

**Economic, technological dimensions**

Alongside shifts in security and diplomacy, economics and technology have come to underpin India's geopolitical clout. Decades of steady economic growth have turned India into one of the world's largest emerging economies. By rising to global prominence in information technology, outsourcing, and digital innovation, India

has secured a key position in the global value chain. Massive investments in renewable energy, space exploration, and domestic defense industries show New Delhi's drive to cut down dependence and step up deterrence capacity. This economic-technological dimension not only backs up India's nuanced foreign policy but also serves as a magnet for international partners and a lever of influence in

great-power competition. India's geopolitical transformation can best be seen as a rational response, grounded in realism, to shifting global power balances. By moving away from idealistic non-alignment and heading toward multi-lateral pragmatism, India is seeking to shore up its national security and strength amid rising threats from China and Pakistan, as well as great-power

rivalries. Drawing closer to the United States while keeping alive traditional ties with Russia and staying engaged in multilateral institutions reflects a classic balancing act — essential for survival in a turbulent environment. Today, India's geopolitical autonomy lies not in detachment from global blocs but in the ability to make the most of international organizations and economic

partnerships. Its membership in BRICS, the SCO, and the QUAD shows how New Delhi builds up its status through a dense web of institutional and economic collaborations. From a classical geopolitical standpoint, India's position on the southern rim of Eurasia — the "Rimland" — gives it leverage over both continental and maritime dynamics, making it a key player in the global balance

of power in the 21st century. Ultimately, India's paradigm shift mirrors an evolution in its identity: from the leader of the Third World during the Cold War to a multidimensional emerging power that redefines its independence through flexibility and layered engagement in world affairs.

*The article first appeared in Persian on the Alef news website.*

# Is India-China détente real?



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**OPINION**

Just recently, India's private airline Indigo flew one of its A320 planes from Kolkata to Guangzhou. It was the first direct flight from India to China in five years, following its halt during the Covid-19 pandemic and the souring of relations between the two neighbours in 2020 amid the border standoff that extended the freeze. In November, more flights, including Chinese carriers, will take to the sky, connecting New Delhi with Chinese cities. The resumption of direct air services is part of the increasing number of confidence-building measures undertaken by both countries to move past a history of distrust and adversarial relations. A détente is seemingly underway. However, on closer examination, the embrace appears more cautious and fragile. Since the October 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a bilateral meeting, both countries have made significant progress in stabilising

their border. Although criticised by the Indian opposition political parties, who term it an ad hoc move that has cemented Chinese control over vast expanses of land formerly under Indian control, a process to start negotiations on the contentious boundary issue has been set in motion. The actual process may not yield much, but it gives New Delhi more time to develop its border infrastructure to match that of China's.

In recent months, both sides have unveiled more confidence-building measures. In June 2025, China acceded to India's request to resume the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage, in which Indian Hindu pilgrims travel to the holy mountain and lake in Tibet. In August, Beijing also lifted the embargo on the supply of specialty fertilisers, rare earths, and tunnel boring machines to India. Reciprocating the gestures, India lifted its five-year-long restrictive visa process for Chinese tourists in July 2025.

If frequent high-level visits between countries are pointers towards attempts to mend frayed ties, both India and China have more than a handful of them. In June and July, India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S.



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Jaishankar travelled to Beijing to meet Wang Yi, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs. In August, Wang travelled to New Delhi to hold the 24th round of the Special Representative talks

with Doval on the Indo-China boundary. Later that month, Prime Minister Modi travelled to Tianjin to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, where he met President Xi on the sidelines. Both leaders welcomed "the positive momentum and steady progress in bilateral relations," India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release.

This reiteration of the positive trajectory in relations by both sides, replacing the frequent acrimonious barbs of the past four years, seems to be the new normal. And yet, the spectre of normalisation remains mostly aspirational, marked by irreconcilable differences, even more apparent in the broader context in which such normalisation is being attempted.

The present thaw between India and China is happening at a time of high tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on both countries. China sees the imposition of 50% tariffs on Indian exports to the United States as an opportunity to pull India out of the American sphere of influence. However, for New Delhi, whose great power ambition is inherently linked to forging closer strategic ties with the United States, it could mostly be a question of managing its relations with China without sacrificing its core interests. Not surprisingly, Modi's China visit in August was preceded by a two-day official tour to Tokyo. He returned home without attending the Victory Day Parade in Beijing,



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which celebrated China's victory over Japan at the end of the Second World War.

In July, senior Indian military officials accused China of logistically assisting Pakistan during the brief India-Pakistan conflict of May 2025. China's attempts to develop trilateral arrangements with Pakistan and Bangladesh on the one hand, and Pakistan and Afghanistan on the other, continue to heighten New Delhi's longstanding concerns of being encircled by a Chinese "string of pearls". For China, India's evasive commitment to a "One China policy" and strengthening ties with Taiwan remain irritants. The issue of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation and advice by an Indian Cabinet Minister for the matter to be treated internally by Tibetans has drawn Chinese ire, with China going on to describe it as a "thorn" in bilateral relations. And on trade, the Indian media is currently abuzz with talk of new curbs on specialty fertilisers from China.

As each side attempts to normalise relations and portray a détente as a strategic necessity, neither country is shying away from issues that divide them or invoke leverage points. This makes the status quo somewhat unreal and extremely unstable. The possibility of armed conflict between the two is remote. But deep distrust and competition will remain the defining features of their relations.

*The article first appeared on the Lowy Institute.*



India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar (2nd-L) meets with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi (3rd-R), in New Delhi, India, on August 25, 2025.  
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