



---

## China's Role in Multilateral Organizations: A Challenge for India's Global Aspirations

**Jyoti Rabi Das**

Dept. of Defence Studies, South Malda College, Malda, West Bengal

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

---

**Keywords:**

*China, India, Multilateral organizations, United Nations, World Health Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Global leadership, International relations.*

---

**DOI:**

**10.5281/zenodo.14105076**

---

### ABSTRACT

This article investigates China's expanding influence in prominent multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO), and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), emphasizing its implications for India's global aspirations. As China adopts assertive strategies to enhance its standing within these institutions, it poses significant challenges to India's quest for increased leadership on the world stage. The article delves into how China's engagement with these organizations reflects its broader geopolitical ambitions and its attempts to reshape international norms to align with its interests. In response to these challenges, India has pursued a dual approach: advocating for reforms in international organizations to increase representation and equity, while simultaneously building strategic partnerships with like-minded nations. By emphasizing the need for a reformed multilateral system that accommodates diverse voices, India seeks to enhance its influence and counterbalance China's growing power. The article also highlights India's efforts to strengthen its soft power through diplomatic initiatives, economic collaboration, and cultural exchanges. Through a detailed analysis of China's role in these multilateral frameworks, the article sheds light on the evolving geopolitical landscape and the complexities of India-China relations. It argues that India's response to China's assertiveness in global

---

governance will be crucial for determining its future role as a key player in international affairs. Ultimately, this article aims to provide valuable insights into the strategic dynamics between these two major Asian powers and the broader implications for global governance.

---

## 1. Introduction

Multilateral organizations play a pivotal role in shaping global governance, facilitating cooperation among nations, and addressing transnational challenges that no single country can tackle alone. These institutions provide a platform for dialogue, negotiation, and collective action on critical issues such as security, health, trade, and climate change. As the international order evolves, the influence of major powers within these organizations has become increasingly significant. In this context, the dynamics between China and India within key multilateral frameworks warrant close examination. China's ascent as a global power has been accompanied by a strategic expansion of its influence within multilateral organizations. The country has utilized its position in institutions like the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to project its interests and shape global norms. For instance, in the UN, China has sought to enhance its role as a permanent member of the Security Council, advocating for policies that reflect its geopolitical priorities, particularly concerning regional security and development. Similarly, in the WHO, China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored its capability to influence global health agendas, demonstrating a willingness to leverage its economic and diplomatic resources to strengthen its position in international institutions. China's strategic objectives are not merely about asserting dominance; they are intricately linked to its broader vision of a multipolar world where it plays a central role in redefining international governance. Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China aims to build a network of economic partnerships that enhance its influence in various regions while promoting a China-centric model of development. The SCO serves as another critical platform for China, where it seeks to foster regional security cooperation while countering Western influence in Central Asia. These actions illustrate a deliberate strategy to reshape the global order in ways that align with its national interests. Against this backdrop, India's aspirations for greater global leadership are becoming increasingly important. As one of the world's largest democracies and a rapidly growing economy, India seeks to enhance its influence in international affairs. India envisions a multipolar world where power is distributed among several states rather than dominated by a single power. This vision necessitates active

participation in multilateral organizations to advocate for reforms that enhance representation and address the concerns of developing nations. However, India's ability to realize these aspirations is challenged by China's assertive presence and strategic maneuvering within these organizations. Addressing China's role in multilateral organizations is thus crucial for India as it navigates the complexities of contemporary global governance. This involves not only understanding China's strategies but also identifying opportunities for collaboration and collective action with other nations. India's approach should encompass advocating for a reformed multilateral system that allows for diverse voices while strengthening its strategic partnerships. By doing so, India can better position itself to respond to the challenges posed by China and enhance its global standing.

## **2. China's Growing Influence in Multilateral Organizations**

China's growing influence within multilateral organizations is evident across various platforms, including the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These institutions serve as critical arenas where China projects its power, shapes global governance norms, and enhances its diplomatic clout.

### **United Nations (UN)**

Within the UN, China holds a permanent seat on the Security Council, giving it significant power over international peace and security decisions. As a permanent member, China has wielded its veto power strategically, often protecting its interests and those of its allies. For example, China has used its veto to block resolutions that it perceives as threatening its territorial claims, such as those concerning the South China Sea. Additionally, China has increasingly engaged in UN-led peacekeeping operations, becoming one of the largest contributors of troops among the five permanent members. This involvement not only enhances China's international profile but also allows it to shape the narrative around peace and security in line with its national interests. Moreover, China has actively participated in various UN-led initiatives and funding mechanisms. It has contributed significantly to the UN budget and various specialized agencies, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). By positioning itself as a key player in global development, China aims to project a soft power image and strengthen its influence over international policy decisions. Initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development align with China's Belt and Road Initiative, showcasing its commitment to global development while promoting its model of governance.

## **World Health Organization (WHO)**

China's influence in the WHO has been particularly pronounced during global health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As the first country affected by the outbreak, China's initial response and the information it shared significantly shaped the global narrative. China's government has been criticized for its handling of the early stages of the pandemic; however, it has also been commended for its rapid response in containing the virus domestically. This response allowed China to present itself as a leader in global health governance, providing medical supplies and support to other countries, thereby enhancing its soft power and influence over international health policies. China's role in shaping health policies and international responses through the WHO has become increasingly critical. It has advocated for a greater focus on non-traditional security threats, such as pandemics, emphasizing the need for collective action and international cooperation. This approach aligns with its broader geopolitical goals, as it seeks to position itself as a responsible global leader in health security. Furthermore, China's contributions to the WHO's funding mechanisms reflect its intention to play a prominent role in determining the direction of global health initiatives.

## **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

The SCO serves as another platform where China has expanded its influence, focusing on regional security and political collaboration. Established in 2001, the SCO includes several Central Asian countries and aims to promote peace, security, and economic cooperation in the region. China has taken a leadership role within the SCO, advocating for initiatives that address common security challenges such as terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Through joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing agreements, China aims to strengthen its security ties with member states, thereby solidifying its influence in Central Asia. China's leadership in driving initiatives within the SCO framework extends to economic cooperation as well. The Belt and Road Initiative has been integral to the SCO's agenda, facilitating infrastructure development and trade among member states. By promoting economic interdependence, China seeks to enhance its political leverage in the region while providing an alternative to Western-dominated economic models. In summary, China's growing influence in multilateral organizations like the UN, WHO, and SCO underscores its strategic objectives in reshaping global governance. By leveraging these platforms, China aims to project its power, promote its interests, and foster a multipolar world order where it plays a central role.

### **3. Impact on India's Global Aspirations**

China's increasing dominance in multilateral organizations significantly impacts India's position in global governance, presenting both challenges and strategic dilemmas. As China expands its influence across various platforms, India finds itself navigating a complex geopolitical landscape that threatens its aspirations for enhanced global leadership.

#### **Geopolitical Competition and Regional Security Dynamics**

One of the most pressing challenges India faces is the geopolitical competition with China, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. China's assertiveness in territorial disputes, such as those in the South China Sea, and its strategic partnerships with neighboring countries have shifted the regional balance of power. This assertiveness not only poses a direct challenge to India's regional influence but also complicates India's security dynamics with countries like Pakistan and in the broader South Asian context. China's growing military presence and strategic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), serve to encircle India, leading to concerns about encroachments on its traditional sphere of influence. This competition necessitates that India bolster its military capabilities and forge stronger alliances, particularly with the United States, Japan, and Australia, in a bid to counterbalance China's influence.

#### **Influence on Economic Partnerships and Trade Relations**

China's dominance in multilateral trade organizations and its economic clout pose further challenges for India's economic partnerships. As China strengthens its economic relationships through initiatives like the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) and the BRI, India risks being sidelined in regional trade dynamics. This exclusion could lead to diminished influence over trade rules and standards that govern the Asia-Pacific region, which are increasingly shaped by China's economic interests. India's attempts to promote its own trade initiatives, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, are critical but face significant hurdles due to China's established economic ties with neighboring countries.

#### **Leadership Perception and Capability**

The perception of India's leadership capabilities in the international arena is also impacted by China's assertiveness. As global attention increasingly shifts toward China's rapid development and its proactive diplomatic engagements, India struggles to present itself as an effective leader in addressing global challenges. Issues such as climate change, global health crises, and security threats demand strong leadership, yet India's response is often overshadowed by China's proactive stance. Moreover, India's slower economic growth compared to China can lead to perceptions of a waning influence, affecting its ability to rally support for initiatives that reflect its priorities on the global stage. In summary, China's dominance in multilateral organizations directly impacts India's aspirations for global leadership. The geopolitical competition, influence on economic partnerships, and challenges to leadership perception collectively pose significant hurdles for India. As the international landscape continues to evolve, India must navigate these complexities strategically to enhance its position in global governance.

#### **4. India's Navigational Strategies**

In the face of China's growing influence in multilateral organizations, India has developed a set of navigational strategies to assert its own position and enhance its global aspirations. These strategies focus on advocating for reforms in international institutions, building strategic partnerships, and enhancing India's soft power and diplomatic outreach.

##### **Advocating for Reforms**

India has consistently called for reforms in the United Nations and other multilateral organizations to better reflect the contemporary geopolitical landscape. India's advocacy for a more representative and equitable decision-making process is rooted in its desire to amplify the voices of developing nations, particularly from the Global South. The push for an expansion of the UN Security Council to include permanent members from Asia, including India itself, is a key aspect of this advocacy. India argues that such reforms are essential for maintaining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN in addressing global challenges. Proposals to enhance the representation of developing countries in various international bodies also reflect India's commitment to fostering a more inclusive global governance structure, enabling more equitable participation in international decision-making processes.

##### **Building Strategic Partnerships**

Recognizing the limitations of its own capabilities, India has sought to strengthen ties with countries that share similar values and goals. By forging strategic partnerships with like-minded nations, India aims to enhance its influence in international affairs. For instance, India's engagement with the United States, Japan, and Australia through the Quad initiative demonstrates a commitment to collective security and a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This trilateral cooperation enhances India's security posture against China's assertiveness and strengthens its diplomatic leverage in multilateral forums. Furthermore, India has been proactive in engaging with regional organizations such as ASEAN, SAARC, and BIMSTEC, seeking to build coalitions that reflect its interests and amplify its voice on global platforms.

### **Enhancing Soft Power and Diplomacy**

India's approach also emphasizes enhancing its soft power through cultural, historical, and economic ties. By leveraging its rich cultural heritage and democratic values, India seeks to build a positive image globally. Initiatives like the International Day of Yoga and cultural diplomacy programs aim to strengthen people-to-people connections and enhance India's influence. Additionally, India's focus on sustainable development and climate change initiatives positions it as a responsible global actor committed to addressing pressing global challenges. By promoting initiatives aligned with global priorities, such as renewable energy and public health, India not only strengthens its diplomatic ties but also asserts its role as a key player in international governance. India's navigational strategies in response to China's growing influence involve a multi-faceted approach that combines advocacy for reforms, strategic partnerships, and the enhancement of soft power. These efforts are crucial for India to assert its position in global governance and navigate the complexities of contemporary international relations.

### **5. Opportunities for Collaboration**

Despite the competitive dynamics between India and China, there are significant opportunities for collaboration in multilateral organizations. By identifying common interests and addressing global challenges together, both nations can foster a more stable and cooperative relationship. Areas such as climate change, health security, and economic recovery present unique opportunities for India and China to work collaboratively, enhancing their positions in global governance.



## **Identifying Areas for Potential Cooperation**

India and China both share a vested interest in addressing global challenges that affect their populations and economies. For instance, climate change poses a significant threat to both countries, necessitating collaborative efforts to mitigate its impacts. Joint initiatives in renewable energy, sustainable development, and technology sharing can pave the way for cooperation. Both nations can leverage their experiences in renewable energy investments, with India leading in solar energy and China excelling in manufacturing and technology. Collaborative projects under frameworks like the Paris Agreement can help them not only meet their own commitments but also provide a model for other developing countries.

## **Addressing Global Challenges Collaboratively**

Health security is another critical area where India and China can collaborate effectively. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for a robust global health response, and both countries can play pivotal roles in strengthening health security frameworks. By sharing research, resources, and best practices, India and China can enhance their capacities to address future health crises. Initiatives like the World Health Organization's Global Vaccine Access program could be platforms for both countries to contribute to global health while showcasing their commitment to international cooperation. Additionally, joint efforts in addressing food security, particularly in the context of global supply chains, can further strengthen their collaborative framework.

## **The Role of Dialogue in Managing Competition**

Dialogue remains crucial in managing the inherent competition between India and China while fostering mutual benefits. Constructive communication through diplomatic channels can facilitate trust-building measures and reduce tensions. Initiatives such as the China-India Strategic Economic Dialogue provide platforms for both nations to discuss economic cooperation and address grievances. By focusing on dialogue, both countries can identify win-win situations where mutual interests align, reducing the likelihood of conflict over competitive aspirations. In summary, while India and China face challenges stemming from their competitive dynamics, significant opportunities for collaboration exist in multilateral organizations. By identifying areas for joint efforts in addressing global challenges such as



climate change, health security, and economic recovery, both nations can not only enhance their global standing but also contribute to a more stable and cooperative international environment.

## 6. Conclusion

China's expanding role in multilateral organizations has significant implications for India's aspirations on the global stage. As China asserts its influence in institutions like the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it reshapes the dynamics of global governance. This growing dominance poses challenges for India, compelling it to navigate a complex geopolitical landscape marked by competition and collaboration.

In response to these challenges, India's strategic adaptability in foreign policy is of utmost importance. By advocating for reforms in international institutions, building strategic partnerships, and enhancing its soft power, India seeks to assert its voice and influence in global governance. The call for a more equitable decision-making process in organizations such as the UN reflects India's commitment to representing the interests of developing nations while challenging the status quo shaped by China. Furthermore, by identifying opportunities for collaboration on pressing global issues like climate change and health security, India can transform competitive tensions into constructive dialogue, fostering a more cooperative international environment.

Looking ahead, the future of global governance will be shaped by the interplay of competition and collaboration among major powers. India has the potential to play a pivotal role in this evolving landscape, particularly as it seeks to enhance its standing in multilateral organizations and assert its influence on global issues. By remaining adaptable and proactive, India can not only address the challenges posed by China's assertiveness but also shape the norms and frameworks of global governance. Ultimately, India's ability to navigate these complexities will determine its success in asserting its leadership and contributing to a more balanced and equitable international order.

In summary, while the rise of China in multilateral organizations presents significant challenges for India, it also opens avenues for cooperation and strategic engagement. Through adaptive foreign policy and a commitment to dialogue, India can position itself as a key player in shaping the future of global governance amidst rising competition.

## References:

1. Buzan, B., & Waver, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Zhang, Y. (2020). China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Impact on International Trade. *Journal of International Trade and Economic Development*, 29(1), 1-19.
3. Kirshner, J. (2018). The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable? *International Security*, 43(4), 122-130.
4. Kang, C. (2020). China's Role in United Nations Peacekeeping: An Analysis of China's Growing Involvement. *Asian Security*, 16(3), 239-258.
5. Zhou, M. (2019). The Rise of China and Its Impact on the United Nations: A New Vision for Global Governance. *Global Policy*, 10(3), 397-405.
6. Shen, S. (2020). Global Health Governance: China's Role in the WHO and Its Implications for International Relations. *International Affairs*, 96(6), 1537-1553.
7. Cai, P. (2021). The Belt and Road Initiative: A New Model for Global Governance? *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 7(1), 1-23.
8. Choudhury, R. (2020). China's Influence in South Asia: Implications for India's Foreign Policy. *India Review*, 19(3), 60-78.
9. Kumar, A. (2021). The Economic Implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative for India. *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 16(1), 42-62.
10. Ghosh, P. (2020). India's Global Aspirations and the China Challenge: Navigating a Complex Landscape. *Strategic Analysis*, 44(3), 245-258.
11. Basu, R. (2020). India and UN Reforms: A Historical Perspective. *Global Governance*, 26(2), 161-178.
12. Khalid, M. (2021). The Quad and India's Strategic Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. *Asian Security*, 17(1), 23-41.
13. Ghosh, A. (2021). India's Soft Power Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of International Relations*, 15(3), 205-222.
14. Khan, S. (2021). Climate Change Cooperation Between India and China: Opportunities and Challenges. *Environmental Politics*, 30(2), 345-363.
15. Basu, R. (2020). Global Health Security: A Case for India-China Cooperation. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, 32(4), 227-234.
16. Zhao, M. (2020). Dialogue and Cooperation: The Future of India-China Relations. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 79(1), 145-162.

