# India’s International Politicking

## What is the issue?

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- India can’t match China’s deep pockets to win allies.
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- Hence, it should consider deploying its soft power to further its vision and also simultaneously work out a strategic understanding with China.
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## What is the current international context for India?

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- 2018 has been a year of the India-China relationship reset, with multiple events that have unfolded thus far:
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- Wuhan: Indo-China Informal Summit in April 2018
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- Singapore: Indian PM’s keynote address at “Shangri-La Dialogue”
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- SCO: ‘Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit’ at Qingdao, China.
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- All have sparked a lot of analysis as to what kind of strategic positioning India is gearing itself in the midst of U.S. and China’s assertion to global supremacy.
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- The Indian PM has proclaimed ambitions to garner influence in the Indo-Pacific region by increasing engagement with the ASEAN countries.
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- He further stated his intent in developing friendship with China, maintaining

cordial ties with Russia, pursuing interests with Australia and U.S.
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- Nonetheless, tensions between India and China still impacts sea lanes, as both countries are actively pursuing individual interests in the Indo-Pacific region.
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## How is China challenging India in the Indo-Pacific?

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- India pursues influence through heightened diplomatic, bilateral and military engagement, among others to influence countries near it.
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- In contrast, China has started to garner influence through hard investments in cash-strapped littoral nations suffering from massive infrastructural deficits.
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- **ASEAN -** China's heavy investments in ASEAN nations have brought these nations closer into its orbit of influence to a massive extent.
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- Notably, ASEAN didn't even pursue the international ruling that barred Chinese activities in "South China Sea" vigorously.
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- China is today Cambodia's largest provider of foreign aid and has invested in dams, oilfields, highways, textile operations and mines.
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- In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has been seeking rapprochement with China, especially after his ties with the U.S. deteriorated.
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- Beijing provided rifles worth about $3.3 million to the Philippines police and guns worth $7.35 million to fight against Islamic extremists in Marawi.
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- Although India enjoys cordial relationship with all ASEAN nations, that alone possibly can't make ASEAN states overlook China's clout to endorse India.
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- ASEAN's trade with China also far surpasses that with India, and Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in ASEAN is 9 times higher than India's.
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- **South Asia -** Even here, which is culturally and geographically more compatible with India, China seems to be outsmarting India.
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- Countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka have been actively demonstrating interest in partnering with China with unambiguous clarity.
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- Souring of relations with Nepal due to the 2015 fuel blockade and the failed strategic interventions in Sri Lanka have both undermined India's potential.
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- On the other hand, China's multibillion dollar investments in Sri Lankan ports and cities have inched the country much closer to China.
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- Last year, Sri Lanka handed over its Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease, which is also part of China's ambitious "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI).
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- China has over the years promised billions for further infrastructure spending, which resource constrained India won't be able to match.
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## What are the promising prospects for India to take forward?

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- Despite China's deep pockets, the overt-assertiveness of China has driven many countries in East and Southeast Asia to seek friendship with India.
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- Some ASEAN countries, with its cultural connections to India, and a sizable Indian diaspora are has been active in its engagements with India.
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- Further, India enjoys global soft power through its art, literature, music, dance and cinema, an aspect that only the U.S. is at a better advantage than India.
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- India is perceived by many in East Asia as a friendly democracy, making the country a safe ally to have in the long run.
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- Japan has significantly increased its engagement with India and the two countries enjoy robust military ties.
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- India and Australia have initiated the '2+2' dialogue signalling Canberra's interest in deepening a maritime security partnership with India.
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- But India still has to develop a strategy to leverage its soft power and optimise its military power to effectively counter China's cash and hard power.

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## What is the way ahead?

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- **Better Deal -** With China, India can strike a better bargain in comparison to the other smaller countries, due to its potential market and regional clout.
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- For example, China needs Indian support to take forward its BRI profitably, which is currently opposing it due to concerns regarding 'China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects' that runs through Pak-Occupied-Kashmir.
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- By demonstrating a willingness to join the BRI, India can positively influence China to re-evaluate the details of the CPEC.
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- **Innovativeness -** Since India can't match China's resource spending, a strategic understanding with China can help India gain regional influence.
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- With a strategic partnership with China, India can better pursue its own regional groupings like BIMSTEC, BBIN & SAARC.
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- **Thaw -** China's recently agreement with India on sharing data on the cross-border flow of waters from the Brahmaputra during the flood season.
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- Further, a protocol for enable all varieties of rice exports from India to China, has been signed, which is also a positive for India (for reducing trade deficit).
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- Recently, Chinese President Xi has also suggested a trade target of $100 billion by 2020, signalling a gradual thaw in relations, which needs to be taken ahead.
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**Source: The Hindu**

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