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Analytical Review Article

STRATEGIC COMPETITION AMONG GLOBAL POWERS AND ITS IMPACT ON DOMESTIC POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

The contemporary international system is experiencing a profound transformation characterized by the relative diffusion of power from a predominantly unipolar structure toward increasingly complex forms of multipolarity. This transformation has intensified strategic competition among major powers while simultaneously reshaping the domestic political landscapes of states located in geopolitically significant regions. South Asia occupies a particularly important position within this evolving strategic environment because of its demographic weight, nuclearized security architecture, maritime significance, economic potential, and geographic proximity to major geopolitical theaters.

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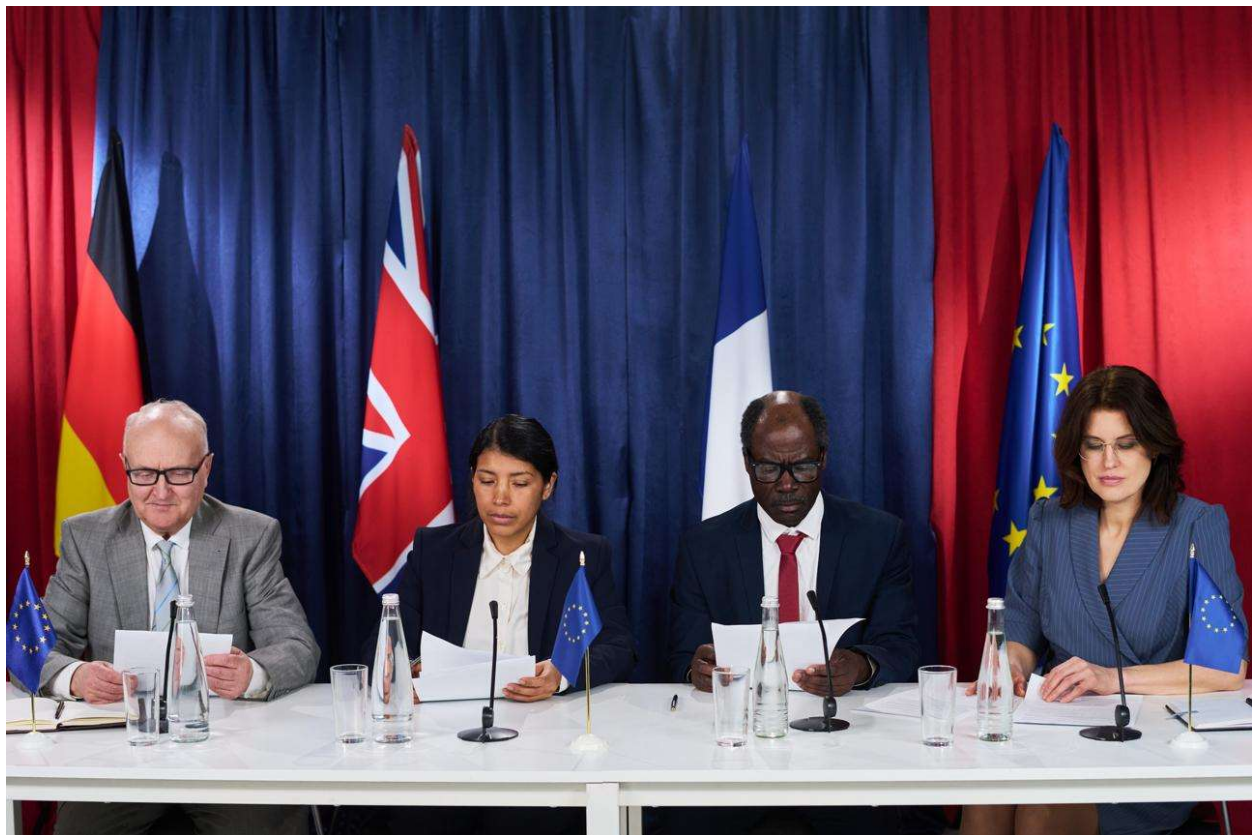
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Introduction

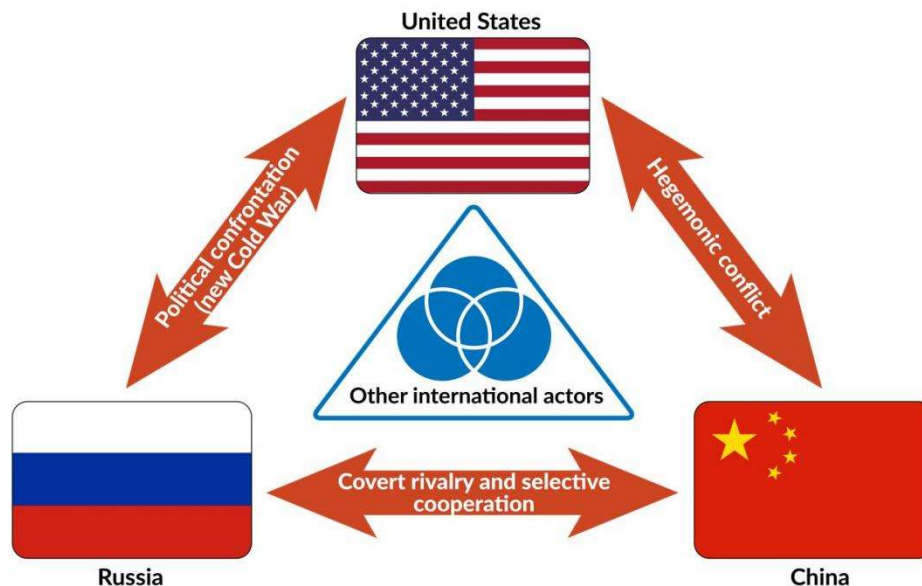
The relationship between international geopolitical competition and domestic political development has become one of the most significant areas of inquiry within contemporary international relations and comparative politics. Traditional approaches often treated domestic politics and international politics as analytically distinct spheres. However, contemporary geopolitical realities increasingly demonstrate that external strategic competition and internal political processes are deeply interconnected. Global power rivalries influence domestic institutions through economic engagement, security cooperation, technological partnerships, diplomatic alignments, development financing, information networks, and strategic narratives. Consequently, domestic political outcomes can no longer be understood solely through internal variables; they must also be examined within broader geopolitical contexts.



South Asia provides an especially important setting for examining these dynamics. The region occupies a strategic location linking the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and the Indian Ocean. It contains major population centers, significant military capabilities, critical maritime routes, and emerging economic markets. Simultaneously, South Asian states confront diverse governance challenges, developmental priorities, security concerns, and foreign policy dilemmas. As major powers expand their engagement within the region, domestic political institutions increasingly interact with external strategic pressures, creating complex patterns of cooperation, competition, adaptation, and resistance.

The contemporary strategic environment differs substantially from earlier periods of Cold War bipolarity. Rather than a rigid two-bloc structure, the emerging international order exhibits characteristics of competitive multipolarity, involving multiple centers of economic, military, technological, and diplomatic influence. This environment creates opportunities for smaller and middle powers to diversify partnerships while also generating new vulnerabilities associated with strategic dependence, policy fragmentation, and geopolitical competition. Understanding how South Asian states navigate these dynamics is therefore essential for explaining both regional political developments and broader transformations within international politics

Theoretical Foundations

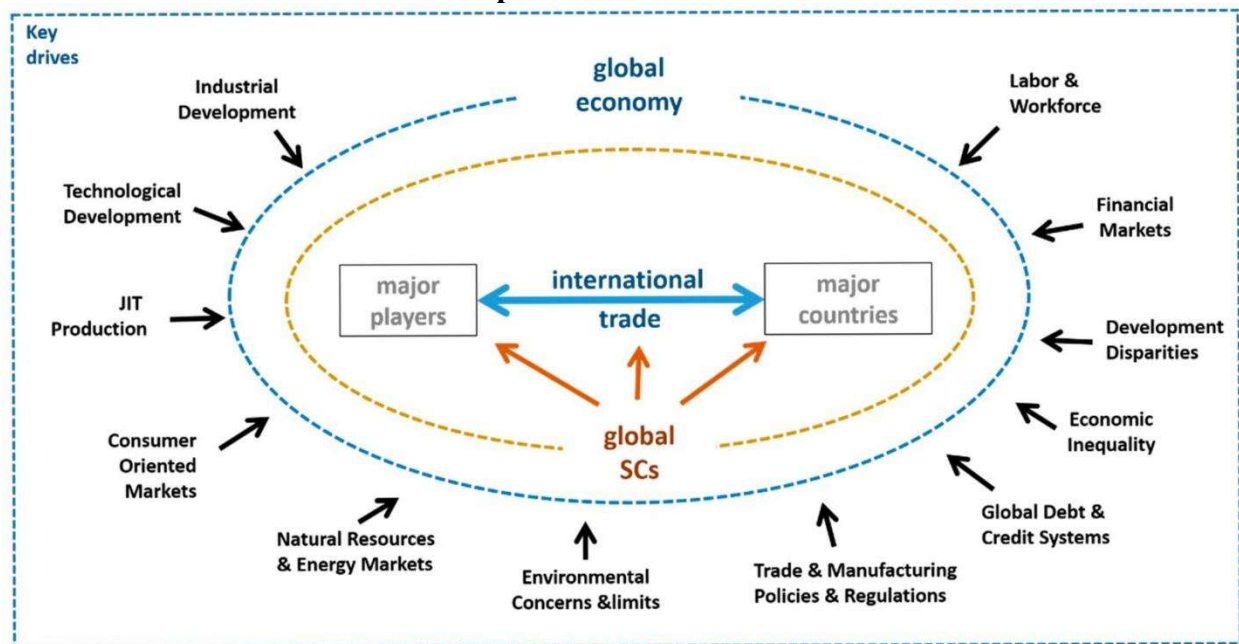


Realist and neorealist theories provide one of the most influential frameworks for understanding strategic competition among global powers. Realist scholars argue that international politics operates within an anarchic environment lacking a central authority capable of enforcing rules consistently across sovereign states. Under such conditions, states seek security, survival, and influence by accumulating capabilities and responding to shifts in relative power. Strategic competition emerges naturally from uncertainty regarding the intentions and capabilities of other actors. From this perspective, contemporary geopolitical rivalry reflects structural incentives generated by changes in global power distribution rather than merely the preferences of individual leaders.

Neorealism places particular emphasis upon the distribution of capabilities across the international system. As new powers acquire economic, technological, and military resources, established powers may perceive challenges to existing hierarchies and respond through balancing strategies. South Asia becomes significant within this framework because it represents a region where competing powers seek influence, partnerships, and strategic access. External engagement is therefore not solely about regional development or diplomatic cooperation; it also reflects broader calculations concerning power projection, alliance formation, and strategic positioning within an evolving international system.

Realist analysis further suggests that domestic political institutions may be influenced by external competition when governments adapt internal policies to accommodate security imperatives. Strategic partnerships often shape defense spending, technological investments, infrastructure development, and foreign policy priorities. Consequently, geopolitical competition may influence domestic governance not through direct intervention alone but through structural incentives that alter state behavior and policy preferences.

Liberal Institutionalism and Interdependence



Liberal institutionalist approaches offer a different interpretation of global competition and regional political development. Rather than viewing international politics exclusively through the lens of power competition, liberal scholars emphasize the importance of institutions, economic interdependence, international norms, and cooperative mechanisms. According to this perspective, strategic rivalry exists alongside extensive networks of cooperation involving trade, investment, diplomacy, technological exchange, and multilateral governance.

For South Asian states, increasing engagement with multiple global powers may generate opportunities for economic growth, infrastructure development, technological modernization, and institutional capacity building. External partnerships can provide access to financial resources, development assistance, educational exchanges, and global markets. However, liberal institutionalists also acknowledge that economic interdependence may create new forms of vulnerability when states become excessively dependent upon specific external actors or supply

chains.



The liberal perspective highlights the importance of regional and international institutions in mitigating geopolitical tensions. Organizations such as regional forums, trade arrangements, development banks, and diplomatic mechanisms can provide platforms for cooperation even amid strategic competition. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such institutions often depends upon broader geopolitical conditions and the willingness of major powers to support cooperative outcomes.

Constructivism and Strategic Narratives

Constructivist approaches emphasize the role of ideas, identities, norms, perceptions, and narratives in shaping international politics. Unlike purely material explanations, constructivist scholars argue that geopolitical competition is influenced by how states interpret threats, opportunities, alliances, and strategic relationships. Domestic political actors often construct narratives regarding national identity, sovereignty, development, and security that influence foreign policy choices and public attitudes toward external partnerships.

In South Asia, strategic narratives frequently play an important role in shaping domestic political debates concerning international alignment, economic cooperation, defense partnerships, and regional integration. Political leaders, media institutions, civil society organizations, and intellectual communities contribute to the construction of competing interpretations regarding external engagement. These narratives influence public perceptions and may affect electoral politics, policy legitimacy, and governance outcomes.

Constructivist analysis therefore demonstrates that geopolitical competition is not merely a contest over material resources or military capabilities. It also involves competition over ideas,

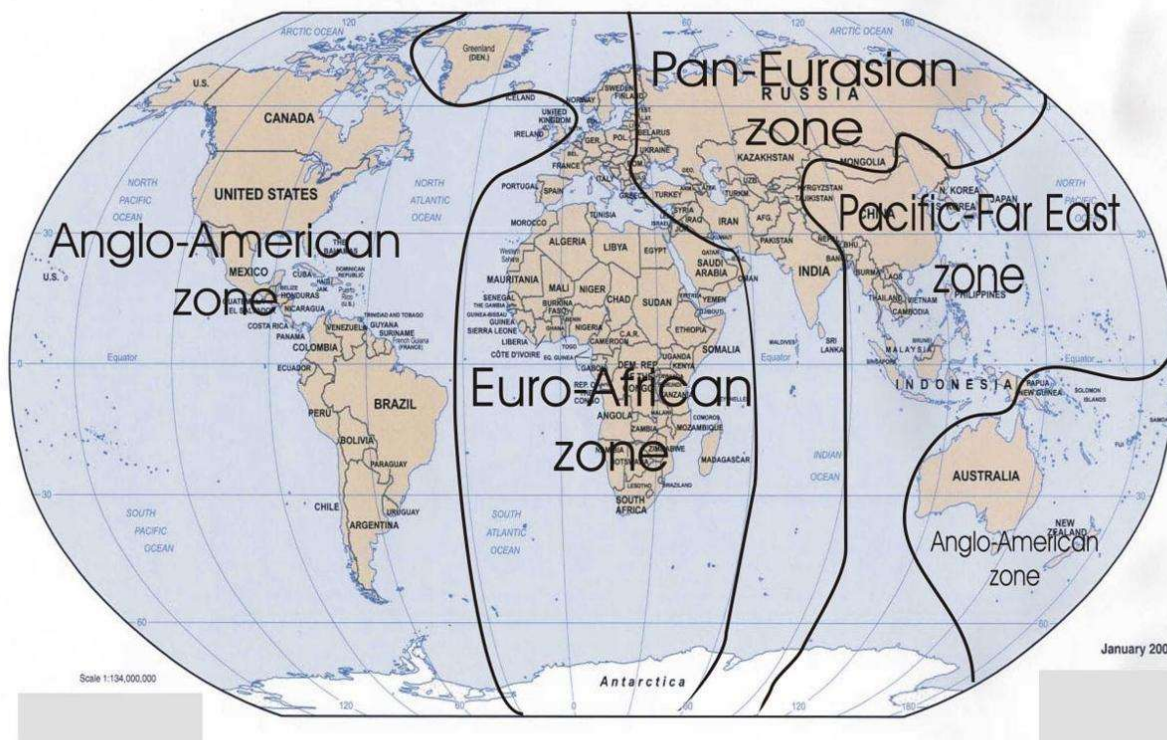
legitimacy, influence, and the interpretation of national interests. Understanding domestic political responses to global power rivalry requires attention to these ideational dimensions alongside more traditional geopolitical variables.

Theory	Primary Focus	Interpretation of South Asia
Realism	Power and security	Arena of strategic balancing
Neorealism	Systemic power distribution	Region affected by shifts in global polarity
Liberal Institutionalism	Cooperation and interdependence	Opportunity for economic integration
Constructivism	Identity and norms	Influence of narratives and perceptions
Dependency Theory	Structural inequalities	Risk of external dependence
Regional Security Complex Theory	Regional security interactions	Interconnected security environment

The Emergence of a Multipolar World Order

The contemporary international system is increasingly characterized by the diffusion of power across multiple centers of influence. While debates continue regarding the precise nature of this transformation, many scholars agree that the relative dominance associated with the immediate post-Cold War period has diminished. Economic growth in Asia, technological advancements among emerging powers, evolving regional security architectures, and increasing diversification of diplomatic partnerships have contributed to a more complex distribution of capabilities.

Multipolarity does not necessarily imply equal power among major actors. Instead, it reflects a system in which multiple states possess sufficient capabilities to influence regional and global outcomes. Economic power, technological innovation, military capacity, demographic resources, diplomatic influence, and institutional leadership collectively shape contemporary power hierarchies. As these capabilities become distributed across a larger number of actors, strategic competition becomes more multidimensional and less predictable.



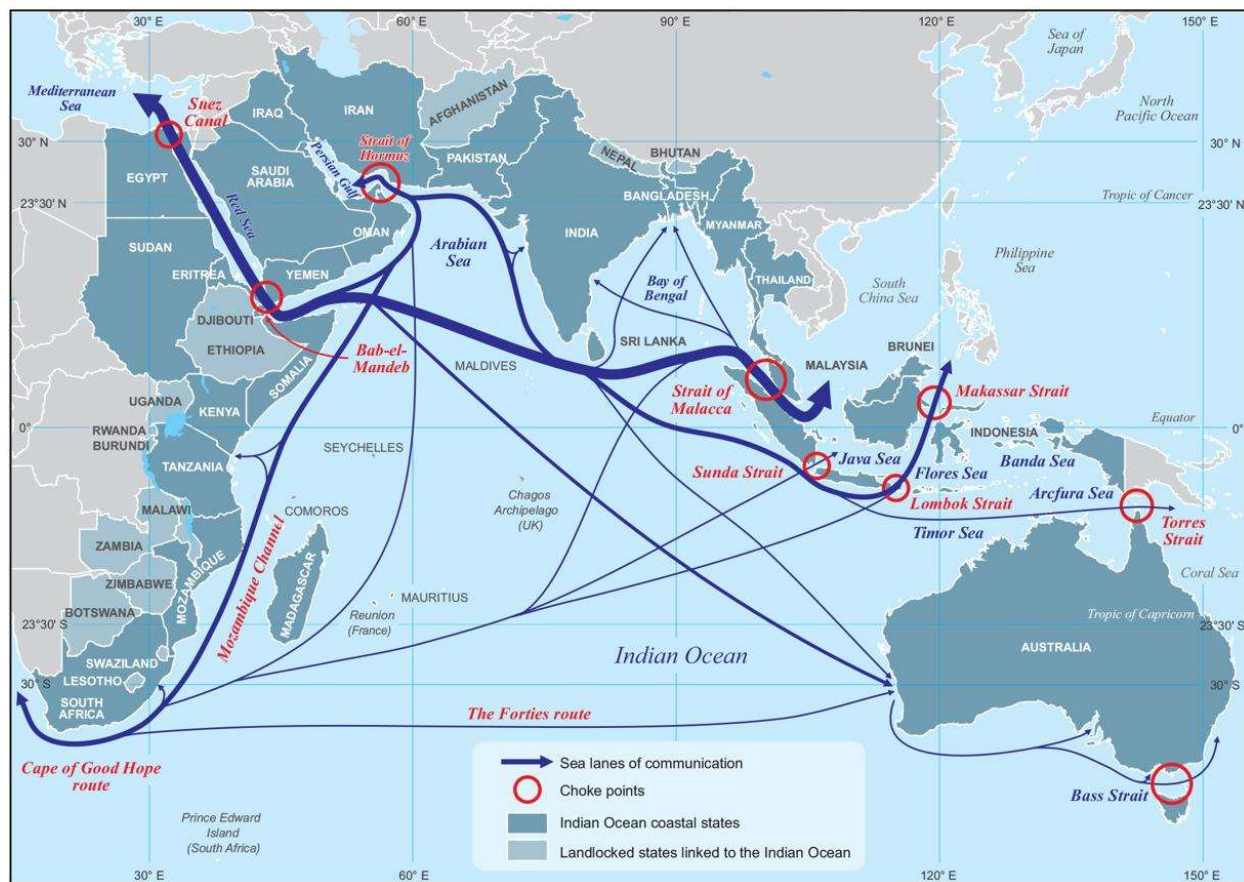
Map of multipolar world. Four zones - four poles

For South Asia, the emergence of multipolarity creates both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, states may gain greater flexibility by engaging multiple partners simultaneously rather than relying exclusively upon a single external patron. On the other hand, intensified competition among major powers may increase pressure upon regional governments to navigate complex strategic environments while preserving policy autonomy and domestic stability.

South Asia in Contemporary Geopolitics

South Asia occupies a uniquely significant position within contemporary geopolitics because of its location at the intersection of several major strategic regions. The region connects the energy-rich Middle East, the resource-rich areas of Central Asia, the manufacturing centers of East Asia, and the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean. These geographic characteristics contribute to South Asia's strategic relevance within broader patterns of global competition.

The region's geopolitical importance is reinforced by demographic, economic, and security considerations. South Asia contains some of the world's largest populations, rapidly expanding urban centers, significant economic markets, and multiple nuclear-capable states. It also encompasses critical maritime corridors through which substantial portions of global trade and energy flows transit. Consequently, external powers view South Asia not merely as a regional arena but as a strategically important component of broader geopolitical calculations.



At the same time, South Asia remains characterized by historical rivalries, security dilemmas, developmental disparities, and institutional challenges. These internal dynamics interact with external competition in ways that shape governance outcomes, foreign policy behavior, and domestic political processes. Understanding these interactions requires examining how global power rivalry translates into specific domestic consequences across the region.

The Strategic Logic of US–China Competition in the Twenty-First Century

The strategic competition between the United States and China represents one of the most consequential developments in contemporary international politics. Unlike earlier geopolitical rivalries that were primarily military in nature, the current competition encompasses economic influence, technological innovation, trade networks, supply chains, digital infrastructure, maritime security, diplomatic engagement, financial systems, and institutional leadership. As a result, the rivalry extends far beyond bilateral relations and increasingly shapes political developments across multiple regions, including South Asia.

From a structural realist perspective, the intensification of competition reflects shifts in relative capabilities within the international system. China's rapid economic growth, expanding technological capabilities, growing diplomatic influence, and increasing military modernization have altered global power distributions. The United States, meanwhile, continues to possess substantial military, technological, financial, and institutional advantages. The resulting interaction creates a strategic environment characterized by competition, deterrence, selective

cooperation, and mutual suspicion. Neither side seeks direct confrontation, yet both pursue policies designed to preserve strategic advantages and influence regional outcomes.



For South Asian states, this competition creates both opportunities and constraints. Increased attention from major powers may generate investment, trade, development financing, security cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. Simultaneously, governments may face difficult choices regarding technological standards, infrastructure partnerships, security cooperation, and foreign policy orientation. Consequently, the effects of great-power competition increasingly extend into domestic political institutions, policy debates, and governance processes throughout the region.

Economic Dimensions of Strategic Competition

Economic competition has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary geopolitical rivalry. Unlike traditional military competition, economic influence often penetrates domestic political systems through trade relationships, investment flows, development financing, infrastructure projects, industrial partnerships, and technological cooperation. Consequently, economic engagement can influence policy priorities, governance structures, regulatory frameworks, and political decision-making processes.

The United States and China represent two of the world's most significant economic actors, each possessing distinct mechanisms of international influence. American influence often operates through financial markets, multinational corporations, technological ecosystems, development institutions, and strategic partnerships. Chinese influence increasingly operates through infrastructure investment, manufacturing integration, development financing, industrial cooperation, and connectivity initiatives. South Asian governments frequently engage with both

actors simultaneously, creating opportunities for economic diversification while also generating concerns regarding dependency, leverage, and strategic vulnerability.

Domestic political consequences emerge when economic relationships become linked to broader geopolitical objectives. Political elites may support or oppose particular partnerships based upon ideological preferences, developmental priorities, electoral considerations, or perceptions of national interest. Economic agreements may therefore become subjects of domestic political contestation, influencing public debates concerning sovereignty, development strategies, and foreign policy orientation.

Technological Competition and Digital Geopolitics

Technological competition has emerged as a central dimension of contemporary strategic rivalry. Advanced technologies increasingly influence economic competitiveness, military effectiveness, governance capacity, intelligence capabilities, and societal development. Consequently, competition over technological standards, digital infrastructure, telecommunications networks, artificial intelligence, semiconductor production, and cyber capabilities has become deeply intertwined with broader geopolitical dynamics.

South Asian states occupy important positions within these technological transformations. Expanding digital economies, growing populations, and increasing demand for technological infrastructure make the region an attractive arena for external engagement. Governments frequently confront decisions regarding telecommunications providers, digital governance frameworks, cybersecurity partnerships, data regulation, and technological investment. These choices often possess geopolitical implications extending beyond purely technical considerations.

The domestic political consequences of technological competition are substantial. Digital infrastructure influences information flows, economic modernization, administrative capacity, and social connectivity. Debates regarding technological partnerships frequently intersect with concerns about national security, economic sovereignty, privacy protections, and strategic dependence. Consequently, technological competition increasingly shapes domestic governance discussions across South Asia while contributing to broader debates concerning strategic autonomy in an interconnected world.

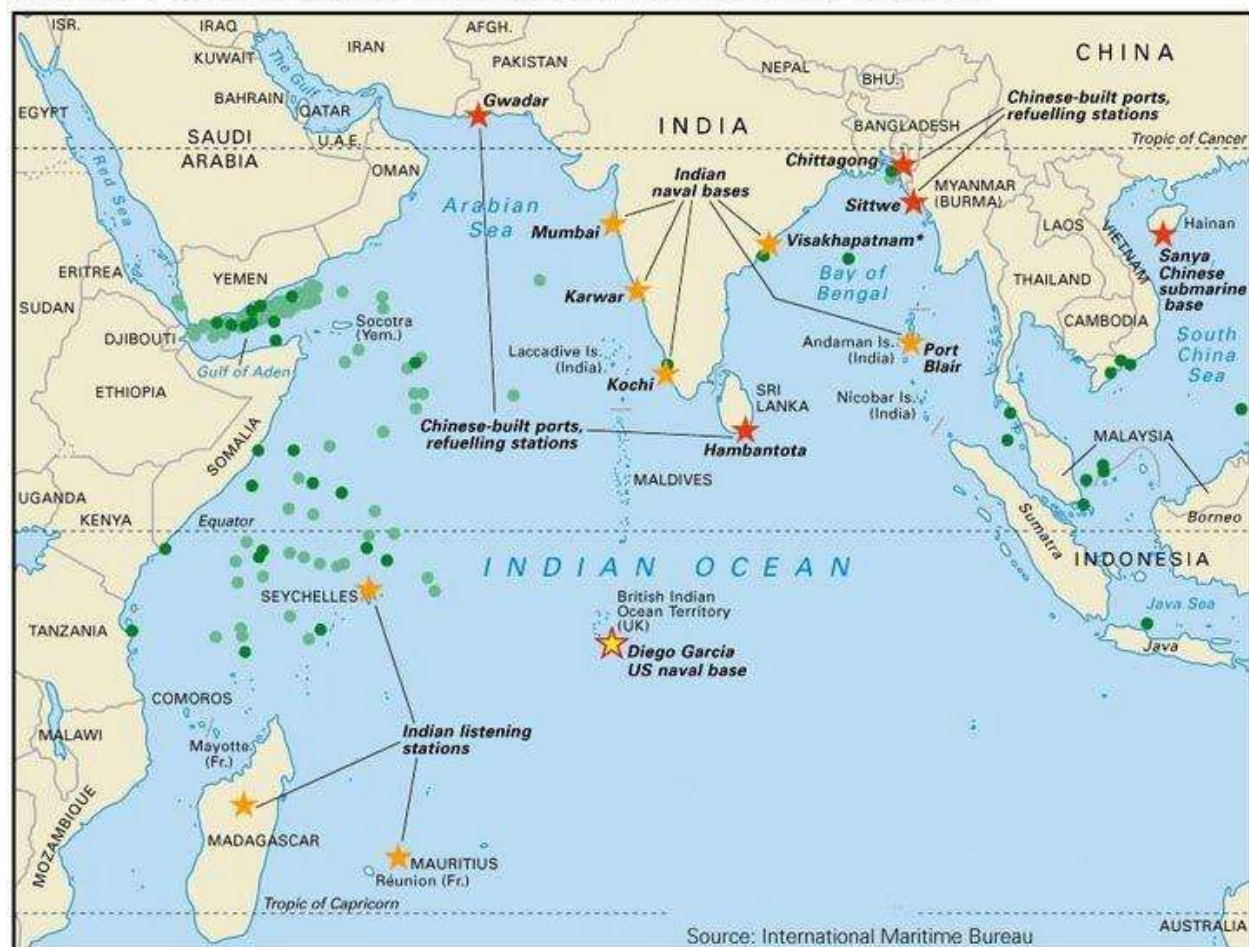


Dimension	Key Characteristics	Domestic Impact in South Asia
Trade	Market access and supply chains	Economic policy adjustments
Technology	Digital infrastructure and innovation	Regulatory and security debates
Investment	Development financing and infrastructure	Governance and development priorities
Diplomacy	Influence and partnerships	Foreign policy balancing
Security	Defense cooperation and deterrence	Strategic calculations
Institutions	Competing governance models	Policy and institutional adaptation

The Indo-Pacific Framework and South Asian Politics

The Indo-Pacific concept has become one of the most influential strategic frameworks in contemporary international relations. Although interpretations vary among governments and scholars, the concept generally emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single strategic space. This framework reflects growing recognition that economic, maritime, technological, and security developments within these regions are increasingly interconnected.

GREAT POWER COMPETITION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN



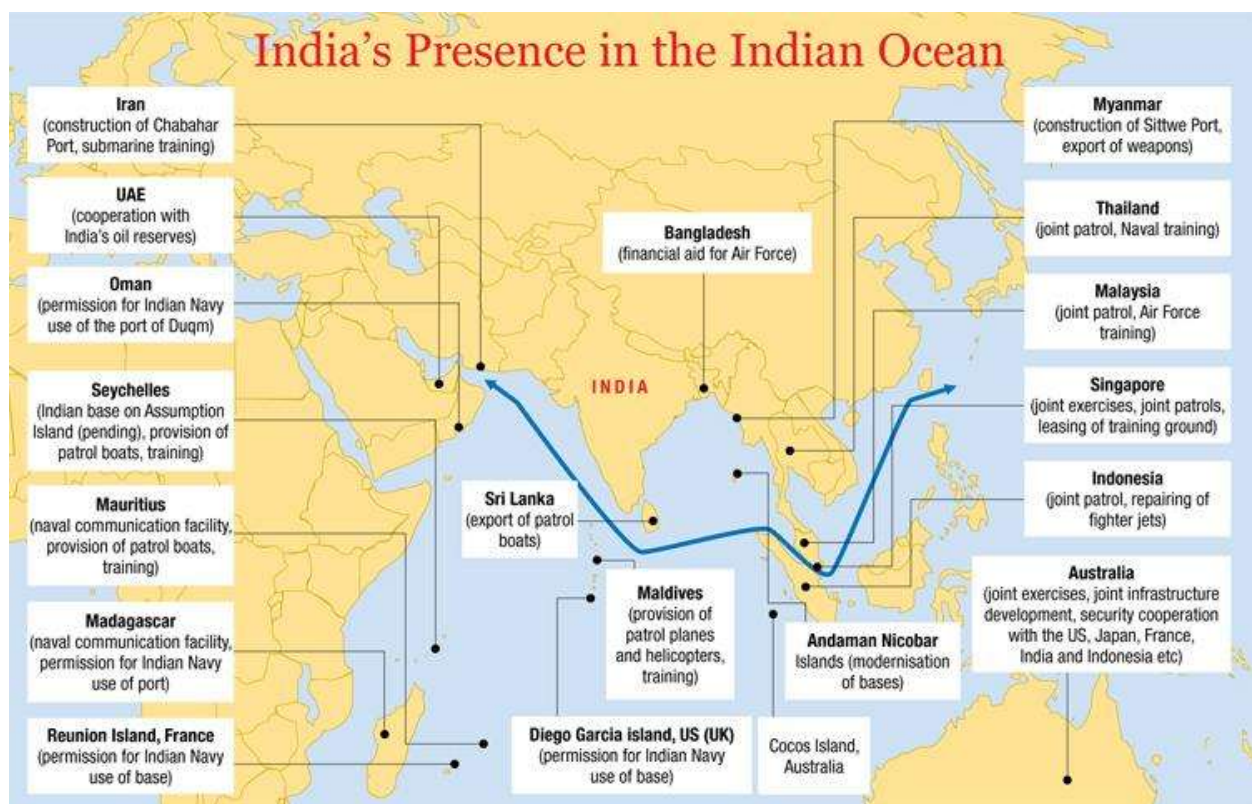
For South Asia, the Indo-Pacific framework has elevated the strategic significance of maritime geography, regional connectivity, and external partnerships. States located along critical sea lanes and maritime routes have acquired increased geopolitical importance as major powers seek to secure trade flows, energy supplies, and strategic access. Consequently, maritime security, naval cooperation, port development, and regional connectivity initiatives have become central components of contemporary geopolitical competition

Domestic political implications arise because participation in Indo-Pacific initiatives often requires governments to make strategic choices regarding partnerships, infrastructure development, security cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. These decisions may influence budgetary priorities, defense planning, economic development strategies, and broader foreign policy orientations. As a result, the Indo-Pacific framework increasingly shapes internal political debates concerning national interests and strategic direction.

Maritime Security and Strategic Geography

Maritime geography plays a critical role in understanding South Asia's geopolitical significance. The Indian Ocean serves as a major conduit for international trade, energy transportation, and global commerce. A substantial proportion of global maritime traffic passes through sea lanes connected to South Asian waters, making regional stability a matter of international concern.

Major powers increasingly recognize the strategic importance of maritime security in protecting economic interests and maintaining regional influence. Consequently, naval cooperation, maritime domain awareness initiatives, port development projects, and security partnerships have expanded significantly. These developments affect domestic political priorities by increasing attention to maritime governance, coastal infrastructure, defense modernization, and strategic planning.



The relationship between maritime security and domestic politics is often overlooked, yet it remains significant. Investments in ports, transportation networks, coastal development, and maritime institutions can influence regional economies, employment patterns, local political dynamics, and national development strategies. Strategic geography therefore influences domestic governance through mechanisms extending well beyond traditional security concerns.

The Belt and Road Initiative and Regional Political Economy

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents one of the most significant international infrastructure and connectivity programs of the contemporary era. Through investments in

transportation networks, energy infrastructure, industrial zones, logistics systems, and economic corridors, the initiative seeks to enhance regional connectivity and facilitate economic integration. South Asia has become an important component of these efforts due to its geographic position and developmental requirements.

Supporters of infrastructure-led connectivity emphasize potential benefits including improved transportation efficiency, expanded trade opportunities, energy security, industrial development, and economic growth. Critics, however, raise concerns regarding debt sustainability, transparency, governance standards, strategic dependence, and long-term economic implications. These differing perspectives illustrate the complexity of evaluating large-scale connectivity initiatives within geopolitical contexts.

Domestic political consequences emerge because major infrastructure projects frequently affect resource allocation, development priorities, regional inequalities, institutional capacity, and public perceptions of governance. Political actors may interpret such projects through competing frameworks emphasizing economic opportunity, national sovereignty, strategic vulnerability, or developmental necessity. Consequently, external economic engagement often becomes intertwined with domestic political debates regarding national development trajectories and foreign policy choices.

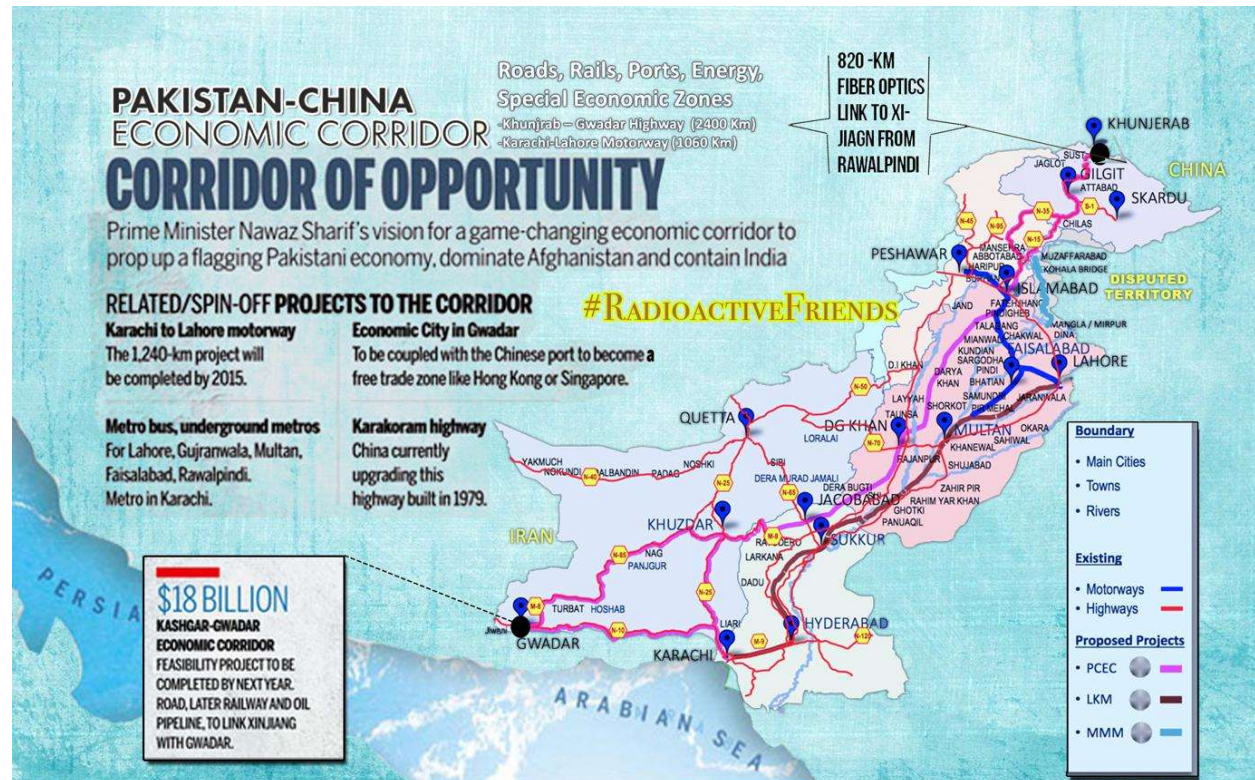


Economic Corridors and Governance Challenges

Economic corridors represent particularly important instruments through which international competition influences domestic political systems. Such corridors frequently involve large-scale

investments in transportation infrastructure, industrial development, energy generation, logistics networks, and regional connectivity. While these initiatives may generate economic opportunities, they also require complex governance arrangements involving multiple stakeholders, regulatory frameworks, and institutional mechanisms.

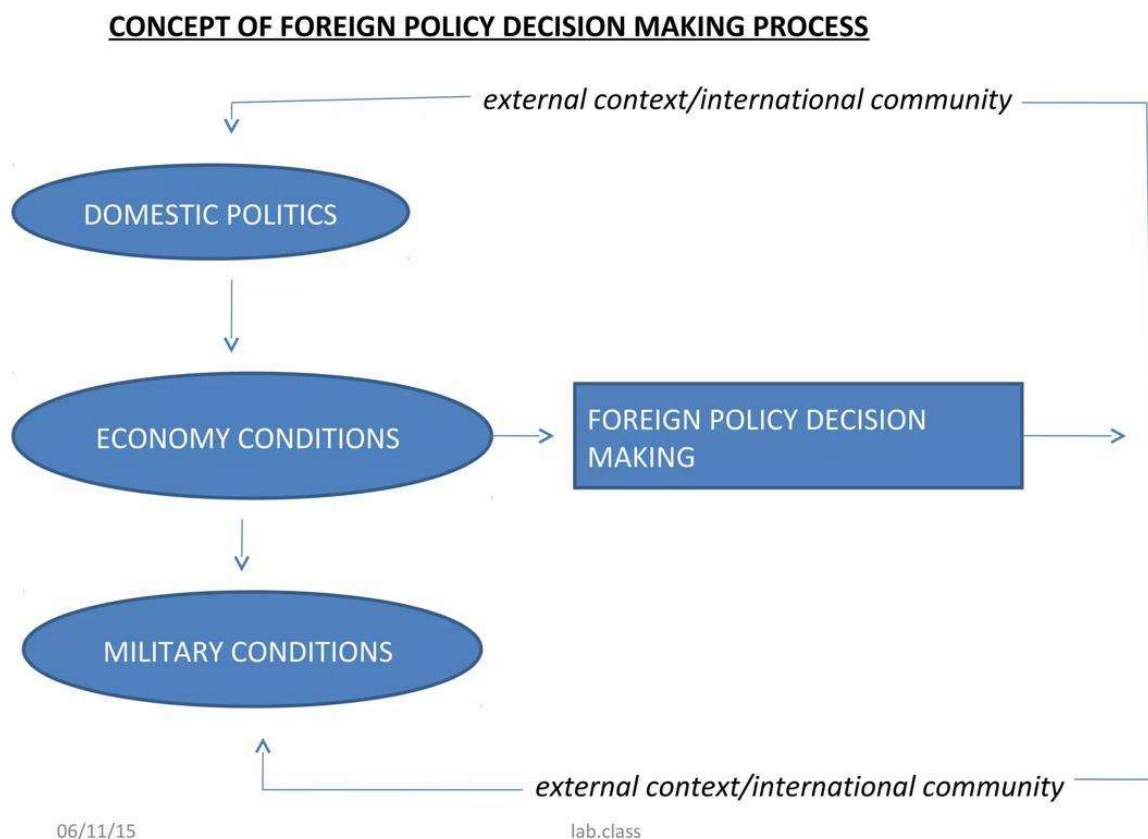
The governance challenges associated with economic corridors often extend beyond economics. Questions concerning land acquisition, environmental sustainability, fiscal management, local participation, transparency, and regional equity frequently become politically significant. Consequently, corridor projects may influence domestic political coalitions, bureaucratic structures, public discourse, and electoral dynamics.



The broader significance of economic corridors lies in their ability to connect international geopolitical objectives with domestic political realities. They illustrate how strategic competition among global powers can shape governance priorities, institutional development, and political decision-making within recipient states.

External Alignment and Domestic Political Transformation

Area	Potential Benefits	Potential Challenges
Infrastructure	Improved connectivity	Financial sustainability concerns
Trade	Market integration	External dependency risks
Energy	Enhanced energy security	Strategic vulnerability
Industry	Economic development	Uneven regional benefits
Governance	Institutional modernization	Administrative complexity
Foreign Policy	Expanded partnerships	Balancing external pressures



One of the most important consequences of great-power competition is its influence on domestic political transformation. External alignments rarely affect only foreign policy; they frequently shape domestic governance structures, elite incentives, institutional behavior, economic priorities, and public discourse. Political leaders often utilize international partnerships to strengthen development agendas, enhance security capabilities, attract investment, or increase diplomatic influence. At the same time, external relationships may generate domestic controversies concerning sovereignty, dependency, transparency, and national priorities.

The impact of external alignment varies across political systems. In some cases, geopolitical competition expands policy options by enabling governments to diversify partnerships and pursue strategic autonomy. In other cases, external pressures may constrain policy flexibility and intensify domestic political polarization. Outcomes depend upon institutional capacity, leadership strategies, economic conditions, and broader geopolitical circumstances.

Understanding domestic political transformation therefore requires moving beyond simplistic assumptions regarding alignment and dependency. South Asian states increasingly operate within a complex environment characterized by overlapping partnerships, multiple sources of external engagement, and evolving strategic calculations. Their responses reflect efforts to maximize opportunities while minimizing vulnerabilities within an increasingly competitive international system.



Future Trajectories of Global Strategic Competition and South Asia

The future of South Asia will be shaped significantly by the evolution of global strategic competition and the broader transformation of the international system. While considerable uncertainty surrounds the future distribution of global power, most contemporary analyses suggest that geopolitical competition is likely to remain a defining feature of international politics for the foreseeable future. The precise form this competition will take remains contested. Some scholars anticipate the emergence of a relatively stable multipolar order characterized by multiple centers of influence, while others foresee intensified bipolar competition, fragmented geopolitical blocs, or issue-specific coalitions that vary across economic, technological, and security domains.

For South Asian states, the future strategic environment will likely involve increasing complexity rather than a return to simple alliance structures. Governments will need to navigate overlapping

networks of economic interdependence, technological cooperation, security partnerships, and diplomatic engagement. This environment may provide opportunities to diversify external relationships and enhance strategic flexibility. At the same time, it may increase exposure to external pressures, competing expectations, and policy dilemmas. The ability of South Asian states to manage these challenges will depend heavily upon institutional resilience, economic adaptability, and foreign policy sophistication.

Domestic political systems will increasingly interact with global geopolitical trends through channels that extend beyond traditional diplomacy. Economic integration, technological transformation, energy security, supply chain restructuring, digital governance, climate adaptation, and infrastructure development will all possess significant geopolitical dimensions. Consequently, future domestic political debates are likely to become more closely connected to international strategic developments than at any previous point in the region's history.

Scenario One: Intensified Bipolar Competition



One possible future scenario involves the consolidation of intensified bipolar competition between two dominant centers of global power. Under such conditions, economic, technological, military, and diplomatic competition would become increasingly institutionalized, encouraging the formation of competing strategic networks and economic ecosystems. States might experience growing pressure to align more closely with one side or the other, particularly in areas involving technology, security cooperation, supply chains, and strategic infrastructure.

For South Asian governments, intensified bipolarity could complicate efforts to maintain strategic flexibility. Foreign policy decisions would likely become more consequential as external actors seek support, access, and cooperation across multiple domains. Economic and technological choices might acquire strategic significance beyond their immediate developmental implications. Domestic political actors could also become increasingly divided regarding preferred external partnerships, generating new forms of political contestation and policy debate.

At the governance level, intensified bipolarity may increase the importance of national institutions capable of managing external pressures while preserving policy coherence. Governments would need to balance security concerns with economic development priorities, ensuring that external competition does not undermine domestic stability or long-term development objectives.

Scenario Two: Competitive Multipolarity

Figure 1. The Ten Emerging Powers



Note: This map is illustrative; boundaries, names, and designations used do not represent or imply any opinion on the part of Carnegie or the authors. Dotted lines represent approximate disputed boundaries and the light teal areas represent contested territory between China, India, and Pakistan. The final status has not yet been agreed upon.

A second scenario involves the consolidation of a competitive multipolar order in which multiple major and middle powers exercise significant influence across different regions and issue areas. Under this arrangement, no single actor would possess overwhelming dominance, and states would enjoy greater flexibility in constructing diverse international partnerships. Economic, technological, and diplomatic relationships would become increasingly diversified, reducing the likelihood of rigid geopolitical blocs.

For South Asian states, competitive multipolarity may provide enhanced opportunities for strategic autonomy. Governments could engage simultaneously with multiple partners while pursuing development goals, security cooperation, and diplomatic initiatives tailored to national priorities. Diversified engagement may reduce dependency risks and expand access to investment, technology, and markets.

However, multipolarity also presents challenges. Increased numbers of influential actors may create more complex negotiation environments and greater uncertainty regarding future alignments. Domestic policymakers would need to manage a broader range of external relationships while ensuring that international engagement contributes positively to national development and governance objectives.

Scenario	International Characteristics	Domestic Political Implications
Intensified Bipolarity	Rival strategic blocs	Greater alignment pressures
Competitive Multipolarity	Multiple centers of power	Expanded policy flexibility
Fragmented Regionalism	Regional blocs dominate	Stronger regional diplomacy
Economic Decoupling	Separate economic systems	Supply chain adjustments
Technological Fragmentation	Competing digital ecosystems	Regulatory adaptation
Cooperative Competition	Selective collaboration	Balanced foreign policy opportunities

Strategic Autonomy as a Governance Imperative

One of the most significant lessons emerging from contemporary geopolitical developments is the increasing importance of strategic autonomy as a governance objective. Strategic autonomy should not be understood as isolationism, neutrality, or disengagement from international affairs. Rather, it refers to the capacity of states to pursue national interests independently while maintaining constructive relationships with diverse external actors. In an era characterized by growing competition among major powers, strategic autonomy becomes a critical mechanism for preserving policy flexibility and minimizing vulnerability.

Strategic autonomy requires more than diplomatic balancing. It depends upon economic resilience, technological capabilities, institutional effectiveness, and social cohesion. States that possess diversified economic relationships, robust governance structures, and effective policymaking institutions are generally better positioned to navigate geopolitical competition without compromising core national interests. Conversely, excessive dependence upon external actors may limit policy options and reduce strategic flexibility.

The pursuit of strategic autonomy also has important domestic political dimensions. Governments must cultivate broad political consensus regarding national priorities while ensuring that foreign policy decisions remain aligned with long-term developmental objectives. Domestic political fragmentation can weaken strategic coherence and increase susceptibility to external pressures. Consequently, strategic autonomy depends as much upon domestic institutional capacity as it does upon foreign policy strategy.

Governance Implications of Great-Power Competition

The interaction between global strategic competition and domestic governance represents one of the defining features of contemporary international politics. External geopolitical dynamics increasingly influence policymaking processes, institutional development, economic planning, and security frameworks. Governments must therefore integrate geopolitical considerations into

broader governance strategies without allowing external pressures to undermine domestic priorities.

One significant implication concerns policymaking complexity. Economic, technological, environmental, security, and developmental issues are increasingly interconnected with international strategic dynamics. Decisions regarding infrastructure, telecommunications, energy systems, education, industrial policy, and digital governance often possess geopolitical implications that extend beyond traditional domestic policy considerations. Effective governance therefore requires greater capacity for strategic planning and policy coordination.

Another implication involves institutional resilience. States operating within competitive geopolitical environments require institutions capable of managing uncertainty, adapting to external shocks, and preserving policy continuity. Institutional weakness may increase vulnerability to external pressures and reduce the effectiveness of national responses to changing international conditions. Consequently, governance reforms that strengthen transparency, accountability, administrative competence, and policy coordination contribute not only to domestic development but also to strategic resilience.

The relationship between governance and geopolitics also highlights the importance of public trust. Governments that maintain legitimacy and social cohesion are generally better equipped to navigate complex international environments. Public confidence strengthens policy implementation, facilitates national adaptation, and reduces the risks associated with external competition. Therefore, governance quality remains a central determinant of strategic success.

Regional Security and the Future of South Asian Stability



Regional security will remain a critical factor influencing the future trajectory of South Asia. The region's security environment is shaped by historical rivalries, territorial disputes, military modernization, maritime competition, economic interdependence, and external strategic engagement. These factors interact in complex ways, creating both opportunities for cooperation and risks of instability.

The concept of a regional security complex is particularly useful for understanding South Asian dynamics. According to this perspective, security concerns within a region are deeply interconnected, meaning that developments affecting one state frequently influence neighboring countries. Consequently, external strategic competition often produces indirect effects across the broader regional system, shaping threat perceptions, defense planning, and diplomatic behavior.

Future stability will depend partly upon the ability of regional states to manage security competition while maintaining channels for dialogue and cooperation. Confidence-building measures, economic integration, regional connectivity, and multilateral engagement may help reduce tensions and enhance resilience. At the same time, the persistence of geopolitical competition suggests that regional governments will continue to face difficult choices regarding partnerships, alignments, and security priorities.

Domestic political institutions play an important role in determining how states respond to these challenges. Governments capable of integrating security concerns into broader development strategies are generally better positioned to maintain stability and avoid excessive securitization of policy agendas. Consequently, regional security and domestic governance remain closely interconnected.

Dimension	High Strategic Autonomy	Low Strategic Autonomy
Trade Relations	Diversified partners	Concentrated dependence
Investment Sources	Multiple investors	Limited alternatives
Security Cooperation	Balanced partnerships	Single-provider reliance
Energy Security	Diverse energy portfolio	External vulnerability
Technology Access	Multiple technology sources	Dependence on one ecosystem
Diplomatic Flexibility	Broad engagement capacity	Restricted policy options

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that strategic competition among global powers exerts profound influence upon domestic political processes, governance structures, economic policymaking, security frameworks, and foreign policy behavior throughout South Asia. The interaction between international geopolitics and domestic politics has become increasingly complex as the international system transitions from a predominantly unipolar configuration toward more competitive forms of multipolarity. Rather than operating as separate spheres, external strategic dynamics and internal political developments now interact through multiple channels involving trade, investment, technology, security cooperation, infrastructure development, diplomacy, and information networks. Several major findings emerge from the analysis. First, geopolitical competition affects domestic politics not only through direct external engagement but also through structural incentives that shape policymaking priorities, institutional development, and elite behavior. Second, economic and technological interdependence has become an increasingly

important mechanism through which international rivalries influence domestic governance. Third, strategic autonomy has emerged as a critical objective for states seeking to navigate competitive geopolitical environments while preserving policy flexibility and developmental priorities. Fourth, regional security dynamics remain deeply interconnected with broader patterns of global competition, creating both opportunities and challenges for South Asian governments. The study further demonstrates that no single theoretical framework fully explains the relationship between global competition and domestic political outcomes. Realist perspectives illuminate the role of power and security, liberal approaches emphasize institutions and interdependence, constructivist analyses highlight ideas and narratives, while political economy perspectives reveal the significance of economic structures and dependencies. Together, these approaches provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms linking international competition to domestic governance. Several broader lessons emerge for policymakers and scholars. South Asian states are likely to benefit from diversified international engagement, strong domestic institutions, economic resilience, and flexible foreign policy strategies. Strategic autonomy is most sustainable when supported by institutional capacity, economic diversification, technological development, and political stability. Effective governance therefore constitutes not only a domestic objective but also a strategic asset within an increasingly competitive international environment. Looking forward, the future of South Asia will depend significantly upon how regional states adapt to evolving geopolitical realities. Whether the international system develops toward intensified bipolarity, competitive multipolarity, or more fragmented forms of regional competition, governments will need to balance external engagement with domestic priorities. States that successfully combine strategic flexibility, institutional resilience, economic adaptability, and effective governance will be best positioned to navigate great-power competition while preserving sovereignty, stability, and long-term development. The central conclusion of this study is that the most durable foundation for strategic autonomy and geopolitical resilience lies not solely in external alignments but in the strength of domestic institutions, governance effectiveness, economic capacity, and societal cohesion. In an era of intensifying global competition, these domestic foundations will increasingly determine how South Asian states shape—and are shaped by—the evolving international order.



Review Typology and Reporting

Review designs were classified into standard categories (scoping, umbrella, rapid, qualitative, and mixed-methods), with reporting aligned to established guidelines (PRISMA-ScR, PRIOR, PRISMA-RR, ENTREQ, and PRISMA/MMAT) to ensure methodological rigor and transparency.

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