Tackling a Rising China

What is the issue?

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- The recent Quadrilateral alliance and the consequent talk of an ‘Asian NATO’ have brought the India-China rivalry back to the limelight.
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- Balancing a rising China requires a great deal of India’s strategic attention in the years ahead.
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How prospective is China?

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- China is becoming a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence.
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- Globally, there is certainly a power vacuum, left by Donald Trump’s ‘reluctant superpower.
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- If China rightly utilises this power vacuum, its superpower ambitions are bound to have a system-shaping impact on the Asian region.
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- There could possibly be China-led alliances, Chinese client states and the establishment of Chinese spheres of influence.
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- China would not fail to ensure that its access to overseas resources/markets and the oceanic trade routes are unhindered.
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What irritants does India face?

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- China is thus involved in a grand strategy to anchor its supremacy and eliminate any U.S.-led coalition in the Asian region.
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- There are several sources of fear for India which include:
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i. denying India entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group
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ii. repeatedly blocking UN sanctions against Pakistan-based terrorists
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iii. ever-strengthening China-Pakistan military alliance
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iv. ignoring India’s sensitivity over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
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v. revisionist claims in the land and oceanic space. E.g. revisionist statements on Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh
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vi. increasing naval presence, including dispatching its nuclear submarines on patrol, in the Indian Ocean.
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vii. China, stepping up its political and economic footprint in the region
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Is India's current strategy effective?

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- **Power** - Currently, India is seemingly increasing its alliance with the US to deal with Beijing; most recently the Quad.
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- Amidst Chinese grand strategy, India's US-centric strategy could turn to be a spoiler. This is because:
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i. the US is a quickly-receding extra-regional power
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ii. its long-term commitment to the Asian region is increasingly indeterminate and unsure
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iii. the reliability of other alliance states like Japan to take forward firmly a

strategic partnership with the U.S is highly uncertain
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iv. US-China relations are far more complex than the general assumptions
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- **Economy** - The second broad policy direction seems to be to compete with China for regional influence in South Asia.
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- Clearly, trying to match the powerful yuan, backed by vigorous political support from Beijing, with our humble rupee is a losing battle.
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- It is suggested that India should use its $70 billion-strong trading relationship with China as a bargaining chip to check Chinese behaviour.
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- But doing so would hurt both sides, especially India, given the fact that India-China bilateral trade is heavily skewed in favour of China.
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- Boycotting Chinese goods would also mean Indian consumers paying more to get them from elsewhere.
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- **Military** - Military preparedness to offset any potential Chinese aggression is something that India can and should invest in.
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- However, military preparedness, in which India is inevitably lagging behind China, alone cannot address the concerns.
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What then should India's strategy be?

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- One way is viewing China as part of the solution to the region’s challenges.
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- A mutual ‘complex interdependence’ in economic, security and other domains should be strengthened by initiating structured consultations.
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- E.g. the current India-China joint anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden.
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- India should certainly focus on the Indo-Pacific and consider cooperating with China, even while being part of the Quad.
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- India also needs to strategise a plan to nudge China towards playing a role so as to ensure a stable regional security order.
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- This is particularly in the context of its role in Pakistan, where China has to balance trade and terrorism.
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- Despite this strategy of mutual trust, the role of military strength in guaranteeing national security cannot be underestimated.
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- Thus, India would be better served by adopting a more nuanced strategy of 'smart-balancing' China.
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Source: The Hindu

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