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International Relations

Mains 2025

Series

by Strategic Sangam

“A concise series analyzing key global affairs for GS Paper 2 of the UPSC Mains. Each issue offers clear insights to boost conceptual understanding and improve answer writing.”

Volume: 1

1. India - China Relations
2. Operation Sindoor
3. Israel - Iran Conflict
4. China's Diplomatic Encirclement Strategy



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International Relations

India–China Relations (2023–2025)

Introduction

From 2023 to 2025, India–China relations remained tense, shaped by unresolved **border disputes**, increasing **technological rivalry**, and **regional competition**. While both countries cooperated in multilateral forums like the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** and **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)**, India increasingly leaned into strategic counter-balancing through deeper partnerships with the **Russia, United States (USA), Japan, Taiwan**, and the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**—a strategic forum comprising India, USA, Japan, and Australia.

India's approach focused on three priorities:

- Safeguarding **territorial sovereignty**.
- Achieving **technology resilience**.
- Asserting **regional influence**, especially in the Indian Ocean.

GS1 – History & Geography

1. Historical Legacy

- The **1962 India–China war** resulted in the current undefined **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
- Key border disputes persist in:
 - **Aksai Chin** (illegally controlled by China but part of India)
 - **Arunachal Pradesh** (part of India, illegally claimed by China)
- Ancient links like **Buddhism**, trade through the **Silk Route**, and scholarly exchanges still form a civilizational foundation.

2. Strategic Geography

India faces infrastructure challenges due to the rugged Himalayas and is addressing them through:

- **DS–DBO Road (Darbuk–Shyok–Daulat Beg Oldie)**: Improves military access to the LAC.
- **Sela Tunnel**: Enables all-weather troop movement in Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Nyoma Airfield**: Being upgraded for advanced fighter deployment.
- **Vibrant Villages Programme**: Develops civilian life near border zones to secure Indian presence.

GS2 – International Relations

1. India's Diplomatic Strategy: Competitive Engagement

India uses a dual approach:

- Cooperates with China in **SCO** and **BRICS**
- Counters China's assertiveness by:
 - Regional partnerships like the **Quad**
 - Deepening ties with **USA, Russia, Japan, Australia**, and **Taiwan**
 - Pursuing **strategic autonomy**, not bloc politics.

2. China's Diplomatic Offensive: Trilateral Talks & SAARC Alternative

To reduce India's influence in South Asia, China has:

International Relations

- **Hosted China–Pakistan–Bangladesh trilateral (Kunming, 2025):** Pitched as economic cooperation, but seen as a move to marginalize India.
- **Pushed China–Pakistan–Afghanistan trilateral:** Aimed at extending the **China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** into Afghanistan.
- **Supported a SAARC Alternative:** China and Pakistan have discussed forming a new regional forum excluding India, citing SAARC's (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) ineffectiveness. Bangladesh cautiously participated but avoided endorsing the idea politically.

India's response:

- Boosted regional initiatives like **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** and **BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal)** groupings.
- Reasserted influence via the **Neighbourhood First Policy** and **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** maritime doctrine.

3. SCO Defence Ministers' Meet – Qingdao 2025

India proposed a 4 point plan to stabilize the LAC. China **blocked reference to terrorism**, especially Pakistan-sponsored terror, resulting in no joint statement—highlighting SCO's limits.

4. Operation Sindoor & China–Pakistan Nexus

In May 2025, following a major terror attack in Kashmir, India launched **Operation Sindoor**, targeting terror camps in **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)** using precision air and missile strikes.

China's reaction:

- Provided **satellite intelligence** to Pakistan.
- Shared **J-10 fighter jet tech** and discussed potential **stealth jet support** in future.
- Enabled the use of **HQ-9 missile defense systems**.
- Issued a statement regretting India's actions but avoided condemning terrorism.

India invoked **Article 51 of the United Nations Charter**, asserting its right to **self-defense**. Nations such as **France, UK, Israel, and Australia** supported India's stance.

GS3 – Economy, Technology & Security

1. Rare Earths: China's Monopoly & India's Strategy

In April 2025, China **restricted exports** of **gallium and graphite**, vital for:

- Electric Vehicles (EVs)
- Missile guidance systems
- Semiconductors

Indian response:

- Advanced **KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd)** – a joint venture to secure overseas critical minerals (e.g., in Africa, Australia, Latin America etc).
- Signed **rare-earth MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding)** with **Japan** and **Australia**.
- Expanded domestic mining efforts in **Odisha** and **Andhra Pradesh**.

International Relations

2. India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) & Taiwan's Role

India launched the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)**—a ₹76,000 crore initiative to promote:

- Fabrication plants
- Chip design
- Testing and Packaging

Key Partners:

- **Taiwan:** Provided ATMP (Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging) support and chip design collaboration.
- **Micron (USA):** Set up a semiconductor plant in Gujarat.
- **Japan:** Helped with design tools and raw materials.

Goal: Achieve **technological sovereignty** and reduce dependency on Chinese tech.

3. Border & Maritime Security

Partial disengagements took place at **Pangong Tso** and **Gogra**, but tensions remain at **Demchok** and **Depsang**.

India's military enhancements:

- **ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance)** via drones, satellites
- High-altitude UAVs like **Tapas-BH**
- Indigenous fighter upgrades (**Tejas Mk2**, **AMCA**)
- Integrated Theatre Commands under development

Maritime front:

- Countered China's Belt and Road-linked port projects (Gwadar, Hambantota, Kyaukphyu)
- Upgraded **Andaman & Nicobar Command**
- Secured port access at **Chabahar (Iran)**, **Duqm (Oman)**, **Addu (Maldives)**
- Active in **Quad naval exercises** and joint patrols

GS4 – Ethics & International Conduct

1. Strategic Restraint with Deterrence

India's response during **Operation Sindoor** demonstrated:

- Ethical use of military force
- Proportionality and legality under **UN Article 51** (right to self-defense)
- Avoidance of escalation, protecting civilians

2. Upholding Rule-Based International Order

India:

- Rejected **BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)** projects in PoK as illegal
- Advocated international law at **UN**, **SCO**, and **BRICS**
- Maintained its reputation as a **responsible regional power**

International Relations

Way Forward – India's Strategic Roadmap

1. Border Stability & De-escalation

- Re-activate **WMCC (Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination)** on border issues
- Set up real-time **military hotlines**
- Digitally **map LAC zones** to reduce patrol clashes

2. Accelerate Tech & Mineral Sovereignty

- Scale up **ISM** with global fabs and design hubs
- Partner with Taiwan, Japan, Quad nations for chip supply chains
- Expand **KABIL's** outreach for rare earths

3. Strengthen Deterrence Posture

- Operationalize **Integrated Theatre Commands**
- Invest in:
 - Long-range UAVs
 - Indigenous jet programs (Tejas Mk2, AMCA)
 - Winter logistics, smart bunkers, satellite surveillance

4. Expand Maritime Influence

- Enhance presence in **Chabahar, Duqm, and Addu**
- Institutionalize **Blue Economy Dialogues**
- Deepen **SAGAR** cooperation and lead in **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** security

5. Strategic Autonomy with Alliances

- Balance ties with **USA, France, Japan, and Russia**
- Stay active in **Quad** and **IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework)** without compromising autonomy

6. Build Internal Strategic Culture

- Increase **China studies** in Indian academia
- Promote **public awareness** of security issues
- Foster bipartisan consensus in Parliament on foreign affairs

7. Shape Global Rules

- Propose:
 - **Cyber and AI norms** via BRICS
 - **Crisis protocols** in SCO
 - **UN reforms** to include Indo-Pacific realities
- Build Global South coalitions to resist Chinese unilateralism

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS1 – History & Geography

- How have geographical factors influenced India's border infrastructure and military strategy vis-à-vis China?

International Relations

GS2 – International Relations

- India's diplomacy with China is a model of 'competitive engagement.' Discuss with reference to 2023–2025.
- Examine China's attempts to isolate India diplomatically in South Asia. How has India responded?
- How did the China–Pakistan nexus shape the regional impact of Operation Sindoor?

GS3 – Security, Economy, Technology

- What is the strategic importance of rare earth elements? How is India addressing China's monopoly?
- Discuss the role of India Semiconductor Mission in ensuring national technology security.
- How is India countering China's strategic influence in the Indian Ocean Region?

GS4 – Ethics & Strategy

- Is military retaliation compatible with ethical diplomacy? Evaluate in the context of Operation Sindoor.
- Should long-term sovereignty take precedence over short-term peace in India's China policy?
- How is India setting an ethical example in global diplomacy? Illustrate using recent events.



International Relations

Operation Sindoor & Pahalgam Terror Attack (2025)

Background & Geography (GS1)

In **April 2025**, terrorists from The Resistance Front (designated terror organization in India) attacked tourists in **Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir**, killing 26 civilians. Located in rugged **Himalayan terrain**, Pahalgam's topography has historically enabled militant infiltration. The attack connects to broader border disputes where infrastructure gaps, like porous regions along the **Line of Control (LoC)**, have been exploited in past incidents (e.g., Kargil).

India's Military Response & Diplomatic Context (GS2)

On **7 May 2025**, India carried out **Operation Sindoor**, a calibrated strike on terror camps in **Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir**, invoking **Article 51 of the UN Charter**. Denying targeting civilian zones, India framed the operation as a **proportionate act of self-defense**.

- **Global Reactions:**
 - **USA, UK, EU, Russia, Israel etc** supported India's legal position.
 - **China** condemned the strike, supplied Pakistan with tech and intelligence.

Technological & Security Takeaways (GS3)

Operation Sindoor relied heavily on:

- **Indigenous systems** (e.g., BrahMos missiles, indigenous drones, Akashteer etc), a test case for **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
- Integrated **multi-domain operations**: Air Force, Army and Navy with ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance), missiles, and drones working in sync.
- The need for resilient infrastructure (airstrips, roads, bunkers) and strengthened border security, especially in civilian hubs across J&K.
- Russian made S-400 Triumf system.

Misinformation Battle: India countered disinformation, with Chinese, Pakistani networks spreading fake visuals and deep-fakes, through **PIB Fact Check, press conferences, periodic briefings, photos, videos, satellite evidence etc.**

Ethics & International Norms (GS4)

Operation Sindoor demonstrates **proportionality**, ethical military action, and **restraint**. It averted civilian casualties and avoided escalation. India upheld the moral high ground while communicating transparently, thus serving as a case study on **ethical realism** in international relations.

Interlinking Across GS Papers

Paper Focus Area

- GS1** Terrain challenges, border infrastructure, historical patterns
- GS2** Right to self-defense, diplomatic support, China–Pakistan axis
- GS3** Indigenous defense tech, ISR integration, misinformation countermeasures
- GS4** Ethical military doctrine, international law, post-strike transparency

International Relations

Way Forward: Strategy & Doctrine

1. **Formalize Pre-emptive Doctrine:**
 - Codify calibrated strike norms and rapid decision-making protocols.
2. **Strengthen Border Resilience:**
 - Boost surveillance, quick-response units, and civilian preparedness in tourist zones.
3. **Expand Indigenous Tech:**
 - Accelerate **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in drones, missiles, ISR systems, stealth aircraft etc
4. **Counter Misinformation:**
 - Set up a **Real-Time Communication Centre** with AI-based disinformation alerts.
 - Engage media, civil society, and state governments **proactively**.
5. **Build Diplomatic Legitimacy:**
 - Lead UN/SCO/BRICS efforts to **define terrorism norms**.
 - Work with Quad and EU to **build global narrative on state-sponsored terrorism**.
6. **Promote Digital Literacy:**
 - Launch **media-verification campaigns** at border and conflict-prone zones.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS1-History & Geography

- Discuss how **terrain and infrastructure** affect India's counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir.

GS2-International Relations

- Critically evaluate **India's right to pre-emptive self-defense in international law** using Operation Sindoor as an example.
- What are the **implications** of the China–Pakistan alliance for India's regional strategy?

GS3-Security, Economy, Technology

- What **role does indigenous defense capability** play in India's national security doctrine?
- Explain how India can build **resilience against misinformation** warfare in light of Operation Sindoor.

GS4-Ethics & Strategy

- Can a nation use military force **ethically**? Discuss with reference to India's 2025 counter-terror doctrine.
- Should **disinformation** be treated as a **national security threat**? Argue with examples.

Operation Sindoor is more than a strike it's a **paradigm shift** showcasing how geography, diplomacy, technology, and ethics converge.

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Israel–Iran Conflict (June 2025)

Introduction

The recent Israel Iran conflict was triggered by Israel's preemptive airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in Natanz and Isfahan in June 2025, **aimed at halting Iran's near-weapons-grade uranium enrichment**. In retaliation, **Iran launched direct missile and drone strikes** on Israeli territory, marking the first time Iran attacked Israel from its own soil. The **United States** then joined the conflict by **bombing key Iranian nuclear sites**. In parallel, **Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz**, escalating fears of a regional war and global energy disruption.

India maintained **strategic neutrality** while focusing on:

- Safeguarding energy and diaspora interests
- Navigating non-aligned diplomacy in a polarized region
- Strengthening maritime and evacuation readiness

GS1 – Geography & Diaspora

1. Strategic Geography: Strait of Hormuz

- One of the world's most critical energy chokepoints, **transits about 20%** of global oil.
- Tensions here directly **impact India's crude oil imports**, currency stability, and shipping logistics.

2. Diaspora Geography

- Over **8 million Indians** live and work in Gulf nations.
- **Evacuation** preparedness was vital for crisis scenarios from UAE, Iran, Israel, and Oman.

GS2 – International Relations

1. Conflict Timeline

- April 2024: Israel strikes Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus.
- Iran retaliates with 300+ drones/missiles; most intercepted.
- June 2025: U.S. launches **Operation Midnight Hammer**, bombs Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan nuclear sites.

2. Global Diplomatic Responses

India's Position

- Called for **maximum restraint and respect for sovereignty**.
- **Avoided** bloc politics; emphasized **peaceful resolution**.
- Reaffirmed support for nuclear **non-proliferation and maritime stability**.

USA

- Directly bombed Iranian nuclear sites using B-2 bombers and submarine-launched missiles.
- Justified actions as "prevention of nuclear breakout."

European Union

- France, Germany, and the UK affirmed Israel's "right to self-defense."
- Expressed concern over Iran's nuclear secrecy and supported IAEA oversight.

International Relations

- EU High Representative urged de-escalation but avoided condemning U.S. strikes.
- Critics flagged EU's lack of a unified, law-based response.

China & Russia

- **Condemned** Israeli and U.S. actions.
- Pushed for multilateral dialogue; supported Iran in UN Security Council debates.
- Warned of destabilization and **“Western double standards”**

Arab World

- GCC nations like Saudi Arabia, UAE urged calm and protected shipping routes.
- Iraq condemned the U.S.–Israel strikes, Qatar maintained cautious neutrality.
- Oman and UAE offered quiet diplomatic channels.

3. Role of IAEA and UN

- IAEA Director Rafael Grossi warned of grave risks to nuclear safety.
- UN Secretary-General called the strikes **“dangerous escalation”**

GS3 – Security, Economy & Energy

1. Nuclear Security Threat

- Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan targeted; Iran suspended IAEA access.
- Enrichment above 60% raises breakout fears.
- Civilian nuclear infrastructure now seen as wartime targets.

2. Energy Security Crisis

- Iran's seizure of an Israeli-linked oil tanker disrupted confidence in Strait of Hormuz.
- Crude oil prices surged 10–12%; freight and insurance costs rose.
- India released reserves from its **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)**.
- **Diversified oil imports** from Russia, Africa, and Latin America.

3. Maritime & Evacuation Security

India's response included:

- Launching **Operation Sindhu** to evacuate Indians.
- Deploying INS Kolkata and Chennai for contingency roles in the Arabian Sea.

GS4 – Ethics & Strategic Conduct

1. Ethical Dilemma: Bombing Nuclear Sites

- Raises questions about proportionality and civilian risk.
- IAEA condemned it; Israel and U.S. framed it as pre-emptive self-defense.

2. India's Ethical Position

- Asserted restraint and diplomacy over retaliation.
- Avoided supporting military escalation while preparing to protect national interests.
- Balanced neutrality with moral opposition to nuclear weaponization.

International Relations

Way Forward – India's Strategic Roadmap

1. Secure Energy & Maritime Supply

- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves capacity
- Invest in alternate routes: INSTC, port infrastructure at Chabahar and Duqm
- Work with IMSC for real-time sea lane protection

2. Uphold Non-Proliferation Diplomacy

- Push for JCPOA revival
- Advocate “No-Strike Norms” on nuclear civilian infrastructure
- Champion IAEA monitoring access

3. Enhance Diaspora Evacuation & Crisis Preparedness

- Digital tracking via MADAD and eMigrate
- Strengthen bilateral agreements for civilian protection

4. Balance Great Power Relations

- Maintain dialogue with U.S., Iran, EU, and Israel
- Continue support for multilateral solutions via UN, BRICS
- Avoid entanglement in bloc rivalries while asserting strategic autonomy

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS1 – Geography

- How does the geography of the Strait of Hormuz affect India's maritime security and energy stability?

GS2 – International Relations

- Examine India's diplomatic response during the Israel–Iran conflict. How did it reflect strategic autonomy?
- Discuss the global legal and diplomatic implications of targeting nuclear infrastructure during wartime.

GS3 – Security & Economy

- Assess the impact of Strait of Hormuz tensions on India's energy security.
- How did Operation Midnight Hammer redefine the global discourse on nuclear conflict thresholds?

GS4 – Ethics

- Can bombing nuclear facilities ever be morally justified? Critically assess.
- How does India's restraint-based diplomacy set an ethical example in global crises?

International Relations

China's Diplomatic Encirclement Strategy (2023–2025)

Introduction: Strategic Competition in the Subcontinent

India and China, Asia's two largest powers, have historically vied for influence across the South Asian region. While India enjoys deep-rooted cultural, historical, and geographic ties with its neighbors, China has emerged as a counterbalancing force, using economic diplomacy, infrastructure investments, and multilateral mechanisms to expand its footprint.

In the **post-2020 Ladakh standoff** era, China has shifted from passive competition to **active containment**, particularly after India deepened its strategic ties with the United States, Japan, and the Quad. A central feature of this containment effort is Beijing's attempt to **revive or create SAARC-like regional platforms that exclude India**, while consolidating parallel bilateral or trilateral ties with nations like **Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh**.

By promoting these new groupings, often under the garb of connectivity, poverty reduction, or counterterrorism, China is gradually building an **"India-minus" regional architecture**, seeking to isolate New Delhi diplomatically, weaken its leadership image in South Asia, and encircle it strategically through both land and maritime domains.

GS1 – Geography & Regional Context

- South Asia is India's natural sphere of influence. China lacks direct borders but uses **infrastructure and influence diplomacy** to build presence across the region.
- Key neighbors like **Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives** provide geographic depth, from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean, a strategic buffer that China aims to penetrate.

GS2 – International Relations

1. The SAARC-alternative Bloc

- By **June 2025**, China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh convened a trilateral meeting in Kunming aiming to create a regional bloc as an **alternative to SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), **excluding India**.
- This new grouping is framed around **connectivity and economic cooperation**, criticized by analysts as a move to **marginalize India** in South Asia.

2. China–Pakistan–Afghanistan Engagement

- On **21 May 2025**, China facilitated a trilateral meeting in Beijing for Pakistan and Afghanistan, renewing diplomatic ties and agreeing to extend the **China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** into Afghanistan.
- This solidifies a strategic triangle aimed at **shrinking India's influence** in Central and South Asia.

International Relations

3. Strategic Implications

- China aims to **erode India's regional centrality** by creating parallel structures (new bloc, trilateral platforms).
- This casts doubt on platforms like **SAARC**, revitalizing them without India through an overt "**India-minus**" approach.

GS3 – Security, Economy & Strategic Considerations

1. Economic Leverage

- China uses **BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)** funding, deepening infrastructure and debt dependencies in **Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka**.
- Extending **CPEC** into Afghanistan enhances connectivity for trade and military logistics.

2. Security Concerns

- Advancing Chinese influence in Afghanistan through **CPEC** provides strategic depth for China and Pakistan.
- Expanding **maritime infrastructure** and digitization (Digital Silk Road) threatens India's security in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.

GS4 – Ethics & Diplomacy

- This strategy contrasts India's approach defined by **Consent-based cooperation** under **Neighbourhood First** and **SAGAR** doctrines.
- India ensures transparent aid and mutual-level governance, avoiding the **debt-trap diplomacy** associated with China—representing an **ethical alternative**.

Way Forward - India's Strategic Counter-Measures

1. Reinvigorate Regional Platforms

- Bolster forums like **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal), **BBIN**, and **SASEC**, cementing connectivity without China.

2. Strengthen Bilateral Ties

- Enhance economic, cultural, and security cooperation in **Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka**, tapping existing historical goodwill.

3. Maritime Diplomacy

- Expand presence in **Chabahar (Iran), Duqm (Oman), Addu (Maldives)** while reinforcing **Quad naval exercises**.

4. Digital & Cultural Soft Power

- Export digital public goods (UPI, e-governance), offer educational scholarships, healthcare aid, and counter the Chinese narrative in regional media.

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5. Mini-Lateral Initiatives

- Establish working groups on climate resilience, public health, and connectivity (e.g., India-Bangladesh-Myanmar, India-Sri Lanka-Maldives trilaterals).

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS1- Geography

- Evaluate how China's geography-based outreach to India's neighbors shapes India's foreign policy in South Asia.

GS2- International Relations

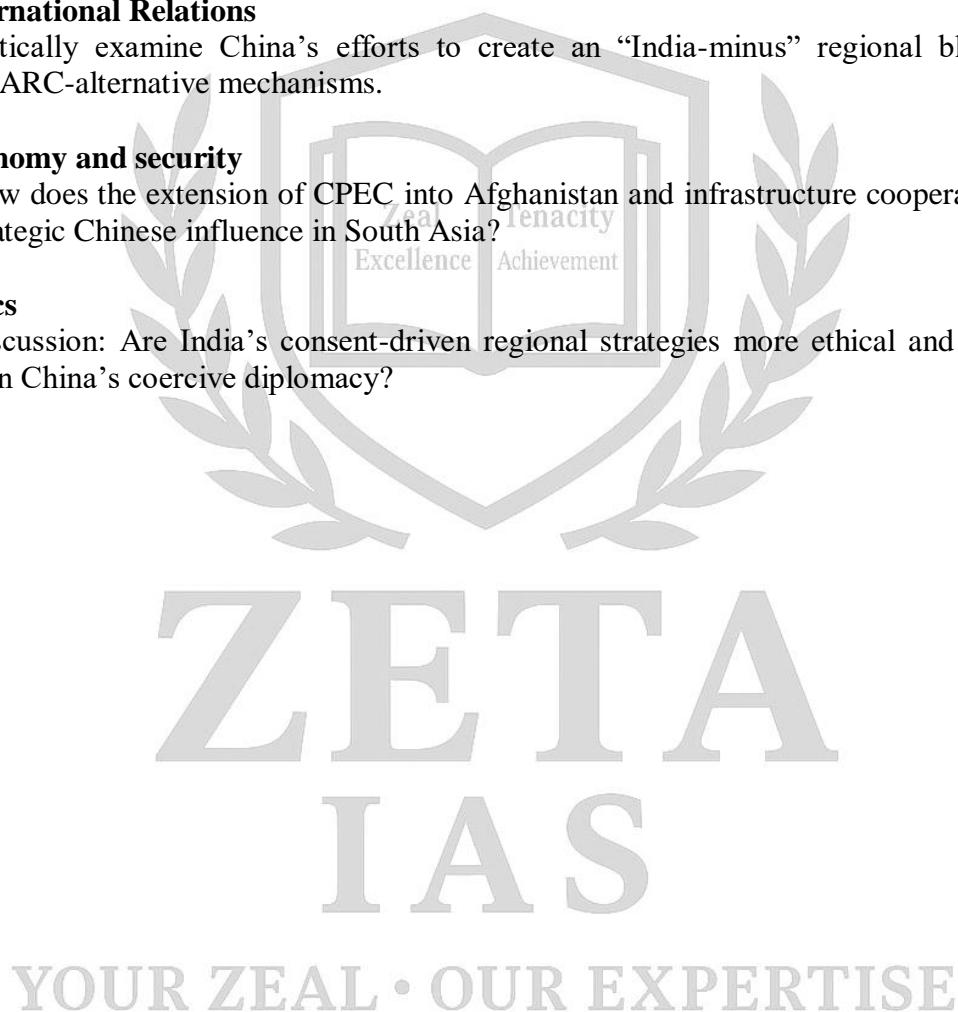
- Critically examine China's efforts to create an "India-minus" regional bloc through SAARC-alternative mechanisms.

GS3- Economy and security

- How does the extension of CPEC into Afghanistan and infrastructure cooperation enable strategic Chinese influence in South Asia?

GS4-Ethics

- Discussion: Are India's consent-driven regional strategies more ethical and sustainable than China's coercive diplomacy?



What This Series Offers

GS-Integrated Coverage

- **GS1:** Strategic geography, civilizational linkages.
- **GS2:** Bilateral/multilateral diplomacy, foreign policy doctrines, international law.
- **GS3:** Defense tech, rare earths, semiconductor strategy, cyber and economic security.
- **GS4:** Calibrated military response, rule-based conduct, ethics in sovereignty & deterrence

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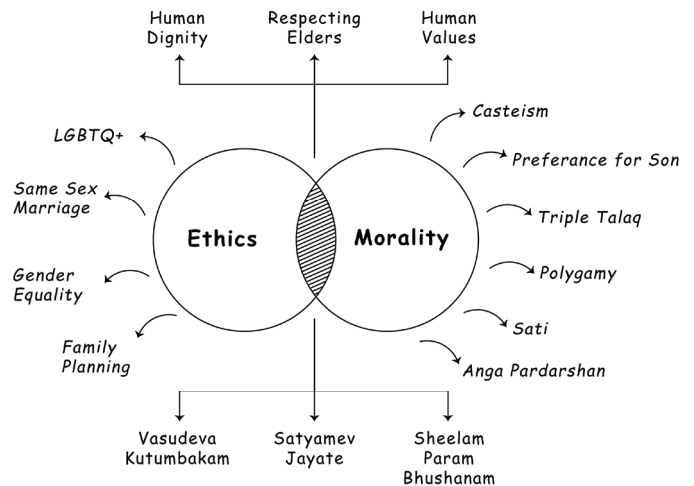


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Gaurav Singh

Thank you, Monish Sir, for your consistent guidance. Your daily feedback on my GS 2 and GS 4 answers helped me identify gaps and improve steadily. Greatful for your time and support.

- Madhav Agarwal, AIR 16

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- Suramya Sharma, AIR 281

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- Gaurav Singh, AIR 859



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Thank you, **Monish Sir**, for your consistent guidance.
Your daily feedback on my **GS 2** and **GS 4** answers
helped me identify gaps and improve steadily.
Greatful for your time and support.

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