

EDITORIAL

DATE : 18th July



India–China Relations: Strategic Rivalry, Diplomatic Reset & BRICS Engagement

Syllabus Mapping

Paper	Topics
GS Paper 2	International Relations, India and its Neighbourhood, Bilateral Relations, Groupings (BRICS, SCO, G20)
GS Paper 3	Border Management, Internal Security, Strategic Challenges
Essay Paper	India's Foreign Policy, Multipolar World, Asia's Future

Context: Diplomatic Reset Amidst Strategic Stalemate

In July 2025, Dr. S. Jaishankar's visit to China marked the first senior-level bilateral diplomatic outreach since the **2020 Galwan Valley Clash**. The visit attempted to reset ties marred by:

- Border tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)
- Strategic mistrust post-Galwan
- Rising trade imbalance
- Diverging ambitions in global leadership forums such as BRICS and the Global South

India–China Relations: 1950–2025

	1950 India Recognizes PRC
	1962 Sino-Indian War
	1993–2013 CBM Agreements Signed
	2017 Doklam Standoff
	2024–25 Border Talks Resume
	2025 Jaishankar's Diplomatic Visit

Key Objectives of the 2025 Visit

Objective	Description
Border Stabilisation	Reinitiate phased disengagement (Depsang, Demchok)
Revive Dialogue	Strengthen WMCC, Corps Commander meetings
Trade Balance	Address \$100+ bn deficit, increase market access
Multilateral Synergy	Align on BRICS+, G20, SCO reform
Geo-strategic Deterrence	Curb China-Pakistan collusion in South Asia

Strategic Highlights

◆ Border Talks

- Reaffirmed 2013 **Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA)**
- India demanded LAC de-escalation before diplomatic normalisation

◆ Trade & Economic Diplomacy

- India raised asymmetry in imports, especially in electronics, APIs, solar tech
- China showed openness to revive **Joint Economic Group**

◆ BRICS & Multilateralism

- Consensus on BRICS+ expansion
- China appreciated India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** models (UPI, CoWIN)

◆ People-to-People Engagement

- Resumption of tourism, student visas
- Re-activation of India-China High-Level Mechanism

Multilateral Outlook: BRICS as Strategic Theatre

Focus Area	India's Position	China's Strategy
Digital Finance	DPI exports (UPI, ONDC)	Push for yuan digitalisation
Global South	Rights-based development	Infrastructure-led BRI
Global Governance	WTO/IMF reform	Status-quo but multipolar resistance
Membership	Advocated BRICS+	Seeks expansion for leverage

Strategic Dimensions

A. Bilateral Dimension

- **WMCC & Corps Commander Talks:** These are institutional-level mechanisms to manage tensions and maintain peace along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Their revival signals a diplomatic thaw.
- **Three Mutuals Doctrine:** India emphasizes “**Mutual Respect, Mutual Sensitivity, and Mutual Interests**” as the foundation for restoring trust and building normalcy.

B. Regional Dimension

- **China-Pakistan Axis:** India is deeply concerned about Chinese support to Pakistan, especially projects like **CPEC through PoK**, which violates Indian sovereignty.
- **UPI Diplomacy:** India is using its **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** (like UPI) to expand influence in South Asia—seen in its adoption by **Nepal, Bhutan, Namibia**, countering China’s Belt & Road Initiative (BRI).

C. Global Dimension

- **Leadership in Global South:** Both nations are vying for influence, but with different models—India via democratic tech-driven diplomacy (DPI), China via infrastructure-heavy BRI.
- **Western Digital Governance Resistance:** Despite rivalries, India and China often oppose **Western-led digital frameworks** (like data localisation, AI rules) in forums like WTO and UN.

D. Economic Dimension

- **Trade Asymmetry:** India faces a **\$100+ billion trade deficit** with China, heavily reliant on electronics, APIs, and solar components.
- **Diversification Strategy:**
 - **PLI (Production Linked Incentive)** schemes to boost local manufacturing.
 - **FTAs with Europe & ASEAN** to reduce dependency on Chinese imports.

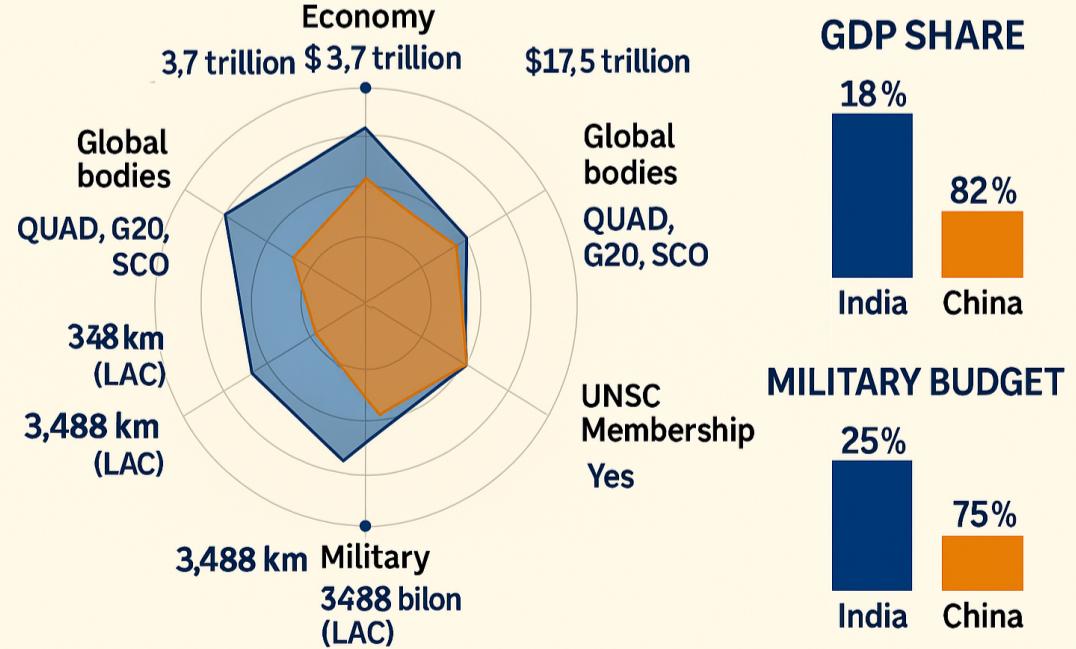
E. Security Dimension

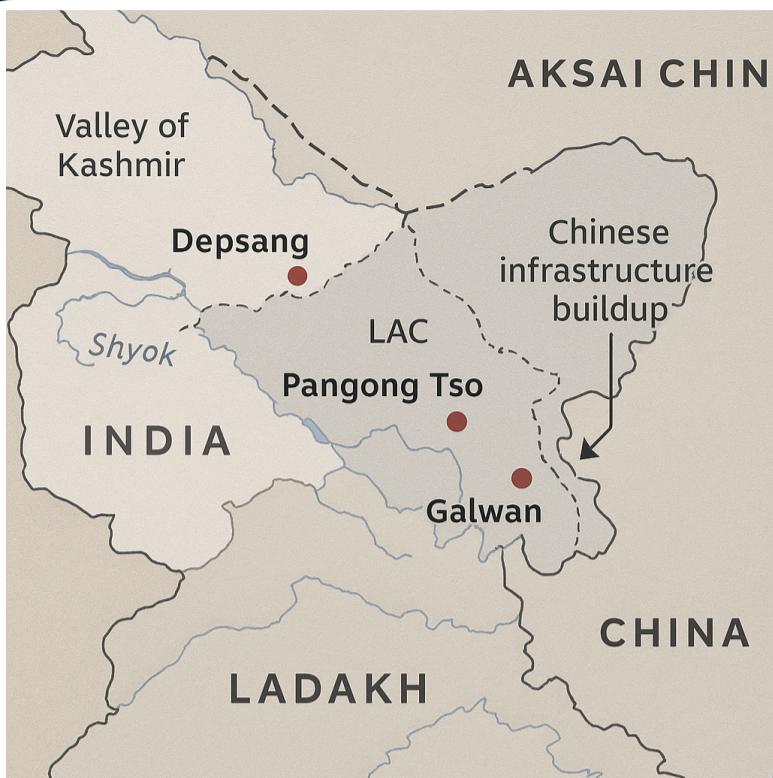
- **Infrastructure Race:** Both sides are rapidly upgrading roads, bridges, and military logistics along the LAC—especially in **Ladakh and Arunachal**.
- **New-Age Security Domains:**
 - Deployment of **drones, surveillance tech, and cyber tools** shows that modern warfare is shifting towards hybrid domains.

F. Technology & Digital Sovereignty

- **India's DPI vs China's Great Firewall:** India promotes open, interoperable digital infrastructure, while China enforces tight internet control.
- **App Bans & 5G Exclusion:** India has banned over 250 Chinese apps post-Galwan and excluded Chinese firms like Huawei from its 5G rollout—reflecting **techno-strategic decoupling**.

Comparative Strategic Profile – India vs China (2024)





Real-Time Catalysts

- **China's Economic Slowdown:** Seeks new partners
- **India's Semiconductor Ambitions:** Global attention, Beijing wary
- **US-China Rivalry:** India as a QUAD hedge
- **AI & Climate Diplomacy:** Competition and cooperation

Challenges Ahead in India–China Relations

1. **Strategic Trust Deficit**
 - The **2020 Galwan clash** led to a severe erosion of trust.
 - Military and diplomatic engagements are shadowed by suspicion and lack of transparency.
2. **LAC Misalignment**
 - India adheres to the **Johnson Line**, while China follows the **Macartney–MacDonald Line**.
 - Differing perceptions lead to repeated face-offs at flashpoints like **Depsang, Pangong Tso, and Demchok**.
3. **Digital Sovereignty Conflict**
 - India promotes **open-source DPI** (e.g., UPI, CoWIN), while China relies on **closed digital ecosystems**.
 - Conflicting ideologies on **data governance, surveillance, and AI** strain tech cooperation.
4. **Economic Dependence**
 - India's high import reliance on China in critical sectors (electronics, APIs, solar panels).
 - Hampers **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and supply chain resilience goals.
5. **Third-Party Strategic Influence**
 - **China–Pakistan nexus:** Beijing's stance on **PoK** and investments in **CPEC** challenge India's sovereignty.
 - India's strategic tilt towards the **US, QUAD, and IPEF** adds to Chinese insecurity.



Conclusion



Dr. Jaishankar's 2025 visit reflects **India's maturing diplomatic posture**: assertive yet pragmatic. While core frictions persist, especially on LAC and trade imbalance, issue-based cooperation in BRICS, AI governance, and DPI diplomacy is emerging. For UPSC aspirants, this scenario underscores how **competition and cooperation** coexist in contemporary foreign policy — a fine example of **realist diplomacy with civilizational undertones**.



Mains Practice Questions

1. **India–China relations reflect a complex interplay of cooperation, conflict, and competition. Discuss in light of recent diplomatic engagements.**
2. **Evaluate how BRICS can serve as a platform for India to manage China while enhancing its leadership role in the Global South.**
3. **How does India's emphasis on Digital Public Infrastructure act as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative?**
4. **Critically examine the implications of the 2025 India–China reset for regional security in South Asia.**