Path of India–China Coexistence

Mains: *GSII – International Relations*

Why in News?

The ongoing global trends suggest that India should address disputes with China through diplomacy rather than viewing it as an existential threat for the peaceful coexistence of both.

What is the Historical Background of India-China Relations?

- **1962 Sino-Indian War** – China's military offensive following years of Hindi–Chini Bhai Bhai damaged mutual trust and created lasting tensions.
- **Border Disputes** – Undemarcated boundaries in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh remain major sources of bilateral disagreements.
- **2020 Galwan Clash** – The violent confrontation resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and worsened bilateral relations.
- **1988 Rajiv Gandhi Visit** – His visit to China initiated a diplomatic breakthrough and encouraged separating boundary negotiations from other bilateral issues.
- **2005 Agreement** – India and China agreed to develop a long-term constructive and cooperative partnership, emphasising peaceful resolution of disputes.

What are the Major Factors Contributing to Bilateral Tensions?

- **Unresolved Boundary Disputes** – Improperly demarcated borders in Ladakh and the McMahon Line in Arunachal Pradesh complicate boundary negotiations.
    - Patrolling deviations frequently trigger military face-offs, threatening peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- **Strategic Rivalry** – China's growing military capabilities and regional ambitions create strategic concerns for India.
    - China's perception of India's participation in the U.S.-led QUAD as an attempt to contain it deepens mutual distrust.
- **Mutual Misunderstanding** – Historical mistrust, particularly after the 1962 war, continues to influence bilateral perceptions.
    - Misinterpretation of military movements and strategic intentions increases the possibility of unintended confrontations.

Why Should India Avoid Viewing China as an Existential Threat?

- **No Inevitable Conflict** – Neither country has an interest in initiating a direct military confrontation.

- **Economic and Strategic Costs** – A war with India could undermine China's ambition of becoming the world's leading power by 2049.
- **Military Balance** – Despite China's advances in missiles, submarines and surveillance, India possesses considerable military capabilities in the Himalayan region.
- **Mutual Interests** – Both countries benefit from regional stability, economic cooperation and constructive diplomatic engagement.
- **Historical Precedents** – The 2005 agreement demonstrates that both countries can pursue cooperation despite unresolved disputes.

What are the Major Challenges to Peaceful Coexistence?

- **Military Miscalculations** – Inadvertent actions by troops and border guards could trigger escalation, as witnessed during the Galwan clash.
- **Strategic Distrust** – China's concerns over India's QUAD participation and India's security concerns complicate diplomatic engagement.
- **Unresolved Boundaries** – Territorial disagreements continue to obstruct normalisation of bilateral relations.
- **Asymmetric Capabilities** – China's expanding military strength and regional influence create strategic uncertainties for India.
- **Diplomatic Stalemate** – Repeated confidence-building initiatives have not produced a lasting resolution to border tensions.

What Measures Can Strengthen India-China Relations?

- **Revive High-Level Diplomacy** – Political leadership should maintain regular dialogue, following the diplomatic breakthrough achieved during Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit.
- **Separate Border Disputes** – Boundary negotiations should continue independently without obstructing other areas of bilateral cooperation.
- **Strengthen Confidence-Building Measures** – Military communication mechanisms and border protocols should prevent accidental confrontations.
- **Improve Strategic Understanding** – India must accurately assess China's intentions, capabilities and domestic strategic considerations.
- **Promote Constructive Engagement** – Both countries should pursue a relationship based on strategic stability rather than zero-sum competition.
- **Respect Border Communities** – Any eventual boundary settlement must protect the legitimate interests of settled populations in border regions.

What lies ahead?

- India and China need not remain permanent adversaries despite historical mistrust and unresolved territorial disputes.
- Peaceful coexistence requires strategic restraint, mutual understanding, sustained diplomacy and effective border management.
- India should maintain military preparedness while pursuing a constructive and stable relationship with China.

Reference

[The Hindu|Can India and China coexist peacefully?]