



BALTIC JOURNAL OF LAW & POLITICS

A Journal of Vytautas Magnus University
VOLUME 15, NUMBER 1 (2022)
ISSN 2029-0454



Cite: *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 15:1 (2022): 1499-1513
DOI: 10.2478/bjlp-2022-00093

Sino-Indian Rivalry for Regional Dominance in South Asia since 2013

Nawar Muhammad Rabie

College of Political Science /Al-Mustansiriya University – Iraq,

Email: nmrk.942002@yahoo.com

Hamsah Amer Najm Hassan

College of Political Science /Al-Mustansiriya University – Iraq,

Email: hamssaamir@gmail.com

Received: November 8, 2021; reviews: 2; accepted: June 29, 2022.

Abstract

South Asia is one of the most important fields of Sino-Indian competition, especially since each country sees itself as the main pole. India adopts the Monroe principle to play the role of the main actor in the South Asian and Indian Ocean region as part of its quest to control the space stretching from the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Bengal and the Indian Ocean to Central Asia. It wields wide influence over South Asian countries except Pakistan. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal are a vital area of Indian influence in South Asia, but in seeking to extend its influence in its regional environment, it faces China, which wants to play a pivotal role in South Asian interactions and where it finds the region optimal. Establishing strategic relations with the countries of the region, whether small non-nuclear states or Pakistan, the nuclear state, with the aim of extending its influence and reducing the Indian presence is evidence of China's determination to become a multidimensional country in Asia and its refusal to keep South Asia as a space for Indian influence.

Keywords

Regional hegemony, South Asia, economic relations

JEL Classifications: J11, F43

1. Introduction

The Sino-Indian rivalry in the South Asian region is highly evident in the efforts of both countries to impose political and economic hegemony and

influence within the countries of the region by forging many alliances and promoting investments and trade exchanges, thus providing both countries with the guarantee of their dominant position within the region.

China's strategy within the South Asian region is to strengthen its relations with Pakistan, India's main enemy in the region, on the one hand, and other small countries in the region on the other, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives because of their political assets and economic wealth that help China impose its dominant position within the region, and confronting India, which is accustomed to playing the role of key actor and regional leader in the region.

The study derives its importance from the nature of the problem at hand as the Sino-Indian competition in the South Asian region creates many inquiries about the future of the regional system in South Asia and its impact on neighboring regional systems and the international system as a whole. Especially in light of the Chinese extension outside its traditional geographical field, and the continuous search of energy sources by China and India due to the rapid influence witnessed by the economic sector. Therefore, the main problem of this research is the following question: to what extent have the policies of the countries of the South Asian region affected the nature of the Sino-Indian competition? , What mechanisms are used by the parties of the competition to attract the countries of the region to their advantage?, And how the policies of China and India have changed the orientations of the countries of the region? To answer this question, an analytical study was presented to assess China's policy towards the countries of the South Asian region, and in return to assess India's reaction to the traditional region of its existence. This research is based on the basic premise that:

The inability of both China and India to achieve territorial control over the South Asian region has led to the inevitability of competition, and the equal strategic importance of the region for both sides of the competition and the disparity of Chinese and Indian power have all helped the continuation of competition.

This study was based on six demands as well as an introduction and conclusion, the first requirement was devoted to the study of Sino-Indian competition in the Republic of Pakistan, The second requirement was devoted to the study of Sino-Indian competition in the Republic of Bangladesh, the third requirement was devoted to the study of Sino-Indian competition in the Kingdom of Bhutan, while the fourth requirement was devoted to the study of Sino-Indian competition in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The fifth requirement was devoted to the study of Sino-Indian competition in the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, and the sixth requirement was devoted to the study of Sino-Indian competition in the Republic of Maldives.

First Requirement: China-Indian competition in the Republic of Pakistan

China is constantly seeking to exploit deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan and the continuation of border problems between the two countries

in order to win Pakistan as its first ally in the region, as Chinese military support for Pakistan is India's primary concern, as China developed Pakistan's military and civilian nuclear programs in 2016. In the same year, Pakistan was also provided with designs for reactors, uranium supplies, missile and weapons designs and submarine platforms, as well as financing and building civilian power plants (Khokhar, 2021).

China is Pakistan's number one arms financier and Pakistan's nuclear program would not have been possible without Chinese assistance. The same goes for the ballistic missile development program and the modernization of the Pakistani army, through various military equipment such as F7 fighter jets, the sale of medium-range ballistic missiles (M11), the provision of technical assistance in the construction of aircraft boats in the Pakistani state of Kamra and the opening of the Naval (Karachi) warehouse, With the signing of protocols on issues of production, research and technology transfer in the fields of defense, about 90% of Chinese arms sales go to countries bordering India, which have always opposed the aspirations of Indian hegemony in South Asia, and therefore resorted to launching security relations with China, India's most important enemy in the region (Grossman, 2020). The Chinese and Pakistani militaries have also increased large-scale military cooperation through regular joint exercises, military education partnerships, and strategic partnerships, and along with military cooperation, the two governments cooperate in technology, systems, and practices to control the information space in Pakistan (Khokhar, 2021).

China also uses its cooperation with Pakistan in the South Asian region to obtain Central Asian oil. It needs Pakistani ports that will play an important role in reviving China's severely poor western regions. By linking these regions to Europe, the Middle East and Africa through Pakistani ports, the economic recovery will begin to infiltrate western China. This will enable China to reach global economic performance with which it faces Indian influence in the region, and from practical steps to embody this trend, China and Pakistan initiated a project to complete the port of Guadar, which has been in operation since March 2002, after China approved the grant of (198) million dollars of (250) million dollars required to complete the first part of the project. It also invested in complementary base structures to the project, financing the completion of a link between the port of Gwadar and downtown Balochistan through Karachi and Keita. The advantage of this port is that it is only 250 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, through which about (40%) of global oil orders are transported, so the port will be a key cargo point in the region (Fravel, 2018).

This port serves Chinese interests in five respects (Fravel, 2018):

- 1.** it will ensure safe shipping of Chinese energy imports from the Persian Gulf, which provides (50%) of its needs.
- 2.** in the event of any hostile action to disrupt its oil supply through the Arabian Gulf, Mina Gwadar will act as a safe and secure supply route.

3. it could be as a reserve corridor for all Chinese shipments through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Malacca, where China relies entirely on the goodwill of the United States and its allies to protect it.

4. because the port of Gwadar is located off the Strait of Hormuz, where the most important energy sources are located in the world, and where important quantities of Japanese imports are shipped, it will give China a strategic lever to respond if its shipments are hindered anywhere.

5. the port will give China a foothold in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, and China's presence in this ocean will deepen its strategic influence with the main South Asian countries.

The 2017 China-Pakistan Strategic Air Cooperative Partnership Treaty is the most important point of cooperation between the two countries, helping to grow military exchanges and conventional arms sales and joint military production agreements, China is the main external backer of Pakistan's military establishment (Grossman, 2020).

Chinese dominance in Pakistan is particularly evident in the projects it is supporting especially after Pakistan in 2018 transferred the management of a deep-water Pakistani port in the restive Balochistan province to a Chinese public company, this gives this port the possibility to reduce the distance traveled by Middle Eastern oil to western China by thousands of kilometers, by circumventing India, damaging the volume of Indian trade (Chellaney, 2020). In addition to China building a gas pipeline linking the port of Gwadar and the Pakistani city of Nawab Shah in order to distribute LNG imported from the Middle East to southern Pakistan (Peri, 2020), India's inability to forge ties with Pakistan increases its concerns about Chinese control of the region, as Pakistan is the second largest and most powerful country in South Asia after India, prioritizing the removal of India with the full support of China (Influence, 2020).

Second Requirement: Sino-Indian competition in the Republic of Bangladesh

Supporting cooperation between Bangladesh and China took several years, as the two countries established diplomatic relations only in 1976, until 2016 when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, where the Belt and Road Initiative was signed, which ensured comprehensive economic, security and geopolitical participation between the two countries (Kabir et al., 2018).

Bangladesh has the largest number of infrastructure investments developed with Chinese assistance in South Asia, as cooperation between the two countries includes elements of a strong security partnership, especially as Bangladesh is the second largest buyer of Chinese military equipment in the world, accounting for nearly a fifth of China's total exports between 2016 and 2020. This includes tanks, rescue vehicles, radars, ships, missiles and defense

systems, at a cost of approximately (\$546) million and in 2020 Bangladesh purchased two electric submarines from China for (\$186) million (Amin, 2022).

Bangladesh prefers to buy Chinese weapons for a number of reasons, including because China is cheaper than arms exporters in the West or the Russian Federation, and because China makes large loans to Bangladesh to boost those military purchases. Alongside Bangladesh's ongoing quest to eliminate reliance on military partnership with India, which controls the security sector in Bangladesh (Kabir et al., 2018), security-related cooperation between China and Bangladesh extends to the police force as the two countries signed agreements in 2020 on assistance with military training and the provision of weapons and ammunition (Abeysinghe, 2021).

China-Bangladesh cooperation extends far beyond security, as China is an ideal partner for Bangladesh to expand its industrial base to meet the needs of diversified export markets, including Chinese markets, and to overcome infrastructure gaps through project finance, construction, economic participation in trade and business partnerships (Scott, 2022). China has allowed (98%) of Bangladeshi goods duty-free access to its domestic market since June 2020, as well as the two countries signed (27) agreements lending China (\$24) billion to Bangladesh for projects including coastal disaster management and the construction of a road tunnel under the Carnavuli River. In addition to helping boost productive capacity, China is also establishing direct manufacturing industries in Bangladesh located in special economic zones such as the China Economic and Industrial Zone at Chittagong Port (Tanti, 2020), China has emerged as a key partner in the construction and financing of several infrastructure projects in Bangladesh such as the Badma multipurpose bridge project and several highways and power plants, In February 2021, the Bangladeshi government implemented nine important development projects, including the multi-lane road tunnel under the Carnavuli River with Chinese loans and credits worth \$7.1 billion, and investment with China leads to the creation of a complete ecosystem that will help Bangladesh relinquish India's control and its emergence as an independent state in the South Asian region (Scott, 2019).

As there are many Chinese facilities in 2021 in the field of trade and services, many Bangladeshi companies have expressed a preference for establishing joint ventures with Chinese companies at the expense of Indian companies, as this helps facilitate the transfer of expertise and technology, as well as attracting investment and financing jobs (Scott, 2019).

Despite the close cooperation between the two countries, a number of issues are of concern to Bangladesh including the (Rohingya conflict)^(*), which led to an influx of refugees into Bangladesh after the sectarian conflict between (Rohingya) Muslims and (Rakhine) Buddhist communities in Myanmar (Kabir et al., 2018).

China's primary goal in building a strong relationship with Bangladesh is to encircle India, as it has pursued "debt trap diplomacy" based on flooding

Bangladesh with many financial benefits that it is unable to repay, leading to China's full economic control over it (Pant, 2021).

The increased Chinese presence in Bangladesh has led India to take several measures to maintain its presence in the South Asian region, as India headed towards Myanmar in 2020 to hold a maritime conference to restrict the ports of Bangladesh by deploying several Indian ships, However, Bangladesh's recourse to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea with the support of China has led to the failure of negotiations with Myanmar, India's withdrawal of its ships from Indian Ocean waters and China's increasing role in Bangladesh (Manor, 2019).

In addition to the failure of negotiations with Myanmar, China took advantage of the deterioration of the relationship between India and Bangladesh following India's adoption of several decisions, including nationality laws, which made it easier for non-Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh to obtain Indian citizenship (Manor, 2019). Bangladesh's citizenship law was passed after India established a population registration program in India's northeastern state of Assam where many illegal immigrants live and work from Bangladesh, with many in Bangladesh fearing that the registration program and the new law could lead to mass exodus of Muslims from India to Bangladesh (Goswam, 2010).

China took advantage of the dramatic decline in India's presence in Bangladesh in 2021 after India banned the export of many agricultural goods to Bangladesh without being informed, leading China sending food aid (Pant, 2021).

To counter China's growing influence in Bangladesh, India held the joint maritime meeting with Japan in 2022, where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Japanese President Shinzo Abe established the Indo-Japanese Act East Forum. Which aims to provide a platform for India-Japan cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, the forum focuses on specific projects in Northeast India (Bangladesh) (Yun Sun, 2022).

Third Requirement: Sino-Indian Competition in the Kingdom of Bhutan

The geographical location of the Kingdom of Bhutan has given great importance in the Sino-Indian competition, especially as it represents a buffer space between the two countries, as Bhutan was and remains India's first ally in the South Asian region and the most reliable. The relationship between Bhutan and India has many commonalties, the most important of which is: first, Bhutan's association with India through a series of treaties that have far-reaching political, economic and military implications, and secondly due to Bhutan's geographical location. It has relied mainly on India for its international trade, and thirdly Bhutan is among the largest recipients of Indian development assistance (Kmart, 2019).

Besides the good relationship between the two countries, India is using a number of economic ties it has with Bhutan as an economic pressure card, as Bhutan relies on Indian development assistance to develop its hydropower resources with significant financial support from Indian companies (Kmart, 2019).

Bhutan and India are a subscribed to the 2013 Permanent Peace Agreement, which stipulates that countries undertake not to allow their territories to be used for activities harmful to national security, India's main goal of the agreement was to prevent Chinese penetration into the Kingdom of Bhutan under the pretext of controlling the disputed Himalayas (Duclam Plateau) with Bhutan's borders (Vajpayee, 2020).

In 2015, there were reports of diplomatic relations between China and Bhutan, as a result of which India withdrew all its supplies of kerosene oil and liquefied petroleum gas, leading to a major economic crisis in Bhutan (Kmart, 2019).

China is exploiting its ongoing dispute over the unagreed Himalayan border with Bhutan in order to increase its influence and impose its hegemony, especially as China follows a strategy of political pressure on Bhutan. In 2020, China demanded 764 square kilometers inside Bhutan. This includes the village of Seshulong and Dramana in the west (near the crossroads between India and Bhutan) China was unable to acquire those villages, and the reason for China's demand for disputed territories was to punish Bhutan for its ongoing alliance with India and to exert indirect diplomatic pressure on India (Simon, 2021).

Fourth Requirement: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The Republic of Sri Lanka is an important arena of competition between China and India because of its strategic importance and a distinctive geopolitical location in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka has long been a leader in Chinese economic participation in South Asia even before the Belt and Road Initiative began in 2013, This Chinese support has gradually expanded as China's direct investment and economic loans increase (Reich, 2020).

China's presence in Sri Lanka is prominent in the mega projects it is funding such as the Colombo Port City construction project known as (CHEC Port City) in 2013 The project is the largest foreign direct investment in Sri Lanka until 2021 with (\$1.4) billion, Construction of the project began in late 2016 as part of Beijing's ambitious plan to create a modern Silk Road across the South Asian region (Mandy, 2022).

China-Sylanca economic cooperation is heavily linked and growing to China's building of a relationship with the ruling (Rajapaksa) family that was in power from 2005 to 2021 (Reich, 2020).

In response to the Chinese presence, India raised many questions about the feasibility and legitimacy of Chinese projects in Sri Lanka, especially after China developed the port of Hambantota, which created a large gap in the coffers

of the Sri Lankan government (P, 2016). Seeking to make debt payments incurred by China, it had no choice but to renegotiate the terms of the port development deal with China. Sri Lanka handed over the port and 15,000 acres of land for 90 years to China, raising India's fears that the port would become a Chinese naval base in the Indian Ocean threatening India's presence in the region (GS, 2018).

India's continued attempts to remove China's presence within Sri Lanka, based on China's political and strategic necessity to distance India from establishing close ties with the countries of the region, have not been successful. For Sri Lankans across the political spectrum, China is a useful ally to stop India's decades-long control over South Asian countries in general and Sri Lanka in particular, as Sri Lanka views its cooperation with China as strategic relations and economic support rather than regional control as is happening with India (Cali M, 2021).

China tightened its presence when the Sri Lankan government supported the Belt and Road Initiative, and on this basis China continues to emphasize that it is the most important partner of Sri Lanka, especially after the Chinese embassy named and thanked parties and leaders individually for attending the anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (GS, 2018).

In response, India has presented a number of projects to strengthen infrastructure with Sri Lanka since 2019, including the Trencomalee port development plan, the liquefied natural gas terminal in Kirawalapitua, and the rental and management of Matala airport near the port of Hambantota. However, India's lack of commitment to the implementation and development of these announced projects has led China to exploit that aspect to its advantage and strengthen its influence in the Republic of Sri Lanka at the expense of India (Wignaraja, 2020).

The most important decision regarding Chinese influence in Sri Lanka is the passage of the project approving the construction of the port of Colombo Port in May 2021, This was done just days after the International Court of Justice and at the instigation of India indicated that sections of the port project were inconsistent with Sri Lanka's constitution and required a popular referendum, Shortly after the approval of the Colombo Port construction project, the Sri Lankan government released data on Chinese investment opportunities and the great economic importance that the project will provide to the country ("Sri Lanka Colombo Port 11th best connected in the World, Cambridge University Press, New York," 2019).

After Sri Lanka rejected India's efforts to disrupt port construction, the Chinese government said (China will continue to firmly support Sri Lanka in protecting its sovereignty and national dignity, and that cooperation between China and Sri Lanka has never targeted any third party, nor should it be influenced by the decisions of any third party) ("Sri Lanka Colombo Port 11th best connected in the World, Cambridge University Press, New York," 2019). The

Chinese government clearly means India in its statement, which involves the idea of China penetrating and expanding its influence within the country.

The Fifth Requirement: Sino-Indian competition in the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Nepal's geographical location adjacent to China's Tibetan region has given great importance to Sino-Indian rivalry, as well as Nepal's historical ties with the two countries, as it has deep-rooted ties with India based on cultural, historical and economic foundations. As for China, Nepal's geographical location is a key starting point for expanding its presence in South Asia (Jaywalk, 2020).

China has exploited poor Indo-Nepal relations to consolidate its hegemony, especially after differences between the two countries increased due to India's continued efforts to keep Nepal under its sphere of influence, along with a number of differences, including: accusation of Nepal that India continues to interfere in its internal affairs, especially after Nepal moved from monarchy to democratic republican. As well as resource disputes, Nepal and India are negotiating several bilateral water-sharing treaties such as the Sarada Treaty and the Mahakkale Treaty, Nepal consistently claims that these treaties are illegitimate and disproportionately supports the Indian side at its expense, leading to mistrust between the two countries, as well as Nepal agreeing in 2013 to draw a new national map, redrawing its national borders at the expense of India in favor of China (Raffle, 2019).

China's dominance in Nepal increased dramatically in 2015, especially after India imposed an informal economic blockade on Nepal that lasted for months to express its displeasure with the citizenship provisions of the new constitution, leading to severe shortages of fuel and food. The blockade has boosted Nepal's dependence on one dominant market, China, and linking it to the country's infrastructure, giving China a role in exploiting poor Indo-Nepal relations and boosting its influence by building several projects (Adam, 2020).

China strengthened its presence in Nepal in 2015 through environmental cooperation, humanitarian aid and disaster relief to strengthen its relations with Nepal for several years, and sent a rescue team within 24 hours of the devastating earthquake in April 2015, This was followed with geologists and seismologists to assess long-term measures, and cooperation between the two countries reached its highest levels, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited people displaced by the earthquake during an official visit, along with funds and human resources that China directly participated in the reconstruction of Nepal through the reconstruction of the Durbar High School it handed over to Nepal in September 2015 (Jain, 2020). China has worked to support medicine, send Chinese doctors to cooperate with doctors in Nepal, and during a visit between the two countries in 2017 it was agreed to cooperate in establishing a factory to promote Ayurvedic medicine (alternative medicine) in Nepal (Jain, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic (*) allowed China to strengthen its health relationship with Nepal and by March 2020, Nepal has signed a treaty with China to deal with the pandemic and has begun working with China on the best strategies to deal with the epidemic. Using Chinese test kits and other equipment, in September of the same year China provided 1.6 million doses of the Sinoharm vaccine to Nepal, along with 1,500 oxygen cylinders as a free grant (Jain, 2020).

In May 2016, Nepal in Shanghai signed an agreement to build the Himalayan Trans-Malaya Railway Network that will connect the Tibetan Railway with Nepal's border in the city of Kirong, to facilitate cross-border economic cooperation between the two countries, along with Nepal joining China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2017, which helped China primarily establish its dominance in the country (Ch, 2020).

Nepal has adhered to the "one China" policy (which is to recognize the Chinese position that there is only one China in the world, and that Taiwan and Tibet are an integral part of this China), and at the instigation of China Nepal has adopted very strict policies against all kinds of anti-China activities by Tibetans, Chinese security forces are working to guide Nepalese police in monitoring and silencing all anti-Chinese sentiment inside Tibet (Raffle, 2019).

Sino-Indian competition in Nepal increased in September 2018 after Nepal ignored the Nepal-India military training hosted by New Delhi under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, due to its participation in a military exercise with China in the same month, as well as the signing of a railway linking the capital (Katmandu) and the Chinese city of Giron in December 2019 (Chowdhury, 2020).

In response to these moves, Indian forces in 2020 revealed the infiltration of the Chinese People's Liberation Army forces into Nepal and set up military bases for it without the knowledge of the Nepalese government, but the Nepalese government denied the existence of Chinese military moves to take its territory. This has not stopped China from continuing to expand its presence in Nepal, sending \$14 million in August 2020 to strengthen economic ties between Nepal, which helped replace India National Hydropower Company under a contract to build Nepal's largest hydroelectric power plant. This led to a decline in Indian direct investment commitments in Nepal (60%) (Castillo, 2019).

Sixth Requirement: Sino-Indian competition in the Republic of Maldives

The Sino-Indian rivalry in the Maldives is relatively recent, dating back to the beginning of 2013 after candidate Abdullah Yameen won power in the Maldives, and despite India's continued support for the Maldives since independence and continued assistance including trade cooperation and natural disaster relief, However, China's deepening economic ties with it, including joining China's Belt and Road Initiative (South Asia's Maritime Silk Road) has helped

significantly reduce Indian hegemony in the Maldives. The Maldives' importance to China is part of its "pearl chain" or "pearl necklace" strategy^(*). as China seeks to establish a chain of ports with short, easy-to-maintain communication lines stretching across the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to the East African coast and Red Sea (Lei, 2021).

This strategy has expanded China's role in the Indian Ocean at the expense of the Indian presence, as the "Pearl Decade" strategy includes China's control of bases and diplomatic relations at the port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Maldives naval bases and electronic intelligence gathering facilities in the South Bay of Bengal (Christopher D. Yung, 2010). This strategy aims to help build strategic relations with many countries surrounding the South Asian region in order to protect China's energy interests and enhance its security objectives (Lei, 2021).

Accordingly, China has built a range of projects that help significantly connect the economy of the Maldives with China including the construction of roads and residential units, the expansion of the main international airport in 2015, and the development of a power plant. Construction of a bridge to connect the capital Male with Hulhumale Island, and construction of a joint ocean observation station in the northwestern Maldives city of Maconodes in 2017. In addition, the establishment of the (Mirao) military base has increased the fears of India, which does not have any military base in the Maldives (Raman, 2021).

By 2018, Chinese loans had overburdened the Maldives at \$1.5 billion (a high rate for a country with GDP of less than \$9 billion annually) (Raman, 2021).

Based on these growing Chinese moves, India has published reports of a Chinese naval base in the Maldives without the knowledge of the government, which has severed many diplomatic relations between China and the Maldives. Along with India's support to (Ibrahim Mohamed Salih) in the 2018 elections in the Maldives, which led to India giving priority over China (Metra, 2020). This led to the decline of China's role in the Maldives after Ibrahim Mohamed Salih and his followers won the 2019 "India First" policy aimed at strengthening the multifaceted and mutually beneficial partnership between India and the Maldives and India was promised a key partner at the expense of China, in addition to the withdrawal of the Maldives from the trade agreement with China, India sent \$ 1.4 billion to help the Maldives repay loans imposed on it by Chinese projects. It provided additional financial support for community development projects (Raman, 2021).

In response, China secretly supported and financed India Out from the Maldives, especially after India signed a joint agreement with the Maldives to develop the MNF Coast Guard port in February 2021. Recalling an emergency proposal by China called on the Maldives to clarify the transparency of the bilateral agreement, The Maldives confirmed the legitimacy of its agreements with India (Holler, 2022).

Indian hegemony in the Maldives narrowed in favor of China after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the Maldives in January 2022 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of relations between the two countries. Important agreements were signed to help increase China's role in the country: (Mutual Visa Exemption Agreement and Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, signing an exchange letter on the feasibility study for the management and maintenance of the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, and the signing of a supplementary contract for the implementation contract for the seawater desalination project. Agreement on the Establishment of the Hospital Assistance and Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Maldives and the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China). The reason the Maldives agreed to these agreements is because it wants to get rid of the Chinese debt imposed on it by increasing its economic cooperation with China and moving away from India, China's number one enemy in South Asia (Dutra, 2022).

Conclusion

That most countries in the South Asian region seek to strengthen China's role and position in the region in order to prevent India from continuing to play the role of the dominant country in the region and lack control and link the policies and decisions of those countries to serve their interests, However, this does not mean giving China full hegemony and influence in the region in a way that harms the interests of those countries, but rather considering China as a trading partner that helps raise the economic growth of countries. The balance of power in South Asia in general is gradually tilting towards China in exchange for a marked decline in Indian influence, after India previously used to consider itself the center of the regional system of South Asia. Which requires other states in the region to be consistent with India's regional role as a major regional power, and therefore the behavior of states should complement their security and enhance their regional position and aspirations to play a global role.

It is noticeable that the followers of both China and India are the principle of soft penetration, which is based on the use of economic and diplomatic mechanisms and means that constitute a great attraction for the countries of the region especially since most countries in the region suffer from an economic recession and the need to help a country with a developed economy and is seeking to remove India's position in the region such as China.

Inferences

1. China, behind its rival, seeks regional hegemony, and refutes any attempt to emerge as a rival power in one of the most important regions in its strategy, especially since other Asian regions is difficult for China to maneuver

better. In East Asia there is Japan supported by the United States of America, and in the north, we find Russia with its strengths seeking to recover it.

2. China and India's hegemonic strategy in South Asia is based on soft expansion and dealing with regional issues with a kind of flexibility so as not to create the enemy and keep the friend. And work to resolve differences without compromising their sovereign right and not raising the level of tension to the point of direct confrontation, and do not allow the emergence of forces superior to power in the region.

3. The two parties are competing to diversify their foreign relations by diversifying economic projects and strengthening infrastructure in the region in pursuit of full economic control that imposes hegemonic influence for the country with the largest presence in the region.

4. The countries of the South Asian region view China as a protective lever that protects them from traditional Indian domination imposed on them for several years, As the countries of the region seek to eliminate the Indian presence by increasing the role of China, India's number one enemy in the region, As well as exploiting the differences that exist between the two countries for many years in order to limit Indian supremacy and give China regional supremacy.

Sources

- Abeyasinghe, C. (2021). Sino-Indian Rivalry and the contemporary significance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace in the Asian Century, *Technique Social Sciences Journal*. 24, 18.
- Adam, W. (2020). *Nepal's Instability in the Regional power struggle*, University of Chicago Press. 93.
- Amin, L. (2022). *India and China in South Asia: Bangladesh's opportunities and challenges*, Association of Asia Scholars, China. 12.
- Cali M, C. T., Kuaka C. (2021). *Integrating border regions and connectivity and competition in South Asia.*, World Bank Group, Washington- USA. 5.
- Castillo, C. (2019). *China's impact on conflict and fragility in South Asia*, Norwegian Peace building Resource Centre. 7.
- Ch, W. (2020). *From hard power to soft power? Ideas, interaction, institutions, and images in India's South Asia policy*, *South Asian and Comparative Politics*. (26), 24.
- Chellaney, B. (2020). *The China-India-Pakistan Triangle: Scenarios for The 21st Century*, *Ceri Strategy Papers*. (10), 10.
- Chowdhury, K. E. (2020). *China-South Asia Relations*, *Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies*. 33- 34.
- Christopher D. Yung, R. R. (2010). *China's out of area naval operations: case studies*, *National Defense University Press*, Washington- DC. 72.
- Dutra, S. (2022). *China's Rise and Implications for South Asia*, Unpublished seminar paper, *Institute of Defense studies and analysis*, New Delhi. 3.

- Fravel, T. (2018). Power shifts and escalation: Explaining China's use of force in territorial disputes, *International security*. 32(3), 83.
- Goswami, N. (2010). China's Territorial Claim on Arunachal Pradesh: Crafting an Indian Response, Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis. 5.
- Grossman, D. (2020). What China wants in South Asia, Observer Research Foundation. (36), 5.
- GS, R. (2018). China's rise in Asia—promises and implications for India, Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies. 49.
- Holler, J. (2022). Embracing Chinese Global Security Ambitions, *Washington Quarterly*. 32(3), 105.
- Influence, C. s. (2020). China's Influence on Conflict Dynamics in South Asia, United States Institute of Peace, Washington- DC, First Published December. 26-28.
- Jain, B. M. (2020). China's soft power diplomacy in South Asia myth or reality, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, London. 170.
- Jaywalk, P. (2020). Caught in The India-China Rivalry Policy options for Nepal, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. 5.
- Kabir, M. R., Islam, S. R., Molla, M. M., & Akter, S. (2018). Geological Importance of Bangladesh in Geopolitics. *Donn. J. Political Sci. Int. Relation.*, 3(1), 1-5. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rezwanul-Kabir-2/publication/330366108>
- Khokhar, A. Y. (2021). Sino-Indian Relations: Implications for Pakistan, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. 9.
- Kmart, S. (2019). Bhutan and Sino-Indian Rivalry, *South Asian Studies*, National University of Singapore. 16.
- Lei, D. (2021). China's new multi-faceted maritime Strategy, *Orbits*. 52(1), 139.
- Mandy, D. (2022). The Sino-Indian conflict scenario, *The Diplomat Magazine*. 12(8), 148.
- Manor, F. L. (2019). Issues in Sino-Indian Relations: Implications for competition, *Global political review*. 4(2), 9.
- Metra, D. (2020). Seven Years on, India Now backs a defence pact between China and Maldives, *The wire Peace Foundation*. 149.
- P, S. (2016). Sri Lanka: Another Battle field for India and China, *New Eastern outlook. Politics, Southeast Asia*. 74.
- Pant, H. V. (2021). China and India: A Rivalry takes shape, foreign policy Research Institute, Philadelphia. 165.
- Peri, S. H. a. D. (2020). China accuses India of trespass, Line of actual control heats up, *The Hindu*. 21.
- Raffle, S. (2019). The China factor in nepal, *Indian defence review*, New Delhi. 25(2), 127.
- Raman, A. (2021). United States-Maldives Defence Pact: What lies Ahead for India, Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS). (34), 8.
- Reich, M. (2020). The Sri Lankan role in the Sino-Indian integration, *Scholar Journal of Applied Sciences and Research*. 1(3), 4.

- Scott, D. (2019). The Great Power between China and India, The Logic of Geography. *13*(1), 24- 26.
- Scott, D. (2022). Sino-Indian Security Predicaments for the Twenty- First Century, Routledge Publisher, New York. 25.
- Simon, L. (2021). Reaching Beyond the Indo-Pacific, *Comparative Strategy*. *32*(14), 337.
- Sri Lanka Colombo Port 11th best connected in the World, Cambridge University Press, New York. (2019). 52.
- Tanti, M. (2020). Managing China: Competitive Engagement with Indian, Characteristics, Global, China, February. 18.
- Vajpayee, C. (2020). China-India Regional Dimensions of the Bilateral Relationship, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter. 109.
- Wignaraja, G. (2020). Chinese Investment and the (BRI) in Sri Lanka, *Asia-Pacific Programmed*, March. 24-26.
- Yun Sun, H. H. (2022). China and crisis management in South Asia, The Stimson Center, Washington- D. C. 15.