Indian Ocean under the pretext of protecting its oil tankers and cargo ships, and has been conducting maritime training to strengthen operational capabilities in the region. For example, in early 2014, a Chinese naval operations group consisting of China's largest amphibious assault ship (Changbaishan) and two modern destroyers (Wuhan and Haikou) conducted sophisticated exercises in the South China Sea, the eastern Indian Ocean, and the Philippine Sea (Brewster 2015, 48). In 2014, the Chinese Navy conducted a nuclear-submarine patrol in the Bay of Bengal as well. This shows that China, which relies heavily on sea routes for its crude oil imports, is rapidly expanding its maritime military operations into the Indian Ocean region.

From India's point of view, however, China's aggressive maritime advancement into the Indian Ocean encircling India undoubtedly poses a very serious threat to its maritime access and trade and territorial integrity (Ashraf 2017; Dabas 2017; Dutta 2017). Traditionally, South Asia, where Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, as well as maritime border countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Mauritius, are located, has been regarded as an extension of India, to such an extent that it has been called the "Indian subcontinent" since the British colonial era, and the Indian Ocean has also been considered a region dominated by Indian hegemony and influence (Paik 2022, 85). In this regard, it is natural that China's aggressive advance into South Asia and the Indian Ocean is seen as a major challenge to India's traditional hegemony and national security.

China-Pakistan economic cooperation, which has been carried out as part of the BRI, also presents another serious dilemma to national security of India, which had three major military clashes with Pakistan in 1965, 1971, and 1999. Since 2013, China has been expanding its economic and military support to Pakistan to build roads, railroads, oil pipelines, and fiber optic cables linking Pakistan and China as part of the BRI. In particular, the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) project, which has been underway since 2013, is a representative project of the BRI and is an aggregate of infrastructure projects under construction across Pakistan. The 3,000-km-long CPEC project from Kashgar in China to the port of Gwadar in Pakistan includes a variety of infrastructure construction projects. Originally valued at \$47 billion, the CPEC project was worth \$62 billion in 2020 (Lal 2020). Although the CPEC project is the most expensive of China's BRI projects, it is classified as a core project for China in that, by linking China and Pakistan

through highways, railroads, and oil pipelines, China can directly enter the Indian Ocean, escaping encirclement by the US Navy. However, the CPEC project is considered a direct threat to India's national security. This is due to the fact that the CPEC project passes through Kashmir, an Indo-Pakistan conflict zone, and that China can set up an overseas naval base in Pakistan's Gwadar port, allowing it to wage an expeditionary war in the Indian Ocean region.

Thus, the geopolitical implications of China's BRI for India's national security are strongly negative. China has advocated active funding of economic projects in India's neighboring countries in an effort to build a new maritime Silk Road. In India, however, concerns are widespread that China is attempting to block India's influence in the Indian Ocean region through the BRI projects (Kim 2018, 106). Therefore, India is very critical of China's BRI and did not attend the BRI Forum held in 2017 and 2019.¹

5. Changes in India's China Strategy: From Hedging to Balancing

India, a weaker state than China, has three strategic options for its survival vis-à-vis the more powerful China: (1) a balancing strategy of countering China's threat by aligning with other countries that share a pessimistic view of China's rise; (2) a bandwagoning strategy of aligning with China to take full advantage of the economic and political benefits that the rise of stronger China can provide despite fears of Chinese domination; and (3) a very ambiguous and neutral hedging strategy that is neither balancing nor bandwagoning.

During the Cold War, India followed the path of non-aligned diplomacy, advocating military neutrality, but immediately after losing the war with China in 1962, India's non-aligned diplomacy began to be revised (Kim 2020, 164). After the defeat in 1962, the Nehru government pursued both internal balancing by increasing India's military spending and external balancing by forming a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union. India devoted itself to developing nuclear weapons for 36 years until the last nuclear test in May 1998. Such close India-Soviet relations were driven by India's experience of war with China and the need to counter China.

In the 21st century, as the diplomatic and security landscape surrounding the Indian Ocean began to fluctuate once again, India's non-aligned diplomatic strategy began to be revised again as well. China's rapid economic development has led to its rapid military build-up, and it has been expanding its power and influence into the Indian Ocean (Cho 2019, 122). China's aggressive expansionist strategy, coupled with frequent bloody clashes along the India-China border, greatly heightened India's perception of the threat of China, serving as a catalyst for further strengthening India-US military cooperation. India's fears over China's expansionism are evident in recent polls. According to a July 2020 MOTN Survey conducted by India Today, India's most widely circulated weekly magazine, 84% of Indians responded that they did not trust China, and 59% believed that a war with China was necessary to resolve persistent border tensions (India Today 2020). A 2019 Pew Research Center (2019) survey also found that 73% of Indians had a negative view of China's military power, while 61% expressed a negative view of China's economic growth. Although India's relations with China are closely connected in all respects, including politics and economy, India's dissatisfaction with China has increased as India's trade and investment relations with China are an asymmetric interdependent structure in which China has an overall advantage over India.² In recent years, India's willingness to participate in the multilateral cooperation, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS, and the New Development Bank, which have been led by China, has been rapidly declining (Paik 2022, 86–87, 96).

As China's direct threat to India's national security has increased significantly since 2010, India's reliance on the existing non-aligned diplomatic strategy has been significantly reduced. In this changed security environment, India is improving its own military capabilities to counter China's threat, while at the same time actively aligning with other countries, such as the United States, Japan, and Australia that share a negative view of China's rise. This is a strategy that fits the realist logic of balance of power theory. India already had a history of forming a military alliance with the Soviet Union to counter the threat from the United States in the 1970s, when the Cold War was in full swing. In short, as predicted by the balance of power theory, India is currently taking a balancing strategy in various ways against the increasing threat from China, and this balancing against China is being further strengthened in conjunction with the US's China containment strategy.

From the perspective of the United States, which is currently using various strategies to contain China, the strategic changes in India toward China present a very positive scenario. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has consistently pursued a new policy of ending hostile relations with India and advancing security cooperation with it on the basis of the realist logic that the United States and India have a common strategic interest in responding to changes in the Asian regional system that China's rapid rise would bring about and in maintaining a balance of power against

¹ India refused to participate in the China-led RCEP for similar reasons.

² For example, as of 2020, India recorded a trade deficit with China of 44 billion dollars (Paik 2022, 87).

China (Choi 2015, 2). To this end, strengthening military cooperation with India, which has a geographical advantage and a certain naval power in the Indo-Pacific region, would help form a strong balance of power against, and maintain US military dominance over, China, which might emerge as a new superpower in the region.

In 2000, President Clinton made an official visit to India and lifted economic sanctions imposed by the US government on India after India's nuclear test. In 2001, the Bush administration signed a Strategic Partnership with India, and in 2002 it signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with India, allowing the Indian government and Defense Public Sector Undertakings to share confidential information with the US government and businesses (Cho 2019, 138). In 2011, the Obama administration upgraded the US-India relationship to a Global Strategic Partnership to promote more inclusive cooperation with India at the global level (Cho 2019, 136). In 2017, the Trump administration announced the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" that put India at the center, declaring India an indispensable element in the security structure of the Indo-Pacific region (Cho 2019, 138). Thus, the United States has been promoting cooperation with India, another regional power, in the strategic space of the Indo-Pacific to balance against China, a newly emerging regional hegemon. Unless there are unusual circumstances, such cooperation between the United States and India is expected to develop into a much closer military and security alliance in the future (Cho 2019, 138).

It was with the inauguration of the Narendra Modi government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which pursued Hindu fundamentalism, conservatism, and populism as its ideology, in May 2014 that the military cooperation between India and the United States began to rise to the level of a full-fledged alliance. Prior to the Modi government, despite recognition of the need to form a strategic alliance with the United States to counter the rapidly growing Chinese threat in the Indo-Pacific region, India had pursued a passive China strategy due to the risk of worsening relations with China (Choi 2015, 4). At the same time, there were still significant domestic political restrictions on security cooperation with the United States due to its non-aligned diplomatic tradition and the weakness of the coalition government (Choi 2015, 4). However, the Modi government, which came to power in 2014, began to promote a stronger military cooperation with the United States by combining Indian nationalism with a realist perspective, and has so far concluded all three major military cooperation agreements between India and the United States—LEMOA, CISMOA, and BECA. In short, the Modi government has been actively stepping up its military power to counter China's threat by raising the level of military cooperation with the United States to the level of an alliance. The fact that the current approval rate for the Modi government is very high suggests that the majority of Indians support the Modi government's strong military cooperation diplomacy with the United States. For example, more than 75% of Indians support Prime Minister Modi, according to a recent poll conducted by Morning Consult, an American company regularly tracking the approval ratings of world leaders (The Hindu 2021).

Regarding the major military cooperation agreements between the United States and India, first, in 2015 the Modi government signed an agreement on the "US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" with the Obama administration emphasizing regional connectivity and freedom of navigation, and enhancing collective security. In August 2016, the Modi government signed the "Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement" (LEMOA) with the Obama administration, allowing the Indian and US armies to access supplies, spare parts, and services from each other's land installations, air bases, and ports, as well as supplies from each other's military bases. The reason that this agreement was so special to India was that so far the US government has signed this agreement with only a handful of very close military allies in the world, and that only those allies that have signed this agreement have been able to purchase sensitive, cutting-edge technologies from the United States. Thus, the signing of this agreement suggests that the US government has finally elevated India to a major US military ally, fully trusting India as the United States' closest ally and partner (Cho 2019, 138).

In September 2018, the Modi government reached an agreement with the Trump administration to share sensitive military information between India and the United States by signing the "Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement" (CISMOA) at the 2+2 summit between the US-India Defense and Foreign Ministers. This agreement is an agreement that the United States enters into with its military allies and close partners to promote interoperability between the armed forces and the sale of advanced technologies (Peri 2018), and is a legal device to facilitate the use of military weapons between the United States and India by facilitating the transmission of encrypted communication systems (Cho 2019, 139). This agreement would facilitate India's access to advanced US defense systems and enable India to optimally utilize existing US-based platforms (Peri 2018).

In October 2020, the Modi government signed the "Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation" (BECA) with the Trump administration, which was the last of the four major agreements that India had long been pursuing to expand and strengthen military cooperation with the United States. The BECA agreement would allow India to use US satellite military map information for its missile and military technologies. That is, India is now able to improve the target tracking and strike capabilities of its missiles and attack drones using the US global satellite

and military map information. In this way, India and the United States concluded four major agreements to expand and strengthen military cooperation between the two countries, the first in 18 years since the signing of the GSOMIA in 2002.

The Modi government has also been actively participating as a key member of the Indo-Pacific strategy announced by the Trump administration. At the keynote address of the Asia Security Summit, the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD), held in Singapore in June 2018, Prime Minister Modi announced India's Indo-Pacific Vision, declaring that India would strengthen its bilateral and multilateral relations and actively cooperate with regional countries for regional stability and peace (Cho 2019, 136). At the ASEAN-Related Summit held in November 2018, Prime Minister Modi had a meeting with US Vice President Pence, in which the two nations agreed to share values for the Indo-Pacific region and to strengthen cooperation for regional development and security (Cho 2019, 136).

The Modi government's active diplomacy with the United States has also led to large-scale joint military exercises of the Indian and US forces. On September 6, 2018, the governments of India and the United States signed a defense agreement promising to hold regular joint military exercises in India, and in November 2019, a large-scale joint military exercise "Tiger Triumph" was held in the Bay of Bengal (Abi-Habib 2018). As the first India-US joint military exercise to include India's land, sea, and air forces, this exercise marked the latest milestone in an increasingly closer military alliance between the two countries (Bowman and Gabel 2019). Even in July 2020, during a period of massive bloodshed between India and China at the India-China border and extreme military tensions between the two countries, India and the United States conducted a joint military operation in the Indian Ocean (Lo & Zhen 2020). In February 2021, the 16th edition of the India-US joint military exercise "Yudh Abhyas" was conducted for two weeks at the Foreign Training Node at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges, located in Rajasthan, northwest India. The uninterrupted series of Yudh Abhyas joint military exercises since 2004 despite the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the alliance between the two countries is stronger than ever (Republicworld.com 2021).

In addition, India conducted the "Malabar exercise" in November 2020 with the US, Japanese, and Australian navies in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Joint naval exercises in which the United States and India participate as permanent partners, the Malabar exercises are the most symbolic and practical military cooperation between the two countries (Kim 2020, 177-178). Originally, the Malabar naval exercises began as an Indo-US bilateral joint military exercise in 1992, but Japan and Australia joined the exercise as permanent training partners in 2015 and 2020, respectively (Gady 2018; Salil 2020). In addition, India has conducted regular annual joint military exercises with France and Britain and expanded naval cooperation with the European Union as well (Babones 2020).

The United States was reported to have a plan to expand and develop the aforementioned Malabar exercises, which included all four member states of the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)," into an "Asian version of NATO" in the long term (Babones 2020; Reuters 2021). Originally formed as a dialogue and consultative body between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia to discuss relief and support for the 2004 South Asian earthquake, the Quad was suspended after the 2008 meeting. Since the mid-2010s, however, as competition between the United States and China intensified over the South China Sea, the leaders of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia agreed in principle to the revival of the Quad at the ASEAN Summit held in Manila, Philippines, in 2017. Since then, the United States, the core leader of the Quad and the regional order, has constantly confronted China over China's unfair trade practices, Taiwan's sovereignty, Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, Uyghur concentration camp issues, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, the US government not only relaunched the Quad, but also planned to expand it to a "Quad+" that includes South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. Furthermore, the US government even envisioned expanding and developing the Quad into an Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization with the character of a military alliance, the so-called Asian version of NATO (Reuters 2021). In this respect, the Quad is part of the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy, an alliance to counter China's hegemonic strategy represented by the BRI. In the meantime, Prime Minister Modi has often promised that India would actively participate in strengthening the security of the Indo-Pacific through the Quad (Reuters 2021).

In conclusion, the recent intensification of military cooperation between India and the United States can be understood in the context of China's growing aggression against neighboring countries in the Indo-Pacific region. It is now clear that India shares the US perception of the threat posed by China's rapid expansion in the Indo-Pacific region and that India-US military cooperation is an effort to preemptively counter Chinese power in the region. In the past, India was passive in the military cooperation with the United States to contain China due to its neutral foreign policy of non-alignment, but it now seems clear that this is no longer the case. As China's expansionism in the Indo-Pacific region coincides with the rising military tensions along the Indo-China border, India has been actively participating in the US-led military cooperation system to contain China, breaking away from its passive China strategy in the past. India's balancing against China is expected to be strengthened further as China's aggressive expansionist strategy accelerates in the future.

6. Conclusion

The discussion of the limits and scope of the theory of balance of power between great powers has been one of the most important issues in the study of international relations. After only one generation, China has escaped from its status as a poor and isolated backward country, and now stands on the threshold of becoming a new global superpower on par with the United States in economic power and international status. According to the realist predictions of the balance of power theory, China is already so large and its potential growth rate is so high that it should trigger a balancing action against it among its neighboring states.

As shown in this study, India has been rapidly shifting its strategy toward China to a balancing strategy intended to actively check China's expansion of power since the Modi government took office in 2014. Traditionally, adhering to a non-aligned diplomatic line, India was passive in responding to demands for a military alliance with the United States for fear of undermining its strategic neutrality. As the border disputes between India and China escalated into bloodshed in the summer of 2020 and military tensions between the two countries increased, however, India rapidly shifted its previous diplomatic strategy toward China. Currently, India is officially participating in the Quad as well as the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy formed as part of the US's China containment strategy, and also expanding a strategic cooperation with Western European countries, such as the UK, France, and Germany, that participate in the US-led China containment strategy. India has even formalized cooperation with Taiwan in Northeast Asia, and its domestic demands for strategic cooperation with Russia are increasing (Paik 2022, 94). In addition, despite strong opposition from China, India is now participating in the Quad critical- and emerging-technology working group, the main mechanism for technology cooperation in the Quad, established in March 2021 to foster technological collaboration between the United States, Japan, and Australia. India also completely excluded Huawei and ZTE from its 5G network construction market, and has taken the measure of blocking 220 Chinese mobile phone-based apps, including TikTok (Paik 2022, 95–96). All these recent actions on the part of India vis-à-vis China clearly go far beyond the level of hedging, and can be viewed as a typical example of a balancing strategy.

Whether India's current balancing strategy against China is a temporary phenomenon or a long-term strategy remains to be seen over time. However, China has recently made a full-fledged advance into neighboring countries in the Indian Ocean region, encircling India as part of the BRI, and escalating military tensions with India through aggressive actions in the disputed border areas. From India's perspective, China's aggressive maritime advance strategy encircling India and frequent military tensions at the border undoubtedly present a very serious challenge to its national security. Accordingly, India is actively cooperating with the US-led military cooperation system to curb China's geopolitical ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region, breaking away from its previous non-aligned diplomacy strategy. This is a typical behavioral pattern of a state pursuing a balancing strategy asserted in the theory of balance of power, in the same way that Northeast Asian countries chose an active alliance with the United States and Western European countries to counter the Soviet threat during the Cold War. From India's point of view, China is now regarded as a much more fearful threat than the United States, so India's China strategy is rapidly shifting to a balancing strategy. Given that the US's China containment strategy is now in full swing in the Indo-Pacific region as a long-term strategy, India's balancing strategy against China is also expected to be strengthened further in the future. In any case, although the balance of power theory was developed to explain strategic actions of neighboring countries toward the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—during the Cold War, it remains able to explain India's China strategy in the 21st century.

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