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India's Foreign Policy toward China (2019 to 2024)

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Abstract: ***This research project delves into the evolving nature of India's foreign policy towards China from 2019 to 2024. The period began with attempts at rapprochement, exemplified by the informal Wuhan summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping. However, this fragile progress was shattered by deadly border clashes at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 2020. This watershed event marked a significant shift in India's China policy.The project explores this shift in detail, examining how India adopted a more assertive stance. This included bolstering its military presence and infrastructure at the LAC, a strategic move to deter further Chinese incursions. Furthermore, India tightened scrutiny of Chinese investments and business practices, aiming to reduce its economic dependence on China. To counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, India actively pursued partnerships with other powers, most notably the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) alongside the US, Japan, and Australia.***

The research highlights the key challenges India faces in navigating this complex relationship. Balancing strong border deterrence with the need to avoid full-blown conflict remains a delicate act. Managing the significant economic ties between the two nations while addressing strategic concerns presents another challenge. Additionally, with India's 2024 elections approaching, achieving a consensus on China policy among various political parties will be crucial.

In conclusion, the project underscores the significant shift in India's foreign policy towards China. The ongoing border standoff and the broader strategic rivalry present significant challenges, but also opportunities for regional cooperation. Resolving the border dispute peacefully and fostering a stable relationship between these two Asian giants will be critical for ensuring regional security and prosperity.

Keywords: Border dispute, diplomacy, foreign policy, China relations, Regional security,

I. INTRODUCTION

The Himalayas cast a long shadow over Asia, figuratively and literally, as India and China, the world's two most populous nations, share a complex and often contentious border. This research project investigates the evolution of India's foreign policy towards China from 2019 to 2024, a period that encapsulates both the fragile hope for rapprochement and the chilling reality of heightened tensions. The year 2019 offered a glimpse of cautious optimism. The informal Wuhan summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in China symbolized a potential thaw in relations. Leaders from both sides engaged in a relaxed setting, fostering a sense of newfound warmth. However, this fragile progress was shattered in 2020 when deadly clashes erupted at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the disputed border separating the two nations. This watershed event triggered a significant shift in India's strategic posture, propelling us to delve deeper into the factors shaping this new reality.

This project aims to dissect the evolving dynamics of India's China policy. We will explore how India's approach transformed from cautious engagement, exemplified by the Wuhan summit, to a more assertive stance in the wake of the LAC clashes. We will analyze the strategic decisions taken, including bolstering military presence at the border to deter further Chinese incursions. Additionally, we will examine India's economic response, such as tightening scrutiny on Chinese investments and business practices, aiming to reduce its economic dependence on China. Furthermore, the project will delve into India's growing strategic cooperation with other regional powers, most notably the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) alongside the US, Japan, and Australia, which is seen as a counterweight to China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. Beyond strategic considerations, the research will address the critical challenges India faces in navigating this complex relationship. We will examine the delicate balance between maintaining a strong deterrent against Chinese aggression and avoiding full-blown conflict, a tightrope walk fraught with danger. We will also analyze the complexities of managing significant economic interdependence with China while pursuing strategic security interests. Here, India must find a way to compartmentalize its economic ties with China from its security concerns. Additionally, with India's 2024 elections looming, the project will explore the potential impact on foreign policy decisions and the importance of achieving domestic consensus on China. A united front on China policy will be crucial for India's long-term strategic interests.

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By delving into these intricacies, this research project aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of India's evolving foreign policy towards China. It will shed light on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in this crucial relationship, with implications for regional security, economic stability, and the overall balance of power in Asia.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: A LEGACY OF UPS AND DOWNS

To fully grasp the recent shift in India's foreign policy towards China (2019-2024), we must delve into the historical context of this intricate relationship. Here's a deeper look at some key points:

Ancient Connections: While the modern political relationship has been turbulent, India and China boast a rich history of cultural exchange dating back thousands of years. Trade routes like the Silk Road facilitated the flow of ideas, philosophies, and goods, fostering a sense of connection. However, the vast Himalayan range also served as a natural barrier, and the precise location of the border remained undefined for centuries. This ambiguity would sow the seeds for future disputes.

Post-Colonial Miscalculations: Following independence, India, under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, championed a policy of "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" (Hindi and Chinese are brothers), advocating for peaceful coexistence with China. This idealism stemmed from a belief in shared Asian identity and a desire to avoid great power rivalry. However, China's ambitions and its perception of a weak India following the partition led to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. This humiliating defeat for India shattered the illusion of a harmonious relationship and ushered in a period of deep mistrust.

Cold War Calculus: During the Cold War, both India and China found themselves entangled in the ideological struggle between the US and the Soviet Union. India, a champion of non-alignment, remained wary of China's growing closeness to the Soviet Union. Border skirmishes continued to erupt, and the unresolved border issue remained a constant source of tension.

Limited Rapprochement: The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed a cautious thaw in relations. Economic reforms in China and a growing realization of the interdependence of Asian economies led to increased trade and cultural exchange. However, the core issue of the border dispute remained unresolved. Talks aimed at finding a solution made little progress, highlighting the deep-seated differences in perception between the two nations.

A. The Significance of the Wuhan Summit (2019)

Viewed against this historical backdrop, the informal Wuhan summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in 2019 held a certain significance. It represented a renewed attempt at engagement, building on the fragile progress made in the previous decades. Leaders hoped to manage differences and explore avenues for cooperation. However, the 2020 border clashes exposed the underlying tensions that had simmered for decades. This historical context provides a crucial foundation for understanding the recent shift in India's China policy. By examining past encounters, we can better appreciate the reasons behind India's current assertiveness and its strategic calculations in navigating this complex and often contentious relationship.

III. FOREIGN POLICY FROM 2019 TO 2024

A. Wuhan Summit (2019)

The informal Wuhan summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping signifies a watershed moment in the intricate tapestry of Sino-Indian relations. Against a backdrop of simmering tensions exacerbated by border disputes and economic competition, the leaders of the world's two most populous nations embarked on a journey of dialogue and diplomacy aimed at thawing the icy currents that have characterized their interactions in recent years. The decision to convene an informal summit, devoid of the rigid structures and formalities inherent in traditional diplomatic engagements, symbolizes a bold departure from convention and a sincere commitment to fostering greater understanding and cooperation. Modi and Xi engaged in frank and substantive discussions on a myriad of issues, ranging from border security and trade imbalances to regional stability and global governance. Through candid exchanges and mutual reassurances, the leaders sought to bridge the trust deficit that has hindered progress in bilateral relations, laying the groundwork for a more constructive and pragmatic approach to addressing their differences. The Wuhan summit, with its emphasis on mutual respect, strategic communication, and shared aspirations for regional prosperity, holds the promise of ushering in a new era of cooperation and collaboration between India and China. As both nations navigate the complexities of an increasingly multipolar world, the success of the Wuhan summit offers a glimmer of hope amidst the tumultuous currents of global geopolitics, underscoring the transformative power of dialogue and diplomacy in building a more peaceful and prosperous future for all.

New York Times: "Modi and Xi Seek Common Ground in Wuhan Summit Amid Rising Global Tensions"

BBC News: "Wuhan Summit: Modi and Xi's Diplomatic Dance Amidst Geopolitical Shifts"

Al Jazeera: "Modi and Xi Aim to Ease Tensions at Wuhan Summit"
The Guardian: "Wuhan Summit: Modi and Xi Chart a New Course for Sino-Indian Relations"
CNN: "Wuhan Summit: Modi and Xi Bridge Divide in Bid for Regional Stability"

B. LAC clash 2020

The escalation of border tensions into clashes at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has resulted in tragic casualties on both sides, further exacerbating the fragile relationship between India and China. The loss of lives underscores the volatile nature of the situation and the urgent need for de-escalation and diplomatic resolution. Such incidents only serve to deepen mistrust and heighten regional instability, posing significant challenges to efforts aimed at fostering peace and cooperation. It is imperative for both sides to exercise restraint, prioritize dialogue over confrontation, and work towards finding mutually acceptable solutions to prevent further escalation and loss of life. Resolving border disputes through peaceful means and maintaining open channels of communication are essential steps towards building trust and promoting stability in the region. The recent clashes serve as a stark reminder of the importance of diplomatic engagement and the consequences of allowing tensions to spiral out of control.
Times of India: "LAC Clash: Tensions Soar as Casualties Mount on Both Sides"
The Hindu: "Border Escalation: LAC Clash Claims Lives, Raises Alarm"
Hindustan Times: "Deadly Clash at LAC: India-China Relations Plunge into Crisis"
China Daily: "LAC Clash: China Calls for Restraint Amid Escalating Tensions"

IV. (2020 TO 2024) THE ONGOING MILITARY STANDOFF AT THE LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL

The Line of Actual Control (LAC) has long been a contentious border between India and China, marked by periodic tensions and occasional skirmishes. However, the recent military standoff, exacerbated by multiple rounds of unsuccessful disengagement talks, has escalated the situation to unprecedented levels. This essay explores India's response to the ongoing standoff, focusing on its efforts to strengthen border infrastructure and military presence, and examines the regional implications of these developments.
The current standoff traces its roots to April 2020 when tensions flared up between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh. The clash resulted in casualties on both sides and sparked a prolonged standoff along the LAC. Despite several rounds of diplomatic talks and agreements to disengage, including the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, the situation remains volatile, with both sides maintaining a significant military presence in the region.
In response to the ongoing standoff, India has undertaken several measures to bolster its border infrastructure and military capabilities along the LAC. One of the key initiatives has been the acceleration of infrastructure development projects in border areas, aimed at enhancing connectivity and mobility for Indian troops. This includes the construction of roads, bridges, and airstrips to improve access to remote border regions and facilitate rapid deployment of forces.
Moreover, India has ramped up its military presence along the LAC, deploying additional troops and equipment to strengthen its defensive posture. This includes the deployment of advanced surveillance and reconnaissance systems to monitor Chinese activities along the border and respond effectively to any provocation. Additionally, India has conducted large-scale military exercises in the region to demonstrate its readiness and deter any further aggression from China.
Furthermore, India has sought to bolster its strategic partnerships with like-minded countries in the region, including the United States, Japan, and Australia. This includes increased cooperation in areas such as defense technology, intelligence sharing, and joint military exercises, aimed at countering China's assertive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region.
The ongoing military standoff between India and China has significant regional implications, impacting not only the two countries involved but also the broader geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. The escalation of tensions has raised concerns among neighboring countries and major powers alike, who fear the potential for a broader conflict with far-reaching consequences.
One of the key concerns is the risk of inadvertent escalation, as the presence of large numbers of troops and heavy military equipment in a volatile border region increases the likelihood of miscalculation or accidental clashes. This poses a serious threat to regional stability and could have dire consequences for peace and security in the Indo-Pacific.
Moreover, the standoff has led to a realignment of strategic alliances and partnerships in the region, as countries seek to balance against China's growing assertiveness. India's efforts to strengthen its ties with the United States, Japan, and Australia, among others, reflect a broader trend of strategic hedging against Chinese influence and aggression.
Furthermore, the standoff has implications for the broader geopolitical competition between India and China, both of which aspire to regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific. The outcome of the standoff could shape the balance of power in the region for years to come, influencing the trajectory of economic development, security cooperation, and political alignment among regional actors.

The ongoing military standoff at the Line of Actual Control represents a significant challenge for India and China, with far-reaching implications for regional stability and security. India's response, including efforts to strengthen border infrastructure and military presence, reflects its determination to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty. However, the standoff also underscores the need for diplomatic dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes to prevent further escalation and mitigate the risk of conflict. As the situation continues to evolve, it is essential for both India and China to exercise restraint and engage in constructive dialogue to address their differences and build mutual trust and confidence for the long-term stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.
Times of India: "India Bolsters Border Infrastructure Amid LAC Standoff"
The Hindu: "Ongoing LAC Standoff: India Ramps up Military Presence"
Hindustan Times: "Multiple Rounds of Disengagement Talks Fail as India Reinforces LAC"
China Daily: "India's Military Buildup Along LAC Raises Tensions"
Global Times: "India's Escalation Along LAC Risks Regional Stability"

V. CONCLUSION

From 2019 to 2024, India's foreign policy towards China has evolved amidst a backdrop of shifting geopolitical dynamics and persistent border tensions. Several key themes emerge when analyzing India's approach towards its eastern neighbor during this period. India has sought to engage with China through various diplomatic channels, including high-level summits and bilateral meetings. The informal Wuhan summit in 2018 between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping marked a significant attempt to reset relations and foster dialogue. Despite the initial optimism, border tensions and strategic competition have continued to strain bilateral ties, leading to periodic fluctuations in the relationship. India has maintained a firm stance on defending its territorial integrity, particularly in the context of the disputed border regions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The deadly clashes in Galwan Valley in 2020, which resulted in casualties on both sides, underscored India's resolve to safeguard its sovereignty and protect its interests in the border areas. In response to China's assertive behavior along the border, India has intensified efforts to enhance its border infrastructure and military capabilities. This includes the construction of roads, bridges, and airstrips in border regions to improve mobility and logistical support for Indian troops. Additionally, India has invested in upgrading its surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to monitor Chinese activities along the LAC effectively. India has pursued a balanced approach in its regional alliances, seeking to strengthen partnerships with like-minded countries while avoiding direct confrontation with China. The Quad initiative, comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, has emerged as a platform for cooperation on shared security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region. However, India has maintained its commitment to non-alignment and strategic autonomy, refraining from aligning itself too closely with any single power bloc. Despite strategic divergences and border tensions, India has continued to pursue economic cooperation with China, recognizing the mutual benefits of trade and investment. However, concerns about trade imbalances, market access, and security risks associated with Chinese investments have led India to adopt a cautious approach in its economic engagement with China. In conclusion, India's foreign policy towards China from 2019 to 2024 has been characterized by a delicate balance between engagement and strategic vigilance. While efforts have been made to foster dialogue and cooperation, persistent border tensions and strategic competition have shaped India's approach towards its eastern neighbor, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding its territorial integrity and national interests in a complex and evolving geopolitical environment.

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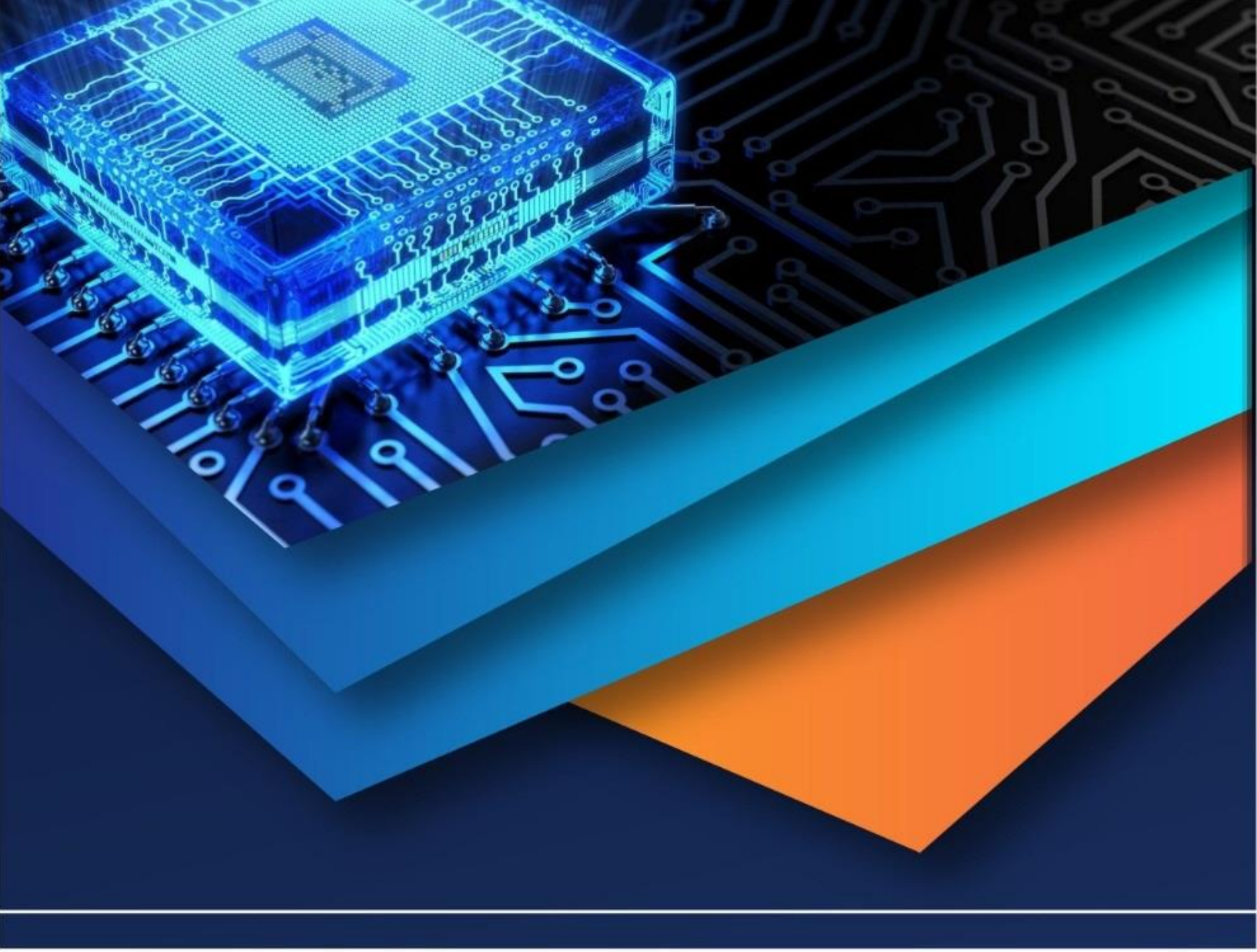
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