

# WHY EURASIA SHOULD MATTER TO INDIA

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**Written by Sarang Shidore**

The recent [China](#)-India clash marks a whole new level of Chinese aggression in the region. Some have argued that this prepares the ground for New Delhi finally overcoming its “strategic autonomy” doctrine and forging a true alignment with Washington. Countering China, however, requires a much subtler grand strategy that factors in a major ongoing geopolitical development — the rise of Eurasia.

A core geopolitical trend over the past five years has been an accelerating strategic competition between the US, Russia, and China. Often portrayed as a triangular contest, this competition is turning into a bipolar face-off with Russia and China forming a compact that spans bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, energy ties, trade in defence items, critical technologies (such as 5G), and growing joint military exercises.

Russia has repeatedly been written off in the West over the past two decades, and each time it has surprised the naysayers. Russia looms large on India – much of India’s defence hardware is still imported from there, it is an increasing source of India’s hydrocarbon imports, and the two countries have joint projects in nuclear energy that extend to third countries.

The logic of Eurasia, however, extends well beyond the Chinese-Russian compact. It is increasingly drawing in Iran. Russia and Iran have been de facto allies on the Syrian battlefield. Beijing’s economic ties with Tehran are strong, and Iran is a vital component of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The three powers have recently deepened their ties with a joint military exercise in the Gulf of Oman. It helps greatly that all three have an adversarial relationship with the US.

Central Asia is the centroid of the new Eurasia. China feeds off its plentiful energy reserves and provides substantial investments in return. Russia, on its part, maintains military bases there and is the destination for many Central Asian migrants. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) are its key security institutions. Western powers are notable for their near-total strategic absence in Central Asia, except Afghanistan.

It is not Eurasia, however, but another geography that makes far greater headlines in India – the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific has been given more than rhetorical teeth with the ambitious Quad initiative of four powers concerned with the rise of China – the US, Japan, Australia, and India. India is uniquely positioned in the Quad, in that it is its only member outside the US “hub-and-spoke” alliance system in Asia. That gap is being made up with the signing of vital military-to-military interoperability agreements between Washington and New Delhi, of which COMCASA is the most significant.

Neither the Indo-Pacific nor Eurasia are marked with a formalised security pact (though the CSTO comes close). Formal, binding alliances are not in fashion in Asia. Yet, there are sufficient hooks now in place for coordinated responses within emerging and adversarial quasi-blocs in any future crisis.

Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, however, do have their internal faultlines. Wariness persists in the China-Russia compact, especially from the vantage point of Moscow, the increasingly junior

partner in this informal alliance. China and Russia both compete and cooperate in Central Asia. Beijing's treatment of Uighurs is alienating some Central Asians. In the Indo-Pacific, India and the US have serious differences on trade, immigration, and Afghanistan. Japan worries about American abandonment in the eventuality of a war with China. Yet, the logics of Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific are sufficiently distinct and divergent such that those actors positioned in the crossroads of both are increasingly under pressure — such as India.

Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy does not seem to account adequately for the rise of Eurasia. US interests in Asia lie primarily in the western Pacific and the South China Sea. Both regions are far from the core of the Eurasian theater.

It is not an accident that China has escalated its aggression in the region in India that is closest to Eurasia and furthest removed from the core of the Indo-Pacific. It is also a zone that abuts Pakistan. A nightmare scenario for India could be Pakistan increasingly integrated within the Eurasian geopolitical logic. Pakistani long standing links with China and Islamabad's warming ties with Moscow make such an outcome plausible. US equities in Islamabad still act as a brake. But that is not a guarantee for the future.

Deep security interoperability substitutes for alliances in today's world. By this standard, India has already abandoned its strategic autonomy doctrine with respect to Asia and aligned with Washington. The US would like India to act toward its maritime south and east in its grand strategy. Eurasia's rise is, however, forcing India to reckon with its north and west. But a hostile Eurasia is arguably more damaging to Indian interests than an unstable Indo-Pacific. Clarifying its approach to Eurasia is India's urgent task.

The border clashes with China are likely only the first glimpse of a strategic bind that India is being forced into. It requires a response far more nuanced than placing most bets on the Indo-Pacific. Bolstering deterrence and simultaneously walking the talk on multi-alignment may be the answer. This means re-centering Eurasia — repairing fraying relations with Iran, striking a hard geopolitical bargain with Russia, and perhaps even the unspeakable, outreach toward Pakistan. Is New Delhi up to the challenge?

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