



T.C.

**ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**MIDDLE POWER HEDGING IN VIEW OF REGIONAL RIVALRIES:
THE CASE OF BANGLADESH VIS-À-VIS INDIA AND CHINA**

PHD THESIS

EHTESHAMUL HAQUE

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ANKARA, 2024

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Thesis Advisor

Assist. Prof. Dr. Christian Lekon

ANKARA, 2024

APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis study titled “MIDDLE POWER HEDGING IN VIEW OF REGIONAL RIVALRIES: THE CASE OF BANGLADESH VIS-À-VIS INDIA AND CHINA” and prepared by EHTESHAMUL HAQUE has been accepted by the following jury unanimously as a PhD thesis in Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of International Relations.

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Director of the Institute of Social Sciences

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammed Enes KAL

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, that I comply with patents and copyrights at all stages from the planning to writing of the thesis, that I have obtained all the information in this thesis within academic and ethical rules, and that I have cited all the information and comments used in this thesis.

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ÖZET

Bölgesel Rekabetler Açısından Orta Güçlerin Hedging Stratejileri: Hindistan ve Çin Karşısında Bangladeş Örneği

Bu tez, Hindistan ve Çin'in Bangladeş'e askeri ve altyapı projeleri destekleri bağlamında, Bangladeş'in 2009'dan bu yana Hindistan-Çin bölgesel rekabeti karşısında Orta Güç olarak hedging stratejisini aydınlatmaktadır. Bu rekabet, Saldırgan Realizm, Neoklasik Realizm, Liberalizm ve inşacılık gibi temel Uluslararası İlişkiler teorilerinden yararlanılarak analiz edilecektir. Dünyanın diğer bölgelerinde olduğu gibi Çin, Güney Asya'da da nüfuz alanını kullanmakta ve özellikle de Bangladeş'e odaklanmaktadır. Bu etki, özellikle Kuşak ve Yol İnisiyatifi (BRI) gibi girişimler ve Çin'in Bangladeş'teki altyapı projelerini uygulaması yoluyla Çin'in Hindistan'a rakip olarak artan önemi nedeniyle son zamanlarda daha belirgin hale gelmiştir. Ancak Hindistan, bölgesel hegemon olma iddiasıyla Çin'le, özellikle de Hindistan'ın her zaman nüfuz alanı altında gördüğü Bangladeş'te karşı karşıya gelmektedir. *Bu çalışmanın ana argümanı, Bangladeş'in Hindistan-Çin bölgesel rekabeti karşısında orta ölçekli bir güç olarak hedging stratejisinin iki düzeyde incelenerek açıklanabileceğidir: Birincisi, uluslararası sistem düzeyinde ve bölgesel Güney Asya alt sistemi düzeyinde, Hindistan-Çin rekabeti Bangladeş için hem zorluklar hem de fırsatlar yaratmaktadır. İkincisi, Bangladeş'in yerel düzeyinde ve özellikle kimlik politikalarının ve kolektif hafızanın etkisi altında, bu sistemik faktörlerin potansiyel faydaları ve maliyetleri tartılarak hedging stratejisini benimsenmektedir. Bu açıklama dört temel uluslararası ilişkiler paradigmasından yararlanan eklektik bir teorik çerçeveye yerleştirilmiştir. Bu açıklamanın sistemik bileşeni Mearsheimer'ın Saldırgan Realizmi ile uyumludur. Ancak Hindistan ve Çin'in Bangladeş konusundaki rekabeti, Neoklasik Realizmin açıkladığı gibi Hindistan, Çin ve Bangladeş'in iç faktörlerine de bağlıdır. İlaveten, Hindistan ile Çin ve sırasıyla Hindistan/Çin ve Bangladeş arasındaki dağınık çatışma ve çekişmelere ve demokratik olmayan yönetim konusundaki anlaşmazlıklara rağmen, Liberalizmin ekonomik faktörler gibi 'düşük politika' alanlarına yaptığı vurgu da konunun ana hatlarını tamamlamaktadır. Ayrıca tez, İnşacılıkla uyumlu olarak, tarihsel ve felsefi köklerin ve liderlerin kişisel ideolojik ve politik yönelimlerinin elitlerin algularını şekillendirdiğini, dolayısıyla Hindistan ve Çin'in Bangladeş'e yönelik dış politikalarını ve Bangladeş'in Hindistan-Çin bölgesel rekabetine karşı politika tepkisini tanımladığını ileri sürmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hindistan, Çin, Bangladeş, Dış Politika, İç Politika, Bölgesel Rekabet, Temel Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri, Hedging Strateji, Orta Güçler

ABSTRACT

Middle Power Hedging in View of Regional Rivalries: The Case of Bangladesh Vis-À-Vis India and China

EHTESHAMUL HAQUE

This thesis illuminates Bangladesh's hedging as a Middle Power vis-à-vis Indian-Chinese regional rivalry since 2009, as expressed through India's and China's military and infrastructural supplies to Bangladesh. This rivalry will be analyzed by drawing upon some broader International Relations theories: Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. Like in other regions of the world, China is exerting its sphere of influence in South Asia, with a particular focus on Bangladesh. This influence has become more pronounced recently due to China's growing prominence as a competitor to India, primarily through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and through China's implementation of infrastructure projects in Bangladesh. However, as a would-be regional hegemon, India is coming face to face with China, specifically in Bangladesh, which India always considers under its sphere of influence. *The main argument of this study is that Bangladesh's hedging as a middle power vis-à-vis Indian-Chinese regional rivalry can be explained by examining two levels: First, on the level of the international system and of its regional South Asian sub-system, Indian-Chinese rivalry creates both challenges and opportunities for Bangladesh. Second, on the Bangladeshi domestic level and especially under the influence of identity politics and collective memories, the potential benefits and costs of these systemic factors are weighed, leading to the adoption of hedging policies. This explanation is embedded into an eclectic theoretical framework that draws upon four major IR paradigms. The systemic component of this explanation is compatible with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism. But Indian and Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh is also dependent on India, China, and Bangladesh's domestic factors, which Neoclassical Realism explains. Furthermore, despite scattered conflict and contention between India and China and, respectively, India/China and Bangladesh, and disputes over undemocratic rule, Liberalism's emphasis upon 'low politics' like economic factors can also contribute to the topic. Moreover, in line with Constructivism, the thesis argues that historical and philosophical roots and leaders' personal ideological and political orientations shaped elites' perceptions, thus defining Indian and Chinese foreign policies towards Bangladesh and Bangladesh's policy response to the India-China regional rivalry.*

Key words: India, China, Bangladesh, Foreign Policy, Domestic Policy, Regional Rivalry, Major IR Theories, Hedging, Middle Powers

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAGC	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
ACSA	Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APC	Armored Personnel Carriers
APTA	Asia Pacific Trade Agreement
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BAL	Bangladesh Awami League
BBIN	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal
BCIM EC	Bangladesh China India Myanmar Economic Corridor
BD	Bangladesh
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BSF	Border Security Force
BTTC	Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CCCC	China Communications Construction Company
CCPIT	China Council for the Promotion of International Trade
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation

CoO	Certificate of Origin
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic corridor
CSC	China Scholarship Council
CT	Counterterrorism
CTTCU	Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit
CVE	Counter Violent Extremism
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EPB	Export Promotion Bureau
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FY	Financial Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSOMIA	General Security of Military Information Agreement
HIC	High-Income Country
ICCR	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IGCC	Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
JAFHS	Jamaa'tul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KNA	Kuki-Chin National Army
KNF	Kuki-Chin National Front
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LBA	Land Boundary Agreement
LDC	Least Developed Countries

LEP	Look East Policy
LoC	Line of Credit
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBR	Bangladesh's National Board of Revenue
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDB	New Development Bank
NEFA	North-East Frontier Agency
NEP	National Education Policy
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NRC	National Register of Citizens
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
PCJSS	Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RAW	Indian intelligence agency Research Analysis Wing
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RMG	Ready Made Garments
RoO	Rules of Origin
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAARC CCI	SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry

SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Area
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SII	Serum Institute of India
TMC	Trinamool Congress
UK	United Kingdom
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
UMIC	Upper Middle-Income Country
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
WTO	World Trade Organization

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FIRST CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Financial Crisis of 2008 is among the numerous events that have occurred globally since the conclusion of the Cold War and have significantly influenced the shift in global power dynamics. China's economic dominance is highlighted, while America's position weakens in comparison. Consequently, non-great powers of the world, in particular the states neighboring China, naturally started experiencing ambiguity or dilemmas, i.e. a indecisiveness on whether to maintain allegiance to the US-led economic system or to enhance economic and military alliances with China. States who had previously supported the economic system led by the United States found themselves in a vulnerable situation due to the superior nature of China's exceptional mixture of a socialist and a liberal economic system.

Particularly, some ASEAN nations as well as Japan, South Korea and Australia have started to prioritize the significance of sustaining military alliances with the United States while keeping economic ties with China. This simply means that they are not ready to take the risk of either military or economic disadvantages. This ambiguity prevents both the USA and China from accurately discerning which alliance these nations would ultimately align with. In international politics, this strategy is labelled as “hedging”. However, the tactics that different countries have been applying both converge and vary from each other. These variations are driven by their global status, i.e. are they small or middle powers, by economic and military requirements, by domestic politics, and by their bargaining power with the great powers. It is difficult for small countries to tackle the acridity of any imminent threat by a great power. As a result, they choose either to balanced, to bandwagon or to remain neutral.

However, many small and middle powers prefer hedging among two great powers. Taking South Asia, we can characterize Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives as small powers in both quantitative and qualitative terms if compared with other non-great powers. Strikingly, these

small powers are hedging (Lim and Mukherjee, 2019) between India and China. In fact, most of the scholarly debates focus on small and middle powers' hedging between the USA and China. However, India's military (it is fourth in global military ranking) and economic (it is fifth in global economic ranking) potential certifies the country as a great power. A doctrine that was framed during the 1980s, explicitly declaring that India would not allow any extra-regional influence in its region, is a latent buttress of India's global power status seeking.

Pakistan, another South Asian country, is categorized as a middle power which has unofficially balanced with China for a long time, thereby serving as a counterbalance to its dominant neighbor and opponent India (Lim and Mukherjee, 2019). Bangladesh, another close neighbor of India, also possess middle power status (fifth chapter), has been stuck in the rivalry between India and China. The period of Sheikh Hasina as Premier of Bangladesh (since 2009) has experienced a unique peak of this rivalry. In contrast to Pakistan, Bangladesh has the option to either balance or bandwagon with one of the two rivals. However, Bangladesh, having no imminent territorial conflict with its neighbors, is hedging between India and China. This can be compared with some Southeast Asian countries, which do have territorial disputes with China and which hedge between China and the USA. Except for the absence of the territorial issue, the roles of China and the USA in Southeast Asia can be substituted by those of India and China in South Asia. This way, Bangladesh's hedging might be explained. This thesis offers an elucidation of the aforementioned pattern by examining the dynamics of Bangladesh's hedging in response to the Indian-Chinese rivalry via the analytical framework of some prominent international relations theories, namely Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism.

India surrounds Bangladesh on three of its sides. Having directly intervened to get Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan, India became the closest and nearest friend of Bangladesh. However, the death of the first Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1971-1975), two consecutive terms of military dictatorship (1975-1990) and two terms of Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) rule (1991-1996 and 2001-2006) directed Bangladesh comparatively more towards China, the country which had been against Bangladesh's liberation in 1971. The

Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), which was the leading party in the independence war, also maintained a cordial relationship with China during 1996-2001 rule, which has popularized China as the all-weather friend of Bangladesh. However, China's economic success despite the 2008 global crisis, followed by the promotion of BRI and AIIB, heavily attracted the Sheikh Hasina government to China. Bangladesh needed a lot of infrastructural loans as well infrastructure construction in order to upgrade itself from a LDC to a developing country and to materialize the Vision 2021, the Forces Goal 2030, the Vision 2031 and the Vision 2041 (fifth Chapter). In 2016, Bangladesh bought two submarines from China and permitted Chinese state-owned companies to construct various infrastructures, including a submarine base, a deep seaport and the Teesta River management. All of these projects are strategically in very important locations and consequently cause concerns for India. As a result, India is exerting efforts to deter Bangladesh from leaning towards China, both directly and indirectly. India is demanding the same opportunities that Bangladesh gave to China, is offering the same opportunities that China offered Bangladesh, and is sometimes just discouraging and criticizing assistance from China - even if India itself cannot provide this assistance to Bangladesh. Even though there are various points of cooperation between India and Bangladesh, the feeling of deprivation – the 'Hindu first' policy, not implementing the Ganges River water sharing treaty, procrastinating over a similar treaty concerning Teesta River water, and the continuous border killings – outweighs the positive feelings concerning cooperation among the Bangladeshi masses. This pattern also encourages Bangladesh to lean towards China, thereby in many cases intensifying the Indian-Chinese rivalry.

This study draws four IR theories - Offensive Realism, Neo-classical Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism - to analyze Bangladesh's hedging in response to the rivalry between India and China with respect of their exerting influences over Bangladesh. Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism is mainly concerned with the global level, namely China as the rival of the USA and China as the potential regional hegemon in the whole of Asia. This study assumes that India is the potential hegemonic power in South Asia, which has been exerting its efforts to deter its rival China from exerting military and economic influences in Bangladesh. This is because of

Bangladesh's very significant geographical and geo-strategic position in this region. However, Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh is largely dependent upon domestic-level factors in Bangladesh (leading to hedging), China (economic success and the Xi factor), and India (Modi's and the BJP's Hindutva ideology, hiding the Muslim heritage in the Indian subcontinent, and focusing upon Hindu rule and anti-colonialism). These factors can rather be explained by Neoclassical Realism and Constructivism than by Mearsheimer Offensive Realism or Liberalism. This study assesses to what extent Bangladesh's hedging as a middle power vis-à-vis the Indian-Chinese rivalry can be explained by the above-mentioned four IR theories.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Middle power

According to Yalcin (2012), there are some countries that hold the status of neither great power nor small power but, rather, they stay in-between these two types of states. These are named as 'middle power.' The first who coined the term "middle power" was the mayor of Milan in the context of the European political system of the 15th century. The concept's contemporary relevance can be traced back to the immediate aftermath of World War II. It seems that Canada was the first country that tried to incorporate the concept of middle power into its international relations strategy. Yalcin uses a straightforward definition of the term: those states that are strong and powerful enough to prevail alone without the assistance of others are referred to as middle powers by him. He uses certain fundamental measures of material power, such as "population, GDP, military spending, and geographical location" to identify Turkiye as a middle power.

Yalcin (2012) further suggests that a proper understanding of the concept of middle power requires an understanding from both a 'Realist' and a 'Liberal' perspective. In Canada's self-understanding, its status as a junior member of larger alliances and as an active participant in the resolution of conflicts beyond its own area places it firmly in the middle power spectrum. The Realist paradigm holds that the ranking of states according to their influence in the global order determines the position of middle powers. The primary concept driving this method is a

ranking system between nations, based upon material factors like geographic location, fiscal might, defence capacity etc.

Moreover, Carsten Holbraad (1971: 78) argues that a middle power is "a state occupying an intermediate position in a hierarchy based on power, a country much stronger than small nations though considerably weaker than the principal members of the state system." However, Cooper (1993: 17) argues "such an approach has its problems, particularly its dependence on quantifiable measures of power." According to Yalcin (2012), that approach fails to take a state's soft power and proactive foreign policy actions into account.

Although being widely used, the concept of middle power is thus not a clearly defined one. For example, Sweijs and Mazarr (2023) subsume a large variety of states - former colonial powers, small and developed countries exerting influence out of proportion with their size, major oil producers, and large developing countries – under the heading middle power. Generally, there are two different ways to identify middle powers. The first one, identified with writers belonging to the English School, focuses upon a country's ranking according to material capabilities like military power, economic power, population size or geographical position. The difficulty with this approach is that most of the criteria, namely power, are difficult to quantify and thus to compare with each other. The second one, preferred by scholars inclined to Liberalism, looks at the behavior of states. According to this view, the foreign policy of MPs is characterized by multilateralism, dispute solution through compromise, and the image of being 'good international citizens'. Foreign policy activism on these lines allows even weak states to exert influence on the international stage (Sweijs & Mazarr, 2023; Yalçın, 2012: 199-201).

The second approach, going back to the self-image cultivated by states like Canada after World War II, has not gone unchallenged. According to Robertson (2023: 382-93), while criteria such as internationalism, multilateralism and good citizenship may have been valid within the context of 20th conditions, alleged middle powers of today largely fail to adhere to them. Other writers focusing upon the international activities rather than the material power capacities of the middle powers distinguish between two types of them: On the one hand, the Western middle

powers, upholding global norms and institutions, having a mediating role in great power rivalries, sponsoring welfare and human rights and involving themselves in the North-South dialogue, are ultimately status quo powers. On the other hand, the Southern middle powers, which are advocating reforms of the international system without, however, challenging the global liberal order. Similar with Robertson, Efstathopoulos (2023: 217-221) argues that this distinction no longer holds.

Drawing upon quantitative data, Oosterveld and Torrosian (2018) use both material factors (population, economic power, military power) and international presence (size of the diplomatic network, membership in the UN Security Council and the Human Right Council) as criteria to identify middle powers. Furthermore, they distinguish between normative middles (scoring high in terms of their contributions to UNDP and their Freedom House Index ranking) and emerging middle powers (scoring low in this respect).

Another characteristic attributed to middle powers is that, in view of great power rivalries, they prefer hedging to either balancing or bandwagoning (Sweijs & Mazarr, 2023; Yalçin, 2021: 202). Balancing occurs when a state reacts to a security threat arising from another country by strengthening its own defense capacities (internal balancing) and/or concluding alliances with other states (external balancing). The former carries the risk wrongly distributing economic resources and thus destabilizing domestic society; the latter of being abandoned by an ally or being entrapped into that ally's conflicts. In contrast, bandwagoning occurs when a state aligns with the threatening power in a subordinate position, expecting thereby to gain security and other benefits. Here, the risk is loss of autonomy (Koga, 2018, 637; Kuik, 2008, 160; Marston, 2023: 32).

1.1.2. Hedging

Hedging, fundamentally, is a strategy that involves two simultaneous actions. The approach is dual in nature as it involves the simultaneous implementation of two sets of

policies that contradict each other. These policies can be categorized as 'return-maximizing' and 'risk-contingency' alternatives. The former, comprised of 'economic-pragmatism', 'binding engagement', and 'limited-band wagoning', enables the hedger to maximize its 'economic, diplomatic, and foreign policy' gains from a great power under favorable conditions. The latter, i.e. risk-contingency, employs 'dominance-denial' and 'indirect balancing' strategies to mitigate potential losses for the hedger in case of unfavorable outcomes (Kuik, 2008).

While hedging is seen as a middle way between balancing and bandwagoning, as in the case of the Middle Power concept there is no complete agreement over the exact meaning of the term. A widely used definition is that of Kuik (2008: 163): Hedging refers to the pursuit of multiple policies options producing mutually counteracting effects. The aim is to offset risks under conditions of high uncertainty and high stakes. In essence, the definition advanced by Koga (2018: 637) – combining balancing and bandwagoning to cancel out the risks connected with both – is on similar lines. One source of disagreement among scholars of hedging is the question of whether its analysis should be restricted to the security sphere or also include actions in the economic and diplomatic sphere (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019: 494; Marston, 2023: 32-33).

Opting for the second view, Koga (2018: 640-42) distinguishes between several types of hedging, of which two are the most frequent one. The first is 'conventional hedging', which combines military balancing (alliance against the target state) with economic bandwagoning (trade and investment links with the target state); the opposite is 'economic hedging', combining economic balancing (sanctions against the target state) with military bandwagoning (alliance with the target state). As it thus means engaging with the great powers rather than minimizing interaction with them, hedging needs to be distinguished from policies like neutrality, fence-sitting or buck-passing (Marston, 2023: 33). But, just as balancing and bandwagoning, hedging is not without risks. The danger is that the other states may interpret the hedging state's actions differently from what it wants to signal (Koga, 2018: 638-639).

How do states choose between one of these three alternatives (balancing, bandwagoning, hedging)? According to Kuik (2008: 164-156) the presence of an immediate security threat by another state encourages balancing while the expectation that a threatening state can also be a source of aid points towards bandwagoning. Hedging is likely if a country faces a potential but not yet immediate threat by the target state, if there are no strong ideological differences to the target state, and if there is no all-out great power rivalry. Koga's (2018: 639) explanation focuses upon the distribution of power in the international political system. Under unipolarity, secondary powers cannot balance against the sole superpower and thus turn to either bandwagoning or hedging. Under bipolarity, secondary powers either balance against or bandwagon with one of the two superpowers. Hedging is difficult as the superpowers pressure secondary states to take sides. Secondary powers enjoy the greatest flexibility in their policy choices under multipolarity, when they can choose and shift between balancing, bandwagoning and hedging. Koga adds that periods of power shift, i.e. transitions from one type of polarity to another, are particularly tricky for secondary powers because then hybrid conditions involving two types of polarity at the same time prevail.

Some writers argue that the international level of analysis is not the only or most important one to explain a state's choice of hedging. Moving to the domestic level, Kuik's (2008: 161-163) analysis revolves around elites concerned about their own political survival rather than that of the state as such. These elites identify and prioritize opportunities and risks to their own legitimacy. The decision of whether or not to hedge will be made depending upon the bases of this legitimacy – for example, national security or economic growth – and how interaction with the target state would affect these bases. Going one step further, Marston (2023: 33-39) takes what he calls 'conventional accounts' of hedging to task. An emphasis upon system-level factors ignores that opportunities and threats are not stable, that there is an emerging US-Chinese bipolarity and that China is increasingly seen as an imminent rather than potential threat by Southeast Asian states. Under these circumstances, one would expect these states to turn to balancing or bandwagoning rather than to continue hedging. Thus, system-level factors need be interpreted as being processed through domestic-level factors before they lead

to a policy outcome - in this case the persistence of hedging despite changing international circumstances.

As Lim and Mukherjee (2019: 494) point out, the literature on hedging is heavily geared towards the cases of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, thus revolving around the potential security threat to the secondary states posed by China and their consequent hedging between Beijing and Washington. In South Asia, the main competing great powers are India and China, and neither of them is currently an actual or potential security threat for the secondary powers (which would include Bangladesh) there. Lim and Mukherjee thus propose to delink the concept of hedging from security threats. They argue that a secondary state's relationship with a great power can bring both benefits and costs in terms of security and economy to the former. The costs depend upon the behavior of the great power (for example, demands that limit the autonomy of the secondary state), the secondary state's domestic policies (for example, opposition against the link with the great power), and the actions of a rival great power (for example, further limiting the secondary state's autonomy through pressuring it to weaken the links with the other great power). It is Lim and Mukherjee's contention that hedging occurs when the secondary state experiences a simultaneous rise of both the benefits and costs of an interaction with a great power. And, as Koga (2018: 640) points out, a secondary power's concerns are usually more about a nearby regional power than a far-away global one.

Kuik (2008) examined several hedging methods (mixed strategies) employed by Asian countries as substitutes for the balancing or bandwagon strategies: First, "indirect balancing" refers to the strategy employed by a government to mitigate security concerns by either strengthening its military capabilities or forming military alliances; second, "dominance denial" refers to the act of inhibiting the rise of a potentially dominant nation in order to mitigate political risks by maintaining a "regional political balance"; third, "economic pragmatism" refers to the strategic approach taken by a middle power to maximize its advantages by engaging in direct economic collaboration with influential great powers; fourth, "binding engagement" refers to the establishment of a mutually obligating connection between a middle power and one or more great powers, resulting in a commitment that is binding for

all parties involved; fifth, “limited bandwagoning” refers to the strategic choice of selectively relying on or cooperating with great powers (Kuik, 2008).

1.1.3. Regional Rivalry and Theories of International Relations

1.1.3.1. Offensive Realism

Mearsheimer (2001) argues that great powers search for ways to get more power at the expense of others. The success or failure of any other nation, no matter how large or little, rests largely on the shoulders of the most powerful nations of the world. For instance, the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1990 had a significant impact on politics across the globe. Regional politics were similarly impacted by the two World Wars that came before the Cold War. Each of these wars was an epic rivalry between great powers, and the specter of this lingered over the entire planet.

Mearsheimer further argues that a state must possess enough military resources to wage a significant full-scale war against the most powerful country on earth in order to be considered a great power. The great power does not have to be capable of toppling the supreme state outright, but it needs to have enough fighting power to be able to turn the dispute into an attrition war that will severely erode the powerful state regardless of who wins in the end. In the atomic age, major powers need both a nuclear deterrent and strong ground forces to ensure their survival (Mearsheimer, 2001: 5).

In particular, Mearsheimer’s Offensive Realism is based upon five basic principles: first, the international system is anarchic and there is no world government to control the behavior of states; second, states that count as great power have capabilities to use force against other states; third, states cannot be certain of other states’ intentions; fourth, survival is the main goal of states, because survival can ensure all other needs; and fifth, states are rational actors (Mearsheimer, 2001: 30-31).

Major powers almost never accept the existing balance of power but, rather, are always motivated to shift it into their favor. As a rule, their goals are “revisionist” and they will resort to violence to shift the power dynamic if they believe they can afford it. Great powers will be patient enough to wait for more optimal conditions if, right now, attempting to change the “balance of power” would be too expensive and risky. But until a state succeeds in achieving its ultimate objective of hegemony, the thirst for additional power persists. The world’s major powers are always ready to strike. While a great power’s primary goal is to expand its influence, protecting its own hegemonic position is also a top priority. Therefore, a major power will work to preserve the status quo if the impending shift benefits another country, and it will endeavor to destabilize the status quo if the shift benefits itself (Mearsheimer, 2001: 2).

An important aspect of the theory of Offensive Realism is the term hegemony. According to Mearsheimer, one state that is so strong that it controls every other state in the system is called the hegemon. No other country can mount a credible military challenge to it. Simply put, a hegemon is the only great power in the system. If there are other great powers in the system, even if one state is significantly stronger than the others that state cannot be a hegemon. For instance, the United Kingdom in the middle of the nineteenth century is often considered to have exerted hegemony. However, the United Kingdom was not a hegemon due to the presence of four other great powers in Europe at the time: France, Prussia, Austria and Russia.

Mearsheimer distinguishes between two kinds of hegemony: global and regional. In practice, geographical barriers in the shape of the oceans make it difficult for any state to project its power beyond its own regional neighborhood. For this reason, a global hegemony has not been realized so far and is unlikely to arise in the near future. In contrast, a regional hegemony is achievable. Currently only the USA exerts one, in this case over the Americas or, in the terms of Mearsheimer, the Western Hemisphere. There also have been unsuccessful hegemonic bids for Europe by Germany, for Northeastern Asia by Japan, and for both regions by the Soviet Union.

Nations that attain regional hegemony often work to stop other great powers from becoming as regionally powerful as they are. To put it differently, regional hegemonies are unwilling to have any rivals. Because of this, the United States was instrumental in impeding regional dominance of aggressive powers like Japan, Wilhelmine Germany, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union. Regional hegemonies do this because they are concerned that a competitor that dominates its own region will be a great adversary that will be effectively free to stir up conflict in the regional hegemon's own backyard. As a result of this fear, they attempt to rein in would-be hegemonies in other regions. It is in the best interest of a regional hegemony if in another region at least two other great powers are immediately adjacent to one another as this diverts their focus away from that geographically distant hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001: 40-42, 140-143).

Mearsheimer does not explicitly state how a would-be regional hegemon attempts to establish domination over its regional neighborhood and how outside powers try to prevent them from doing it. But in the historical examples he discusses, there are recurring references to expansion, conquest, or territorial acquisitions by force (for example, Mearsheimer, 2001: 169-170, 174, 183, 184, 189, 242, 244). Within the context of discussing the Soviet bid for hegemony over Europe and Northeast Asia, he writes that a would-be regional hegemon is 'concerned mainly with controlling territory and dominating other states in (the region) in which is located' (Mearsheimer, 2001: 192). Giving the example of the USA's policies to prevent a hegemon to emerge in Europe and Northeast Asia, Mearsheimer argues that it first relied upon buck-passing the job to the other great powers in the region. However, once it realized that this was not sufficient, it sent armed forces across to the ocean to directly confront the would-be hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001: 252-256). At another passage, he also mentions the offshore balancer using economic and naval power to stifle a regional hegemonic bid (Mearsheimer, 2001: 176). Overall, he seems to understand both regional hegemony and offshore balancing largely in terms of military power and war but does not explicitly exclude other means, for example economic ones or soft power.

As his analysis is focused upon the great powers, Mearsheimer only gives a few hints on the behavior of secondary states within a region. Presumably, many of them simply end up being

passively occupied by the would-be hegemon or being liberated by the armies of the offshore balancer. But he also refers to regional states which retain a degree of independence. In an instance of alternative history speculation, Mearsheimer envisages a 1950s in which Nazi Germany has won World War II and established hegemony over Europe while Mexico has become powerful enough to be able to oppose US hegemony over the Western Hemisphere. In this scenario, Mexico would ally with Germany against the USA (Mearsheimer, 2001: 142-143). Going back to the real world, Mearsheimer characterizes the policies of small powers like Romania and Bulgaria during World War II as bandwagoning - first with Germany and then, when the latter was about to lose the war, with the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer, 2001: 163). In contrast, other small powers (Finland, Austria, Yugoslavia) remained neutral during the Cold War (Mearsheimer, 2001: 201, 475 n. 82). Combining these admittedly scattered references into a more systematic shape, Mearsheimer seems to argue that a middle power would tend to balance with the offshore power against the regional hegemon while a small power would either bandwagon with the would-be hegemon or be neutral. All this is however never stated explicitly; Mearsheimer's theory ultimately leaves it open how non-great powers would behave.

Indeed, Mearsheimer frankly admits that the theory of Offensive Realism also has its weak points. First, there may be cases of anomaly. He points towards the power configuration in Europe in 1905 when, in line with his theory, Germany should have been more likely to start a war than in 1914. According to Mearsheimer, such anomalies might have to be explained on the individual or domestic level of analysis rather than on the international one. For him, such anomalies are the occasional price to be paid for the overall explanatory power provided by a theory that simplifies reality. Second, there are also cases when an interpretation based upon Offensive Realism allows different possible outcomes. An example of such indeterminacy are the different degrees of intensity of security competition during different phases of the Cold War. As Offensive Realism is compatible with either a high or a low degree, it needs to be supplemented with a middle-range theory tackling this specific issue (Mearsheimer, 2001: 10-11).

1.1.3.2. Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical Realism emerged in International Relations as a result of scholars' efforts to update the field in light of the increasing need for multi-level understanding of foreign affairs. According to Neoclassical Realism, foreign policy is influenced by both exogenous and endogenous factors. States' foreign policies are seen as depending on the global power structure, with domestic variables as intervening factors that can speed up or abate foreign policy shifts (Rose, 1998, cited in Ye, 2019).

In his 1998 paper for World Politics review, where he used the phrase "Neoclassical Realism", Gideon Rose makes the following observation:

A theory of foreign policy limited to systemic factors alone is bound to be inaccurate much of the time, the neoclassical realists argue, which is why Offensive Realism is also misguided. To understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment, they say, one must analyze how systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and domestic state structure. In the neoclassical realist world leaders can be constrained by both international and domestic politics (Rose, 1998: 144-172).

In the short term, international anarchy offers governments a lot of scope in framing their security objectives while power dynamics only serve as guidelines for long-term grand strategy. Effectively gauging the strength and motives of other powers is a challenging endeavor. When leaders' calculations and views get in the way of a swift and 'objectively efficient response or policy adaptation to shifts in the external environment', it can be disastrous. Furthermore, leaders almost always have to play a two-layer game when coming up with and carrying out a grand strategy: they have to react to the outside world as well as have to draw and mobilize national society's "resources", operate through established state institutions, and retain the endorsement of major stakeholders. However, in the long-term leaders or regimes who repeatedly refuse to act on structural incentives endanger the very existence of their state (Rose, 1998).

Neoclassical Realism notes four significant drawbacks in Structural Realism (of which Offensive Realism is a set): the capacity of leaders to accurately sense systemic shocks, the absence of precision in the “international system”, the issue of “rationality”, and the challenge of organizing “domestic resources” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 2016).

The term ‘Neoclassical Realism’ refers to two distinct modes of thought (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 2016). Type one of Neoclassical Realism argue that governments get unambiguous signals from the international system but that these signals cannot be used to guide national policy until they have been filtered through the imperfect transmissions of leader views and domestic affairs (Rose, 1998, cited in Ripsman, Taliaferro & Lobell, 2016). Sometimes, either the signals are misinterpreted or internal political restrictions prohibit national leaders from acting appropriately. Therefore, one aspect of Neoclassical Realism is a theory of pathology or sub-optimality to account for what, from the perspective of Structural Realism, can only be perceived as irregular departures (Zakaria, 1992, cited in Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, 2016).

The second type of Neoclassical Realism says that states normally act the way Structural Realists would expect them to when they face explicit and immediate threats and do not have many policy options. However, such severe decisions are not frequently encountered by states. Instead of having a clear strategy determined by international conditions, governments frequently have a variety of policy options to select from in more typical situations where the international environment does not pose a clear and immediate threat (cited in Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, 2016).

1.1.3.3. Liberalism

Although the world is characterized by anarchy, there are limitations on the utilization of violence. States are not in constant conflict with each other, even when the conditions identified by Realists are prevalent. Conflicts are limited by geographical constraints, the alignment of national interests through alliances, and the equilibrium of power (Russett, 2013: 95). What is

known as Liberal Institutionalism draws upon classical thinkers such as John Locke, Hugo Grotius, and Immanuel Kant.

Kant suggested that the establishment of republican constitutions, the implementation of cosmopolitan law in commercial transactions, and the establishment of a system of international law among nations guided by domestic rule of law would create the foundation for long-lasting peace (Kant: 1970, cited in Russett, 2013: 95). Kant's framework encompasses confidence in the rational attributes of persons, trust in the attainability of progress in the social world, and the certainty that humans, notwithstanding their self-interest, possess the ability to collaborate and establish a more tranquil and concordant society. Liberal Internationalism, influenced by Kant, has applied these principles to the global arena by highlighting the possibility of resolving or reducing war and conflict by coordinated reforms in both domestic and international systems of administration (Russett, 2013: 95).

Kant acknowledged a Hobbesian depiction of struggle among multiple states but he surpassed it significantly. The pacific federation he anticipated can be more correctly described as a confederation rather than a world state. The members of the organization maintain their sovereignty and are connected solely through partially federal institutions, similar to those that are currently available in Europe, or through collective security alliances. Writers inspired by Kant perceive democratic governance, economic interdependence, and international law and institutions as mechanisms to resolve the security challenge inherent in the international system (Russett, 2013: 95). To put it more explicitly, a Kant-inspired perspective outlines three restraints on war: international institutions can constrain decision-makers by actively supporting peace; democracies will refrain from employing force against other democracies; and economically significant trade offers impulses to keep up peaceful ties (Russett, 2013: 101). The significant decrease in the prevalence of autocracies (dictatorships) worldwide, along with the even more substantial rise in the number of democracies characterized by their institutions allowing for free political competition, can be identified as the reason for the reduction in global conflict-related fatalities (Russett, 2013: 95).

1.1.3.4. Constructivism

Alexander Wendt's (1992) famous article "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics" rejects an analysis that ascribes static nature to the international system. Instead, he asserts that it is states themselves that give meaning to international anarchy. Fierke (2013: 188-189) argues that Constructivists, in a broad sense, have expressed a criticism of the fixed material assumptions of conventional International Relations theories. The concept of international relations as a social construction can be understood in a straightforward manner. Constructing something is the act of creating a subject or object that would have no existence otherwise. For example, wood is a natural material that may be transformed into various objects, such as a beam in a home, a rifle, a musical instrument, or a totem pole. Likewise, social phenomena such as states, alliances, or international institutions, which are the collective entities involved in international relations, are influenced by the fundamental aspects of human nature. However, they also acquire distinct historical, cultural, and political characteristics as the result of interactions between people within a social context.

Constructivists have emphasized various themes. First, the concept of social construction posits that variations exist across different contexts rather than a singular, objective reality. Constructivists have endeavoured to elucidate or comprehend alterations occurring on the international stage. Conventional theories of International Relations, which frequently presume that nations are similar regardless of time and location, have given priority to identifying patterns in order to create generalizations and develop theories. Second, constructivists have placed significant emphasis on the social aspects of international relations, highlighting the significance of norms, rules, and language in this context. The significance of Gorbachev's New Thinking in ending the Cold War, the growing significance of humanitarian intervention standards, and the dissemination of liberal democratic principles have prompted important inquiries regarding the exclusive focus of Realist theory on material interest and power. Third, Constructivists contend that international politics is not an objective reality but rather a realm that is created by human actions and perceptions (Onuf, 1989). Constructivists establish the concept of agency and stressed interactive processes as a counter to the excessive

focus on structure in Neorealist and Neoliberal theory. The profound transformations that occurred following the conclusion of the Cold War underscored the significance of historical circumstances and prompted inquiries regarding the shift from conflict to collaboration or from peace to warfare (Fierke, 2013: 188).

1.2. Literature Review

The Indian doctrine, which was outlined in the 1980s and states that India will not permit any extra-regional force to exert influence in the region, makes it clear why India assumes that the surrounding states are under its sphere of influence. China has therefore been a rival to India, as seen by its growing military and economic clout in South Asia in recent years. While Pakistan and Bangladesh might be classified as intermediate states or middle powers in South Asia, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives can be considered as small powers. An analysis of different states' foreign policies shows that middle powers balance with a great power. In contrast, small powers typically hedge between two great powers or bandwagon with a great power which would be responsible for the small power's security. The existing literature asserts that Bangladesh under the BAL government (since 2009) has been hedging between China and India. This is different from the behavior of other middle powers, which are hedging between the USA and China, thereby assuming that China is an imminent or potential security threat for them. Apparently, Bangladesh's hedging strategy resembles that of the small powers of South Asia, i.e. Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Nepal. On the other hand, it differs from that of a middle power, i.e. Pakistan, which unofficially balances with China against India. For Pakistan, India is an immediate military threat because of their territorial conflict. However, Bangladesh has no territorial conflict with India and thus does not face an immediate security threat. Yet, the indicators for qualifying Pakistan as well as other states as middle power can also be applied to Bangladesh. It has the characteristics – of both quantitative and qualitative kinds – of other countries that have been categorized as middle powers. Whether or not Bangladesh's hedging strategy is similar to that of others will be explored by looking at the literature discussed below.

According to Chacko's (2018) book chapter "Constructivism and Indian Foreign Policy", the BJP government aims to portray India as an aspiring leading power. This is to appeal to the neo-middle class, which is urbanized and heavily influenced by Hinduism. The Bharatiya Yog Sansthari (Indian Yoga Society), founded by the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has long promoted mass-drill yoga sessions as a nationalist therapy that denotes health in terms of the holistic integration of country and consciousness, body and society. This has greatly influenced the framing of India's China policy under the BJP government.

Jain's (2017: 119) 'China's Soft Power Policy in South Asia: Myth or Reality' argues that Chinese and Bangladeshi ties, like the ones between Pakistan and China, are founded on the shared goal of preventing India from becoming the sole regional hegemon. Jain (2017: 120) also mentions the reasons for the strained relationship between China and Bangladesh during the 1972-1975 period and for the warm relationship in later days. In addition, Hossain and Islam's (2021) "Understanding Bangladesh's Relations with India and China: Dilemmas and Responses" suggests that the rivalry between India and China rivalry bears both positive and negative implications for Bangladesh.

While focusing upon the theoretical perspectives of Chinese foreign policy, Cai (2020) suggests that both the conditioning factors (philosophical traditions, historical experience, and the communist ideology of the state) and the determining factors (national core interests originating in communism, state and personality traits, and the leadership styles of individual communist leaders) are responsible for framing Chinese foreign policy.

Ahamed and Rahman's (2020) "A Geostrategic and Geo-economic Study of China-Bangladesh Relations Regarding the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean" argues that the connection of China's southwestern region with the Bay of Bengal rivals with India's 'Look East' policy that focuses upon the Bay of Bengal region and onwards into Southeast Asia. India and China are forming economic, military, and strategic alliances with Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka and want to gain as much as possible for their respective economic and national security interests from the latter three countries.

Gallagher, Bhandary, Narassimhan, & Nguyen (2021) 'Banking on coal? Drivers of demand for Chinese overseas investments in coal in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam' argues that China's eagerness to fund and export material and services for the construction of new energy infrastructures overseas is met by the demand coming from receiver nations. Another study by Kumar (2020), 'China's Increasing Footprints in Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal: Strategic Implications for India', supports this claim. It also highlights the issue of China's familiar role as an all-weather friend of Bangladesh even though the Rohingya issue creates contention between both countries. However, China uses infrastructural projects and credits as tools for exerting its influence. In a slight contrast to the above studies, Alam (2019) in his study "China-Bangladesh Relation: a Quest for Bangladesh's Integrating into Sino-Myanmar Connectivity" stresses that Bangladesh's economic ambitions and geo-strategic priorities encourage the country to opt for connectivity with Southeast and East Asian countries without challenging India's hegemony in any way.

In addition, Kahandawaarachchi (2015) in his PhD dissertation titled 'Politics of Ports: China's investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh' argues that Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh see Chinese investment as an attractive substitute to receiving development loans from international financial institutions and Western donors, which often impose stringent conditions on their aid. The author also stresses that a robust Chinese presence would be a welcome balance against India's regional dominance in South Asia.

Hossain and Islam's (2021) 'Bangladesh's Relations with India and China' argues that Bangladesh has an excellent relationship with both China and India. However, Bangladesh's geostrategic importance makes it particularly significant for both India and China, thus becoming a stage for their rivalry.

In a similar vein, Chandrasekaran's (2020) article 'Bangladesh Playing Chinese Checkers with India' indicates a good relationship of Bangladesh with both India and China and focuses upon the post-2016 military engagement of Bangladesh with China. Bangladesh's

purchase of two submarines from China in 2016 and the awarding of a contract to build a submarine base in Pekua, north of Cox Bazar, to a Chinese state-owned firm in 2017 are the key causes for the recent rivalry between India and China in Bangladesh. However, Chowdhury (2013: 1) stresses that the strategic port of Chittagong and the thriving economy of Bangladesh attract external regional and international powers - the United States, China, and India - to exert financial and military influence there. At the same time, the lack of a consolidated democracy in Bangladesh eases the penetration by foreign countries.

Chan (2019)' 'Australia's Strategic Hedging in the Indo-Pacific: A "Third Way" beyond either China or the US' discusses Australia's hedging between USA and China. It characterizes it as 'under-hedging' as the country pursues insufficient efforts in mitigating future risk and uncertainty, overemphasizes the role of the USA as the security guarantor and does not engage actively with regional states. Focusing upon Germany's hedging, Ulatowski's (2022) 'Goeconomic Balancing, Goeconomic Bandwagoning or Goeconomic Hedging? German-Chinese Relations 2008-2020' asserts that Germany is pursuing goeconomic hedging by maximizing its collaboration with China to continue to benefit economically and politically from this partnership while remaining aligned with the 'West' without compromise. According to López i Vidal and Pelegrín's (2018) 'Hedging against China: Japanese strategy towards a rising power', Japan is implementing an indirect balancing with the USA against China in the realm of security. It also maintains precautions for the worst case as Japan does not understand China's true intentions. As a way of precaution, Japan is retaining formal chain communication with China – dominance denial or binding engagement – in regional and international forums like ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN+3, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), and ASEAN+6.

Mendiolaza's (2019) 'An examination of Foreign Policy Strategies of Middle Powers during Great Power Competition: A Case Study of Thailand's Strategic Hedging between a Dominant USA and Ascending China' suggests that Thailand is hedging through maintaining military relationships (vehemently engaging with US-led Cobra Gold military drills every year)

with the USA and retaining security relationship with China. Moreover, Castro (2003) focuses on Philippine's military balancing with the USA and its economic engagement with China.

Of the countries mentioned above, Australia and Japan have territorial conflicts with China, which makes them assume that China's rise as the next superpower is an economic and security threat for them. On the other hand, although Germany sees its EU membership as a best way of balancing and has no territorial issue with China, the country attempts to overcome the uncertainty generated by China's rise. Though Thailand has no territorial issue with China, the country like the Philippines has been balancing militarily with the USA while simultaneously pursuing economic binding and engagement with China.

Lee (2017)'s 'Hedging Strategies of the Middle Powers in East Asian Security: The Cases of South Korea and Malaysia' argues that South Korea is pursuing limited bandwagoning, thereby allowing US deployment of THAAD missiles in its territory while also maintaining economic pragmatism through emphasizing its engagement in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Malaysia, another ASEAN member, applies soft balancing through maintaining military tie with the USA as a part of its attempt to encourage other ASEAN countries' military strengthening and also keeping the USA as the counterweight to China. Furthermore, Mubah (2019) in 'Indonesia's Double Hedging Strategy toward the United States-China Competition: Shaping Regional Order in the Indo-Pacific?' explores Indonesia's double hedging policy, pursuing at the same time economic pragmatism (engaging with the Chinese-led BRI) and limited bandwagoning (maintaining security relationship with USA). Along with this, Indonesia is proposing its own concept for Indo-Pacific policies to other Western powers. Moreover, according to Zha (2022), Singapore has greatly intensified its hedging strategy since 2010. On the one hand, Singapore keeps on enhancing its strategic collaboration with the USA. On the other hand, Singapore has a strong and intimate relationship with China motivated by realistic economic considerations (Fernandez, 2018). According to Kuik (2008), Singapore has consistently followed a policy of binding-engagement and has actively tried to involve Beijing in ASEAN organisations. Thus, South Korea and Indonesia pursue the same strategy for their hedging between USA and China while Malaysia's and Singapore's military soft balancing and

economically dominance denial/binding engagement is different from the previously mentioned two countries.

Lim and Mukherjee's (2019) 'Hedging in South Asia: Balancing Economic and Security Interests amid Sino-Indian Competition' suggests that the Maldives and Sri Lanka are exploring hedging measures in response to the strategic competition between China and India, as both countries provide economic opportunities rather than posing military threats.

A master thesis by Haque (2013) titled 'India-China Rivalry and Strategic Options for Bangladesh' expects that future tensions between China and India are highly probable and suggests that malleable and lucid non-alignment is the best strategic path for Bangladesh to pursue. Besides, Siddiquee (2022) in 'Great Power Rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region and Bangladesh: Challenges and Responses' mentions Bangladesh's strategic hedging as an innovative solution that allows it to turn a geopolitical struggle to its own advantage.

However, Lintner's (2020) 'Bangladesh Wins and Loses in China-India Rivalry' focuses on both the benefits and costs of Bangladesh's hedging between India and China while Rashid's (2022) 'Balancing Quad-China: Why Bandwagoning and Hedging are Unviable for Bangladesh' argues that neither bandwagoning nor hedging, but a middle ground between the world's two leading powers based on 'Friendship to All, Malice towards None' is a tried and tested tactic for Bangladesh. Chowdhury, Inderjit, & Krishnan (2019) also suggest Bangladesh to pursue multilateralism and good relations with major powers like India, China and the USA without directing its foreign policy against any of them.

As this overview shows, there are several studies dealing with Indian-Chinese rivalries in Bangladesh as well as other South Asian states. Jain's (2017:119) and Hossain and Islam's (2021) works substantiate the rivalry between India and China over Bangladesh. Some writers focus on the reasons for this rivalry, some suggest hedging and multilateralism as the best response from Bangladesh while one author suggests neither bandwagoning nor hedging as Bangladesh's policy response. What these works more or less lack is to connect their findings

with larger IR theories and middle power concept while discussing Bangladesh's policy response to India-China rivalry.

1.3. Gap in the Literature

The previous literature review demonstrates that the competition between the Indians and the Chinese in South Asia, particularly Bangladesh, is a well-established topic. In a similar vein, Bangladesh's hedging is thoroughly explored in the existing body of scholarly work. However, bigger IR theories are only partially embedded into this literature and there is no well-established literature focusing Bangladesh's middle power status while analyzing Bangladesh's hedging strategy. This thesis will examine whether broader IR theories - Offensive Realism, Neo-classical Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism can - explain Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh and why Bangladesh, despite being a middle power, has been pursuing hedging.

1.4. Justification

Bangladesh, along with Pakistan and some Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, could be characterized as a middle sized power if the power distribution within the South Asian and Southeast Asian regional sub-system is taken into consideration. India, for sure, is a great power and potential regional hegemon if one compares its power with that of smaller states like Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka and of mini-states like Bhutan and the Maldives. However, it is striking that Bangladesh is hedging, i.e. maintaining close but asymmetrical relations with both rival powers India and China, in the same way as some other middle powers are hedging between USA and China. While the other middle powers' hedging is a response to the emerging uncertainty caused by China's economic and military rise as well as to the increasingly imminent threat from China, Bangladesh's nearest great power neighbor, India, is at most a potential threat for Bangladesh. This differs strikingly with the cases of the other middle powers in the ASEAN; and it also differs to Pakistan, which is utilizing its relationship with China for balancing against the by far strongest regional power, India. These reasons inspired me to deal Bangladesh as a single case in the thesis.

1.5. Research Questions

This thesis aims to answer the above-mentioned question - Why does Bangladesh, despite being a in middle power position like Pakistan and other countries, pursue a policy of hedging rather than balancing? - within the context of discussing the merits and deficits of major IR theories.

Main Research Question: Why does Bangladesh pursue a policy of hedging vis-a-vis India and China, rather than either bandwagoning with the former or balancing with the latter?

As the conceptual framework addressing this main question draws upon the theoretical discussions within IR, it raises the

Sub-Question 1: How far does Bangladesh's middle-power hedging in view of Indian-Chinese rivalry correspond to the assumptions of major IR theories, i.e. Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism?

Answering this sub-question also provides some insight to tackle two additional issues:

Sub-Question 2: Which means do India and China use in pursuing their rivalries over Bangladesh?

Sub-Question 3: What is the respective relevance of the domestic levels in explaining the policies of India, China, and Bangladesh towards each other?

1.6. Hypothesis

The Thesis's starting point is the following hypothesis (cf. Van Evera, 1997:7-15), based upon the assumptions of the mainstream literature on middle powers and hedging discussed above:

Independent Variable: The degree of threat (here: potential but not imminent) that a regional great power (A) competing with an extra-regional great power (B) poses to a regional middle power (C).



Intervening Variable: The degrees of both benefits and costs (here: both high) that close cooperation with either A or B brings to C.



Dependent Variable: The policy C adopts towards A and B (here: hedging) among a set of choices ranging from alliance with either A or B (i.e. bandwagoning or balancing) to no-commitment and neutrality.



Antecedent Conditions: The international distribution of power (here: multipolarity encouraging hedging while bipolarity would have discouraged it).

As for *conceptualization*, the term ‘middle power’ is defined on the lines of Oosterveld and Torossian (2018), combining quantitative criteria (population, GDP, military spending) with qualitative ones (diplomatic network, participation in UN institutions). As for *operationalization*, a ‘potential threat’ is identified through geographical proximity as well as large military power imbalances between A and C, combined with the absence of serious territorial disputes. Following Lim and Mukherjee (2019: 497-501), the ‘benefits’ for C in cooperating with either A or B are identified as security (for example, through military alliance) and economic growth (for example, through trade and investments) while the ‘costs’ for C are identified in loss of policy autonomy vis-à-vis A or B, in domestic opposition against too close cooperation with A or B, and in B’s counter-reaction against C’s cooperation with A or vice versa. Combining the insights of Kuik (2008: 163) and Koga (2018: 637), ‘hedging’ is identified by C pursuing multiple policy actions vis-à-vis A and B having mutually counteracting effects (for example, policies appearing like bandwagoning with A accompanied by policies appearing to balance with B against A). Finally, ‘multipolarity’ is identified as the existence of three or more great powers, either on the international level or on the regional level.

1.7. Methodology

The thesis attempts to explain a single case, i.e. Bangladesh's hedging vis-à-vis India and China. Case studies are often charged of providing limited opportunities for controlling the effects of variables not included in the hypothesis and of their results being difficult to generalize; this latter charge is particularly directed at single-case studies. But case studies make up for these deficiencies through providing strong empirical evidence to throw light upon a theory and to show how exactly the causal chain leading from the independent to the dependent variable is working (Van Evera, 1997: 50-55).

Based upon the hypothesis presented above, the thesis starts from the following provisional assumptions: *The South Asian regional sub-system is characterized by a rivalry between India, trying to establish regional hegemony, and China, trying to prevent India from achieving this. For Bangladesh, India constitutes a potential but not imminent security threat. Bangladesh faces both potentially high benefits (enhanced security and economic growth) and costs (limitation of political autonomy, domestic opposition, countermeasures by the competing power) from closely cooperating with either India or China. In view of this, Bangladesh adopts a policy of hedging between both rival great powers. Bangladesh's hedging is further encouraged by the multipolar character of the international system.*

These provisional assumptions have the character of a generalized specific explanation: It aims to explain a specific phenomenon (Bangladesh's hedging between India and China) by reference to a general phenomenon (rivalry between a regional great power and an extra-regional great power resulting in middle power hedging), of which it is an instance (cf. Van Evera, 1997: 15-17). The thesis aims to check this single-case explanation with respect to the question whether the assumed values of the independent variable (potential threat by a would-be regional hegemon to a middle power), of the intervening variable (both high benefits and high costs for the middle power in cooperating with either of the competing great powers), and of the antecedent condition (a multipolar international system) are present in the case at hand (cf. Van Evera, 1997: 40-43, 74-75).

As a first step, the thesis thus applies the hypothesis upon the single case in a deductive way to reach the working assumptions. Deduction involves analyzing data based on a pre-existing theoretical framework. The goal is typically to utilize the theory as an analytical instrument or perspective during data collection and analysis. The documentation of this technique may imply that the hypothesis is ‘true’ or has been ‘proved’ or ‘supported’ by the evidence. One benefit of deducing from theory in qualitative research is that the theory assists researchers into specific features and subtleties in the data that could otherwise be missed. One problem is that researchers focus solely on data features defined by the theory and ignore additional data aspects beyond the theory’s scope. There is a risk of data being over-interpreted. The theoretical framework may lead to data being manipulated to meet existing conceptions that may not align well with the data or have limited relevance to the subject or phenomenon being examined.

To minimize these shortcomings and to achieve a more satisfactory explanation for the case, an inductive approach will be used as a second step. The empirical evidence will now be used as data to, wherever necessary, supplement or revise the provisional assumption and on that basis formulate a new set of causal explanations. This combination of deductive and inductive reasoning is also known as abduction (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018).

While this single case explanation is ill-fitted to test or create theories, it may still throw some light upon the applicability of some larger theoretical paradigms in IR, namely Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. As a final step, the thesis will discuss to what extent the causal explanation of Bangladesh’s hedging is pertinent with the basic assumptions of these paradigms. The thesis thus consciously adopts an eclectic approach.

1.8. Limitations

As the thesis is a qualitative and single-case study, it would be ill-fitted to test, create or identify theories or their antecedents. Instead, it tries to explain the peculiarities of this specific case (Bangladesh’s policy of hedging in response to Indian-Chinese regional rivalry)

by using larger theories - Offensive Realism, Neo-classical Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism - as starting point and thereby discussing the applicability of those theories' in view of the identified independent variables, intervening variables, dependent variables and antecedent conditions of the hypothesis related to this case. The thesis will examine to which degree these four IR theories suit the case, thereby pointing out instances of indeterminacy and anomaly of the case in question.

1.9. Aims and Expected Outcomes of the Research

This study will assist to better understand the dynamics of Indian and Chinese policies towards Bangladesh and of the latter's policies in response. It thereby hopes to be of interest for policy-making and academic circles working on the issue. Finally, the study aims to contribute to Bangladesh's making policy responses that respond to the reality of its relations with both countries.

SECOND CHAPTER

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TO BANGLADESH

2. INTRODUCTION

“I am glad to inform the House that in the light of the existing situation and in response to repeated requests of the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of India have, after most careful consideration, decided to grant recognition to the Gana Praja Tantri Bangladesh.”

-Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, 6 Dec. 1971

On December 6, 1971, India and Bhutan were among the earliest countries to recognize Bangladesh as an independent nation. It is important to remember that India and Bangladesh share a 4,096.7-kilometer-long border, making it the fifth lengthiest frontier in the world today. As a result of their shared past and close vicinity, India and Bangladesh have deep linguistic, cultural, and economic ties. Despite these similarities, India-Bangladesh relations have been turbulent over the past fifty years. India and Bangladesh's ties cooled after the 1975 assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founding father. This was followed by a decade and a half of military administration in Bangladesh. However, Dhaka and New Delhi's relationship entered a new phase with the country's democratic revival in 1991 and the consolidation of democracy and expansion of the economy in its aftermath. There have been a lot of misunderstandings between the two countries, but thanks to various pacts and mutual recognition, bilateral ties have reached a new peak (Chaudhury, 2021). However, it is worth mentioning that the issues of border killing, restrictions on water sharing, and the high trade deficit discussed later in the current chapter have triggered some scholarly debates to shed more light on the bones of contention while explaining the ties between the countries. Accordingly, to better understand the ties, this chapter attempts to explain India's foreign policies to Bangladesh. It deals with the following issues: a) The grand strategies of India's foreign policy, b) the international and domestic factors determining India's foreign policy towards South Asia

and Southeast Asia, and c) the areas of cooperation and contention between India and Bangladesh.

2.1. The Grand Strategy of Indian Foreign Policy

This thesis mainly focuses on developments from the post-Cold War period to define India's grand strategy in foreign policy. However, to put these facts into their historical context, it also sheds light on some pre-Cold War developments that had a long-term impact upon Indian foreign policy during the Modi regime.

India's collective memory of British colonial rule and Mughal rule can be considered to have an unavoidable significance in Indian foreign policy. The last instance of pre-British imperial rule was the Mughal Empire, during which India is seen to have enjoyed a position of economic and cultural dominance. In contrast, British colonialism is identified with the subjugation of India. These two narratives of Indian history - domination and subjugation - largely shape Indian foreign policy. The fear of subjugation is active in the minds of Indian people, which has triggered Indian foreign policy towards 'Purna swaraj' or 'complete independence.' Thus, India led the non-alignment movement and undertook a process of modernization', taking a distance from the global bipolar order once it gained its independence in 1947 (Quinn, 2018). India also led the economic institution known as Group of 77 (G77) (Harshe, 1990).

However, more recently, attempts to wipe out the history and symbols of Mughal rulers have been pursued by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Shiv Sena, two Hindu religious organizations that give intellectual and religious backup to the BJP (Athreya and Haaften, 2020). This is expected to add a different dimension to India's foreign policy.

Apart from that, the national autonomy concept that extended over India was based upon the desire of getting the freedom to frame its own external policy, thereby avoiding the constraints of the Cold War. This desire was all the stronger, considering that India had been

under British colonial rule for almost 200 years (Ganguly and Pardesi, 2009). Tickner (1986) argues that keeping India outside the reach of the Cold War was possible as an anti-colonial feeling grew very high in Indian political theatre, while Rana (1976) argues that India marketed its foreign policy as ‘nonalignment’ rather than ‘neutralism.’ In particular, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the main designer of India’s foreign policy, was acutely suspicious of the USA despite being known as a Westernizer (Nehru, 1963). Resorting to the policy of ‘non-alignment’ was also convenient in view of Nehru’s unwillingness to spend much on defense expenses and his efforts to retain the spirit of newly won independence (Ganguly and Pardesi, 2009). He was worried that India’s alignment would entangle it into a titanic struggle that would draw away the attention on economic progress (Cohen, 1990), even though there existed a continuous security threat from the People's Republic of China since 1962 (Ganguly & Pardesi, 2009). In accordance with above-mentioned two narratives, it can be suggested that, in line with the domination narrative, India ventures to dominate those neighbouring countries that once were under the Indian rule. At the same time, the fear of subjugation narrative and anti-colonial sentiments drive India to lead and abide by a non-alignment policy.

Moreover, India’s foreign policy actions from its independence in 1947 to the 1962 war include: vibrant participation in UN peacekeeping operations, being one of the key role players in the nuclear test ban treaty, negotiable settlement of regional conflicts, and relentless efforts for decolonization all over the world. These initiatives played a crucial role in shaping India’s diplomacy during this period (Ganguly and Pardesi, 2009).

However, after the vast debacle of the Indian army in 1962, the Nehru regime faced acute criticisms inside India as it had adopted a policy of very low expenditures for the military. Consequently, India now started a process of military modernization, paving the way to a Realist foreign policy perspective. One of the systemic constraints on Indian foreign policy that originated in 1947 was that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States of America paid interest in India at the outset of the Cold War. None of them felt a particularly strong cultural, economic, or strategic connection in newly independent India. Though this was a great

opportunity for India to maneuver its strategy independently, the regionally disadvantaged position against China prevented it from doing that. For the time being, at the global level, the United States, having no interest in India, kept room for the Soviet Union to impose its sphere of influence in South Asia, particularly in India (Ganguly and Pardesi, 2009).

Meanwhile, the combined operation by the militaries of India and East Pakistan during the last stage of the latter's liberation war in 1971 dismantled united Pakistan and gave birth to independent Bangladesh, thereby leaving India superior in the subcontinent. Moreover, India's worry over the first nuclear test by the People's Republic of China in 1964 encouraged discussion among the political elites about obtaining nuclear power. This was followed by India's first nuclear test in 1974. Yet, India's economic weakness and the sanctions imposed after the test prevented it from further pursuing its nuclear program during the 1970s, restricting India's sway to South Asia (Ganguly and Pardesi, 2009).

However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the financial crisis created by the Gulf War-born oil crisis, and the loss of a huge market in East Europe budged Indian foreign policymakers. They undertook reform measures to liberalize the economic sector, such as normalizing rules and regulations regarding trade and commerce (Ganguly and Pardesi, 2009).

Besides, the post-Cold War decline in interest in the NAM forced India to build strategic partnerships with the great powers (Mazumdar, 2011). While previously India had been maintaining a strategic autonomy in the sense of decreasing the costs and risks of being a weak state, after the Cold War, India began maintaining autonomy as a way of obtaining the status of a major power in the world. From then onwards, India continued to maintain the policy of establishing multiple partnerships through a hedging strategy: expanding its stakes and improving relationships with powerful countries as much as possible (Basrur, 2017). It is also argued that India's massive investment in the military since the end of the Cold War is an explicit shift away from Idealism to Realism (Basrur, 2017). Having said that, India did not engage in

any major war or did not support any major power in any big war, except for some skirmishes with China and Pakistan.

Until the Modi-led BJP came to power in 2014, Indian foreign policy was based on Idealism, Realism, and pragmatism. The election slogan of the BJP calling for a 'Great India' and proclaiming India's inclination to be a major power in 2015 are perceived as a shift away from the Nehruvian approach - Idealism, Realism, and pragmatism - to Realism and pragmatism only (Horimoto, 2017). Instead of illuminating India's bilateral relation with its neighboring countries, let us now focus on the multifaceted internal influences that affected India's foreign policy after the Cold War. This is vital to understand India's current foreign policy towards its neighboring countries.

While the Congress-led former regime under Manmohan Singh (2004–2014) viewed the so-called foreign policy activism of India's federal states as a constraint, the BJP-led regime (since 2014) does not seem to view states' influences as something necessarily negative. Having been Chief Minister of Gujarat state himself for more than a decade, Modi seems to be aware of, and sensitive to, states' demands and concerns. More importantly, the central government increasingly views states' role as useful, i.e. as an asset that can be utilized to better articulate and pursue the country's national interest. In short, in India today there is a certain demand for mainstreaming and purposely directing what was previously seen as interference by the Indian states in the realm of foreign policy (Jacob, 2016).

The onset of India's economic liberalization, influenced by the end of the Cold War, persuaded some Indian states to initiate programs of attracting foreign investments on their own behalf. This was marked as the beginning of the states' vibrant role in foreign policy-making. Among them, one of the most noticeable ones dealt with Bangladesh. Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, abstained from going with the delegation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, then in his second term, to visit Bangladesh to sign the long-awaited Teesta River treaty in 2011. However, Indian state governments played a major role in negotiating and signing the land boundary agreement with Bangladesh. Although the United Progressive

Alliance (UPA) government's initial effort to introduce the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) legislation in the parliament met with stiff resistance by the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which is the ruling party in West Bengal, and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a key regional party in Assam, and also by the BJP initially, India's government eventually could manage to get the state governments on board and to proceed with the agreement (Jacob, 2016).

Mishra and Mikilan (2016) define five categories of domestic influences that frame recent Indian foreign policies under the Modi regime: simple majority politics, the symbolism of Indian aspirations, the factor of Modi's personality, regional states' influence, and business interests. First, Modi's simple majority ensures that alliance partners or regional political forces have very few checks on his government. It is also true that there are very few who can challenge Modi or the president of the party Amit Shah. Although there is discontent in the party, they do not have enough force to influence the government's foreign policy decision-making. Thus, the party very easily can maintain its entirety as a body and marginalize dissents by emphasizing the need for unity for the sake of steady economic growth and social prosperity. Second, the current Indian government ventures explicitly to display India as an ambitious country. If needed, an offensive kind of international projection of power is resorted to. The replacement of 'Panchsheel' (the inclination to accommodate Indian culture and values with those of the West) by 'Panchamrit' (dignity, dialogue, security, shared prosperity, and culture) indicates Modi's tendency to prioritize non-western or Asian culture and values. Third, Modi's personality is of great importance for India's external policy as he is being orchestrated as a vigorous, enthusiastic, deliberate, and incorruptible person in Indian diplomacy. His deliberate policy of highlighting economic interests rather than democratic sustainability and of positioning himself with powerful global leaders, thereby forgetting the colonial past of the country, is noticeable in the diplomatic gestures of the Indian government. Fourth, although traditionally Indian external policy was influenced by its states, the increasing significance of states is noteworthy in Indian foreign policy in recent times. In particular, the eastern belt of India comprising Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal, and northeast India comprising Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Nagaland are noteworthy to get importance in Indian external policy decisions. Fifth, the current

Indian government's special priority on overseas trade commerce and foreign investment to boost the local economy of the country creates an environment in which corporate interests are getting preference to national interests. This is reflecting in India's foreign policy to a greater degree than under any of the previous regimes (Mishra and Miklian, 2016).

Moreover, Modi's connection with 'Hindutva' presumably also has influences on India's recent foreign policy toward neighboring countries. Unlike his predecessors, Modi is a charismatic and authoritative leader who can easily be understood by his personal attitude and decision-making style (Basrur, 2017). Moreover, Modi's call for a radical change and the redirection of the foreign policy objectives, matters, and procedures in the election manifesto means a paradigm shift with respect to global strategies (BJP, Election Manifesto 2014).

Unlike his immediate predecessor Manmohan Singh, who had faced difficulties in making decisions in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), Modi could control the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and, as a result, did not have to battle with the parties of his coalition. Moreover, Modi's ideological and political roots in Hindutva are seen by many to signal the emergence of a harder and indomitable India. Based on actual domestic security and the respect an affluent India conveys in the world stands in contrast to the alleged incapability and compromise-mindedness symbolized by the Indian National Congress (Basrur, 2017). In addition, the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) framed by the Modi regime seems to be a major turn in the history of India's education. It puts high importance on the ancient and modern history of the country, bypassing the 'medieval' Mughal Era (Ruby, 2021). However, Basrur (2017) argues that though Hindutva's influence is clear in the education policy and in the campaign prohibiting eating beef, a deeper investigation into Hindutva's thinking in India and the world reveals more complex matters.

Among the several strands of Hindutva, the mainstream thinks that India, the land of the Hindus, has been dominated by Christians and Muslims for a thousand years. Now, it should be fortified by the agglomeration of force and by the promotion of soldierly drive and societal coherence (Sagar, 2014). In contrast, another strand thinks the world is a place of eternal chaos,

so the states are compelled to extend until they acquire the world empire. This view, according to Basrur (2017), resembles the strand of Offensive Realism that assumes that a state will aim to acquire as much power as possible until it gains the status global hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001). Moreover, one more strand finds the root of 'Hindutva' in the thinking of Kautilya, who stresses that a firm sovereign employs power to achieve 'sarva-bhauma', or world-empire', in the world of endless impingement (Sarkar, 1919, cited in Basrur, 2017).

However, contemporary Hindutva analysis is more familiar with the idea of 'Akhanda Bharat' or 'Greater India', which dreams of a country comprising – in addition to India itself - not only Bangladesh and Pakistan but also Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. They also tend to understand that Hindutva has the propensity to promote Islamophobia and a firm posture toward enemies (Manchanda, 2002).

Many think that Hindutva, accompanied by Modi, represents a warmongering face of 'Hindu nationalism'. This face is apparently discernible by the bloodshed of Muslims in 2002 when Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat (Basrur, 2017). Ogden (2014) argues that the muscularity of Hindutva means toughness or an unwillingness to compromise with firm opponents and a desire to wield forces against impotent antagonists. Nevertheless, many other analyst think that Modi is pursuing a continuity of his predecessor with only a little change in its style. However, Basrur (2017) stresses that Modi's remarks on different occasions do not prove a typical understanding of Hindutva. His pioneering of both 'Shanti and Shakti' (The Business Standard, 2013) implies how complex the web of Hindutva over current Indian foreign policy can be.

Moreover, in 2015 the BJP national executive headed by Modi stated the five stakes, called Panchamrit, of his foreign policy: 'Samman' that stands for 'honor' and 'dignity', 'Samvad' for increased participation and communication, 'Samridhi' for distributive riches, 'Suraksha' for 'regional and global security', and 'Sanskriti evam Sabhyata' for connections between cultures and civilizations (Tiwari, 2015). From the perspective of common sense, these stakes do not certify to a muscularity rooted in Hindutva in Modi's foreign policy. However, the stake of

Samman that seeks honor and dignity may be rooted in the traditions ancient Hindu ruling practices in India before the rise of the Mughals, who according to followers of Hindutva strands disregarded Hindu people. Moreover, Suraksha, i.e. the stake in regional and global security, may be rooted in India's aspiration to lead at least in South Asia and to be a major power beyond the region.

Furthermore, it is supposed that Kautilya, who was a prominent thinker in Indian history, has a great influence on India's foreign policy. His work 'Arthashastra' (the science of politics) illustrates that administration; law, order and justice; taxation, revenue, and expenditure; foreign policy; and defense and war seem to have great roles for Indian strategic thinking (cited in Zaman, 2006). More particularly, the Arthashastra argues that only territorial expansion can secure the advancement of a state and its populace. It further argues that if a king becomes satisfied with his existing territory, then another aggressor would subdue him. Though Kautilya kept alive the likelihood of peaceful dealings between kings, saying that both peaceful and warlike methods are aspects of Arthashastra, he mentioned that getting ready for and conducting war is an inseparable part of being a king (Rangarajan, 1992: 15).

However, it is also argued that structural and domestic factors continue to shape the broad contours of Indian foreign policy. The administration sought to manage the emerging multipolarity at the systemic level by engaging with partners based on the convergence of interests. The need for delivering economic development at home has been an overarching theme: there is both an effort to acknowledge global interdependence as well as to play up economic nationalism to assuage domestic constituents' concerns. At the domestic level, the BJP's legislative majority has afforded it substantial independence from coalition partners as well as from bureaucrats (Ganguly, 2009).

2.2. India's South Asian and Southeast Asian Policies

India's engagement in South Asia is mostly based on three factors: domestic needs, bilateral ties with smaller neighbors, and Indian reactions to Chinese or American involvement in the

area (Adhikari, 2018). Chadda (2019) highlights the concepts of relational power (RP) and the balance of domestic forces to discern India's regional policy. Within the academic community, it is debated whether India is defensive and consequently poses threats along its borders only or whether it is hegemonic in South Asia and consequently ventures to inflicting its dominant agenda. Chadda argues that India's power-seeking can be interpreted neither as defensive nor as hegemonic nor as searching for dominance. Scholarly debates acknowledge a gap between India's relative power capacities and its policy framing. Moreover, Majumdar (2014) argues that India's regional policy is centered on two factors: regional dominance and resisting meddling by global powers. Accordingly, a good interpretation of India's regional policy needs a careful assessment of India's hegemony in the fields of trade, commerce, culture, and politics in South Asia as well as of India's responses to external influences, mainly the USA and China.

Apart from that, the "Indian Doctrine" shaped during the 1980s asserts that no extra-regional power would be allowed to become dominant in South Asia (Gupta, 1995). The doctrine matches well with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism and clearly stresses that India will not allow the USA or other extra-regional great powers to influence Bangladesh.

Moreover, India's 'Look East' (now 'Act East') (Patgiri & Hazarika, 2016) policy, which was inaugurated by the Narsimha Rao (1991–1996) regime and was continued by Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004) and Manmohan Singh (2004–2014), and the 'Neighborhood First' policy (Sahoo, 2016) are significant to measure India's external policies towards Bangladesh. India's leading role in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) also fostered its neighborhood first policy.

Since 2014, India has been making efforts to revitalize the BIMSTEC, established in 1997, in order to take advantage of unexplored trade potential, to enhance food and energy security, and to stimulate the flourishing of its Northeastern region by improving infrastructure connections with Southeast Asian nations and by pushing for stronger economic ties in the Bay of Bengal area. India's strategic objectives and security concerns - which particularly manifest themselves through exerting pressure on Pakistan, countering China's incursions into India's

strategic sphere, and safeguarding the Northeastern area - have prompted a renewed focus on reviving BIMSTEC (Kumar, 2020).

India unveiled its "Look East" Policy (LEP) in line with its determined attempt to reinvigorate Southeast Asia's relevance in the state's external policy agenda. The policy's goal was to strengthen the nation's enduring social, religious, and political ties to the area by participating in more concrete military and governmental collaboration as well as financial interdependence (Bajpae, 2022). In 1996, India participated in the ASEAN ministerial meeting as well as the Post-Ministerial Conference, which elevated its status to that of a full dialogue partner. In 2002, India was elevated to summit dialogue partner. The third ASEAN-India Convention in 2004 resulted in the signing of the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity, which established a formal framework for India's relations with the ASEAN states. This was put into action at the yearly Delhi Dialogue, which resulted in the 2020 ASEAN-India Vision Document. Since 2012, engagements between India and ASEAN have been classified as a strategic partnership. In 2015, India constructed a consular office in Jakarta, Indonesia, to serve as its permanent delegation to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The Ministry of External Affairs of the country made the statement "India is as much a Southeast Asian nation as it is a South Asian nation" in response to the increasing size and scope of India's connections with ASEAN countries (Bajpae, 2022).

In the meantime, during the India–ASEAN summit that took place in Myanmar in November 2014, Indian Premier Narendra Modi declared that India would be transitioning from its previous Look East Policy (LEP) to a more action-oriented policy known as 'Act East' (Palit, 2016). Modi reiterated the term 'Act East' while visiting South Korea in May 2014 and Singapore in 2015 and highlighted the significance of these nations as partners in the initiative. Moreover, during her visit to Thailand in 2015, Foreign Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj emphasized India's attempts to interact with Southeast Asia more extensively through the 'Act East policy' and referred to Thailand as an important ally in this regard. Modi's ambition for India's incorporation into international supply chains and industrial networks for the East and West fits into this strategy, which places equal focus on actors in both areas. The 'Act East policy' differs from

the previous 'Look East Policy' with respect to its belief that geostrategic prominence is a function of the extent and depth of India's economic success. India is expanding the definition of 'East' to include regions outside ASEAN and is formulating its strategic aspiration concerning the larger Asia-Pacific region as it seeks to strengthen financial connections with nations to its east (Rajendram, 2014).

S. Jaishankar, current Foreign Minister of India, stressed that 'Neighborhood First is about connectivity, is about commerce, is about contacts' (Ministry of External Affairs of India, September 17, 2019). In addition, the invitation of Prime Ministers and Presidents of regional and world leaders to the oath taking ceremonies inaugurating both terms in 2014 and 2019 (Hindustan Times, May 28, 2019), Modi's bilateral visit to Sri Lanka in 2015 as a the Premier since four decades (Xavier, 2017), his visit to Nepal in 2014 as the first Indian Premier in the past twenty years (India Today, August 1, 2014), the visit of the Indian Defense Minister to Bangladesh in 2016 as the first visit by the same rank in the history of India-Bangladesh relationship (Peri, 2016) – all this signifies India's Neighborhood First policy that is largely shaping its external policies. Needless to say, reciprocal visits by both countries' premiers, ministers, and defense chiefs continue to date.

Because India and Bangladesh are geographically located in the same region, i.e. South Asia, India's foreign policy to Bangladesh largely reflects its regional policy confronting extra-regional forces, particularly the USA and China. There are probably also some particular bilateral issues that affect India's and Bangladesh's foreign policy.

2.3. Bangladesh-India Relations: Benefits and Costs

India is the closest neighbor of Bangladesh as the former was directly involved in the latter's liberation war against Pakistan and is surrounding Bangladesh to the west, north, and east. During the early days after Bangladesh's independence, the two countries enjoyed a warm relationship. However, after the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the relationship between the two countries experienced ups and downs until Sheikh

Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, came to power in 1996. From the very beginning to the till date, this relationship went on both cooperation and contention, albeit to a varying degrees.

2.3.1. Cooperation

India collaborated on a range of areas in Bangladesh: the land boundary agreement, connectivity projects, the inland water protocol, the maritime boundary settlement, trade and credits, and the facilitation of visa.

2.3.1.1. Trade

Geographically, Bangladesh's location makes it a strategic gateway to India, Nepal, Bhutan, and other East Asian countries. Bangladesh has the potential to be an economic powerhouse by improving its regional trade, transit, and logistics networks. Bangladesh and India can procure mutual benefits from trade using transshipment opportunities as they are the nearest neighbors.

India's 1.22 Billion USD imports from Bangladesh and 9.21 Billion USD exports to Bangladesh in the financial year 2018-2019 make the latter the biggest trade partner of the former in South Asia (The Economic Times, 2020), while in the 2019-20 economic year Bangladesh exports to India were worth \$1.09 Billion vis-a-vis its import from India worth \$5.77 Billion (Islam, 2022). In addition, India also gave duty-free and quota-free access to many Bangladeshi exports, except for some listed products to India (The Economic Times, 2020). India's enlisting Bangladesh as the former's fourth biggest export destination in the 2022 financial year clearly orchestrated the India-Bangladesh trade relationship (Jayaswal and Laskar, 2021).

A bilateral agreement for the transshipment facility was signed in 2018 to allow India's use of Chittagong and Mongla ports, Bangladesh's top two ports for business. A standard

operating procedure was signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s visit to India in October 2019. It allows transshipment of goods from Chittagong and Mongla on four road, rail, and water routes to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhaura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamabil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheila; and Srimantapur (Tripura) via Bibir Bazar. During the trial period, the cargo destined for northeast India was transported from Chittagong to Agartala by road (Bhattacharjee, 2020).

Northeast India’s geographical segregation from the mainland and the restrictions on Indian trucks passing through Bangladesh left India only the option to use its 27-kilometer wide Siliguri corridor, which is also known as ‘chicken’s neck’. As a result, transshipment of Indian goods to its northeast becomes lengthy and costly (World Bank, 2021). Bangladesh’s National Board of Revenue (NBR) mapped up customs rules to make the transshipment of Indian goods to its northeastern area and other countries easier via Bangladesh. This was done according to the transit and transshipment deal between Dhaka and New Delhi. The Customs Transit and Transshipment Rules 2021 intend for particular regulation and lawful authorization for the transportation of transit or transshipment goods (Jahid and Suman, 2021). Indian exports to Bangladesh are illustrated in the following chart.

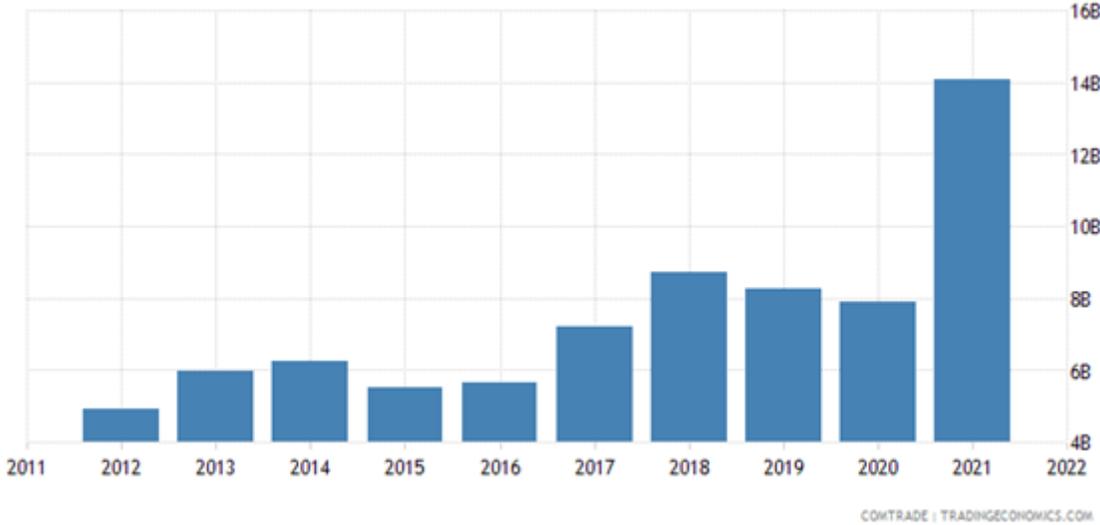


Figure 1: Indian Export to Bangladesh
Source: Trading Economics Data, October 2022

On the other hand, Indian import from Bangladesh is illustrated in the following chart.

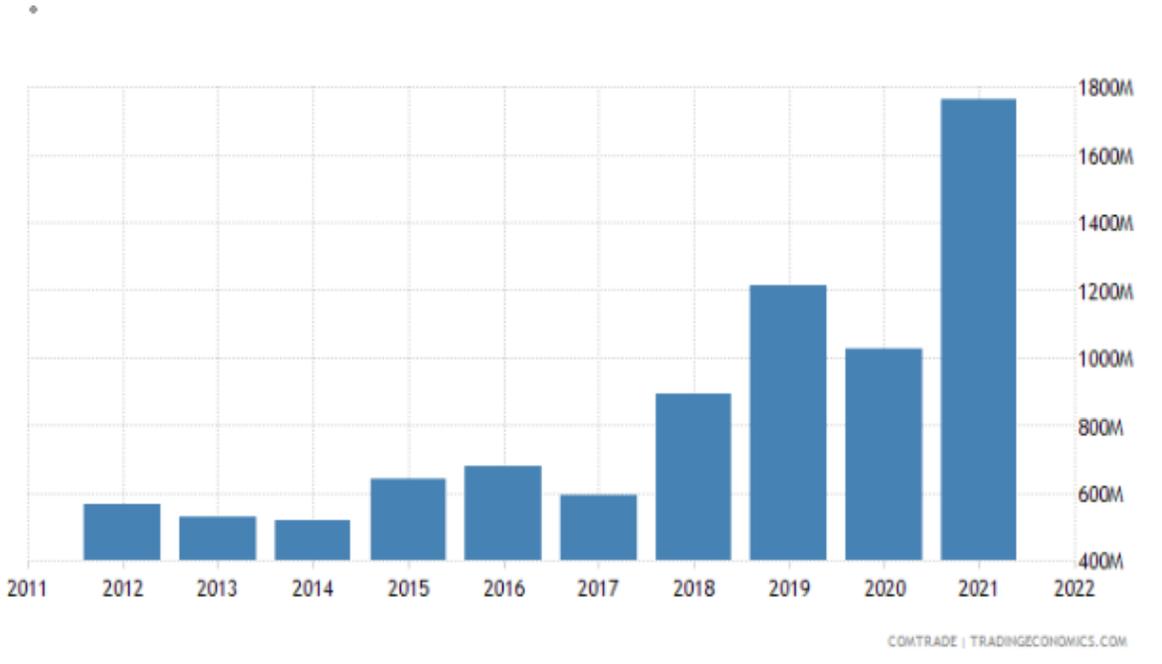


Figure 2: Indian Import from Bangladesh
Source: Trading Economics Data, December 2022

2.3.1.2. Credits and Investments

Bangladesh and India signed three lines of credit agreements: the first was in August 2010, worth a substantial amount of \$862 million, a total of \$747.52 million of which has been disbursed; the second was in March 2016, amounting to \$2 billion, a total of \$336.8 million has been paid; and the third agreement was inked in March 2017, amounting a total of \$4.5 billion, \$405.14 million of which has been released by 2023. Bangladesh and India have mutually agreed to expedite the process of providing debt funding for projects. This decision was made due to the fact that only 20% of the funds allocated under this program were actually disbursed in the 13 years leading up to 2022. The projects that have been canceled include a railway project to build a new carriage workshop in Saidpur at \$70.28 million, the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar project worth \$165 million, the Bay Container

Terminal project worth \$400 million, and the Saidpur Airport project worth \$375 million. The Economic Relations Division (ERD) of Bangladesh has reported that out of the 40 projects listed under the Line of Credit system, 14 have been successfully finished, eight are still awaiting permission, and the other projects are currently in the process of being executed (Saif, August 07, 2023).

2.3.1.3. Rail, Road, and River Transport Cooperation

Bangladesh and India took a number of steps to reestablish the train connections and other forms of interconnectivity that prevailed between the two countries before 1965. On December 17, 2020, they officially reopened the railway line connecting Haldibari, India with Chilahati, Bangladesh. From February 2020, the service frequencies of the Bandhan Express and Maitree Express, two passenger services, increased from four to five days per week and, respectively, from one to two days per week. During COVID-19, both nations began utilizing side-door containers and shipment trains to keep up unimpeded deliveries (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2021).

On 27 July 2020, the Indian government offered ten broad gauge diesel locomotives as grant-in-aid to Bangladesh Railways during a virtual meeting between Indian foreign and railways ministers and their Bangladeshi counterparts (The Business Standard, 2020a). Moreover, during Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in October 2019, both governments agreed upon the inauguration of Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and Dhaka-Siliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka bus services with the aim of promoting people-to-people connections between the two countries. In addition, India and Bangladesh simultaneously launched the Feni Bridge of Bangladesh, linking the LCS Subroom of India and LCS Ramgarh (Bangladesh) online on March 9, 2021 (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2021).

2.3.1.4. Territorial Cooperation

At midnight on 31 July 2015, around 50,000 people became citizens of India or Bangladesh after living in a limbo for decades. Ending a prolonged dispute, the two nations

swapped 162 enclaves on the border region, allowing the people living there to stay or opt-out to the other country. While 14,214 citizens of Bangladesh residing in 51 enclaves on the Indian side became Indians, a large number of people in the 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh preferred to stay with Bangladesh and just 979 opted to move to India. As a result, the total number of new Indian citizens became 15,193 (Yadav, Alin and Nedelea, 2016).

Bangladesh and India share a land border that was drawn up in 1947 after India and Pakistan both achieved independence from British rule. A conflict over territorial seas resulted in years of talks between Bangladesh and India. In these discussions, India advocated using the concept of equidistance to define a border line whereas Bangladesh enlisted equitable principles to prevent being separated from the middle of the Bay of Bengal. Efforts to reach a negotiated solution failed, as it happened over a similar issue with Myanmar. Considering this, Bangladesh launched different legal actions against India and Myanmar on October 8, 2009, in accordance with Annex VII of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Finally, the disagreement between India and Bangladesh over the delineation of their total sea border in the northern portion of the Bay of Bengal was resolved by an ad hoc arbitral tribunal based in The Hague according to Annex VII on July 7, 2014. Finally putting an end to a dispute that had lasted over decades, the verdict determined the path of the borderline in the territorial seas, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the continental shelf within and beyond 200 nautical miles (Anderson, 2015).

2.3.1.5. Military Cooperation

The 25-year-long military pact between India and Bangladesh signed in 1972 (Bhattacharjee, 2018a) stipulates the following bindings for the military of both countries: Article 8 declares that the two countries would not enter in or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party. It further states that each country shall refrain from any aggression against the other and shall not allow the use of its territory for committing any act that may cause military damage to or constitute a threat to the security of the other; Article 9 mandates the countries to refrain from giving any assistance to a third party taking part in an armed conflict against the other party. If either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the

contracting parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultation to take appropriate and effective measures to eliminate the threat. Article 10 prohibits the two countries from undertaking any commitment - covert or otherwise -with another country that may be incompatible with the present treaty.

However, the lack of an official military cooperation framework before Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in 2017 led to skepticism over developing stronger ties between the two nations. It is argued that the Bangladesh-India bilateral relationship underwent much volatility due to the fickle political approaches of various Bangladesh governments vis-a-vis India. The India-Bangladesh military alliance against Pakistan during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was the primary reason for the defense cooperation between the two countries. However, the military governments later bungled the cooperation with India (Bhattacharjee, 2018a).

In 2008, there was a breakthrough when Bangladesh Army Chief Gen. Moeen Ahmed visited India, and reciprocal visits by both countries' military chiefs happened in the following years. These visits drove away previous mistrust and strengthened bilateral understandings. Regular talks, joint exercises for collective security and against terrorism, medical assistance, and training programs between the two countries' military forces taking place during Sheikh Hasina's government symbolize increased military cooperation. Sheikh Hasina's 2017 visit to India resulted in a series of pacts and MoUs in defense areas, which imparts both countries' wishes for enlarged military cooperation (Bhattacharjee, 2018a).

India and Bangladesh signed an agreement regarding a credit of \$500 million to Bangladesh for defense purchases promised by India (Debates, Oct 15, 2019, Laskar and Singh, January 03, 2023). However, it was not put into action until September 2022. India is considering Bangladesh as a potential market for several types of military equipment, including specialized vehicles, helicopters, and the maintenance of Russian-made equipment. Bangladesh has expressed interest in acquiring specialized cars from Mahindra and Tata as well as Tejas combat planes and Dhruv light helicopters. So far, Bangladesh has acquired defensive

equipment, including helmets and bulletproof jackets. Both countries are investigating the possibility of India's involvement in the upkeep of Russian-made equipment, specifically aircraft like the Mi-17-1V helicopter, Antonov An-32 transport aircraft, and MiG-29 jets (Laskar and Singh, January 03, 2023).

2.3.1.6. Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

The BAL's election manifesto in 2008 and Sheikh Hasina's proposal for forming the South Asian Task Force declared that they would not allow terrorism against India's north-eastern provinces using Bangladesh's land (Sikri, 2009). On a global level, since 2009 Bangladesh's Premier has made a point of strongly denouncing terrorism in all of its manifestations during all her General Assembly speeches. Bangladesh's cooperation with the United Nations in the areas of counterterrorism (CT) and countering violent extremism (CVE) has grown significantly under her direction over time. The viewpoints of Bangladesh on CT and CVE align with the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as a whole, which was unanimously accepted by the UNGA in 2006 (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations, 2022).

Moreover, Dr. Dipu Moni, then Bangladesh's external minister, fully outlined counter-terrorism ideas on February 9, 2009. Speaking at a joint press conference in Dhaka with Indian Foreign Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Moni expressed that Bangladesh would not tolerate any anti-Indian operations carried out on Bangladeshi soil by parties opposed to India. In the same vein, Bangladesh has also asked for India's assistance in battling those attempting to destabilize Bangladesh. Moni argued that the South Asian Task Force can effectively foster collaboration to 'complement independent national action of all the willing countries joining the Task Force' (Sikri, 2009).

The 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery incident in Dhaka brought violent extremism in Bangladesh to the spotlight of the global community and sparked a coordinated and contentious counterterrorism campaign by the Bangladesh government. Even though there have been fewer

terrorist attacks in recent years, violent extremist organizations continue to operate and recruit new members (United States Institute of Peace, 2022). In her remarks at the 73rd UNGA in September 2018, Bangladesh's Premier Sheikh Hasina remarked that the country will maintain zero-tolerance for terrorists. Bangladesh has successfully prevented violent extremism, human trafficking, and the flow of illicit goods (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2022). Moreover, the US Embassy, the Bangladesh Police Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTCU), and the UN held a two-day seminar on preventing and countering violent extremism in Bashundhara, Dhaka, on December 9–10, 2019 (US Embassy in Bangladesh, 2019). Recently, India and Bangladesh have committed themselves to increasing their collaboration in the fight against 'terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalization in the region and beyond' during Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in September 2022 (Niazi, 2022).

2.3.1.7. Educational Cooperation

India has swiftly established itself as a prominent center for higher education in South Asia. The nation proudly possesses multiple prestigious universities that are listed among the top 1,000 globally. QS's top 250 rankings include four Indian colleges, while their top 1,000 rankings encompass a total of 41 Universities. Education in India is more cost-effective than in the Western world, even at prestigious universities, rendering it a financially viable choice for Bangladeshis. Based on a 2022 survey by the All-India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), Bangladesh is in third place concerning the number of international students enrolled in educational institutions in India. In the academic year 2019-20, 2,259 students from Bangladesh registered for admission to Indian universities (Karmaker, April 26, 2023).

The Indian and Bangladeshi education ministers met for the first time on 2 October 1972. They consented on a range of areas of education, including arranging joint seminars, study trips, and collaboration between academics, generating shared university academic committees, and interchanging cultural, sports, and scientific studies (Sajen, 2020). Later, a Bangladesh and India education partnership was formalized in a Statement of Intent on 7 June 2015 according to their shared commitment to 'Education for All' (cited in Mishra & Das, 2020). Due to its nearness to

Bangladesh and the common cultural background, West Bengal has become a focal point for educational collaboration between India and Bangladesh. Since 1971, major institutions in West Bengal and Bangladesh have collaborated on research projects, held joint seminars, and exchanged students and teachers. Dhaka has opened the Bangladesh Bhavan at Visva-Bharati in India to share knowledge and culture with one another (Mishra and Das, 2020).

Moreover, the decision taken by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) on July 12, 2021, to inaugurate the Bangabandhu Chair at the University of Delhi became a milestone point in the history of educational cooperation between the countries. The Indian Prime Minister visited Bangladesh in March 2021 and reached the accord. Since Bangladesh is at the confluence of India's 'Neighborhood First' and 'Act East' initiatives, the Bangabandhu Chair will focus on increasing Indians' awareness and respect for its eastern neighbor (The Daily Star, 2021).

2.3.1.8. Cultural Cooperation

In fact, it is very difficult to differentiate the culture of India and Bangladesh except for some religious festivals, due to the historical and geographical connectedness. Despite the fact that Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country and India, a Hindu majority one, in terms of culture, many social patterns intertwine directly and indirectly. People of all religions go and enjoy various festivals, especially in the time Puja, i.e. the worship festivals of Hindus. Even the presence of a section of Muslims was noticed at one time, though mainstream Muslim scholars discouraged Bangladeshi Muslims from going to Puja festivals. Nevertheless, India enjoys an extra advantage in promoting its cultural policy to Bangladesh.

Indian cultural policy mainly centered on the policy of Panchsheel (currently known as Panchmrit): mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in one another's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence (Dasgupta, 2016).

Hall (2019: 10) argues that an all-embracing pursuit of cultural rallies is framing India's connectivity focus within the region, emanating from the idea that the civilization of India goes beyond its political border. Furthermore, proactive public diplomacy (or people-to-people communication) is also being driven by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) that concentrates on similar values between cultures and religions in South Asia and elsewhere.

The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) was launched on 11th March 2010 in Dhaka to put in common culture ventures, including Yoga, Hindi language, Indian classical music and dances like Kathak and Manipuri, and other cultural arrangements to enhance the people-to-people connection between the two countries (Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, 2020).

2.3.1.9. Covid-19 Crisis Cooperation

The Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina participated in the video conference of Leaders of SAARC countries on 15 March 2020 at the invitation of Prime Minister Modi to share assessments of the current situation relating to this pandemic, consider best practices, and identify cooperative measures to minimize and mitigate the spread of the disease. As part of bilateral assistance, the Government of India has extended three tranches of medical assistance including 30,000 surgical masks, 15,000 head covers, 50,000 surgical latex gloves, 100,000 hydroxychloroquine medicine tablets, and RT-PCR test kits capable of running 30,000 tests in March-April 2020 to Bangladesh to assist in its efforts to fight against the COVID pandemic.

The Government of India has also been conducting various online training modules to train the health professionals of Bangladesh on the treatment and care of COVID-19 patients. In January 2021, the Government of India gifted 2 million Covishield (Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines) to Bangladesh to assist in its efforts to fight against the pandemic. Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh, BEXIMCO Pharmaceuticals Limited of Bangladesh, and the Serum Institute of India (SII) signed a trilateral MOU to procure 3 crore doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from the SII (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2021).

Moreover, Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, received assurances from the Indian Premier that he would pay close attention to her nation's demands when it comes to the delivery of COVID-19 vaccinations. Bangladesh and the Serum Institute of India (SII) signed a contract for the purchase of 30 million doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine on the condition of distributing over six installments (The Hindu Businessline, 2020).

2.3.2. Bones of Contention

2.3.2.1. Water

India and Bangladesh have 54 rivers that flow across their borders. The Ganges and Teesta River issues are intensely discussed in Bangladesh's political arena (Mostofa, March 23, 2023). India unilaterally diverted water from the Ganges River to the disadvantage of Bangladesh, causing the desolation of a third of the country's land and demography during some seasons. Though a 30-year-long treaty was signed in 1996 to share the Ganges water between the countries, it never saw implementation. Ganges water sharing has become an issue of national discontent having a momentous in the national politics of Bangladesh; if any politician avoids the issue while campaigning during the election, he/she would be marked as 'being soft on India', 'selling out to India' or 'being cowed down by India' (Iyer, 1997).

Moreover, Pandey (2018) argues that from the beginning of the negotiations over the Ganges issue, Bangladesh favored a multilateral solution while India reiterated the bilateral solution to the Ganges water sharing problem. However, Swain (2002) suggests that countries that are very little interested in collaboration can create restrictions to negotiation and consequently hinder reaching an agreement.

Pandey (2018) further argues that the Ganges water sharing is related to other issues. For example, steps were taken by the government of India against those working there against the interest of the Zia regime in Bangladesh. The Indian authorities repressed them heavily and, consequently, an environment of formal meetings between the two governments emerged that paved the way to sign a treaty in 1977. However, that signing took only place in 1996, after

several more bilateral meetings. He also argues that, because the Teesta water sharing agreement of 2011 was not properly implemented, Bangladesh stayed away from signing a transit treaty, which would have enabled India to transport its goods to its northeastern parts via the Ashuganj port of Bangladesh (Pandey, 2018). It is worth mentioning that the Teesta, traversing Sikkim and West Bengal, two provinces of India prior to its entry into Bangladesh, is the fourth largest river and serves as a key river in the northern region of Bangladesh. The floodplain spans across 2,750 square kilometers and sustains a population of over 10 million people. Additionally, it contributes approximately 14 % of Bangladesh's overall cultivation (Mostofa, March 23, 2023). Mamata Banerjee's (Chief Minister of West Bengal) clear-cut declaration of not providing water of the Teesta River in the dry season in Bangladesh, saying that West Bengal needs more water (Palma, 2021), is also an explicit violation of the expected Teesta River water sharing treaty that was prepared for signing between the two countries in 2011 (Baten and Titumir, 2016).

2.3.2.2. Illegal Immigration to India and the Border Killings

India has a 4096 km border with Bangladesh, the longest among its neighbors (Singh, 2011). India has continuously alleged high-scale migration of Bangladeshi people to West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura from the late 1970s onwards and in the 1990s in particular (cited in Ghosh, 1993). India, marking the cross-border migration through their shared porous border as illegal migration, thinks it is a serious obstacle to its relationship with Bangladesh (Singh, 2009).

Though millions of Bangladeshi refugees were sheltered in West Bengal during the war in 1971 (Singh, 2009), Bangladeshi migration into the Indian state of Assam incited the political parties of that state. The feeling arose that people of Assam would become a minority in their homeland because of the Bangladeshis migrants (Weiner, 1983: 283). Indian authorities continuously claim that the Bangladesh government does not take the necessary steps to check the flow of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to India while the latter refuses the former's claim (The Business Standard, 2020b).

The cross-border issue, having a special focus on Muslim Bangladeshi migrants, was highly focused when the BJP-led government came to power in India in 1998. It played an important role in shaping the relationship between the two countries (Sing, 2009). Because of their inextricably intertwined destinies, Bangladeshi and Indian people developed feelings of being 'India-locked' and, respectively, 'Bangladesh-locked'. The geographical locations and the sizes of both countries mean that they normally cannot disregard each other (Rather, 2016). Accordingly, both countries should have maintained a good relationship to satisfy their mutual security interests. However, statistics by Odhikar - a human rights organization in Bangladesh - during 2000-2021 on human rights violations, including killing, injury, abduction, disappearance, rape, and snatching, by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) against Bangladeshi citizens illustrated the situation that existed along the Bangladesh side of the border with India while 1253 people in total were killed by BSF shootings.

In particular and most strikingly, the killing of Felani - a 15-year-old Bangladeshi girl – by the Border Security Force (BSF) of India on the barbed wire fence along the Bangladesh-India border drew huge protests and reprehension against India throughout Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2021a). In a joint statement released on September 7, 2022, the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India stated their commitment to achieve minimal deaths at the border. But on that same day, a 17-year-old Bangladeshi boy was gunned down by India's Border Security Force (BSF) along the Dainur border in the Dinajpur Sadar upazila (The Daily Star, 2022b). Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said that 'the assassination of a Bangladeshi on the Indian border during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Delhi is distressing, painful and shocking for the family members and for us as well' (The Financial Express, 2022). Majumder (2014) argues that extensive smuggling happens through India-Bangladesh leaky borders. Lewis (2012) argues that the leaky border 'works in favor of India where most goods tend to be cheaper and undermines the potential of small business to grow in Bangladesh.' However, continuous firing and killing on the border of Bangladesh, India's closest neighbor, without regard to any international law, cannot be accepted under any law. If there is a question of smuggling or border terrorism, then these unarmed people can be caught and brought to court.

Most of the killings targeted unarmed Bangladeshis, raising questions about the good relations between the two countries. Below is a statistics of Indian BSF killings on Bangladesh border.

Border killing by BSF during BNP regime (2001-2006)	
Year	Number of Killed
2001	84
2002	94
2003	27
2004	72
2005	88
2006	155
Total killed=520	
Border Killing by BSF during Bangladesh Awami League (2010-2021)	
Year	Number of Killed
2009	98
2010	74
2011	31
2012	38
2013	29
Total killed= 270	
2014	35
2015	44
2016	29
2017	25
2018	11

Total killed=144	
2019	41
2020	51
2021	17
Total killed= 109	

Table 1: Border Killing by Border Security Force of India

Source: Human Rights Violation by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) against Bangladeshi Citizens: 2000-2021, http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Border_2000-2021.pdf

2.3.2.3. Allegations of Sheltering of Insurgents, Terrorists, or Foreign Secret Services

The Naga National Army, an armed rebel group of the Naga province of India, started to battle Delhi's rule in the Naga Hills in the 1960s. Pakistan took advantage of this. The country's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) provided the insurgents operating out of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh with weapons and safe havens. Later, the ISI provided similar support to the Mizo insurgency, which was based at remote CHT bases in Bolipara, Ruma, Thanchi, and Mowdak. Pakistan's CHT policy gave major importance to these covert activities. The area was made into an ISI preserve (Ali, 1993: 181-182).

India claims that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) got a firm shelter in Bangladesh while the Khaleda Zia-led BNP was in power. Salahuddin Kader, one of the most prominent political figures in the BNP and in national politics, was claimed to have a close connection with the Pakistani Intelligence force (The Financial Express, December 10, 2018). Moreover, India also alleged that insurgents of northeastern India got shelter in Bangladesh during the BNP rule (Pattanaik, 2010).

Following 1975, Bangladesh received significant moral backing from Pakistan and military assistance from China, India's two bitter adversaries. Therefore, India saw full-scale support' for the Shanti Bahini, an armed organization in the CHT area formed by Manabendra Narayan Larma in 1972, as a viable negotiating chip with Bangladesh. According to John Laffin (1986: 23-24), China provided training to the Nagas and Mizos just as was given to Shanti Bahini by Russia and India.

India claimed that the BNP government, in its tenures 1991-1996 and 2001-2006 overlooked the issue of Indian insurgents getting shelter in the CHT, and this despite India repeatedly voicing its concerns (Nayak, 2023). India's ex-defense intelligence officer recently claimed that BNP's acting Chairman, Tarique Rahman, had a connection with ten trucks of arms haul that allegedly was to be handed over to Paresh Barua, the then head of United Liberation Front of Assam, a separatist organization of India's Assam province (The Business Standard, 2023). This is a significant indication of why India did not trust the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and backed the Bangladesh Awami League instead, as will be discussed later.

2.3.2.3.1. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Issue

The CHT, which encompasses 10% of the country's total land area (5.095 square miles) and is home to 0.45% of the people, experienced an insurgency movement. They are fighting for their right to secede from Bangladesh. The CHT area encompasses 10% of the country's total land area (5.095 square miles) and is home to 0.45% of the people. It is located along the country's southern border with Myanmar (Burma) and India. This area of Bangladesh is very remote from the rest of the country. Tribes in the area have a distinct culture from the Bengalis, the dominant ethnic group. While the Bengalis are predominantly Muslim, the majority of those of Sino-Tibetan heritage are either Hindus, Buddhists or Christians (Islam, 2003).

Conflict between the Pakistani government and the local tribes began after the CHT territory was formally incorporated into Pakistan. The Indian flag, which the tribespeople had

raised, was brought down by the Pakistani corps. A Muslim League senior official said that 'if necessary, we shall tame the tribals like elephants' (cited in Islam, 2003).

To urge their desire for federation with India, a team of CHT tribes people met with the leaders of the Indian Congress. The CHT territory was given to Pakistan by the Bengal Boundary Commission, which was led by Cyril Radcliffe, notwithstanding the Indian Congress' backing for tribal demand. Since Pakistan's founding, CHT residents have been labeled "pro-Indian." Pakistani leaders were unwilling to accommodate CHT leaders. The Pakistani government's post-independence priority over other political matters culminated in the breakdown of the civilian administration in 1958 and the start of the military administration (Islam, 2003).

Since 1971, when Bangladesh gained independence as a nation-state, CHT groups have been involved in guerrilla insurgency activities and claimed independence or total autonomy for the area. The Indian government's backing allowed CHT militants to persist in their fight for independence. After the death of Sheikh Mujib in 1975, who had kept strong links with India, the Zia administration adopted an external policy that favored the West, the Arab countries as well as Pakistan over India. As a result, anxiety between India and Bangladesh increased (Islam, 2003). Shantu Larma, the most famous tribal leader, went across the border into India to run the insurgency from Tripura. The Indian government started providing the rebels with safe havens, money, training grounds, weapons, and ammunition (cited in Islam, 2003).

After the Sino-Indian War in 1962, China began to fund these clandestine 'operations'. China disapproved of Bangladesh's 1971 separation from Pakistan. Furthermore, Bangladesh's government and foreign policy were unmistakably pro-India after the country gained its independence. Bengalis kept moving into the CHT after Bangladesh gained its independence. Because the settlers did not arrive as land occupiers, the indigenous population did not object to the natural migration of the Bengalis. However, the migration trend shifted from 'natural' to 'political' in 1979. In the CHT region, the Bangladesh government chose to gradually relocate families who did not own land to state-owned "khas" or protected land. The Bangladesh authority initially took steps to relocate 30,000 families and provide each family with 5 acres of

land in addition to initial financial assistance. Beginning in August 1980, the second phase distributed either four acres of lower-quality land or 2.5 acres of cultivable land to each family (Islam, 2003).

An estimated 400,000 Bengalis were thought to have relocated to the CHT area by the end of 1984. In 1948, Bengalis made up the other two percent of the region's population, leaving the tribespeople to make up 98 percent. These ratios underwent a significant alteration. Bengalis made up 12 percent of the region's populace in 1962; by 1991, they made up 50% of the population (cited in Islam, 2003).

As response to Bangladesh's support for the Naga and Miszo insurgencies, India continued to provide the CHT terrorists with weapons after 1975. The Indian intelligence agency Research Analysis Wing (RAW) ramped up its operations in the region. Throughout its many military and paramilitary academies, the Indian government provided teaching to the insurgents. A detained Shanti Bahini captain named Animesh Dewan admitted in 1991 that India supplied the insurgents with 300 G-3 rifles in 1989 in an effort to ramp up their operations (cited in Islam, 2003).

The Chittagong Cantonment in Bangladesh displays a considerable amount of captured Indian weaponry and ammunition in its counter-insurgency museum. India exploits CHT refugees against Mizo and Tripura rebels. Given that they are reliant on the government for their own existence, it assumes that the refugees will stand by the Indian regime (Islam, 2003).

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, disputes between the local Shanti Bahini and the Bangladeshi military lasted for more than twenty years. The violent dispute ended on December 2, 1997, when the Bangladeshi government and Parbatya Chittagong Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) signed the CHT Accord, also known as the "Peace Accord." The accord promised the repatriation of CHT refugees from the Tripura province of India and the rehabilitation of Internally Displaced People (IDP), the Bengali settlers who went to the CHT area from different regions of Bangladesh (Tripura, 2019).

Since the BNP-Jamaat alliance government took office in 2001, not much has been done to put the deal into action. The alliance stood against the agreement being signed. After coming to rule in January 2009, the BAL once more started taking action to put the CHT Peace Accord into effect and restore normality to the area. The newly appointed Prime Minister of Bangladesh declared on July 29 that by September of 2009, one company of military and 35 provisional 'security camps' would be withdrawn from the Chittagong Hill Tracts zone. In 1988, the se 'camps' were built in order to provide 'security' in a total of 23 different places. As part of its commitment to follow the 1997 CHT Peace Accord, the Bangladesh government officially began removing temporary army camps from the CHT, beginning with two camps in Khagrachhari and Rangamati. The government is required by the peace agreement to remove all military bases and security personnel from CHT, except the three cantonments located at the district headquarters in Bandarban, Khagrachhari, and Rangamati, as well as those in other three Upazilas, as well as the police and border security (The Daily Star, 2009).

Recently, the pro-India Sheikh Hasina administration has faced a significant struggle to eliminate extremist forces. The Jamaa'tul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya (JAFHS), one such organization, is purportedly attempting to set up an outpost in the unrest-ridden Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a development with wider ramifications for the neighboring Indian subcontinent. The Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) led a 20-year-long armed separatist effort in the area that ended in the contracting of a peace agreement in 1997. Yet, at least six armed groups are still active in the region. Bangladeshi law enforcement started a significant offensive against a recently emerged rebel organization, the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF). The Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA), the armed wing of the KNF, and a splinter group of the United People's Democratic Front, a group which is primarily made up of Buddhist Chakmas, engaged in the most recent fighting. Since its inception in 2018, JAFHS and KNF have collaborated to make it easier to instruct new enrollment in the CHT area. The KNF reportedly made a financial transaction with JAFHS (Kalita, 2023).

Moreover, the KNA increased its destructive efforts in recent times. Two soldiers were hurt, and a Bangladesh military officer was murdered on March 12, 2023, when KNA members allegedly fired on an army unit in Rowangchhari. Around 550 Kuki-Chin, who were forced to leave the CHT, area are housed in Mizoram, which has a 318 km-long external frontier along Bangladesh. A number of them also have family members living in India (Kalita, 2023).

Previously, members of the Chakma ethnic community who reside in Tripura sought rights from the International Court of Justice. They based their claim upon the charge that they faced ethnic oppression and insisted that Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) would become an ‘integral part’ of India after more than 70 years after the partition. Since 2016, August 17th has been observed as ‘Black Day’ by the Chakma National Council of India and the Tripura Chakma Students Association. In 2019, protests were held in 11 different Tripura cities (Deb, 2019). The day was also observed in 2021 as ‘Black Day’ by Chakma in Tripura, India, criticizing CHT’s integration with East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (Chakraborty, August 20, 2021). These developments are very uncomfortable for Bangladesh as an independent sovereign country.

2.3.2.4. Trade Imbalance and Customs Barriers

The India-Bangladesh relationship is soured by the trade imbalance between the two countries, whereas Bangladesh thinks that a decrease in trade imbalance will enhance its national income. However, India intentionally prevents such a decrease (Majumder, 2014). Bangladeshi exports to India were 114558 million taka while its imports from the same country were 1059725 million taka in the 2020-21 economic year, manifesting a big amount of trade gap between Bangladesh and India (Foreign Trade Statistics of Bangladesh 2020-21, May 2022). Moreover, the Customs Rules-2020 declared by India in August of the year is supposed to be a barrier to Bangladeshi exports to India. The Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC) and the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) marked the step on Rules of Origin (RoO) as incoherent with the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement under which least developed countries together with Bangladesh would obtain tax-free access to India based on a Certificate of Origin (CoO) that would certify where the goods were made. However, the RoO would now permit

India's customs authorities to ask for details of the certificate that was issued by the government authority of the exporting nation (Byron and Parvez, 2020).

2.3.2.5. India's Concern over the Hindu Minority in Bangladesh

On November 6, 2016, Sushma Swaraj, India's external affairs minister, via the Indian High Commission expressed her country's concern to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina about the safety of its Hindu minority, saying: 'I have asked the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka to call on the Prime Minister and express our grave concern about the safety and wellbeing of the Hindus in Bangladesh.' The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh stated that the assault on multiple Hindu shrines in the country was part of a sophisticated scheme to seize the properties of the minority population (The Daily Star, 2016b).

Moreover, Bangladesh's Hindu minority was attacked during Durga Puja in October 2021. Social media rumors that a Quran was defiled at a puja mandir sparked mob violence (Daniyal, 2021). On July 15, 2022, arsonists in the Sahapara neighborhood of Lohagara, Narail, targeted the residences of the Hindu minorities. After Friday prayers, crowds began torching homes on the accusation that a local man, aged 18, had offended their religious sensibilities via Facebook. Sheikh Hasina, before her visit to India in September 2022, said,

As long as we are in power, we always give importance to that and I always tell them (the minority) that you are our citizens. You should own our country. But some incidents sometimes take place but immediately we take action. It is sometimes, it happened, it's very unwanted situation but you know very well it is not only Bangladesh, even India also sometimes minorities suffered (Hindustan Times, 2022).

India also expressed its worry about the decreasing number of the Hindu population in the last four decades after Bangladesh's independence. The 2022 national data of Bangladesh reveals that the Hindu percentage of Bangladesh's total population decreased from 13.5% to 8.5% during the last 40 years (Hindustan Times, 2022).

2.3.2.6. Anti-Modi Sentiments in Bangladesh

Anti-Indian sentiments have increased in recent times due to Modi's policy strategies for Bangladesh. According to a New York Times report, the two-day visit by Modi to Bangladesh in March 2021 on the occasion of observing the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence and the 100th birthday of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (locally marked as the Mujib Year), the leader of Bangladesh's independence movement in 1971, resulted in violent protests in Bangladesh. This led to at least four deaths and dozens of injuries (The New York Times, 2021). The President of the Bangladesh Students Union, a student wing of the Communist movement in Bangladesh, Foez Ullah, claimed that Modi's policies are in opposition to the fundamental elements of Bangladesh's core beliefs (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Another statement by the Union expresses that 'inviting India's riotous, communal Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the golden jubilee of independence is against the spirit of the liberation war'. In addition, Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh, an Islamist group, led the protests in Chittagong against Modi's visit. The group believes Modi is advancing a Hindu-first agenda in India. The view was echoed by Imtiaz Ahmed, one of the most renowned International Relations specialists in Bangladesh as well Dhaka University Professor, saying that 'Sheikh Mujib fought for a secular nation whereas Modi is inherently communal' (Al Jazeera, 2021).

2.3.2.7. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) Issue

The earliest years of British control in Bengal saw a significant influx of people into Assam. After the fall of the Muslim Nawab in East India in the Battle of Palassi in 1757, many affluent Muslims from Bengal escaped to the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent to avoid political repression at the hands of the British East India Company. These people settled down in Karimganj, Cachar, and Gauhati and started successful timber and manufacturing firms. Thus, it was Muslim migrants who first introduced industrialization to Assam. To maintain Assamese hegemonic dominance that is centered on language and culture, which reduces the

opportunities for political engagement among the Bengali population, provincial political parties conducted citizenship-centric movements against the Bengali people. The movement was known as 'Bongal Kheda' (1940s-1980s) and 'Assam Agitation'. According to the Assamese identity narrative, 'Bengali migrants' have been turned into 'Bangladeshi migrants' throughout time (cited in Sufian, 2020).

The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was established in India to track Indian nationals living in Assam, which experienced waves of mass migration in 1947, when India became independent, and in 1971, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Assam shares a 163-mile border with Bangladesh, and a third of its 32 million residents are Muslims - the second-highest ratio after India-administered Kashmir. The NRC, first compiled in 1951, marked residents of Assam as foreigners if they could not prove they had been living there before Bangladesh declared independence on March 26, 1971 (The Economic Times, 2019).

The NRC, followed by the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, denied citizenship to 'illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants' as part of BJP's Hindutva ideology. Hindutva's reconceptualization of India as a de facto ethnocracy underpins the BJP's portrayal of Bangladeshi Muslim migration as a hazard to the 'Hindu nation's' unity within it. The Bengali Hindu community, Tea tribes, and Scheduled Castes are seen by the BJP as a reliable voting bloc in Assam whereas Muslims are seen as a potential political danger for the party. To protect the priorities of the BJP-Multinational Companies nexus in Assam's energy and tea markets, the NRC in Assam has been made consistent with the BJP's geopolitical formula of initiating the CAA-2019. It has been argued that long-term exclusion of Muslim identity, i.e. the prevalent ethnic identity in Bangladesh, through the NRC-CAA in Assam and India may result in non-resilient and fractured Bangladesh-India relations (Sufian, 2020).

2.3.2.8. The Bangladesh-Pakistan and Bangladesh-Turkiye Relationships

Pakistan's efforts to mend the broken relationship with Bangladesh have been noticed clearly. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's telephone call to his counterpart in Bangladesh

(Syed, 2020) and the sending of mangoes by the Pakistan President to the Bangladesh President and Prime Minister (The Daily Star, 2021c) has drawn attention. Moreover, Bangladesh's recent leaning toward Chinese economic investments and its military cooperation with Turkiye (Daily Sabah, 2022) encourages the motivation for reshaping the relationship with Pakistan, the more so as the latter has the closest partnership with China. These changing undertakings of Bangladesh's foreign policy undoubtedly make India angry.

According to India Narrative (2021), in 2021 Dhaka discussed with Ankara the purchase of six Istanbul-class guided missile frigates, which are capable of anti-air, anti-surface, and submarine warfare. India, seeing itself as being Bangladesh's intimate friend, would be unwilling to approve of close political ties between Dhaka and Ankara, which continues to assist Pakistan's efforts to undercut India's dominance in Jammu and Kashmir. So, any effort to position Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Turkiye in opposition to New Delhi's policy aims, with China looming in the background, is improbable to be well received in India.

2.4. Conclusion

The international system is currently transitioning from a unipolar distribution of power, characterized by US dominance, to a multipolar or perhaps bipolar distribution, primarily due to the development of China and the relative decline of the United States. Consequently, China is actively endeavoring to exert its influence in neighboring nations and extend its reach further afield. In South Asia, there are land borders between neighboring countries such as India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Notably, India is the sole nation sharing three sides of its border with Bangladesh. Bangladesh shares its southeastern border with Myanmar, a country that is not typically classified as part of South Asia but rather shares much of its borders with China. China has established a significant presence in Myanmar over an extended period while Bangladesh has found itself caught amid a rivalry between China and India, both of whom are exercising their respective powers. The geographical proximity and cultural similarities between India and Bangladesh, except for religious differences, have provided India with additional advantages in exerting its influence over Bangladesh for an extended period of time. Nevertheless, at present,

the enhanced relative power of both India and China has resulted in significant changes to their approaches to implementing foreign policy. China's inclusion of Bangladesh in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the establishment of a 'string of pearls' might be interpreted as a manifestation of China's aspirations to attain great power status. This move is perceived as problematic by India in view of its proximity to China, with which it has a tense relationship. Consequently, China is expanding its sphere of influence while India is endeavoring to dissuade Bangladesh from aligning closely with China and is seeking comparable, or even greater, opportunities that Bangladesh has been affording to China.

India's foreign policy toward Bangladesh, its closest neighbor, primarily revolves around the principles of 'Neighborhood First' and the 'Act East' policy, which are influenced by the Hindutva dogma, the Kautilya factor, and shared historical ties. The bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh encompasses collaboration in various domains alongside several areas of disagreement. Cooperation is observed in military, trade relations, credit and loan agreements, the establishment of rail and road networks, the resolution of land border disputes, and educational and cultural exchanges. Most strikingly, a unity of opinion between the state governments and the central government of India facilitated the historic land boundary agreement with Bangladesh in 2015. On the other hand, there are some contentious issues in the India-Bangladesh relationship comprising water distribution, illegal immigration, border killings, hiding of insurgents, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), discrimination of Muslim and Hindu minorities, and the relationships between Bangladesh and Pakistan, as well as Bangladesh and Turkiye. India perceives Bangladesh's geographical constraints as a strategic advantage, allowing it to maintain a dominant position over Bangladesh. Furthermore, there are concerns about India's lack of sincerity in fulfilling its obligations under several treaties, particularly those related to water sharing with Bangladesh.

The two terms of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) regimes from 1991-1996 and 2001-2006, as well as the single term of the secular Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) regime from 1996-2001, did not succeed in elevating the relationship between India and Bangladesh to its current height, as achieved during the current BAL regime led by Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina since 2009. Furthermore, it is imperative to conduct a thorough assessment of Bangladesh's internal political dynamics, as they have a significant impact on India's external strategy towards Bangladesh. Bangladeshi politicians often exhibit a proclivity for positioning themselves as 'anti-Indian' and attributing the label of 'India's broker' or 'India's Dalal' to other political parties, with the intention of garnering public attention, particularly during election campaigns. It is indeed implausible for any political party in Bangladesh to exclude the India factor from its foreign policy upon assuming power, owing to the geographical constraints of the country.

In what respect can India's policy towards Bangladesh be interpreted on the lines of Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism and, especially, the attempts of powerful states to become regional hegemons? Indian policies like trading with and investing in Bangladesh, settling Indian-Bangladeshi border issues, or cooperating with Bangladesh in the educational field or against the joint threat of terrorism bring India tangible benefits - which may be the direct motivation to pursue these policies in the first place. But, seen from the long-term perspective, they also contribute to keeping a friendly Bangladesh within the orbit of India. And it is not a friendship between equals, as can be seen in the vast trade deficit or the fact that India invests in Bangladesh but not vice versa. Indian-Bangladeshi relations can thus be interpreted as India's exerting some domination over Bangladesh. This, in turn, would be an aspect of India's attempt to gain a hegemonic position within South Asia – just as good US-Canadian or US-Mexican relations contribute to US hegemony over the Western sphere or good German-Italian relations in the 1930s contributed to Nazi Germany's hegemonic bid in Europe. In this respect, India's policies towards Bangladesh are in line with Mearsheimer's approach.

However, Offensive Realism is indeterminate on the means that a would-be hegemon employs to exert domination over a weaker state. It seems that, while not excluding other means, Mearsheimer focuses on military ones. India certainly used the military option against Pakistan during Bangladesh's war of independence. Since then, however, the means it has used to keep Bangladesh as far as possible within its orbit have not been of a military nature but of an

economic and cultural kind. The case of Indian-Bangladeshi thus represents an anomaly in terms of Mearsheimer's approach

This anomaly is not the only one. Among the five principles of Offensive Realism is the assumption that states are unitary actors advancing their interests on the international level by rational means. Assuming that, for India's hegemonic aspirations pursued by non-military means, the most rational policy would be to cultivate friendly relations with Bangladesh, then some Indian policies would have to be considered non-rational. The non-implementation of the water sharing treaties, the border killings, the National Register of Citizens, and perhaps even things like Yoga Day or the expressed concern for Bangladesh's Hindu minority have the potential to create anti-Indian resentment in Bangladesh. This hampers India's aim to keep Bangladesh within its own orbit and indirectly do China a favor.

Why are these apparently irrational policies done by India? Some, like the NRC, go back to the ideological mindset of many supporters of Modi, namely emphasizing the Hindu identity of India; others reflect the influence of India's federal states over international issues, especially of West Bengal, in the case of the water sharing issue. This shows that in the case of Indian-Bangladeshi relations, at least, a Mearsheimerian approach needs to be supplemented by others that account for non-military means of domination and for domestic-level decision-making. A good candidate here is Neoclassical Realism, which integrates those domestic aspects neglected by Offensive Realism into the argument. From this perspective, India's policies towards Bangladesh are not only driven by systemic factors like its regional rivalries but also by domestic ones like those related to identity issues and the federal structure of the Indian political system. Moreover, while analyzing Indian foreign policy in terms of Neoclassical realism, both systemic and domestic factors for India's foreign policy toward Bangladesh can be understood. As discussed above, the Indian foreign policy pattern to Bangladesh is largely run by a global power structure except for some domestic issues that can supplement as intervening factors to systemic factors.

On the other hand, in what respect can India's policy towards Bangladesh be interpreted on the lines of Liberalism and, especially, the attempts of powerful states to become regional hegemons? India and Bangladesh have engagements in several regional (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and global institutions (NAM, AIIB etc). However, Liberalism expects that international organizations bind nations together for mutual cooperation. Although this is indeed partially the case as far as the India-Bangladesh relationship is concerned, the high trade deficit, border killings, and restricting water sharing substantiate that the relationship is one-sided and largely dependent on India's will. The cooperation can thus be interpreted as an Indian attempt to keep Bangladesh in its orbit and to establish domination in the region. Despite being a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, India is not collaborating with Bangladesh on the smooth running of SAARC and is also opposing Bangladesh's endeavors to include China in the organization (Ghimire and Pathak, July 30, 2021). The claim that countries which are democratic do not go to war against each other - one of the prime principles of Liberalism (Kantian constraint) - also does not fit with continuous border killing by Indian BSF Bangladesh. Actually, continuous border killing can even be a solid cause for war. However, it is Bangladesh that does not embroil in war because of its 'friendship to all, malice towards none' principle and its internal divisions on the India issue (discussed in the fifth chapter).

What can be explained through Constructivism is how India's philosophical tradition - Kautilya's thinking concerning the urgency of expansion for safeguarding a state - strongly shaped the strategic thinking of ruling elites with respect to India's policies towards its neighbors. Though India has no recent record of expansion, persistent border killing, non-implementation of the Ganges River treaty, and not signing of the Teesta River treaty, and endeavors for a renewal of the 1972 comprehensive military treaty with Bangladesh substantiate India's zero-sum attitude.

The historical root of India play an important role here. The ancient Hindu period is assumed to be the glorious past by extremist, Hindutva-inclined BJP supporters. Policymakers

are motivated to take action to delete any feelings of subjugation by undermining both the Mughal and British legacies and by undertaking a 'Hindu first' approach in both domestic and regional politics. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which explicitly targeted Muslims of India and abandoned many Muslims in Assam as illegal, is derived from that point of view. The replacement of Panchsheel with Panchmrit, which highlights non-Western cultures, is rooted in the current Indian government's effort to delete the memories of British domination in the Indian sub-continent.

Furthermore, its identity as a previously colonized country encouraged India not to join any alliance but rather to lead in the NAM and later to pursue the Act East policy to retain autonomy in its foreign policy. The idea of a great Indian state rooted in Hindutva persuades the country to formulate a neighborhood-first policy under which economic, military, and cultural cooperation takes place. According to this way of thinking, otherwise China would cooperate with Bangladesh, which would undermine Indian influence. On the other hand, India's non-cooperation – the border killings, trade deficit, not implementing the water treaty – derives also from the feeling that complete cooperation would not keep Bangladesh subservient to India. So, the historical feeling of subjugation not only persuaded India to deemphasize the British and Mughal legacy but also forced neighboring countries to accept subjugation.

In addition, Modi's personality traits and leadership style need to be taken into consideration. Extraordinarily, his roots are that of a typical tea-vendor who became a person having a mass following in India. This and his ideological connection with RSS and Hindutva-inspired him to seem himself as the vanguard of India's Hindu majority people. One effect of this is that he keeps trust into the secular BAL for preserving the security of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. Also, Modi is visualizing himself as a vigorous figure who successfully can maneuver the Hindu people's demands through utilizing Hindutva ideology, thus securing for himself consecutive terms at the top of political power in India.

THIRD CHAPTER

CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY TO BANGLADESH

3. Introduction

According to Xi Jinping,

“Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was an old and good friend of the Chinese people. He visited China twice in 1952 and 1957 and forged great friendships with Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai, and other Chinese leaders of the elder generation. The seed of China-Bangladesh friendship had been planted by the veteran leaders of the two countries long before diplomatic ties were established” (Jiming, 2021).

There is an involuntary irony in Xi's seeking of the baseline of China's relationship with Bangladesh from the former's 'dream of national renewal' and the latter's 'dream of Sonar Bangla.' The Sonar Bangla concept was associated with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who could not forge a bond with China during his rule from 1972 to 1975 despite his efforts to do so. Being a friendly neighbor and the largest source of funds, China attracts Bangladesh and other South Asian nations, except Bhutan, to approach it for implementing major projects. China's intention to link its landlocked Yunan province to the Bay of Bengal for economic purposes is an important cause why China is so tenacious in framing economic ties with Bangladesh. In addition, China's ever-increasing economic power and political clout from the 1980s onwards and the likelihood of China's elevating itself to position the world's largest economy from its current second place after the USA in the near future – all this attracts all South Asian countries except Bhutan (Datta, 2021: 171-173). The Chinese government's foreign policy and diplomatic efforts have reached a pivotal juncture. In the effort to craft short-term and long-term strategies promoting China's global and regional interests, President Xi has called on his entire party cadre, including members of the Chinese diaspora, to spread and promote

China's cultural soft power. This will help to project China's identity as a quiet and committed nation. Reviving Marxist-Maoist ideology is also part of Xi Jinping's strategy to check Western liberal democracy in China (Jain, 2017). However, China's arms sales, provision of bulk infrastructure loans, and Chinese state-owned companies' leading in building infrastructure in South Asian countries, particularly in Bangladesh and just next to India, drew mounting concerns from India in view of its strategic security perspectives. This has been triggering India, perceived as the regional hegemon in South Asia, to pursue policies to deter Bangladesh from approaching China while China is pursuing efforts to diminish Indian influence in Bangladesh. To get a clear understanding of such developments, let us illustrate China's foreign policy details through the following points: a) The grand strategy of China's foreign policy, b) China's foreign policy towards South Asia, c) The areas of cooperation and contention between China and Bangladesh.

3.1. Grand Strategy of Chinese Foreign Policy

Jisi (2011) argues that a nation's grand strategy must respond at a minimum to the following three inquiries: what are the basic 'interests' of the country, what outside elements challenge those interests, and what steps can the national government take to protect those interests? He also argues that as China has not declared any grand strategy as of today, the content of such a grand strategy is now an open secret that calls for a debate.

Chinese history underwent a long period of feudal rule that ended with the Opium War (1839-1842). The war forcibly opened the door of China for Western imperialists, turning China into a semi-colony and a humiliated nation. After independence from imperialist influence, Chinese society experienced a long period of stagnation due to its self-sufficiency and to the policy of closing its doors to the outside world. However, the debate on Chinese policy strategy started to grow during the latter half of the 1970s following the inauguration of openness and revision by Deng Xiaoping (Wenzhao, 1990). Wenzhao writes that,

By the early twentieth century, China had signed unequal treaties with almost every capitalist country in the world. By these unequal treaties, Chinese territory was ceded, harbors forcibly

occupied, tariff sovereignty seized, financial lifelines manipulated, and economic rights to railways and mines snatched. Foreign powers' influence extended throughout the country, state sovereignty was torn to pieces, the national economy was depressed, and people were living in untold misery and suffering. These historical facts of more than half a century have proved that foreign invasion and oppression by the feudal rulers of the country were the fundamental reasons for China's poverty and backwardness. (Wenzhao, 1990)

Mao believed that the world had become so divided between imperialist and revolutionary forces that an alignment with the USSR was necessary. China's worldwide power, prestige, and security would all increase if it took a firm stance with the revolutionary camp led by the USSR, which would, in turn, assist in moving the rest of the world towards a socialist society. Keeping the forward momentum of the Chinese domestic revolutionary struggle was another reason Mao considered collaboration with the Soviet Union important. By 1949, the revolutionary goal was to overthrow capitalism and to establish a 'Leninist political system' based on a centrally planned, state-owned economy. The thirty-year military pact between the PRC and the USSR during the Mao Zedong era brought the USA and the PRC in two opposite directions. However, Washington reversed its hostile tactics toward China in 1971-72 after a change in Chinese geostrategic orientation. In addition, the Reagan administration, which led the most extensive and continuous anti-communist initiative of the whole Cold War against the Communist bloc, endorsed the PRC's attempts to undertake military upgrading during the 1980s. Another occasion when the anti-communist doctrine did not stop the USA from helping the People's Republic of China's economic endeavors was in the 1990s, when the PRC, the globe's only significant socialist nation, set out on an aspirational route of globalization (Garver, 2003).

During China's rise, for a long time the question of what policies China should pursue at the global level with respect to the existing hegemon America was answered by Deng Xiaoping's '24-Character Strategy': "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership" (Latham, 2020).

Deng's realization of the urgency for financial progress and national advancement led to an increase in China's external connections and its participation in international organizations (Stanzel, Jacob, Hart, and Rolland, 2017). Deng Xiaoping began a number of domestic reconstruction projects and actively sought out international trade and investment opportunities (Garver, 2003). Hu Yaobang, secretary-general of the CCP, developed the new Chinese external policy in 1982 in accordance with reform and opening up to the external world, emphasizing independence and peace, which would be advantageous to China's long-term social and economic progress. The word 'peace' denotes the fact that China based its foreign policy decisions on whether or not another state will contribute to global and regional stability and peace rather than on the pursuit of military dominance. And 'independence' denotes that China based its foreign policy on both its own domestic benefits and the benefits of all peoples across the globe (Liping, 2001: 18, cited in Garver, 2003).

Deng's new strategy likewise dropped most of China's previous external policy's ideological components. Put another way, national interest would take precedence over ideology in determining China's ties with foreign nations. Therefore, as long as a state did not constitute a security danger to China and could aid Chinese modernization endeavors, China could establish cordial ties with all nations, regardless of whether it adhered to capitalism or socialist ideologies like those of the Soviet Union (Garver, 2003). China's joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and stepping up its relationship with the US signifies changes in its external policy. Moreover, in an effort to increase trust in it, China involved with various regional-level international organizations (Hormats, Economy and Nealer, 2001).

Thus, China took a U-turn from being limited to socialists to the rest of the world based on satisfying its national interest. The policy went further hand in hand in later days. Yet, the 18th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012 seems to be another turning point in understanding today's Chinese foreign policy, as it was only then that Xi Jinping rushed to step up innovations in China's foreign policy that had not been seen before.

This section argues that the shift in Chinese foreign policy has a connection with Xi's individual leadership. According to Tian and Munroe (2022), Xi Jinping is one of the 24 members of the Politburo Standing Committee. The seven-man Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party is highly allegiant to President Xi. Richard McGregor, the senior East Asian fellow at the Sydney-based Lowy Institute, states: 'All of his rivals, potential and real, have been forced out of the Politburo Standing Committee, and Xi loyalists took their place. The new Politburo is an emphatic statement of Xi's dominance over the party' (Tian and Munroe, 2022).

Xi solidified his hold on power and unveiled a new 205-member Central Committee in which two important figures who had no personal connection to Xi lost their positions. The party, which has around 96 million members, accepted modifications to its constitution to solidify Xi's position as the party's de facto leader and the primacy of his political philosophy. The 'Two Establishes' are one of the revisions that designate Xi as the core leader of the party and of his views as the pillars of China's future progress. The 'Two Safeguards' guarantee Xi's role as the party's core figurehead and its centralized control over China (Tian and Baptista, 2022).

3.1.1. 'Realist-revisionist' and Other Schools

China's favor of North Korea's inflammatory gestures, the political impasse with the Philippines and Japan in terms of territorial strife, and grievances between the USA and China over Taiwan (Buckley and Myers, 2021) validated Realist interpretations of China's external policy.

Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism stresses that as a rising power, China's policy behavior will be no different from that of the United States in the 19th century, i.e., pursuing regional hegemony in its own hemisphere (Mearsheimer, 2001). This indicates that China would follow a Chinese type of the Monroe Doctrine to catch up with the United States, the remaining hegemon, the same as the United States pursued regional hegemony in the 19th century (Kai

and Huiyun, 2013). In turn, the USA would also do everything to deter China (Segal, 1996). The U.S. shift of focus to Asia from 2011 (Clinton, 2021) could be exemplified as an endeavor to contain China's elevation in line with Realism's predictions.

The power transition theorists argued that China, as a rising power, has more possibilities to act as a revisionist by challenging the current hegemon and disarranging the current international system (cf. Gilpin, 1981). Despite Defensive Realists' assumption that nations focus on security rather than power (Waltz, 1979), power transition theorists are alarmed about the United States' fall, China's elevation, and the change of the international order.

China's decades-long pursuit of the strategy of 'keeping a low profile' and 'attaining some achievement' was replaced by 'proactively attaining achievement' in 2011, 'striving for achievement' in 2013, and 'striving for achievement in a new era' in 2017 (Wei, 2020). Moreover, China has gradually increased its military budget in recent years, as shown in the table below.

Year	Personnel Expenditure (By Yuan)		Training and Maintenance (By Yuan)		Equipment Expenditure (By Yuan)		Total (By Yuan)
	Quantity	Share (%)	Quantity	Share (%)	Quantity	Share (%)	
2010	185.9	35	170.1	32	177.4	33	533.3
2011	206.5	34	189.9	32	206.3	34	602.8
2012	195.6	29	233.0	35	240.6	36	669.2
2013	200.2	27	270.0	36	270.9	37	741.1
2014	237.2	29	268.0	32	323.7	39	829.0
2015	281.9	31	261.5	29	365.4	40	908.8

2016	306.0	31	267.0	27	403.6	41	976.6
2017	321.1	31	293.4	28	428.8	41	1043.2

Table 2: China’s Official National Defence Budget, by category, 2010-17

Source: China’s National Defense in the New Era, July 2019).

http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2019n/202207/t20220704_130616.html

China's ever-increasing military budget can trigger the country to pursue revisionism in its foreign policy. Though Mearsheimer’s Offensive Realism’s main focus is on a global level, like China vs. the USA, his conceptual framework suggests that China is a potential regional hegemon that could pursue policies to decrease the influences of other major powers in its own periphery. Thus, India could be the first target in China’s attempt to do so, as India is declared to be the prime partner of the US’s Indo-Pacific strategy.

The “nativist school”, which is extremely nationalistic and unwaveringly anti-American, recently pushed for policy of isolationism and unilateral freedom of action in which China matters first. Its members, drawing on both history and Marxist theory, have asserted that China should never have opened its doors to the world, as doing has brought back unwanted western influences, and that it should never have become entangled in an ineffaceably coercive capitalist world order, as doing so has undermined Mao's anti-capitalist movement. It also asserts that there will be no strategic alliance with the USA, no complicated relationships with other nations or international organizations, and no presiding over the demise of the American international system or the establishment of a Chinese one in its place (Latham, 2020).

The ‘Asia First’ branch of Chinese foreign policy is a group of academics and government representatives who contend that China's politics should concentrate on its near surroundings and, to a somewhat greater extent, on its East Asian neighborhood. This school of thought is of the opinion that China's economic development and national security will be put into jeopardy if the region immediately surrounding China is unstable or is controlled by nations that are

unfriendly to China. It calls for concerted action (multilateral if at all achievable, unilateral if not) to preserve China's regional map and to influence the Indo-Pacific regional order more extensively. This policy is based on the idea that China, like all other major powers, needs to look out for its own interests in the region known as the 'backyard', even though this backyard is being shaped by the United States' newfound preoccupation with the Indo-Pacific construct (Latham, 2020).

The 'Middle Kingdom' school, like the nativists, is firmly based on the idea that China is the successor to a millennium-old civilization that ruled its world in terms of military, economic, and diplomatic might up till the sixteenth century. However, they are different from the nativists in that they believe that modern China can restore its historical status as the Middle Kingdom and resume its rightful role at the heart of its world system, albeit one that is genuinely global in scope. They see this as both a threat and an opportunity because the American-led post-war order is supposedly in its final stages of collapse. It poses a threat because it raises the terrifying possibility of serious political and economic unrest, which would be harmful to China and the CCP. It is seen as a chance because it allows the CCP to establish a new global order that reflects the Chinese Communist Party's interests, values, and norms. This new system will eventually benefit China, just as the previous liberal order was advantageous to the US (Latham, 2020).

3.1.2. The 'Chinese Dream' and the 'Belt and Road' (BRI) Initiatives

It is very crucial to understand China's recent One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiatives, which is currently known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as part of China's current grand strategy of its foreign policy, as this initiative aims at China's global ascendancy in the political, economic and strategic arena.

Some argue that it is motivated by factors within China's internal economy, such as the need for more expansive markets, greater resource security, and new possibilities for Chinese multinational firms (Blanchard, 2017; Cai, 2017; Clarke, 2017). Others see it as the PRC's attempt to establish its authority over Eurasia and the international system (Cai, 2017, Len,

2018). And for some, it is an exercise in soft power (Clarke, 2017). To understand the motives for China's Belt and Road Initiative, one needs to focus earlier than 2013, when Xi declared BRI for the first time.

The BRI has been highlighted as a way to strengthen China's standing in the global economy within the current setting and is the focal point of China's current external policy (Flint and Xiaotong, 2019). In the early fifteenth century, the Ming emperor sent off a number of naval operations and treasure ships to external states, approaching as far as the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the African continent (Waugh, 2011, cited in Yu, 2017). Thus, China linked itself with its neighboring coastal states in the region in ancient times.

While traveling to two distant neighbors in the fall of 2013, current President Xi Jinping made the first official remarks concerning the BRI. One was at China's western continental boundaries, i.e. in Kazakhstan, and the other was at its southeastern sea boundary, i.e. in Indonesia. These opening comments were brief and interwoven in longer passages that mostly emphasized the importance of bilateral ties. Its importance and intended audience were obviously local, with the historic Silk Road's shared legacy serving as a legitimizing common denominator. In Astana, President Xi suggested a new strategy to forge tighter economic links, strengthen cooperation, and increase possibilities for growth in the Eurasian region by collectively building an economic belt along the Silk Road. The address in Jakarta alluded to China's will to deepen maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries to construct the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, aiming to maximize mutual benefit through shared development and prosperity (Alves and Lee, 2022).

The speech in Kazakhstan offered five vectors of cooperation for this journey. The first is discussing policies with others while finding a middle ground amongst disagreements. The second is connectivity, which aims to unite East Asia, West Asia, and South Asia to promote trade and tourism throughout the region. The third objective is to raise the rate and quality of regional economic flows and attain 'win-win' development through the elimination of trade barriers, the reduction of trade and investment costs, and removing other obstacles to free

markets. The fourth axis is increasing the flow of money by encouraging the use of regional currencies in commerce, similar to how China and Russia have dealt with one another. The fifth focuses on fostering intercultural understanding through cordial interactions to develop widespread public support and a strong social base for regional cooperation (Xi, 2013, cited in Alves and Lee, 2022).

These statements indicate that the initiative was originally conceived of as a broad, diversified cooperation platform with the primary goal of promoting economic integration and common development with China's western and southeastern neighbors. However, the initiative's geographic focus has evolved over time to progressively become worldwide. There is little question about the enthusiasm the BRI concept inspired around the world, especially among political elites in developing countries, as evidenced by the growing number of nations joining BRI agreements with China – over 140 by January 2021 – giving Beijing a significant confidence uplift. However, academic and policy communities, especially in the West, were concerned by the lack of clarity in the original concept. In later days, the BRI was explained by three policy papers in 2015, 2017, and 2019 as well as by President Xi Jinping's two addresses at the inaugural ceremonies of the first and second BRI Forum meetings, organized in Beijing in 2017 and 2019 (Alves and Lee, 2022).

Chinese state-owned companies are engaged in constructing container ports in a couple of countries that are shown below, imply the significance of China's BRI.

China's One Belt, One Road



Figure 3: China's One Belt, One Road

Source: Yuan F (2019). The one belt one road initiative and China's multilayered multilateralism. In *Mapping China's 'one belt one road' initiative* (pp. 91-116). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Chinese engagement in constructing ports in accordance with its BRI programs are in the below.

Name of the Port	Location	Name of the Chinese Company	Ratio of Shareholding
Kuantan Port	Malaysia	Guangxi Beibu Gulf Port Group	40%
Singapore Container Port	Singapore	COSCO Pacific	49%
Kyaukphyu Port	Myanmar	China National Petroleum	50.9%

Corporation (CNPC)			
Colombo International Container Terminal	Sri Lanka	China Merchants Holdings (International)	85%
Hambantota Container Port	Sri Lanka	China Harbor Engineering Corporation	65%
Gwadar Port	Pakistan	China Overseas Port Holding Company	40-year lease agreement for operating and managing port
Safaga Port	Egypt	COSCO Pacific	20%
Djibouti Container Port	Djibouti	China Merchants Holdings (International)	23.5%
Haifa New Port	Israel	Shanghai International Port Group	25-year lease agreement for operating and managing port
Piraeus Container Port	Greece	COSCO Pacific	35-year lease agreement for operating and managing port
Naples Container Port	Italy	COSCO Pacific	50%
Port of Antwerp	Belgium	COSCO Pacific	25%

Table 3: Chinese Companies' Investment in Container Ports along the Silk Road Route.

Source: Yu H. (2017). Motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiatives and establishment of the Asian infrastructure investment bank. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26(105), 353-368.

3.1.3. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

The OBOR strategy of China centralizes interconnectivity infrastructure development (Yu, 2016). In October 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared the formation of a new multilateral development bank led by China named the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in order to ‘promote interconnectivity and economic integration in the region’ and ‘cooperate with existing multilateral development banks’, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2013).

Two years of discussions concluded at the formal setup of the AIIB on December 25, 2015, comprising 57 founding members together with four G-7 countries, i.e. Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy (Weiss, February 3, 2017). It started its function in mid-2016, and the number of its total membership reached 103 by the end of 2020, exhibiting about 79% of the world population and GDP (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 2022).

According to the Congressional Research Service Report (February 3, 2017), ‘the purpose of the Bank shall be to (i) foster sustainable economic development, create wealth and improve infrastructure connectivity in Asia by investing in infrastructure and other productive sectors; and (ii) promote regional cooperation and partnership in addressing development challenges by working in close collaboration with other multilateral and bilateral development institutions.’

3.2. China’s South Asian Policy

Jain (2017: 115) argues that three major pillars serve as the foundation for Xi's South Asia strategy. First, China will keep advancing and solidifying its historical connections with Pakistan, which saved it from ‘international isolation’ during the 1960s and first half of 1970s. Second, as an effort to entice South Asian nations to join, Xi launched the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) policy. Third, Xi's energy diplomacy is concentrated on Bangladesh's abundant mineral (coal, oil, natural gas, hard rock, white clay, limestone, mineral sand, and glass sand) and energy (solar, Wind, biomass, and hydropower) resources.

China's economic influence is growing in South Asia because of the region's strategic importance. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka make up South Asia, which has 1.67 billion people (22% of the world's total) (Jain, 2018). India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bhutan border China. South Asia has been called the 'epicenter of future middle-class growth' in global trade (Wenqian, 2016). As it is a nuclear flashpoint and as important water channels of communication between the Orient and the Occident go through the Indian Ocean, the region has gained interest in world politics (cited in Jain, 2018). The most notable examples of China's ties to the South Asian region during the Cold War were its 'all-weather' relationship with Pakistan, particularly in terms of supplying military equipment and enhancing Pakistan's nuclear and missile capabilities, and its unstable, though occasionally improving, ties with India due to the unsettled border conflict (Jain, 2018).

China, Jain (2018) further argues, did not even open an embassy in the Maldives, a coastal South Asian country until 2011, and still has no diplomatic ties with Bhutan. However, in recent years, particularly under Xi Jinping's rule, China has increased its outreach to the area across a wide range of fields, from commerce and investment to culture and higher education, and is rapidly infiltrating into the region by capitalizing upon its alluring economic generosity. The arrangement of the 14th China South Asia Business Forum in Kunming, Yunnan, on June 12, 2019, collaboratively held by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SAARC CCI) and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) aimed at strengthening commercial and economic ties between South Asian nations and China.

In addition, Jain (2018) thinks that China, as a rising global power, has three main goals in South Asia: First, to expand its economic hegemony in the region and hence its financial clout and to reduce India's sway over the region. Second, China plans to boost bilateral relations with each country in the region through its economic diplomacy. The third benefit is that it supports China's economic policy of exploiting its geo-economic dominance over trade-reliant nations.

The BRI of China included the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula (ICP) Corridor, the New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the Maritime Silk Route (MSR), that will explicitly impact India (Sharma, 2019). On the other hand, to counter China's rise, India has been championing the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) collaboration, the Indo-Pacific policy, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). BBIN targets improving connectivity and security by segregating Pakistan and countering Chinese dominance in South Asia. It might be seen as India's response and alternative to the BCIM EC and the anticipated China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor (CNIEC) (Zhaoli, 2017, cited in Sharma, 2019).

Moreover, Gwadar, near the very tip of Pakistan's coastline, has big plans as a Belt and Road port city. Thus, Chinese exports will be able to cut across Pakistan in place of having to go across South Asia. China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) has benefited from the high-security compound in the port. The CCCC, a great share of which is controlled by the government, comprises numerous civil engineering projects. Rifle-wielding patrols are also seen there. In fact, the Gwadar area being close to Afghanistan and Iran, a long-running insurgency by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is taking place. Especially the attacks of November 23, 2018 and of May 11, 2019, aimed at Chinese Consulate in Karachi and, respectively, a Gwadar hotel that was constructed by China's investment, seem to be point towards a security issue for China that it came to address (Sutton, 2020).

In addition, China's alleged pursuit of a military base has raised concerns in the Indian Ocean region. Jiwani, 80 kilometers west of Gwadar, seems to host this installation. Once implemented, it would be China's second external army post after Djibouti, which opened in August 2017. Beijing's concern over a possible naval encirclement of its sea route appears to be the prime motivation for its development of the Gwadar port (SLOCs) (Rajagopalan, 2018). India seeks to advance its Neighborhood First Policy and expand regional and sub-regional collaboration to counter the BRI's increasing significance (Sharma, 2019).

Moreover, if the CPEC is seen from the point of view of China, India becomes affected by the old adage 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. This massive endeavor between China and Pakistan is considered as a challenge to Indian hegemony in the region because of India's adversarial relationship with Pakistan and troubled relationships with China. Kashmir cannot be excluded from any evaluation of India-Pakistan animosity. Since CPEC goes through the contentious region of Jammu and Kashmir and involves the development of hydropower projects, roads, motorways, and railways, India was initially concerned that China could become involved in the bilateral Kashmir conflict if it endangered Beijing's economic goals (Naqvi, 2017).

China's increasingly industrialized economy and environmental concerns have led to a greater dependence on gas and oil, resulting in a significant requirement to import a large amount of natural gas and oil (Biorol, 2010, cited in Rehman, and Ali, 2021). China's energy demands are projected to reach their highest point by around 2030 (Meidan, 2019). In order to meet its energy demands, China is obliged to import from a variety of suppliers located in Middle Eastern, Central Asian, African, Southern and Central American countries (Brutlag, 2011). Railways and pipelines serve as means of transport for moving goods from Russia and nearby countries while the sea is utilized for transporting goods from other supply nations (Wang and Lu, 2015). The maritime vessels are required to navigate via the Strait of Malacca, which is a narrow passage of water located between the Malaysian Peninsula and the Indonesian islands. The Strait of Malacca serves as a pathway for around 70-85% of overall oil imports of China (Brutlag, 2011).

However, Chinese naval vessels navigating through the Strait of Malacca encounter not just the peril of piracy but also endure the burden of a protracted and expensive journey. Furthermore, it is situated in a geopolitically precarious area, where surrounding nations are either aligned with the United States, China's economic competitor, or engaged in territorial conflicts with China (Shaikh et al., 2016).

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the objective of linking Western China to the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean. The region of Western China is geographically isolated from the sea and has a relatively low level of economic development. Therefore, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become especially significant due to the 'Go West' policy of China, which focuses on the economic advancement of five autonomous areas and six provinces, including Xinjiang and Tibet (Malhotra, 2015).

The CPEC primarily focuses on Gwadar and Karachi, which are Pakistan's deep-sea ports situated in close proximity to the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. The strait is responsible for around 44% of Chinese imports (Graham, 2019). These ports can be conveniently reached from both Central Asian countries and Iran. The Chinese leadership has considered them highly significant in the context of the "Go West" initiative and the goal of diversifying energy imports. Therefore, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to serve as a crucial channel for improving the economic integration of Western China by facilitating both land and ocean trading routes (Ranjan, 2015). This would not only result in a reduction of both time and expense associated with the conventional routes but it will equally enable China to decrease its dependence upon the Strait of Malacca.

3.3. China-Bangladesh Relations

Bangladesh-China relationship is based on five principles: Peaceful co-existence, spirit of good-neighborliness, mutual trust, confidence, and non-interference into each other's internal affairs (Business Standard, 2016). However, for the time being, changing national interests and diversified prospects in terms of bilateral relationship have affected the pattern of the relationship between the two countries (Ranjan, 2017).

In view of the two countries having no similarities in terms of geography, social history and culture, that the relationship between China and Bangladesh is called all-weather friendship is a matter of surprise in the study of International Relations. Though a formal bilateral relationship

between China and Bangladesh was established through the former giving recognition to the latter on October 4, 1975 (Quiyum and Jahirul, 2021) and inaugurating a Chinese diplomatic mission in Dhaka at the same month, traces of relationship between ancient China and Bengal are much older.

It was two thousand years ago when the southern Silk Road to the Indian subcontinent) was used as a trade channel which exchanged culture, science and business between the two ancient dominions. The reciprocal visits of the ancient tourist Fa Hien in the early fifth century and of Hue en Tsang in the seventh century from China and of Atish Dipankar in the eleventh century from the then Bangla left vestiges led to the first contacts (Xianyi, 2017). Moreover, during the reign of Sultan Giasuddin Azam Shah (1389-1409), Bangla or Bengal (currently known as Bangladesh) and China traded ambassadors with one another (Huq, 1993).

Later on, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then the Awami League leader, visited the People's Republic of China in 1952 and 1957 while China's ex-Prime Minister Zhou Enlai also visited East Pakistan twice in the 1950s and 1960s (Yan, 2020). Moreover, Moulana Bhasani, then Chairman of the National Awami Party in East Pakistan, also visited China and attended the 14th anniversary of the country on 1st October 1963 in response to an invitation from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Redmaulanas, 2018). Bhasani was a pro-Chinese political leader, as can be understood by his separation from the Awami League and his establishment of a new political party, the National Awami Party (NAP), in 1957 because of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy's pro-American stance in the later 1950s (Ahsan, 2019).

In later days, China opposed the very birth of Bangladesh as it was a trusted ally of Pakistan, and since the 1960s China took a strategic stance on the liberation of East Pakistan issue (Mahanty, 1983). On the one hand, China blamed India for the disturbances regarding the relationship between East and West Pakistan, marking it a gross Indian interference into the internal affairs of Pakistan. On the other hand, its recommendations focused on not using force but rather seeking a settlement of the odds between the two parts of Pakistan on the basis of mutual counseling (Quaderi, 1972: 386-387).

USA's favor towards West Pakistan's dominating rule over what was to become Bangladesh was marked by the US consul general to Dhaka in 1971 as the 'moral blindness' of the US external policy. She further argued that Pakistan's anti-communist elite was thought by the then US administration to be an ally that could satisfy the latter's strategic interests and put down the Soviet dominance in South Asia while Pakistan played the role of a channel for the USA's inaugural outreach to China (Ashrafi, 2021).

The China-Bangladesh relationship had a new start under the hands of Ziaur Rahman in 1975. Over the years, the relationship flourished and satisfied both country's respective interests. After the death of Ziaur Rahman, the relationship between Bangladesh and China relationship intensified under the hands of Zia's successor Hussein Muhammad Ershad, who was a military ruler like Zia. While Ziaur Rahman visited China only twice, Ershad visited China five times. So Ershad and the Jatiyo Party established by him should be characterized as more pro-Chinese than the BNP at that time. Ershad instated Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh. Despite all this, Ershad is not figured as anti-Indian because of his ousting from power by an all-party movement against him in 1990. After that, his party could not retain its support base in the country.

In later days, the BNP, during its stints in power in 1991-1996 and 2001-2006, continued its predecessor's policy with an anomaly. Even so, no policy against the interest of the People's Republic of China during the Awami League government period from 1996 to 2001 can be identified. Rather, the BDR-BSF clash in April 2001 and the death of 16 BSF personnel (Dugger, 2001) were deemed to be a critical event in terms of Awami League's relationship with India. However, since 2010, the warmest relationship established between the current BAL government and China is unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh, as will be discussed later.

China's declaration of the BRI in 2013 decisively enhanced Bangladesh's 'geo-strategic' significance. On the other hand, once the USA dismissed sanctions against Myanmar in 2016, India sought to develop connectivity with its eastern neighbors. Bangladesh got a position of

prime importance in this plan. Japan also declared its Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy in 2016 (Plagemann, 2022), whereas the USA, for a long time, had tried to establish a deep seaport in the Bay of Bengal-part of the Indian Ocean. The USA initially tried to get Bangladesh's consent but could not gain it. Thereby, it achieved consent from Myanmar instead. Thus, the USA, India, Japan, and China all have good reasons to bargain with Bangladesh over their ambitions for preeminence in the Bay of Bengal.

3.3.1. Defense Cooperation

The trajectory of China-Bangladesh defense cooperation is largely related to the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States of America. On December 10, 1971, during the last phase of Bangladesh's liberation war, the USA sent the 7th Fleet led by the USS Enterprise in the Indian Ocean in a bid for India's retreat from the war. In turn, the USSR sent a nuclear-armed flotilla on December 13 in response to that of the USA (Mahfuz, 2013). Because India was an ally of the USSR, China took a stance against the independence of Bangladesh and vetoed Bangladesh's entry into the United Nations twice (Singh, 2010).

As mentioned before, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, put his best efforts into establishing a relationship with China, but he could not succeed. After Sheikh Mujib's death in 1975, Ziaur Rahman sought to buy defense equipment from China, a policy that continued later. Since then, the governments of China and Bangladesh have maintained good relations since the relationship is mainly based on trade and infrastructure investments (Singh, 2010).

The then-Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Bangladesh in January 2002 resulted in the signing of a Defense Cooperation Agreement, the first in its character in the history of Bangladesh (Jain, 2017:118). The Chinese leader called Bangladesh 'a reliable and trustworthy friend' (The Times of India, 2002). The treaty aimed for Bangladesh to accumulate new weapons from China. According to the treaty, Bangladesh received 65 artillery guns and 114 missiles and systems related to it in 2006. According to Ranjan (2017), 'most of the tanks (T-

59, T-62, T-69, and T-79), a large number of armored personnel carriers (APCs), artillery pieces and small arms and personal weapons in the Bangladesh Army are of Chinese origin' (Ranjan, 2017). Jain (2017) argues that the treaty had protracted strategic implications for India because it carried China's strategic expansion into India's eastern flank in Bangladesh as well as helped accomplish 'China's game plan to develop Chittagong Naval Base' in a manner like that which it had implemented in Pakistan's Gwadar port. However, Bangladesh explained that it was 'not directed against any country and would not affect Bangladesh's relations with India' (Jain, 2017:118).

The SIPRI report on Chinese arms export to Asian countries is sketched in the following bar, clarifying China's role as the prime arms provider to Bangladesh.

Chinese Arms Export to Asia (2010-2020)

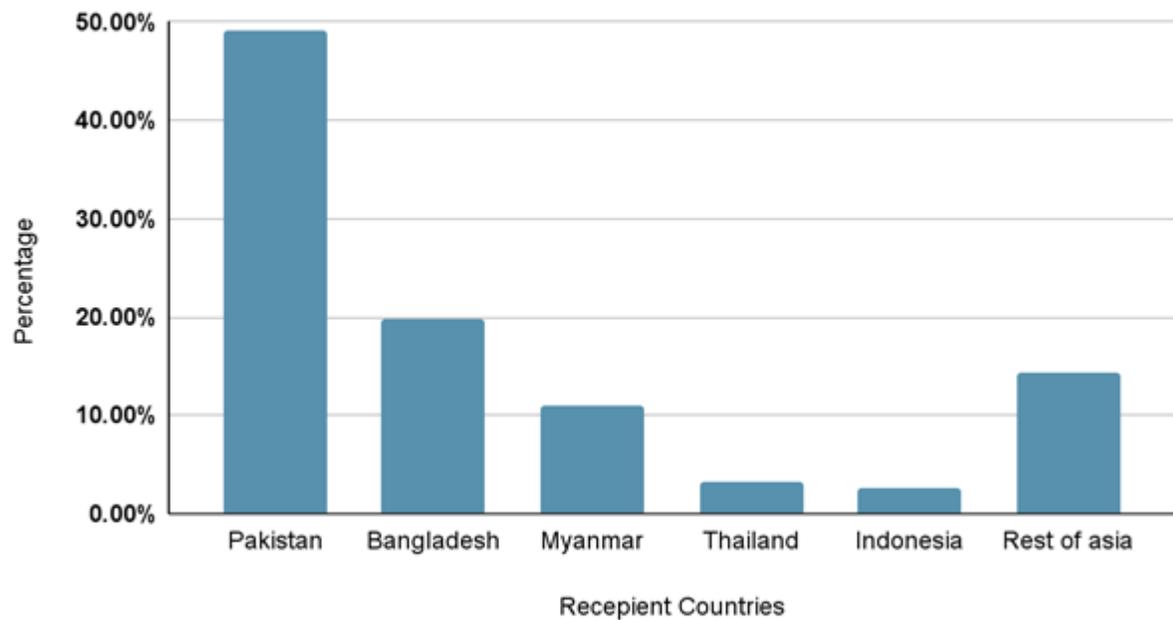


Figure 4: Chinese Arms Exports of Asia

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2021), cited in China Power, Web Link: <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-global-arms-trade/> (The pattern of visualizing the information has been sketched according to author keeping the data original)

However, the relationship is not limited to military hardware sales. Chinese military officials holding high profiles visited Dhaka in 2014 when the two countries re-signed agreements in terms of giving training to the military personnel of Bangladesh. A meeting between General Wang Jianping, deputy chief of the general staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), and General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiul Huq, visiting chief of staff of the Bangladeshi Army, was held in Beijing in December 2015. Both generals expressed their interest in collaborating more with each other in the defense and military fields (Tiezzi, December 4, 2015).

In addition, in October 2016, the MoUs and other agreements were signed after which Chinese President Xi Jinping said,

We agreed to elevate China-Bangladesh ties from a comprehensive partnership of cooperation to a 'strategic partnership' of cooperation. We have agreed to increase high-level exchanges and strategic communication so that our bilateral relation will continue to move ahead at a higher level. (Global Times, 2016).

Xi Jinping's visit to Dhaka in October 2016 resulted in signing 27 agreements worth \$25 billion for Chinese investments in Bangladesh's energy and infrastructure projects (Paul, 2016); and it also resulted in Bangladesh's taking delivery of Chinese submarines in November 2016 just days before the visit of Indian Defense Minister to Dhaka (Raghuvanshi, 2016). Then, Sheikh Hasina's visit to India led to the signing of 35 deals and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and India's offer of \$5 billion worth of credit to establish infrastructure and buy military hardware in 2017 (Hussain, 2017). Bangladesh pursues of a 'go slow' policy to execute agreements with India, saying it would buy arms only if its military feels it necessary as the MoU does not impose any binding for Bangladesh to buy weaponry (Bhuiyan, 2020). This and Bangladesh's decision to buy military weapons from NORINCO (a Chinese company) and other state-owned companies of China (Sharma, 2020) implies Bangladesh's hedging tactics and its balanced stance towards China and India.

The relationship reached its peak when the Sheikh Hasina-led Bangladesh Awami League remained in power in its consecutive term in 2018. China was one of the earliest countries congratulating the newly elected government while India was the earliest (The Daily Star, 2019). Moreover, in recent times, Bangladesh's repeated support to for the One China policy (The Daily Star, 2022a) strengthened the relationship between the countries more.

3.3.2. Economic Cooperation

China's outstanding economic growth made Bangladesh one of the prime focuses for the former's engagement in South Asia. The country retained its smooth and steady GDP growth over the last decade except during the pandemic time, that is sketched in the chart below.

China GDP Growth Rate - Historical Data	GDP Growth (%)	Annual Change
2008	9.65%	-4.58%
2009	9.40%	-0.25%
2010	10.64%	1.24%
2011	9.55%	-1.09%
2012	7.86	-1.69%
2013	7.77%	-0.10%
2014	7.43%	-0.34%
2015	7.04%	-0.38%
2016	6.85%	-0.19%
2017	6.95%	-0.10%
2018	6.75%	-0.20%
2019	5.95%	-0.80%

2020	2.24%	-3.71%
2021	8.11%	5.87%

Table 4: China's Economic Growth

Source: Pattern of the chart has been changed according to the author keeping the originality of the data in Macrotrends. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/gdp-growth-rate>

Though informal economic relations between Bangladesh and China date back those between to pre-independence Bangladesh (East-Bengal and East-Pakistan) and Communist China, it was only under Ziaur Rahman's regime when a formal economic relation between the countries were initiated.

Dutta (2022) argues that, starting in the Zia era (1975-1981), China and Bangladesh began working together on a wide range of economic, technical, and trading issues. In March 1978, Chinese Vice Premier Li Xiannian visited Dhaka for the first time. The trip culminated in the signing of a pact to increase business, scientific, and technological exchanges. There followed several decades of visits to China by different delegations and leaders from Bangladesh, during which numerous agreements of this type were signed. Starting with the H.M. Ershad era (1982–1990), China became the leading foreign direct investor in Bangladesh.

The two countries' expanding trade partnership is still built on the long-term trade agreement that was reached in 1984. When China officially recognized Bangladesh in 1975, the two countries' trade was a pitiful US\$13.75 million. In 2001, it reached US\$918, in 2003–2004, it reached US\$1.14 billion, and in 2007 it surpassed US\$3.4 billion. Chinese imports from Bangladesh include clothing, textiles, frozen foods, leather, jute, jute goods, and plastics while its exports to Bangladesh include raw cotton textile and textile goods, machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical equipment, base metals, and vehicles. China overtook India as Bangladesh's top trading partner in 2015, unseating it from its 40-year position (Datta, 2021: 176).

China ventured for heightening bilateral, multilateral, and regional relations through attaching itself with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (Bhuiyan, 2021). The year 2016 is considered a turning point in the history of China-Bangladesh relations because Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the partnership between Bangladesh and China as a strategic relationship during his visit to Bangladesh, as mentioned before. Before visiting Bangladesh in 2016, the Chinese president said in his speech that China was now the largest trading partner of Bangladesh while Bangladesh was China's third largest trading partner and third largest project contract market in South Asia. Bilateral trade soared from USD\$900 million in 2000 to US\$14.7 billion in 2015, registering an annual increase of around 20%" (The Daily Star, 2016), and around 30% in 2022 (Datta, 2022).

Xi also said 'China is ready to synergize its 13th Five-Year Plan with Bangladesh's Seventh Five-Year Plan with a view to leveraging our respective comparative advantages, increasing economic exchanges and trade, building key projects in areas such as infrastructure, production capacity, energy, electricity, transportation, information, telecommunications and agriculture, strengthening practical cooperation under the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor and delivering to our people tangible benefits of our cooperation' (The Daily Star, 2016a).

Besides, a declaration of China on June 26, 2020 gave Bangladesh a 97% concession of tariff line with duty free export benefit on its extra 5,161 products totaling the number 8256 including the previous permitted items under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) (Islam, 2020).

3.3.3. Chinese Investment in Bangladeshi Mega Projects

The Chinese collaboration with Bangladesh includes development aid as well. Chinese investment in Bangladesh has exploded in recent years. Total FDI grew 10.9 times between

2011 and 2019. Bangladesh was one of South Asia's major receivers of Chinese FDI in FY19, at \$1.159 billion (Samsani, 2021).

China is financing ranges of projects in Bangladesh: 'Padma railway link, Dasherbandi water treatment plant, the development of national ICT infra-network for Bangladesh government phase III (Info-Sarkar), the construction of a tunnel under the river Karnaphuli, and the installation of single point mooring (SPM) with the double pipeline' (Kabir, 2021). Additionally, eight China-Bangladesh Friendship bridges (Samsani, 2021), as well as the Boropukuria power plant were built with Chinese assistance. Chinese citizens gave Dhaka the Bangabandhu International Convention Centre in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar as a bestowal from them (Aditya, 2021: 4471).

Moreover, the China Major Bridge Engineering Company constructed the Padma Bridge, which is regarded as a 'symbol of national pride' in Bangladesh (Patranobis, 2022). The bridge will link Dhaka's expressways and railways with multiple lanes to Payra, Bangladesh's largest deep-water port, making it convenient for travelers from northeastern India, Bhutan, and eastern Nepal to reach the port (Pramanik, 2018). The bridge will improve regional trade and cooperation along the Asian Highway No. 1 and the Trans-Asian Railway network in addition to connecting nearly 30 million people in Bangladesh's southwest region to the rest of the nation (China Daily, 2018).

China's Exim Bank is contributing \$3 billion to the bridge's rail link construction (Islam, 2017). China's investments in recent years have largely gone toward the energy industry. It's no secret that China has been busy developing its electric infrastructure, with many new coal-fired power plants among the many plants built. And in a joint venture with Bangladesh, which will pay 30% of the entire cost, it has constructed the largest power plant in Bangladesh. Three 1,320 MW units are approaching completion at a cost of roughly US \$ 4.5 billion out of a total of at least 12 proposed dual-fuel power plants. The Chinese government has proposed a solar power plant with an output of 310 megawatt and is actively involved in other green energy projects. Together with a Chinese firm, Bangladesh has established a joint venture with an initial

investment of US\$400 million, with the goal of constructing 500 MW of renewable energy projects by 2023 (Samsani, 2021).

China's efforts in the electrical grid are another key strategic area. China is investing US\$1.32 billion to expand and reinforce the power system network as part of a project called Power Grid Network Strengthening. With an estimated cost of \$2.04 billion, it will aid in the intelligent management of Bangladesh's electricity infrastructure (Samsani, 2021).

Moreover, a Chinese company constructed the Payra Bridge over the Lebukhali River making communication easier between Dhaka and southern areas of Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2021). In addition, transacting \$ 1 billion credit for managing Teesta River (Roy, 2020), and sanctioning US \$11-\$15 billion in the Payra Deep Sea Port (Samsani, 2021) certifies a close bond between the two countries. India thinks this is part of China's open plan to contain it in the region.

Besides, as per an agreement made in 2017, three natural gas resources in Bangladesh were purchased by Chinese firms, which totals more than 50% of Chevron's, an American company working in Bangladesh, gross gas output. Direct unloading of imported oil at the Chittagong refinery is made possible thanks to China's funding and assistance in the construction of a 220-kilometer pipeline and a single docking point in Bangladesh. Oil will be transported to mainland China's storage facilities from here, according to the Chinese government (Samsani, 2021).

To further develop the Mongla port, China also signed an agreement. China has offered to lend Bangladesh \$85 million, or 85 percent of the estimated US \$1 billion cost, to manage and restore the Teesta River. The Dhaka-Chittagong High-Speed Rail Project has also attracted interest from Chinese companies. It is investing heavily in numerous infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, including the building of eight friendship bridges, a sewage treatment plant, and a tunnel beneath a river (Samsani, 2021).

Furthermore, the Shanghai Stock Exchange Group and Shenzhen Stock Exchange Group, two major stock exchanges in China, have purchased a 25% stake in the primary stock exchange in Bangladesh. The Indian bid for the same item was 56% lower than the Chinese one. Other Chinese projects include the creation of special economic zones, the expansion of Sylhet Airport, and the construction of highways and rail links, the most prominent of which is the US \$3.3 billion Padma Bridge Rail Link Project. Alipay, a Chinese e-commerce giant, recently acquired a 20% stake in bKash, Bangladesh's largest mobile financial services provider. The first tier IV data center in South Asia is being built in Bangladesh, and China is providing funding and construction assistance. Besides, Bangladesh officials hoped to secure funding for a program called 'Modernization of Telecommunication Network for Digital Connectivity', which aims to close the digital divide between the country's rural and urban areas. Huawei, a Chinese tech giant, hopes to contribute 5G 'technical support' to the same project (Samsani, 2021).

3.3.4. Educational and Cultural Cooperation

With an aim to enhance bilateral relationship, the Chinese government provides full free scholarships to the Bangladesh students. The China Scholarship Council (CSC) and the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh are jointly working to implement the scholarship process for Bangladeshi undergraduate and graduate students, general and senior researchers (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh).

Apart from that, the Chinese language is getting more popular day by day than the previous time. Opening the Confucius Institute in North South University, University of Dhaka and BRAC University (three top ranked private and public universities in Bangladesh) targets expanding Chinese language and culture in Bangladesh (China Daily, 2009). A 'China Bangladesh Culture and Art Show' was held at North South University (NSU) and was co-organized by the Confucius Institute of NSU and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2023).

3.3.5. Covid-19 Cooperation

China continuously provided its Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine to Bangladesh; indeed, a notable number of them came as a gift from the People's Republic of China (The Daily Star, 2021b). The COVID-19 pandemic opened a new chapter in terms of relationship between Bangladesh and China as the latter had very little connection with the public health sector of the former. Following its pledge to give Bangladesh priority when it discovered COVID-19 vaccine, Beijing recently offered to send 100,000 doses of the coronavirus vaccine to Bangladesh for emergency use on March 16, 2021. China has previously received medical supplies from Bangladesh, including masks, gowns, caps, and gloves. At the same time, China has sent a team of medical specialists to Bangladesh to help with patient care, laboratory testing of patients, pandemic control measures, and training for Bangladeshi medical staff. More than 110,000 sets of personal protective equipment, more than 3 million surgical and N-95 masks, a sizable quantity of test kits, thermometers, ventilators, and sanitizers, as well as more than 110,000 sets of personal protective equipment have also been donated by China to Bangladesh. In order to combat the pandemic conditions, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has pledged one hundred million United States dollars to Bangladesh (Sakhawat, 2020, cited in Dutta, 2022:188).

3.4. Bones of Contention

3.4.1. Discontent on the Rohingya Issue

A holistic solution to Bangladesh's problems with the Rohingya refugee issue largely depends on China's voting role in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Though China and Bangladesh are having a generally warm relationship, the former's ceaseless opposition to proposals on the Rohingya issue in the UN (The Guardian, 2017) explicitly goes against Bangladesh's interest.

In October 2020, Myanmar informed China that it would accept the return of Rohingya Muslims who were living in Bangladesh at the time. China's Foreign Minister and State

Councilor Wang Yi declared in a remark on October 23 that ‘recently Myanmar had once again assured that the displaced Rohingya would be returned to Myanmar’ (Kamruzzaman, 2020). Accordingly, in a video conference on January 19, 2021, representatives from Bangladesh and Myanmar praised China's positive role in facilitating the repatriation and pledged to increase both bilateral and multilateral channels of negotiation and consultation, show flexibility, fill up disparity, and work for an early commencement of the Rohingya resettlement. China stated its commitment to the resettlement process and its desire to keep on using good offices. It advocated an increased dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh and to take a dynamic role in hastening the return of Myanmar’s citizens to their home country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

It can be argued that the worse the Rohingya crisis will become, the more Bangladesh will have to approach China. Consequently, the Rohingya crisis is not going to end in the near future. And a section of Bangladesh society thinks that the Rohingya problem is a non-traditional security issue that can turn into a traditional security one. So, Bangladesh feels a crying need to get China’s support for the settlement of the Rohingya issue in the future.

3.4.2. The Trade Gap

The deficit was just over \$1 billion in 2004, and it reached \$2 billion in 2006 (Dutta, 2020: 175). In FY-2019, the trade deficit between Bangladesh and China reached a record high of \$12,808 USD Million. The trade deficit grew at its fastest rate in fiscal years 2015–16 and 2017–18, both at 19% (Haroon, 2020). The trade gap in recent times can be discerned explicitly, as shown in the following chart.

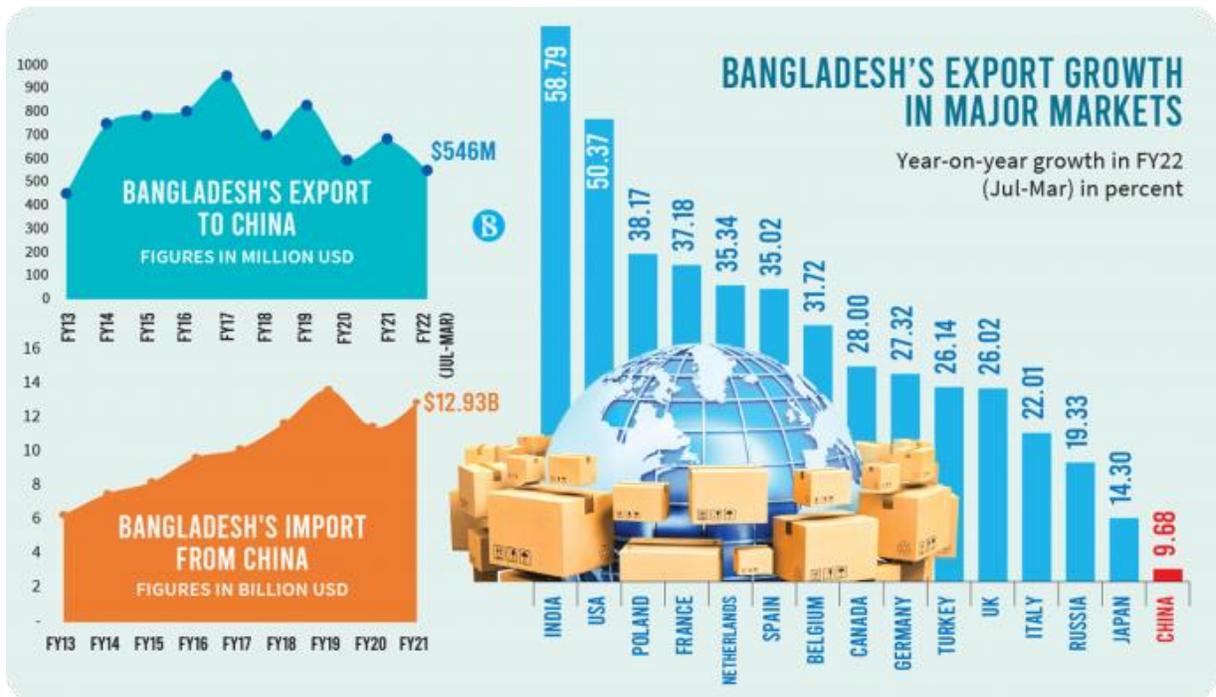


Figure 5: Bangladesh's Trade Gap with China

Source: Kashem A. (May 12, 2022). This is why duty-free access did not jack up exports to China. <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/why-duty-free-access-did-not-jack-exports-china-418742>. Accessed: 29-12-2023

However, on the occasion of the People's Republic of China's 73rd anniversary in October 2022, the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh confirmed in an interview with The Daily Star that China was trying its best to increase Bangladeshi exports (Palma, Oct 1, 2022). In fact, China is now experiencing a severe shortage of 20 items. Bangladesh's export hopes were undermined by the absence of any of its own products among the items in such categories. Furthermore, the need for internationally renowned branded items in China is steadily growing. China has a substantial need for leather items from Bangladesh. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has yet to establish a distinct reputation for its leather products, specifically within the Chinese consumer market (Kashem, May 12, 2022).

3.4.3. A Chinese ‘Debt Trap’?

Evidence from the past shows that China's ties to South Asia have been significant due to the area's status as a ‘great bazaar’. Given Bangladesh's geopolitical and commercial significance, China has been paying particularly careful considerations to the country in order to profit from it. If Bangladesh undertakes to maximize its potentials as a financial powerhouse in South Asia, it requires foreign money for its signature development projects as the funding of these projects is below its domestic capacity. Because of this, Bangladesh has been exploring opportunities to obtain financing from outside on favorable terms (Shazzad, 2021).

Since China adheres to a non-interference policy with its partners' domestic affairs, Dhaka is happy to accept increasing amounts of funding from Beijing. To address its social and economic issues, Bangladesh's rising economy needs substantial investment, which China is able to provide. To put it another way, as a result of its ability to link China's southeastern landlocked province, Bangladesh is crucial to China's strategic equations. Additionally, China can take advantage of Bangladesh's low wages and reroute its sunset industries there (Shazzad, 2021).

The U.S. government cautioned Bangladesh against deepening its commercial ties with China, citing the example of Sri Lanka, which became ‘unwisely’ connected with China and is now ‘suffering’ from the Chinese debt trap (Kashem, 2022). In exchange for a payment of \$1.1 billion, Sri Lanka reached an agreement in July 2017 with the China Merchants Port Holdings Co. to lease the port of Hambantota for a period of 99 years. This eased the weight of the debt that was incurred by China for constructing the port (Reuters, 2018).

However, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund consider a country to be in a precarious position when its external debts exceed 40 percent of its GDP. Bangladesh’s external debt is lower than 15% of its GDP. The country owes the World Bank 38% of its loans for the 2019-20 fiscal year, followed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with 24.50%, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) with 17%, China with 6.81%, Russia with

6.14%, and India with 1.3%. That Bangladesh is making progress in the right way can be seen in the data (Shazzad, 2021). Bangladesh’s overall foreign debts are sketched below.

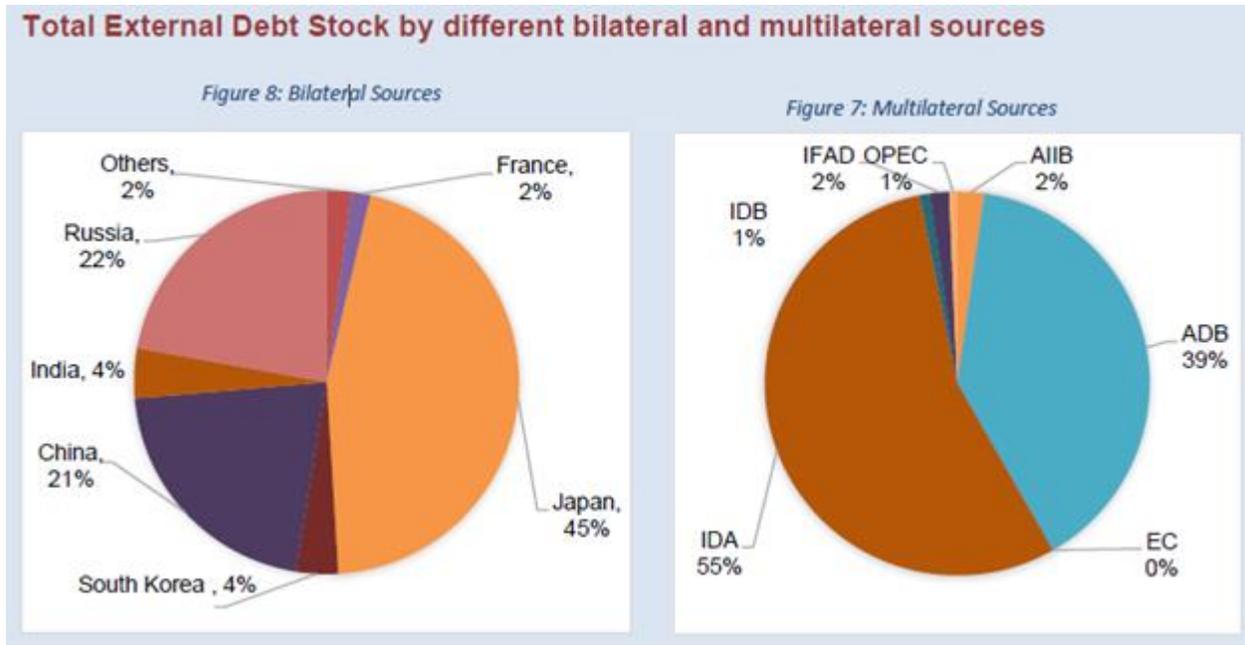


Figure 6: Bangladesh’s Overall Foreign Debts

Source: Quarterly Debt Bulletin, Issue No.3, June 2022, Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh

Moreover, to increase its 'foreign exchange reserves', Bangladesh applied for \$2 billion from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank in August 2022 (Reuters, 2022). Previously, Bangladesh has also applied to the International Monetary Fund for a \$4.5 billion debt in July 2022 (Aljazeera, 2022b).

3.4.4. The US-India vs. China Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific

The Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, Li Jiming, recently voiced his alarm that China’s relationship with Bangladesh would deteriorate if the latter goes with the US-led QUAD alliance. The latter aims at preventing Chinese expansion in the South Asian area. This statement

drew sharp criticism from Bangladesh, which stressed that it was an internal issue to decide whether to join QUAD or not. Bangladesh's Foreign Minister also criticized the ambassador's statement as interfering, aggressive and regretful (Rahman, 2021). This episode confirms that Bangladesh would not relinquish its position to any major nation. However, China kept on criticizing US influence over Bangladesh politics in later days.

On September 25, 2023, the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh stated that China is against any form of external intervention in Bangladesh (The Daily Star, Sep 26, 2023). Moreover, China has expressed its view that Bangladesh's Premier Sheikh Hasina's comments against (possible) US sanctions reflect the firm stance of the Bangladeshi population as well as the views of a significant portion of the global community, particularly the developing nations. According to the Chinese ambassador in Bangladesh,

We have noted the recent remarks by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Indeed, while turning a blind eye to its own racial discrimination, gun violence and drug proliferation problems, a certain country has long been interfering in the internal affairs of Bangladesh and many other developing countries under the pretext of democracy and human rights (The Business Standard, June 14, 2023).

Furthermore, on October 11, 2023, the Chinese ambassador, indicating the 'unilateral visa restrictions', raised concerns over the involvement of 'certain foreign countries' in Bangladesh (Dhaka Tribune, Oct 11, 2023). The background was that on September 22, 2023, the U.S. Department of State had imposed visa restrictions against persons 'responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.' It included the ruling and opposition political party and law enforcers of the country (The Business Standard, September 22, 2023).

However, Bangladesh's recent tilt with China more than with India created a bit of disturbance for regional and extra-regional stability. Dr. Ali Riaz, a Bangladesh-origin Professor at the Political Science Department at Illinois State University, expressed his alarm about

Bangladesh being ‘the theater for a proxy war’ between the two regional powers, China and India, while being interviewed by the Nikkei Asian Review (Han, 2020).

As Bangladesh looks to purchase cutting-edge weapons from the USA as part of its effort to modernize its army by 2030, the US wants to negotiate two defense deals with Bangladesh. These are the Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). GSOMIA is a cornerstone intergovernmental agreement that paves the way for improved collaboration efforts. Governments are not compelled to share any materials or information that are classified under the GSOMIA. It guarantees the security of the data exchanged between partner countries. The United States has GSOMIA deals with 76 nations, encompassing some in South Asia.

According to an US official,

We are currently working with the government of Bangladesh to conclude certain foundational defence agreements ... these are essential to enabling a close relationship, expanding opportunities for defence trade, information sharing, and military-to-military cooperation between our two countries. (The Daily Star, 2019)

The official also said that ‘it’s a reciprocal legally-binding agreement that ensures governments understand and commit to protecting classified military information’ (The Daily Star, 2019).

On the other hand, according to a US source who explained the ACSA agreement, it was created to make it easier for the armed forces of the US and its allies to buy and pay for supplies and services-food, water, clothing, transportation, instruction, oil, ammunition, maintenance, and medical services-of a similar nature. The source explained that, for instance, if a US ship docked at Chittagong and required gasoline, it could purchase it from the Bangladeshi government and make a cash payment. In other regions of the world, the US ship may compensate a Bangladeshi ship with a comparable quantity of gasoline (The Daily Star, 2019). From an aim to alleviate Bangladesh’s fear, the source also claims that,

The agreement does not in any way commit a partner nation to military action nor does it authorise stationing of ships, aircraft or military personnel in foreign countries. It only serves to

simplify procurement agreement, logistic support, supplies, and services between partner forces. (The Daily Star, 2019)

China's newly appointed Foreign Minister Qin suddenly visited Bangladesh immediately before Eileen Laubacher's, the senior director for South Asia at the National Security Council of the White House, four days visit to Dhaka starting on January 10. Though the Chinese side referred to the visit as a technical stopover, Qin's visit happened just before Donald Lu, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, visited Dhaka on January 14, 2023 (Tiezzi, 2023).

Political circles of Bangladesh were widely discussing the consequence of Lu's visit to Pakistan just days before Imran Khan was ousted from the parliament. The Foreign Ministry and other government officials concerned were seen to be very busy with preparations for approaching Donald Lu. The Bangladesh side was very careful about dealing with Lu because its Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which was formed by the direct assistance of the USA for operating the 'war on terror' has been facing US sanctions (Saad, Dec. 10, 2022) since December 10, 2021.

3.5. Conclusion

China developed a proactive foreign policy in 2011, a stance that was further strengthened upon Xi's accession to power. Xi's activism prompted the Chinese government to undertake the formation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the development of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) alliance, and the execution of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has arrived at a pivotal moment in its development, transitioning from a state of concealment to one of proactive efforts to gain acknowledgment in international organizations.

China's historical connection with Bangladesh can be traced back to the Pakistan era, during which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a prominent leader of the Awami League, visited China. Nevertheless, China's opposition to Bangladesh's pursuit of independence, then shared by the United States, resulted in a strained relationship between the two countries, despite Sheikh Mujib's endeavors to restore normalcy. The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon can be attributed to the prevailing dynamics of world politics during that period. At the time, the bilateral relationship between the United States and China was undergoing a notable transformation, coinciding with China's strong military ties with Pakistan. The favorable bilateral relationship between the United States and Pakistan can be attributed, in part, to the perception of Pakistan as an anti-socialist entity within the South Asian region.

China maintained its opposition to the establishment of Bangladesh until 1977, when Ziaur Rahman, the military dictator, formally assumed the office of President. Hussain Muhammad Ershad, a subsequent military ruler, similarly pursued a balanced approach by cultivating positive diplomatic ties with the Middle East, Europe, and America. This foreign policy pattern was observed throughout Khaleda Zia's tenure from 1991 to 1996 and from 2001 to 2006. China has been a steadfast partner of Bangladesh, maintaining a strong and consistent relationship. However, during the Awami League's governance period from 2009 to the present, this friendship has achieved its pinnacle. The goal of national renewal in China and the aspiration for Sonar Bangla in Bangladesh intersected within the current government's Vision 2021, Armed Forces Goal 2030, and Vision 2041, which necessitate substantial borrowing to support infrastructural growth. China has achieved good outcomes through Bangladesh's integration into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor. Chinese engagement in the construction of ports, a submarine base, and river management might be attributed to a strategic agenda aimed at altering the balance of power, given the expected surpassing of the United States economy by China in the near future.

The concept of the 'Chinese dream' and the emphasis on 'striving for development' under President Xi is widely regarded as indicative of a notable change in Chinese foreign policy.

China was motivated to increase its efforts in response to the country's economic importance following the global financial crisis in 2009. The geographical proximity between Bangladesh and the northeastern parts of India is of considerable significance in China's assessment of its structural power. China and Bangladesh have engaged in cooperative efforts in defense, economy, education, and culture. However, there are issues that have caused dissatisfaction on the part of Bangladesh. These include the trade gap between the two countries, the Chinese veto on the Rohingya issue, tensions arising from Bangladesh's possible participation in the US-led QUAD as well as concerns surrounding the GSOMIA and ACSA treaties.

With respect to what Offensive Realism would make us expect, the case of Chinese-Bangladeshi relations mirrors that of Indian-Bangladeshi relations: It broadly fits into the theory but also calls for some supplementary adjustments. As in the case of India, China surely gets immediate benefits from trading, investing, and cooperating with Bangladesh. At the same time, these policies allow China to keep a strong foothold in Bangladesh and thereby contribute to limiting India's influence there and thus hamper its bid for regional hegemony.

Again, paralleling India, China does not primarily exert influence over Bangladesh by military means. True, it is Bangladesh's prime supplier of military hardware. Furthermore, in line with the string-of-pearls narrative, Chinese port-building activities in Bangladesh have raised Indian eyebrows as they might be the first step toward naval bases. However, China has neither sent military forces to Bangladesh nor concluded a military alliance. Instead, China's main means of exerting influence over Bangladesh have been economic and cultural, just like India's. Indeed, China's economic influence abroad, especially the Belt and Road Initiative, has been interpreted as an instance of geo-economics, which means using economic means in interstate rivalries (Golley & Wesley, 2020; Medcalf, 2020: 182-185).

Finally, China also mirrors India with respect to some policies that are counter-productive for good relations with Bangladesh, namely its position on the Rohingya issue and its clumsy attempt to bully Bangladesh over the QUAD. While not as serious as the Indian-Bangladeshi bones of contention, these policies bring the risk of diminishing China's influence over

Bangladesh and thus involuntarily do a favor to India. Given China's very different political system compared to India's, religious identities or federal state interests cannot account for such seemingly irrational policies. One possible domestic-level explanation might be found in Xi's coming to power and his heavy-handed, autocratic way of handling others. In any case, just like the case of Indian-Bangladeshi relations, that of Chinese-Bangladeshi relations suggests that Mearsheimer's interpretation generally holds but needs to be supplemented by approaches dealing with non-military means of influence as well as with domestic-level factors. Again, this can be done by drawing, in the first place, upon Neoclassical Realism. From that perspective, China's regional rivalry with India is a system-level factor while China authoritarian and increasingly Xi-centered political system is a domestic-level factor. China's policies towards Bangladesh, including apparently contradictory ones, are the result of the way the systemic aspects are processed by the domestic ones.

Concerning Liberalism, China's rise would be peaceful as the country has economically spiraled into a liberal-minded international member of the UN, World Bank, and WTO. The Chinese-led AIIB, BRICS, and different economic projects under the BRI generated mutual dependency among states, which triggered the skipping China's revisionist ambition. Ex-Prime Minister Wen Jiabao expressed in a speech in 2004 that China's elevation 'will not come at the cost of any other country, will not stand in the way of any other country, nor pose a threat to any other country.' (Pan, 2006). This would fit very much into the Liberal assumptions of the benevolent effects of economic interdependence. It is however well to remember that China's trade with and investment in Bangladesh supports its position there against its Indian rival and that, furthermore, the economic interdependence between China and India has so far not led to amicable political relations. Nevertheless, the fact that China's position in Bangladesh is based not only upon security-related cooperation, namely arms deliveries, but also upon economic and cultural cooperation gives support for the interdependence Liberals' emphasis upon 'low' rather than 'high politics'.

From the Constructivist perspective, Cai (2020) points towards a philosophical tradition, i.e. Confucianism, which can be enlisted in support of ideals like sovereignty, equality, mutual

respect, non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs, and win-win patterns in international relations. The Confucianism-rooted idea of harmony among diversified interests and of overcoming conflict is deeply entrenched in Chinese foreign policy. Both India and Bangladesh are engaged in BRI and AIIB, which may be considered as an example of harmony. However, India's non-cooperation forced China to separate the BCIM from the BRI. More significantly, a question automatically arises: who will harmonize diversified interests? India is promoting the BBIN at the expense of BCIM and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. Thus, India together with Japan pursues its diversified interests. Again, in line with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism, India is doubtful about Chinese intentions related to BCIM, the deep seaport, and the submarine base construction, therefore opposing Chinese engagement in Bangladesh. Also, the Chinese ambassador's remark on the consequence of Bangladesh's joining QUAD asserts that harmony among diversified interests is not possible.

China's historical experience also includes Sun Zi's doctrine of 'breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting as the highest form of excellence' (Cai, 2020). This suggests different ways of avoiding war if harmony is not possible. However, Sun Zi favors achieving a quick victory rather than prolonging the war if the latter is unavoidable. This approach leaves room for the most disastrous war with the aim of winning a quick victory. Moreover, its 'great power mindset' and 'victim mentality' (Cai, 2020) also triggered China to obtain prestige at the global level through the BRI and through connectivity with the rest of the world. Furthermore, the Communist Party's seven foreign policy objectives put the highest emphasis on the security of the existing communist political system along with enhancing China's international status. Xi being the most prominent figure of the current Chinese communist system and his swift political maneuvering capacity could promote the 'Chinese dream' swiftly through the BRI and the AIIB.

However, the Chinese-Indian rivalry over Bangladesh (discussed in fourth chapter) substantiates that China cannot be certain of India's intentions. That is the reason why the Chinese ambassador in Bangladesh is commenting clumsily over the consequence of Bangladesh's probable joining QUAD. Canceling the contract with China for constructing a deep sea port named Sonadia deep seaport (Bagchi, 2016), India and Japan's construction of

another deep seaport just a few kilometers away from the canceled seaport, sharp criticism over Bangladesh's purchasing of two submarines from China and criticism over the Teesta River management by China, and India's complete absence in the BRI forum and giving more importance to the BBIN and the Asia Africa Growth Corridor – all this suggests that India also cannot be certain of China's intention in Bangladesh. These points certify the Offensive Realism of Mearsheimer, suggesting that states are not certain of other states' intentions. In fact, the fact that the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait are its main oil transportation route encourage China to establish an active presence in the Bay of Bengal (which is a part of the Indian Ocean) through the construction of Kyaukphyu Port in Myanmar. Moreover, connecting the landlocked Yunan province of China to the rest of the world corresponds with Chinese interest in satisfying its economic needs. This means that from China's point of view, it is a rational action.

FOURTH CHAPTER

INDIAN-CHINESE RIVALRY OVER BANGLADESH

4. Introduction

India was the first country to recognize independent Bangladesh (Mujibnagar, 1972) while China was one of the countries that delayed doing so (Quiyum and Jahirul, 2021). Accordingly, India became closest with Bangladesh and was the first and foremost concern in the latter's foreign policy as long as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in power. At the same time, he exerted efforts to maintain a balanced relationship with the great powers and the Muslim world including Pakistan. However, after his death, China and India embroiled in a competition for exerting influence in Bangladesh. The prime reason was Bangladesh's getting recognition from China in 1975 and Ziaur Rahman's stepping up the relationships with China, USA, Europe, and Arab world. At that time, India was on friendly terms with the Soviet Bloc while China was close to the US Bloc. For the time being, many more issues—both domestic and international - are relevant for Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh and will be discussed in the current chapter. This chapter addresses the following issues the: a) The determinants of the bilateral relationship between India and China, b) The areas of rivalry between India and China, c) The areas of rivalry between India and China over Bangladesh.

4.1. The India-China Relationship: Economic and Military Perspective

Whether Liberalism and, respectively, Realism can or cannot be applied to the relationship between India and China is a matter of scholarly debate in International Relations. Oneal and Ray (1997) argue that the liberal economic interdependence theory assumes that trade links between countries can lead them to peace rather than confrontation. According to The Economic Times (2022), trade between India and China increased by nearly a third, from USD 86.4 billion to USD 115.42 billion, in the fiscal year 2021-2022. India sends China about USD 21.25 billion in exports yearly while receiving USD 94.16 billion in Chinese imports. Despite

the trade deficit, a large volume of trade substantiates an elevated relationship between them, favoring an interpretation in line with the Liberal International Relations theory.

Moreover, Paul (2018: 5) argues that businesses and commercial organizations in India and China communicate, thereby opening up potential areas for collaboration. The potential for hostility has been mitigated thanks to the regular meetings between the two parties for the purpose of border negotiations. Being members of the same club of growing powers within the context of global governance has given them a chance to lessen mutual tensions. India and China have been able to engage in diplomatic dialogue and work together thanks to their participation in multilateral organizations like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), the Group of Twenty (G-20), the BRICS (India, China, Brazil, Russia, and South Africa), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Moreover, Reischer (2012) argues that there are examples of collaboration, such as combined surveys in the fields of natural gas and oil in Myanmar, Sudan, Iran, Syria, Colombia, and Peru.

“Globalization” has expanded commercial connections and reduced collision but not eliminated it. Ties between India and China become apparent through frequent highs and lows, the latter usually connected with unresolved conflicts. India’s decision to abandon its earlier official stance, i.e. that it would not do business with China except by addressing the latter's border issue, has launched a welcoming atmosphere for their economic relationship. In December 1988, Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, paid a visit to Beijing to demonstrate that ‘India no longer held other areas of interaction hostage to the settlement of the border issue’ (Sharma, 2009). However, more and more problems are emerging between the two countries as China is rising and seeks to build its geostrategic dominance in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, thereby running the risk of probable future armed conflict with the US and its partners, including India (Paul, 2018: 6).

In contrast to what economic interdependence would lead one to expect, India and China's military expenditures increase yearly. The Economic Times (2021) reveals that the Chinese

declaration of a \$200 billion military budget in March 2021 was three times bigger than that of India, with a 6.8% increase in GDP for the sixth consecutive year. Moreover, India frequently complains about the trade deficit with China while Chinese products overflow the Indian market. As a result, an unequal trade relationship exists between the countries, which is at odds with Liberal economic interdependence theory.

In contrast, Realism argues that too much trade dependency increases the possibility for one country to take military steps to secure its trade routes. As China's vast energy imports come through the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait, it may militarily confront India in the future (Rehman, 2009). Today, China is the biggest oil importer in the world (Arab News, 2023), which encourages the country to seek to secure the import route. Given this perspective, this section argues that China's BRI and the so-called 'string of pearls' are to secure its trade route while the 'pearls' are not used as a military base of China for the time being.

4.2. Indian-Chinese Rivalry

4.2.1. Bilateral Issues

China and India's conflict is well over sixty years old. The border battle between the two republics in 1962 cemented what had been a simmering conflict over the territory since the 1950s (Paul, 2018: 3). There are three parts of land that are up for debate. India and China are at odds over who should control the Aksai Chin Plateau in western Ladakh. Arunachal Pradesh, formerly known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), is located in northeastern India, but Beijing considers this area to be 'Southern Tibet' and hence claims 96,000 square kilometers of Indian land. Areas close to India's Uttarakhand state, totaling around 2,000 square kilometers, are in dispute. Despite claims that India consented to compromise on the western part in exchange for the Arunachal Pradesh region, China has refused to give up a major border area named Tawang due to its religious and historical importance to the Buddhists of Tibet. As a result of insufficient delineation, military guards from both countries frequently violate each other's proclaimed border stations, which contravenes the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that was demarcated following the war between India and China in 1962 (Paul, 2018: 7).

Attempts by China to single out the Dalai Lama and his adherents' foothold in Tibet are inextricably linked to the territorial dispute. Despite its official acceptance of Beijing's jurisdiction over Tibet in 2003, India has been providing shelter to the Dalai Lama and thousands of other refugees coming from Tibet since 1959. China considers it as an insult to its jurisdiction over Tibet. In 2017, India halted the PLA from constructing a road between Bhutan, India, and Tibet and on the doorstep of the strategically significant Siliguri Corridor connecting northeastern India to the remainder of the state. Despite prioritizing national security, India supported Bhutan's claim to the disputed area through a protectorate arrangement. This prolonged the crisis by 70 days and raised conflict fears. However, it was a surprise that both sides were unwilling to engage in armed collision (Paul, 2018: 7).

In addition, controlling the water flow of the rivers of Brahmaputra and Indus is another area where discord exists between the two countries. India fears that China may redirect water from the Brahmaputra by setting up barrages on the river, which flows 28,000 kilometers through China into India. Despite worries about the detrimental environmental effect of the dams and water redirection, China insists that the 'hydroelectric projects' are not against the natural flow and would not disrupt the water movement as well (Ramachandran, 2015; Paul, 2018).

The conflict has reached novel stages as China, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, has stepped up its efforts to become a world power, and India, under the authority of Narendra Modi, has stepped up its efforts to be acknowledged as a growing major power. The competition is becoming systemic, encompassing many broader strategic challenges and geographical regions that had not been affected by it before, suggesting that the conflict is not getting over in the near future (Paul, 2018: 4). There are some regional and international issues behind their conflict that are discussed in the following section.

4.2.2. Regional and International Level Issues

The economic liberalization during the 1990s prompted India to spread its sphere of influence to Central Asia and Africa, vying with China for hydrocarbons (Reischer, 2012). China and India had nearly identical rankings in Asia in the late 1940s due to their similar colonization history. However, the status quo altered with India falling behind China in economic progress and martial ability. China's attainment of permanent membership in the UNSC in 1972 and its de facto participating in the US-led anti-Soviet bloc in the 1970s increased its prestige in the Western world. Moreover, unlocking China's economy to the Western world a decade before India did the same enhanced its global economic share. Political systems are another contrast. China was frank about seeking a bigger rank at the Asian-African Bandung Conference in 1955, arranged by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Suharto. China's growing linkages to Asia and Africa concerned Nehru. In addition, China's efforts to woo developing nations, especially since the 1962 conflict, and Mao Zedong's calling India 'ackey of the Western imperialists' have a telling significance in this regard. Moreover, the end of the Cold War saw a different resurgence of India's and China's efforts to gain prestige. Though India took more than ten years to attain a high level of economic growth compared with China, it persisted in gaining 7-8% every year for more than one decade after its launching of economic liberalization forced the world to pay attention to India (cited in Paul, 2018: 8).

Since 2010, India started paying heed to the Pacific area of China while the latter's navy advanced into the Indian Ocean zone. China's marine policy seeks worldwide dominance while prestige and national pride underpin this policy (Ross, 2009; Paul, 2018: 8-9). As China extends its reach in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea by constructing ports in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, reclaiming and setting up islets, and strengthening its naval presence, India has begun to take the bait with naval drills as well as recharging and feeding US navy ships. India wants to strengthen its tactical ties with Australia, Japan and Vietnam, therefore its navy vessels are making more frequent visits to Southeast Asian waterways. In response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was formerly known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, Japan and India are working to create an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (Shepard, 2017).

4.2.3. The US-Indian Alliance in the Indo-Pacific

The third major bilateral summit between the USA and India in 2016 declared them as long-term partners while the leaders of the two countries praised the finalization of a collaboration framework under the 2015 United States-India Bilateral Strategic Planning for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2016).

Moreover, according to the Biden administration's newly declared Indo-Pacific strategy, Washington will 'continue to build a strategic partnership in which the United States and India work together and through regional groupings to promote stability in South Asia', as well as "steadily advance our Major Defense Partnership with India and support its role as a net security provider." India was also identified as a 'like-minded partner and leader in South Asia and the Indian Ocean' in the strategy and also 'a driving force in the Quad and other regional fora, as well as a regional growth and development engine' (Rajagopalan, 2022).

4.2.4. India's Nuclear Deterrent

A letter from India's Premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee to the President of the USA on May 13, 1998 reveals that India sets China as its primary enemy and its nuclear deterrent aims first at China, followed by Pakistan:

We have an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapons state. At the hands of this bitter neighbor we have suffered three aggressions in the last 50 years. And for the last ten years we have been the victim of unremitting terrorism and militancy sponsored by it in several parts of our country, specially Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir (The New York Times, 1998).

4.3. India-China Rivalry over Bangladesh

India's initiation of the “Act East” policy in 2014, which is an updated version of Look East policy (second chapter) initiated in 1991, aimed to counterbalance China in Southeast Asia. Apart from that, Bangladesh's retreat from the Sonadia deep Seaport that had been agreed to be constructed by Chinese assistance, can be judged as a significant event. In the scholarly debates, it is argued that Bangladesh canceled it due to India's pressure and security concerns.

Moreover, another striking fact concerning the rivalry between India and China over Bangladesh seems to be the geographical restraints as well as the domestic politics of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's external policies towards both India and China are highly centered on both its geostrategic location and its domestic political parties' conflict. As a result, that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's stance is generally perceived to be anti-Indian does not mean that the pro-Indian Awami League is anti-Chinese.

Rather, China has proved to be an ‘all-weather’ and ‘time-tested’ friend of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2021). Though the relationship between China and independent Bangladesh was journeyed by Ziaur Rahman, President of Bangladesh and the founder of BNP, all regimes after Zia maintained a friendly relationship with China. Many scholarly debates argue that China's economic assistance without any political interference has been attracting Bangladesh for long.

That China is Bangladesh's all-weather friend is indicated by comparing the number of visits by high-level Bangladeshi politicians to China and, respectively, India.

Name of Bangladeshi PMs or Opposition leaders	Visiting China	Visiting India
Ziaur-Rahman	January 1977	January 1977
	August 1980
PM Khaleda Zia (1991-1996)	June 1991, September 1995	March 1992

PM Khaleda Zia (2001-2006)	2001 December 2002 August 2005	March 2006
Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina	June 1993
PM Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001)	September 1996	December 1996, February 1997, September 1997, June 1998, January 1999, May 2001
Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina	September 2005, June 2006
PM Sheikh Hasina (2010-2022)	March 2010, June 2014, July 2019	January 2010 April 2017 October 2019 November 2019, September 2022
Opposition leader Khaleda Zia	December 2010	October 2012

Table 5: Bangladeshi Government or Opposition Leaders Visiting China and India

Source: The table has been slightly changed while keeping the data original from Datta (2008). Bangladesh's Relations with China and India: A Comparative Study, Strategic Analysis, 32:5, p-761

High-profile reciprocal visits between Bangladesh and India and Bangladesh and China shown in the above table from the beginning seem to be beyond normal fervency, which can be clearly understood by India's repeated concern about China's upper hand and efforts to deter Bangladesh from inclining to China.

China's welcome message to the newly elected Bangladesh Prime Minister (UNB, 2018), coming immediately after that of India (Hindustan Times, 2018), is another indication of the competition between China and India to exert their influence.

4.3.1. Bangladesh's Arms Purchases from China and Russia

Though Bangladesh purchases its arms from many big powers like the USA, UK, and other Western countries, defense weapons mostly come from China while there is little arms trade with India, which is sketched in the following table explicitly.

Type	Name of Weapon-Origin
MBT-2000	Main battle tank-China
Type 69-II Mk.2G	Main battle tank-China
Type 69-II	Main battle tank-China
Type 59II	Main battle tank-China
Type 5	Main battle tank-China
Type 62	Light Tank-China
Type 85	Armored personnel carrier-China
Type 54	Semi-automatic pistol 7.62mm-China
DShK	Heavy machine gun 12.7mm-China
Type 63-1	Mortar-China
Type 54	Anti-Tank Gun-China
Type 93	Mortar -China
M 29A1	Mortar-China
Type 87	Mortar-China
Type 54	Anti-Tank Gun 76mm-China
Type 54-1	Howitzer-China
Type 83	Howitzer-China
Type 86	Howitzer-China
Type 96	Howitzer-China
Type 59-1	Field artillery-China
Type 82	Multiple Launch Rocket Systems-China
Type 90B	Multiple Launch Rocket Systems-China
Type 75	Recoilless rifle-China

Type 92	Semi-automatic pistol 9 mm-China
HJ-8 /Baktar Shikan	Anti-tank guided missile-China
Type 69-1	Rocket-propelled grenade 40 mm-China
Type 70-1	Rocket-propelled grenade 62 mm-China
PF-98	Anti-tank guided missile-China
HJ-8	Anti-tank guided missile-China
Type 69	RPG rocket propelled grenade-China
Type 75	Single Anti-aircraft gun-China/Russia
Type 58 Twin	Anti-aircraft gun -China/Russia
Type 56 Quad	Anti-aircraft gun -China/Russia
Type 55/65/74	Anti-aircraft gun-China/Russia
Type 59	Anti-aircraft gun-China/Russia
HQ-7/FM-90	Self-propelled anti-aircraft weapon-China
HN-5J1A	Man-portable air-defense systems-China
QW-2 Van Guard 2	Man-portable air-defense systems-China
Type 73	MBT ARV-China
Type 2000	MBT 2000 ARV-China
Tiema XC2030	Heavy Transporter-China
SX2190	Heavy Truck-China
Yanan SX2150	Heavy Truck-China
Ming Class Submarine	China

Table 6: Bangladesh's Arms Purchasing from China and Russia

Source: Bangladesh Defence (2023). <https://bangladeshdefence.blogspot.com/p/bangladesh-army-equipment.html>

According to the above table, India does not share China's role as a major supplier of weapons to Bangladesh. It easily suggests that there are enough reasons for India to be concerned about China's presence in Bangladesh. Needless to say, India's concern over Bangladesh's submarine purchase from China surpassed all concerns India previously expressed over the Chinese move into Bangladesh. However, it also should be mentioned that the reason for India's negligible role as arms provider is that it itself has to purchases 85% of its arms from

Russia (Lalwani and Sagerstrom, 2021). Furthermore, Chinese arms are cheaper than those of other countries.

4.3.2. Bangladesh's Trade Relations with India and China

Imports and exports are important determinants of one country's trade relations with others. Bangladeshi imports from India and China can be identified from the following chart, which may provide ideas about Bangladesh's trade relations with these two countries.

(Million Tk.)

Country	2019-20		2020-21	
	Value	% of total	Value	% of total
Total Import	5441658	100.00	6633052	100.00
1. China	1123512	20.64	1350427	20.36
2. India	656981	12.07	1059725	15.98
3. Singapore	254994	4.69	558612	8.42
4. Indonesia	421190	7.74	282766	4.26
5. Hongkong	179697	3.30	265785	4.01
6. Brazil	128969	2.37	235063	3.54
7. Malaysia	53425	0.98	231221	3.49
8. Japan	216361	3.98	204027	3.08
9. USA	219741	4.04	195837	2.95
10. Korea	87056	1.60	121526	1.83
11. Others Countries	2099732	38.59	2128063	32.08
Total import	5441658	100.00	6633052	100.00

Table 7: Bangladesh's Imports from India and China

Source: Foreign Trade Statistics of Bangladesh 2020-21 (May, 2022)

Moreover, Bangladeshi exports to India were 114 558 million takas, while imports from the same country were 1 059 725 million takas in the 2020-21 economic year (Export Promotion Bureau, May 2022). On the other hand, Bangladesh's top ten export destinations show China's

backward position, while India holds the 7th position (Export Promotion Bureau, May 2022). In 2020-21, Bangladeshi exports to China were 71418371881 taka while imports from China were 1 350 427 435 048 taka (Export Promotion Bureau, May 2022).

Bangladesh has maintained steady exports to the top ten major powers in recent years, which can be clearly understood by the table below. It explicitly indicates Bangladesh that maintains a many-sided approach in its external policy.

(Value in million TK.)

Countries where we Exports	2019-20		2020-21	
	Value	% of total	Value	% of total
1. U.S.A	458342	16.30	607092	17.45
2. Germany	37945	1.35	528060	15.17
3. UK	255589	9.09	328914	9.45
4. Spain	129727	4.61	214777	6.17
5. France	82202	2.92	173013	4.97
6. Italy	533943	18.99	119667	3.44
7. India	98799	3.51	114558	3.29
8. Japan	162189	5.78	104366	3.00
9. Canada	54510	1.94	102844	2.96
10. Australia	31854	1.13	71749	2.06
11. Other countries	966568	34.38	1114850	32.04
Total exports	2811668	100.00	3479890	100.00

Table 8: Bangladesh's Exports to India and China

Source: Foreign Trade Statistics of Bangladesh 2020-21 (May, 2022)

4.3.3. Chinese Presence in Bangladesh's Ports (String of Pearls)

The string-of -pearls policy aims to increase China's influence in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) on the political, diplomatic, military, and economic fronts. Each pearl on this 'chain' or

‘string’ represents a sphere of influence that China is attempting to establish along the IOR (Ashraf, 2017).

The ‘pearls’ symbolize the Chinese-used seaports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldives. The Chinese construction of Gwadar port in Pakistan bears great significance as its distance from the Strait of Hormuz is only 240 miles. Given that it is barely 6 nautical miles from the primary shipping lane that travels from East to West in the Indian Ocean, the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka is also highly significant. In addition, China desires to draw a connection with its Yunan state to the ports of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Myanmar's strategic location as a maritime gateway would allow for the safe transport of commodities (especially oil) to China, providing an alternative to the ill-protected Malacca Strait (cited in Marshall Jr, 2012).

China’s String of Pearls entails the areas sketched in the following map.

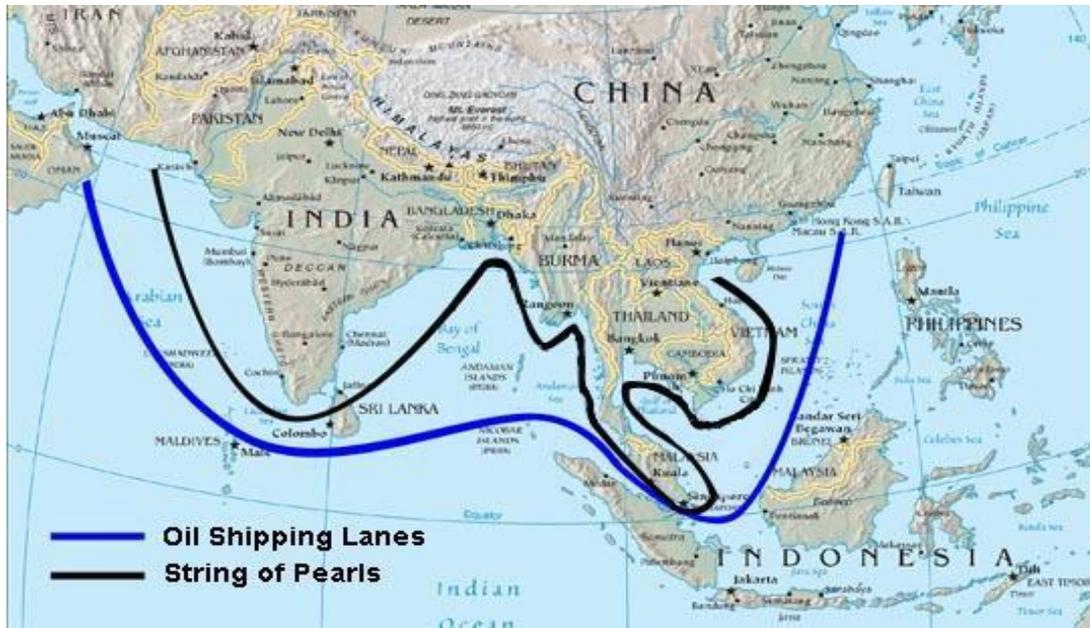


Figure 7: String of Pearls by China

Source: Devonshire-Ellis C. (2009). China's String of Pearls Strategy, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china%E2%80%99s-string-of-pearls-strategy/>.

The establishment of a submarine base in Pekua, Cox's Bazar, with the help of a Chinese company at an estimated cost of 103 billion taka (\$1.2 billion) substantiates China's active presence in the Bay of Bengal (and thus the Indian Ocean in turn). However, Bangladesh affirmed that the base is only for harboring two Ming class submarines it purchased from China (Radio Free Asia, 2019). Bangladesh's decision to hire a Chinese state-owned company to construct the base at Pekua, north of Cox Bazar, alarmed the Indian strategic community in 2017 (Chandrasekaran, 2020).

Moreover, China provided an estimated US \$11- \$15 billion in the Payra Deep Sea Port (Samsani, 2021). In addition, China wanted to build the Sonadia deep seaport, which Bangladesh finally skipped because of India's concern, though Bangladesh declared potential environmental consequences as the reason for scuttling the project. Since 2019, China has been permitted to use the Chittagong and Mongla ports for its exports and imports. India also got permission in later days.

4.4. India's Response to China in Bangladesh

Chinese ties with Bangladesh were mainly directed by Pakistan - an all-seasonal friend of China. Even China's recognition of Bangladesh in 1975 was preceded by Pakistan doing the same in 1974 (Jain, 2017: 115). India was already engaged with a range of connectivity projects in Bangladesh. However, China's recent move to do the same with Bangladesh forces India to counter or deter Bangladesh from being a part of this connectivity with China. India expressed concern over Bangladesh's being part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project and the Chinese lead in the building of Payra seaport in the Bay of Bengal just next to India (Financial Express, November 11, 2020), China's proposal for a Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM EC) (Global Times, 2009), the Chinese lead in the Teesta River management and restoration program (The Daily Star, 2020) near Siliguri in India.

India's move for connectivity is now more dependent on what policies China is pursuing in South Asia. Xavier (2017) says that there are three drivers of India's post-2014 connectivity policy: first, the geopolitical reaction to China as Beijing has enhanced its influences in the economic, political, and diplomatic arenas on a vast scale; second, its economic progress and heavy economic size, giving it great importance in the region; third, the cultural links due to the religious spirit of Hinduism and Buddhism in the area.

Moreover, India considers the current dynamics between China and Bangladesh while formulating its foreign policy: between 2010 and 2019, Bangladesh purchased 72% of its gross weaponry imports from China (Anwar, 2022), and China has a lead in terms of military relationship between Bangladesh and China.

It is argued that Indian, Japanese, and US pressure forced Bangladesh to cancel the Sonadia deep seaport project in Cox's Bazar, which was to have been financed by China, though Bangladesh showed the issue of environmental degradation behind such cancellation. India is concerned that once Sonadia port is constructed, it can face the same fate as Hambantota and Gwadar ports, which India sees as Chinese projects of a 'string of pearls' for enclosing India (Bagchi, 2016).

Chinese companies were assigned to construct the Padma Bridge and the Padma Bridge rail link project in Bangladesh (Mamun, 2020). India technically responded to this project, saying everything had not ended. Originally, India had intended to finance the Padma Bridge project itself. However, China hurried up, grasped the opportunity to finance, and took the bridge's construction tender. India missed the chance but it expressed its hope to construct a railway from Chilahati to Haldibari and a petroleum pipeline from Siliguri to Dinajpur (Malhotra, 2020).

The following table illustrates how China and India rival over Bangladesh.

China's strategy of dominance	India's response or counter strategy
<p>Meeting between foreign Ministers of China and Bangladesh in Dhaka in October 2013 about BCIM (China Daily, 2013) and Bangladesh's formally joining in BRI in 2016</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. India's advancing of 'Act East' policy in 2014 (Palit, 2016), and BBIN in 2015 (Kashem, 2021). 2. India abstained itself from Belt and Road Forum in 2017 and in 2019 while China unlisted BCIM from BRI project (Bose, 2022a). 3. India joined the 'trilateral highway' by India, Myanmar and Thailand and offers extension for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (The Economic Times, 2023).
<p>Bangladesh received two submarines from China in 2017 (Anwar, 2019)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indian Navy expressed its worry over Bangladesh's purchasing submarines from China (Gupta, 2013) 2. Indian chief of the naval staff Admiral Sunil Lanba visited Bangladesh in November 2017 and navy chiefs of both the countries together launched 'India-Bangladesh CORPAT' (Mushtaq, 2018b)
<p>China expressed consent to build the deep-sea port at Sonadia, Cox's Bazar, in 2006 (Ramachandran, 2020).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. India's expression of concern over Chinese engagement in the Sonadia project compelled Bangladesh to skip the project in 2012 (Ramachandran, 2020). 2. India and Japan engaged in Matarbari deep Sea port project, Cox's Bazar, at just a few kilometers distance from Sonadia (Borah, 2023).

Table 9: China and India Rivalry over Bangladesh

Source: Author's Compilation

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter argues that the absence of territorial and martial disputes between China and Bangladesh, coupled with China's policy of “non-interference” in political matters, are significant factors that have prevented the deterioration of their bilateral relationship, in contrast to India's relationship with Bangladesh. China's initial engagement with Bangladesh mostly involved economic aid, infrastructure advancement, and the transfer of military equipment. However, the visit of China's President Xi to Bangladesh in 2016, Bangladesh's initiation of a strategic partnership and its participation in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, the allocation of contracts to Chinese state-owned companies for the management of the Teesta River and the development of the Payra deep seaport, the procurement of two submarines from China, and the Pekua submarine base construction by the Chinese state-owned enterprises caused concerns among Indian authorities. The establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has generated widespread international interest and speculation on China's true motives. The location selected by the Chinese company for the administration of the Teesta River is in close to Siliguri, India. Siliguri now serves as the sole gateway for mainland India's connectivity with its northeastern provinces.

China's initiatives, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), were introduced subsequent to 2009, and Bangladesh has actively engaged in these endeavors. Undoubtedly, China is poised to enhance its economic influence by means of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is evident that the establishment of the World Bank, IMF, and other Western institutions was spearheaded by the United States, leading to the country's sustained global hegemony. China's increasing engagement in alternative banking and diverse economic infrastructures is expected to lead to its dominant position in the global economy, despite its claims of playing a collaborative role with Western institutions.

However, the military coalition, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led by the United States, has played a significant role in facilitating the success of the United States-led economic system. China currently lacks a prominent military alliance under its leadership,

and there are no indications of any forthcoming endeavors to establish such an alliance or engage any nation in a military alliance. China has been exerting its influence on Bangladesh, discouraging its participation in any coalition under the leadership of the United States within the Asia-Pacific area. As long as China's military presence does not come to the fore, there is no other way than to consider this economic involvement or infrastructure building as economic. The potential development of military alliances by China in the future is contingent upon China's conduct subsequent to its economic surpassing of the United States.

The primary source of contention between India and China predominantly revolves around territorial disputes. Both nations are situated within the effective radius of their respective nuclear arsenals. India is expressing concerns over the economic and political ties between Bangladesh and China, particularly with regard to the current Bangladesh government's acceptance of Chinese loans and offering of infrastructure contracts to Chinese state-owned companies. Bangladesh's procurement of armaments from China is primarily motivated by the comparatively lower cost, a factor that India is unable to match. Consequently, Bangladesh has exhibited a growing economic and military inclination towards China while simultaneously maintaining its diplomatic ties with India intact.

India asserts that China is covertly executing its 'string of pearls' strategy, aiming to encircle India from multiple directions. China, however, consistently denies these allegations. India's apprehension regarding the Chinese presence in Bangladesh is justified due to the potential for China to leverage its economic influence and provision of military equipment for military objectives. China may also endeavor to establish a balanced relationship with Bangladesh in the near future. Consequently, the military alliances led by the United States, namely QUAD, GSOMIA, and ACSA, as well as the economic forum known as IPEF, exhibit a strong determination to advocate the inclusion of Bangladesh, favoring India in the process. However, it is imperative for Bangladesh to establish a balanced relationship with China in order for India to consider engaging with China on economic grounds. The projected Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) initiative has the potential to yield economic benefits for India. By establishing a gateway for India's northeastern provinces as well as facilitating connections

with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and with Pacific countries, the BCIM initiative aligns with India's 'Act East' policy. Nevertheless, it is a fact in the Structural Realist world that every country is suspicious about its opponent countries, which turns governments to act in a rational way and activates their military building up. In certain instances, the situation may escalate into armed conflict, especially in cases when the system exhibits unbalanced multipolarity.

As for Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism, it has already been pointed out in the two previous chapters that Indian and Chinese rivalries over Bangladesh can be interpreted in line with that approach: India's policies are driven by its regional hegemonic aspirations while China's reflect that of an offshore balancer trying to block these aspirations. Mearsheimer's account needs however to be supplemented by a focus upon geo-economics and soft power as well as by a domestic-level perspective.

Beyond this, the case of Indian-Chinese competition for influence in Bangladesh suggests another revision of Mearsheimer's account, namely broadening its geographic scope. In his book, Mearsheimer extensively discusses the conflict between the would-be hegemon and offshore balancer with respect to two regions only: Europe and Northeast Asia (Mearsheimer, 2001: 252-261, 347-358, 373-380, 392-400). In addition, the Western Hemisphere is also dealt with but given a comparatively short shrift because here, the hegemon never faced a serious offshore challenger (Mearsheimer, 2001: 238-252). In contrast, South Asia is only briefly mentioned, and this only within the context of Indian-Pakistani relations (Mearsheimer, 2001: 133, 372).

The material presented in this chapter suggests that a Mearsheimerian analysis can be applied to the hegemonic dynamics of other world regions like South Asia as well. It further suggests that, in addition to Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union/Russia, or China, other states like India can be described in terms of a would-be hegemon. As for China, Mearsheimer (2001: 375, 397-400) concentrates upon its role as potential hegemon in its own neighborhood.

However, there is no reason why the term offshore balancer should only be applied to Great Britain and the USA and not also to China and other countries.

As has already been discussed in the previous two chapters, when explaining Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh in accordance with Neoclassical Realism, domestic factors of both India and China exist side by side with systemic factors. Thus, the Indian-Chinese rivalry for dominating Bangladesh economically and culturally can be explained partly by the latter. As we will see in the next chapter, domestic factors behind Bangladesh's hedging also can be analyzed in terms of Neoclassical Realism.

High trade volume, the absence of any massive war between India and China, and common membership in various international organizations including AIIB and BRICS are largely congenial to the Liberal principle - trade links and membership in international organizations reduce the possibility of war. In fact, Liberalism believes in reducing systemic anarchy through cooperation among states. The points of rivalry between India and China - India's non-cooperation with respect to BCIM, its questioning of Bangladesh's submarine purchasing and forcing the scuttling of the Sonadia deep sea project that was supposed to be given to Chinese company, and the Chinese warning over Bangladesh's possible QUAD membership - are not overtly coercive in nature. On the other hand, India is the largest democracy in the world while China runs a socialist system, which makes the Kantian claim that democracies do not embroil in war against each other irrelevant. In addition, domestic issues influencing foreign policy of India heading rivalry with China over Bangladesh, cannot be explained by Liberalism.

What political elites assume of themselves and of others (explained in Second and Third Chapter) worked as a significant factor for a complete understanding of India's and China's foreign policies towards Bangladesh, which is in line with Constructivism. However, Constructivism downplays system-level static variables, which are assumed as unhelpful for explaining the case as thesis attempts to understand the topic from both systemic and national level. When explaining Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh, Constructivism as mentioned

in the previous two chapters suggests that there should have been a harmony between the Indian political thinker Kautilya and 'Panchamrit' (dignity, dialogue, security, shared prosperity, and culture) on the one hand and the basic principles of Confucianism on the other hand. However, the 'Great India' concept based rooted in Hindutva is not compatible with harmony. In fact, the Indian doctrine very naturally made India interpret the Chinese presence in Bangladeshis a big threat. Likewise, the collective memory of 'hundred years of humiliation' and the resulting motivation for a forceful foreign policy is difficult to reconcile with Confucian harmony. Constructivism from this perspective can explain India-China regional rivalry over Bangladesh.



FIFTH CHAPTER

BANGLADESH'S POLICY RESPONSE TOWARDS INDIA AND CHINA

5.1. The Types of Hedging by Bangladesh

It is fair to say that Bangladesh can be counted as a middle power, no matter what approaches (discussed in 1.1.1) defining the terms one favors. Looking at power capacities, Bangladesh ranks 8 among the world's countries for population size and 33 for GDP, even though it is not among the 40 biggest military spenders. Looking at behavioral criteria, Bangladesh likewise has a reasonably strong presence on the international stage.

As Koga (2018: 640) points out, a secondary power's concerns are usually more about a nearby regional power than a far-away global one. Thus, for Bangladesh it is the by far strongest state in South Asia, i.e. India, that plays the role China does for a country like South Korea or Malaysia. Likewise, for Bangladesh, China is the extra-regional great power rivalling the regional one – here it plays the role that the USA does in Northeast and Southeast Asia. As has been shown in the thesis, Bangladesh engages with both India and China, thus sending contradictory signals about its alignment – in other words, it is hedging. This hedging policy takes place in the security sphere, as Bangladesh pursues military cooperation with China and, if to a lesser extent, India. But it also simultaneously engages with both rival great powers in economic and diplomatic terms. Thus, whether we use the narrow, security-related or the broader understanding of the term hedging, it can certainly be applied to Bangladesh's policies towards India and China. Bangladesh cooperates in each field – military, economic and diplomatic – with both powers simultaneously rather than balance either of them in one field and bandwagon with it in the other. Thus, Koga's sub-types of hedging like Conventional Hedging or Economic Hedging cannot be applied here.

One contrast between a Northeast Asian or Southeast Asian country's position vis-à-vis China and Bangladesh's position vis-à-vis India is that the latter is not an imminent security threat (cf. Lim & Mukherjee, 2019: 515 n. 18). As we have seen, there is certainly no lack of

conflictual issues between both countries. Nevertheless, India does not have the kind of territorial dispute with Bangladesh that China has with its neighbors over issues like Taiwan or the East and South China Seas. Ideological issues are also not a big topic between Bangladesh and either India or China. One might however argue that, with the launching of the BRI and the recent border clashes, there is a heating up of Indian-Chinese rivalry and thus a regional bipolar competition, which according to some scholars are factors that make hedging less likely. That Bangladesh is hedging all the same indicates that domestic factors need to be taken into account as well in order to fully understand the reasons for this policy.

Oosterveld and Torrosian (2018)'s categorization of middle power on the basis of 'material factors' - population, economic power, and military power - and Lee's (2017) characterization of some ASEAN middle power in the same way (except the addition of life expectancy) as an indication of middle power substantiate Bangladesh's having the same status:

Country	Population (Million) 2021	GDP (Billion/Trillion) 2022	Life Expectancy 2021 (Year)	Military Expenditure (% of GDP) 2022
Indonesia	273.75	1.32 trillion	68	0.7
Malaysia	33.57	407.03 B	75	1.0
South Korea	51.74	1.67 trillion	84	2.7
Philippines	113.88	404.28 B	69	1.4
Vietnam	97.47	408.8 B	74	2.3
Singapore	5.45	466.79 B	83	2.8
Thailand	71.60	495.42B	79	1.2
Pakistan	231.40	374.7B	66	2.6
Bangladesh	169.36	460.2B	72	1.1

Table 10: Different Indicators of Middle Powers

Source: Author's Compilation from World Bank Country Profile

<https://data.worldbank.org/country>

Moreover, Bangladesh's following position in different fields substantiates what Oosterveld and Torrosian (2018) term as 'international presence' (being a good international citizen), thus providing further evidence for the country's middle power status.

- a. Membership in the UN (1974), World Health Organization (WHO) in 1972, World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, International Labor organization (ILO) in 1972.
- b. Non-permanent membership in UNSC in 1979-1980 and 2000-2001 (Source: UNSC)
- c. Second biggest contributor of military and police to UN peacekeeping operations and deployment of Bangladeshi peacekeepers to ten UN missions (Source: UN Peacekeeping)
- d. Member of the executive board of three United Nations Organizations - UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS in 2021-2023 (The Daily Star, Sep 15, 2020)
- e. Member of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (The Daily Star, April 12, 2021).
- f. President of the UNICEF Executive Board (The Daily Star, January 15, 2020).
- g. Member of the UN Human Rights Council (Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, October 11, 2022).
- h. Presidency at the UNICEF Executive Board in 2020 (New Age, January 13, 2024).
- i. Presidency at the Executive Boards of UN Women's organizations (New Age, January 13, 2024).
- j. Director of the WHO South-East Asia region since February 1, 2024 (The Daily Star, Nov 1, 2023).

Furthermore, as mentioned before, Bangladesh is currently hosting about one million Rohingya refugees, which became only possible due to Bangladesh's humanitarian perspective. Thus, Bangladesh's hospitality to refugees put it in line with some other,

western and non-western countries, which are prominent refugee hosts. Yasmin (2022) argues that Bangladesh's upcoming elevation from the list of Least Developed Countries to the status of a Developing Country signals that Bangladesh is no more dependent on foreign aid and has achieved the confidence in its external policy to become one of the countries 'that can say no.'

Lee (2012) classifies the types of hedging utilized by middle powers into three categories: 'soft hedging', 'hard hedging', and 'double hedging'. Soft hedging refers to the strategy employed by a middle power to enhance its influence on major powers and foster stability in a particular region by leveraging the support of other major powers. Hard hedging prioritizes indirect balancing above over balancing and involves implementing a hedging strategy that takes into account the conventional power dynamics while getting ready for a worst-case situation. Double hedging refers to the establishment of a strategic framework where a middle power may effectively safeguard its own security priorities while also upholding regional stability by maintaining a systematic balance.

When we analyze the types of hedging which Kuik (2008: 165-171) applies to ASEAN countries as substitutes for the balancing or bandwagon strategies – 'economic pragmatism', 'binding engagement', 'limited bandwagoning', 'dominance denial', 'indirect balancing' – we see that Bangladesh's hedging vis-a-vis India and China bears the traits of all these types.

Economic pragmatism: The hedging state aims to get economic gains through trade and investment connections with a great power, regardless of political problems between them. Bangladesh trades extensively with India and China and also receives investments from them, despite the bones of content discussed in sections 2.3.2 and 3.4. Especially these investments are important in view of Bangladesh's aim to become an upper middle-income power in the future.

Binding engagement: The hedging state maintains channels of communication with a great power through regular and institutionalized diplomatic activities, thereby aiming to socialize the

great power into non-aggressive behavior. Frequently, binding-engagement is done on a multilateral level and involves international organizations. Bangladesh's participation in institutions like SAARC, BIMSTEC or the AIIB, in which India or China play prominent roles, may be interpreted as a kind of attempted binding-engagement of these powers. Another instance would be Bangladesh's bringing its dispute with India over maritime borders to an ad hoc tribunal at The Hague.

Limited bandwagoning: While eschewing firm political and military ties with the great power (as in pure bandwagoning), the hedging state pursues a political (not security) partnership with it. This involves policy coordination on specific issues as well as voluntary deference to the great power. Examples would be the cases of Indian-Bangladesh cooperation discussed in section 2.3.1, with counterterrorism cooperation (especially over Naga separatism) being an instance of Bangladesh's deference to India.

Dominance denial: The hedging state, or a regional organization consisting of hedging states, uses political (not military, as in pure balancing) means to prevent interference on part of great power states. This is done through two methods: First, by encouraging extra-regional great powers to get involved into the region and, second, by strengthening the joint diplomatic capabilities of several hedging states. Bangladesh's cooperation with China would be an instance of the first method, as Bangladesh involves with an extra-regional power that has the capacity to hinder any regional hegemonic ambitions that India may have. In contrast, there is not much in terms of Bangladesh's teaming up with other hedgers.

Indirect balancing: The hedging state improves its own military capacities and pursues security cooperation with other states against a diffuse security uncertainty (rather than against a clearly identifiable military threat, as in direct balancing). Bangladesh is in the process of upgrading its armed forces in cooperation with China, as most prominently seen in the purchase of submarines from Beijing. These measures can be interpreted as directed against a security threat on the part of India and, indeed, have been interpreted on these lines in New Delhi. However, whatever security problem India as regional would-be hegemon presents, it has yet the character of a

potential rather than an imminent one. Crucially, and in contrast to China vis-a-vis many of its East and Southeast Asian neighbors, India has no longer any territorial dispute with Bangladesh and the ones that existed (enclaves, maritime border) have been resolved amicably.

5.2. Causes for Bangladesh's Hedging Strategy

5.2.1. Geographical Constraints

The fact that Bangladesh is surrounded by India on its three sides makes all political parties give pride of place to India - willingly or unwillingly - in both their election manifestos and the party's foreign policy. In fact, India utilizes Bangladesh's geographical constraints as a tool to keep Bangladesh under pressure. India's support to the PCJSS was in response to China's and Pakistan's harboring of the organization. The 1997 peace treaty brought hope for resolving the escalating CHT issue. However, the celebration of the August 17th as the 'Black Day' by the Chakma National Council of India and the Tripura Chakma Students Association and, since 2016, the demands for Chittagong's incorporation into India suggest that the dispute over the CHT, which comprises 10% of Bangladesh's overall territory, still remains. Moreover, continuous border killings and the failure to implement or sign the river water distribution treaties with Bangladesh substantiate the suspicion that India's strategy is to keep Bangladesh under pressure.

5.2.2. Domestic Divisions on India

Talk Shows, election manifestos, and election campaigns in Bangladesh highlight how political parties deal with the issue of 'keeping India content.' The death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and its aftermath diverted the national political discourse from linguistic nationalism to religion-based Bangladeshi identity (Hajjaj, 2020). This prompted India to pursue policies to get back the prominence of linguistic nationalism from the cultural point of view. However, India's efforts seem to have backfired as all political parties except the Awami League took an anti-India stance in their foreign policies and created room for criticizing each other with the charge of being 'India's stooge' (Pant, 2007).

The BAL formally led Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971. Many leaders and supporters of the Student League, the student branch of the BAL, received military training in India at that time. Finally, the India-Bangladesh joint military alliance came together in the last month of war and won the victory. Thus, a historical bond was created between the BAL and the Indian Congress, the party that was in power at the time, playing a significant role for BAL-led governments in later times. Currently, the Modi government's one-sided support to the Bangladesh Awami League, a secular political party - and this despite the BJP being an extreme Hindu religion-based political party - and the resulting divide among Bangladeshi people is a remarkable phenomenon in contemporary South Asian politics. Scholarly debates argue that the BAL-led government's partnership with the US-led global war on terror brought India and Bangladesh closer as India vibrantly participated in the war on terror.

Habib, Amp, and Singh (2015) assert that defense collaboration between the two countries was given a huge boost on November 11, 2015, when Bangladesh handed over the head of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Anup Chetia, to the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Hours after Bangladesh turned in Chetia, Prime Minister Modi thanked his counterpart Sheikh Hasina 'for the help in the war against terrorism'.

Pant (2007) argues that India is not ready at all to efficiently respond to the rise of Islamists in Bangladesh. As a result, religion-based political parties pursued efforts to strengthen their bases in Bangladesh by using anti-Indian rhetoric. Accordingly, that anti-Indian rhetoric ultimately underlined an anti-Awami League sentiment in Bangladesh, which made the BAL to be aligned even more with India since 2009.

On the other hand, Zia's policy could be better understood by the following quotation of his Foreign Minister: 'Bangladesh is a small country and wants to have good relations with all, big or small. We do not believe in any bloc. We do not like it. Bangladesh believes in equal sovereign rights of all nations and non-interference in other's internal affairs' (Hossain, 2008). General Zia-ur-Rahman, commander of the Z force during the Bangladesh liberation war, officially became head of state in 1977. He brought some major changes in the policies of

Bangladesh: abolishing secularism, substituting Bengali nationalism for Bangladeshi nationalism (Franda, 1982), and exhibiting softness to alleged war criminals having affiliation to Islamic politics (Ghosh, 1993). In later days, Khaleda Zia, the head of the BNP (1991-1996 and 2001-2006) regime, followed the example of her husband and predecessor in terms of relationship with China and India.

In particular, Ziaur Rahman's offered Bangladeshi citizenship to the so-called war criminal and ex-chief of East-Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami-Professor Golam Azom (Khan, 1994). This provided a good opportunity for the secular political front led by the BAL to castigate Ziaur Rahman and his founded political party, the BNP. Though General Ershad, the second military ruler of Bangladesh, followed his predecessor, the Jatiya Party founded by him could not retain its position in national politics once he was ousted from the president portfolio through an all-party mass movement in 1990 (Alam, 1995).

Professor Dr. Emajuddin Ahmed, late Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor, a renowned political scientist in Bangladesh and one of the key advisors to BNP Chief Khaleda Zia, argues that if Indian policy is keeping the side of the Awami League it is giving birth to anti-Indian sentiments in Bangladesh. His acknowledgment of India's assistance for Bangladesh's independence and his demand that India should establish a relationship with the people rather than with any political party mean that BNP is also interested in being on good terms with India (The Economic Times, 2016). At the same time, it does not fit the current BNP's anti-Indian stand. In fact, Zia's strengthening of the relationship with Pakistan made his party appear anti-Indian.

The perceived anti-Indian Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chief's visit to India at the end of her term in 2006, just eight months before the next general election in 2007 and her expressing the hope for more cooperation (Shukla, 2006) seems to have been a turning point for the party. Moreover, Khaleda Zia paid another visit in 2012, before the next general election in 2014, when she met with the Indian Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha, the President, the external affairs minister, national security adviser and foreign secretary

(Hindustan Times, 2012). Furthermore, a delegation of BNP senior leaders visited India in 2018, before another general election in the same year. Then, they hailed India, saying that India was the ‘champion of democracy and human rights’ and sought India’s assistance for a free and fair election in 2018 (Haidar, 2018). The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) also alleged to India that Sheikh Hasina was trying to establish a one-party rule in Bangladesh (The Hindu, 2018). All this perfectly expresses to what extent Bangladesh politics prioritize India.

Moreover, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said a sound relationship with India is necessary but not as advocated by the ruling Awami League. He said: ‘We also want India to have good relations with Bangladesh, but not the way you (the Awami League) are talking about having a relationship like that between a husband and a wife’ (The Business Standard, 2022).

From the above explanation, the following stimulators seemed to work for the principle of ‘India first’ to, either positively or negatively, appear urgent for the political parties of Bangladesh:

Positive Stimulators	Negative Stimulators
India’s contribution in 1971	Geographical constraints
India’s being the largest democracy	India’s fellow feeling for BAL
India’s being the closest neighbor	India’s unfriendly attitude to BNP/Jamaat
India’s being the prime partner of the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy	Territorial integration and sovereignty concern over CHT
	Continuous border killing by Indian BSF
	Non-implementation of joint river water distribution
	Indian Citizenship Amendment Act

Scapegoating tendency of Bangladeshi political leaders
Unconsolidated democracy of Bangladesh

Table 11: Stimulators for ‘India first’ urgency among political parties of Bangladesh

Source: Author’s Compilation

The issue of ‘India’s Dalal’ (extreme supporters or collaborators of India) or ‘Razakar’ (collaborators of Pakistan or extreme supporters of Pakistan) also got priority in the Bangladesh political arena, especially during election period campaigns and debates (Rahman, 2019). In fact, continuous border killings, not implementing the joint river water distribution, and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have given birth to a consensus on anti-Indian sentiment among Bangladeshi masses. As a result, the BAL’s pro-Indian stance since 2009 was vehemently castigated by the BAL and its supporters as that of *India’s dalal*, collaborator of India, while the BAL also struck back by stigmatizing the, BNP, the Jamaat and their supporters as *razakar*, collaborators of Pakistan. The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, a well-known and self-declared anti-independence party, had been allied with the BNP since 2001. More explicitly, the *razakar* term became familiar during the 1971 war when *razakar* was clearly defined as a collaborator of Pakistani atrocities in Bangladesh (then East-Pakistan). This kind of jargon remained relevant in Bangladesh’s politics more or less in later days. The BAL utilized the term as a tool against the BNP-Jamaat combination while the BNP and Jamaat utilized the *India’s dalal* term as a tool to protect their own political fortunes. Nevertheless, the BAL government (2009-2003) has taken the two jargons to a unique height. According to its election manifesto, during the last decade the party could successfully bring some Jamaat and BNP leaders to trial on the charge of war crimes in 1971. It is worth noting that, although the BNP was not against Bangladesh’s liberation, the party’s Jamaat connection buttressed the Awami League’s stigmatizing of the BNP as *razakar*. This can be understood by the following statements of BAL leaders:

- I. Social Welfare Minister Nuruzzaman Ahmed said on July 02, 2023, that the BNP opposed Bangladesh's independence. They wanted Bangladesh to become part of Pakistan again. They must not be left unchallenged. The BNP should know that the BAL waged a liberation struggle but have not given up training. Patriots will overcome anything (Hasan, July 02, 2023).
- II. On September 20, 2022, Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said that the BNP wants to make Bangladesh Pakistani (NEWS24, September 20, 2022).
- III. Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Joint General Secretary of the Awami League Hasan Mahmud said that BNP-Jamaat has become worse than Pakistan (Dhaka Post (November 14, 2023).
- IV. Bangladesh Awami League joint general secretary agriculturist AFM Bahauddin Nashim called the BNP-Jamaat murderers. They killed Bangladeshi democracy and politics. BNP-Jamaat destroyed Bengali nationalism and the goals of the liberation war. They want to destroy Bangladesh and create a greater Pakistan (August 11, 2023).

Moreover, the following chart indicates converging points for anti-Indian sentiments in Bangladesh irrespective of political ideologies.

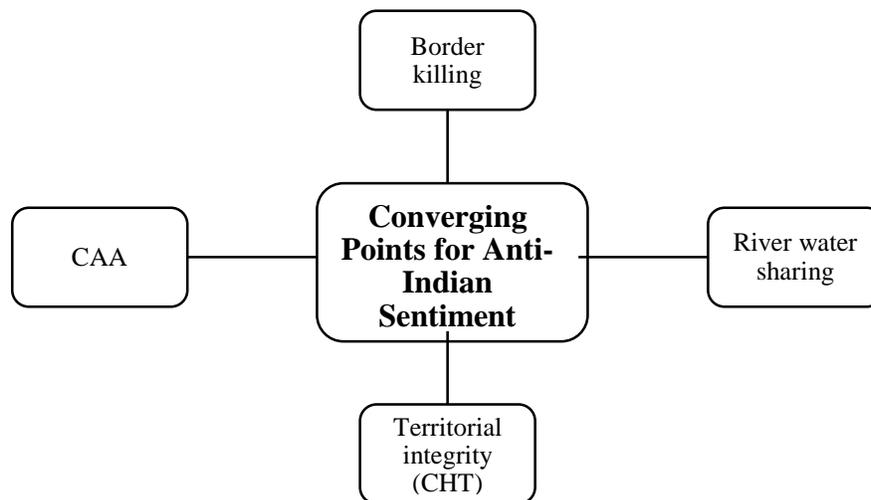


Figure 8: Converging Points for Anti-Indian Sentiments in Bangladesh irrespective of Political Parties.

Source: Author's compilation

In addition, following stimulators seemed to work for stigmatizing supporters of opposition political parties as 'India's Dalal/Razakar' in Bangladesh:

Stimulator for stigmatizing BAL as India's Dalal (collaborator of India)	Stimulator for stigmatizing BNP/Jamaat as Razakar (collaborator of Pakistan)
BAL's pro-Indian stance	Jamaat's anti-liberation stance in 1971
Political tool of BNP-Jamaat	Political tool of Awami League
	BNP-Jamaat alliance since 2001

Table 12: Stimulators for Stigmatizing BAL and BNP-Jamaat as India's Dalal and Razakar

Source: Author's compilation

So, the converging points of anti-Indian sentiments among Bangladeshi masses triggered the BAL government (since 2009) to refrain from bandwagoning with India. Instead, this provided the option of balancing with China. However, Bangladesh is hedging between India and China.

5.2.3. The BAL Government's Visions and Transitional Uncertainties

China's economic prosperity in 2009, marked as a transition in the global system, left Bangladesh, along with other developing nations, uncertain about the appropriate economic policies to adopt. While most ASEAN nations, which have territorial conflicts with China, have managed to maintain a delicate equilibrium between China and the United States, Bangladesh finds itself uncertain about the nature of its relationship with China, its largest trading partner, and India, its closest great power neighbor and a potential hegemonic force.

Systemic level uncertainty joined with domestic level uncertainty as the Bangladesh Awami League included the idea of a 'Charter for Change' in its 9th general election program in 2009, which seems to have helped the party to get a sweeping victory in the election. The

phrase "Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021" has gained widespread popularity among the populace in Bangladesh since the 2009 general election. The term has entered the administrative and institutional lexicon, and the BAL has utilized it to expand the novel actions related to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It is believed that ICT can only serve crucial roles in advancing human resources, self-awareness, and economic growth in the twenty-first century. Thus, the BAL-led Bangladeshi government, which is currently in power, strongly emphasized expanding ICT's scope and implementing cutting-edge technologies for the long run (Mazumdar and Alharahsheh, 2020).

As a follow-up to 'Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021', the Bangladeshi government launched "Vision 2041" to move the country toward growth. It includes rooting out extreme poverty, reaching out to the Upper Middle-Income Country status by 2031, and reaching the High-Income Country rank by 2041, with the possible termination of poverty. This 'document' introduces "Making Vision 2041 a Reality: Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041", a step to translate Vision 2041 into a development plan with policies and initiatives (PP2041). Vision 2041 and the accompanying PP2041 are supported by four pillars: 'democracy,' 'leadership,' 'decentralization,' and capability enhancement. They will be utilized by the people, who are the primary agents of change and evolution (UN Environment Programme, 2020).

Moreover, the declaration of the 2009 Armed Forces Goal 2030, revised in 2017, of Bangladesh could also be emphasized as the country aims to modernize its Army, Navy, and Air Force to employ multi-platform warfare with the latest weapons and equipment by 2030. Accordingly, the government gradually increased its buying of military weapons from 2009, which did not appear likely before because the country largely focused on its national economic development. The force's Goal-2030 also includes installing further military bases at different places in Bangladesh, and the Ramu military station close to Myanmar was the first one to implement this goal. Bangladesh's buying of two Ming-class type 035B submarines from China is a pivotal event in terms of the bilateral relations between the two countries, which became a matter of concern for both India and Myanmar (Mushtaq, 2018a).

To put it in geostrategic terms, Bangladesh's location within the nuclear range of three big powers - India, Pakistan, and China, illegal crossings by Myanmar border security forces leading to tensions along Bangladesh's border, particularly in 2007, multiple violations of Bangladesh's airspace by Myanmar Air Force in 2017 amid the Rohingya crisis - seem to have been a major factor behind Bangladesh military upgrading (Mushtaq, 2018a). Additionally, recent frequent provocation by Myanmar security forces along Bangladesh' border (Aljazeera, 2022a) further strengthened the rationale for Bangladesh's venture in this respect.

Besides, it can be argued that Bangladesh's fulfilling the criteria (income per capita, human assets, economic and environmental vulnerability) for exceeding the Least Developed Countries (LDC) by 2026 (Bhattacharya, 2021) further stimulated the country's ambitions to maintain its developmental drive during the transitional period. As a result, Bangladesh has been sending ambiguous messages to India and China and does not want to risk falling prey to a global conflict.

5.2.4. The National Consensus about the Relationship with China

The Bangladesh-China relationship was brotherly after the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, regardless of whether the BNP or the Awami League was in power. The G2G level relationship between the two countries was launched by the military ruler and founder of the BNP, Ziaur Rahman, and it was continued by his successor and founder of the Bangladesh Jatiyo Party (BJP), General Ershad (Habib, 2022). Both military rulers enjoyed warmer relationships with China than with India. Bangladesh's army was equipped with Chinese weapons for a long time because Pakistan had maintained a close relationship with China before Bangladesh's independence in 1971. So, it did not come as a surprise that the newly established Bangladeshi army would need Chinese support to retain the functionality of its weapons (Bhattacharjee, 2018b). Thus, after ending military rule, all Bangladeshi governments carried on arms purchasing from China.

However, the Hasina regime's recent tilt towards China - in terms of receiving infrastructure loans, the giving of infrastructure tenders to Chinese state-owned companies, and the purchasing military weapons from China rather than from India - has been happening for four reasons: The first is the feeling of deprivation and frustration about India not fulfilling treaties and promises trigger Bangladesh to go to China. This a signal to India that it should be more careful about its promises. Second, there is Bangladesh's acute need of investment loans to implement its mega projects, Vision-2021, Arms Forces Goal-2030 and Vision-2041, and the target to be a middle-income country by 2026. These ambitions go well together with China's provision of loans in an easy way - without political condition and pressure as in the case of loans from India and several western countries - as well as with China's superior economic position after the 2009 global economic crisis. Thirdly, Chinese needs new markets to expand its huge production and commodity sector while developing countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal are among the most attractive investment destinations among its neighbors due to cheaper labor there. Ad, fourth, there is Bangladesh's failure to procure loan from the World Bank for the construction of the Padma Bridge.

Yet, the interesting point is that Sheikh Hasina has not been called a 'broker of China' or 'China's Dalal' until now despite her inclination more towards China than to India. This has only been possible because of an unseen national consensus toward Beijing among Bangladesh's ruling and opposition parties, despite differences in their foreign policy directions. The Awami League is eager to strengthen its relationship with China to an extent which India could not hope for from the Khaleda Zia regime (Dutta, 2022: 173). Thus, China remained an all-weather friend of Bangladesh.

5.2.5. Bangladesh's Benefit from Hedging

As mentioned before, Bangladesh benefits from the rivalry between India and China, that inspires Bangladesh to ally with either China or India. Recent efforts for incorporating Bangladesh to the great power connectivity of the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), GSOMIA, and ACSA added extra

impetus through discouraging Bangladesh not to be balanced or bandwagoned either with India or China but, rather, to maintain an even relationship with all great powers.

5.3. Constraints for Bangladesh's Hedging Policy

For the time being, Bangladesh's geostrategic importance is increasing. Bangladesh's hedging between India and China is benefiting the country economically and militarily. However, it may not persist for long. The pressure for Bangladesh to join with QUAD, IPEF, GSOMIA, and ACSA is increasing day by day. Bangladesh's joining this alliance would mean steering the country against China. Rather, if Bangladesh abides to non-alignment and equidistance from China and the USA until its upgrading to an upper-middle-income country, Bangladesh will continue to benefit from China, India, and the USA. If Bangladesh avoids any US-led alliance, it will not hamper its relationship with the USA for the simple reason that Bangladesh did not join any military alliance led by China either. In fact, China has no military alliance till now. Once China achieves that position, the question of whether to choose China or India will become more apparent for Bangladesh.

Thus, Bangladesh can resist the pressure from the USA to join its fold until China establishes a military alliance of its own, whether locally or globally. Bangladesh's joining any military alliance led by the USA may seriously hamper Bangladesh's relationship with China, which is difficult to imagine at the moment as China has massive infrastructure engagement in Bangladesh. As a result, there is little likelihood, irrespective of whether the BAL or the BNP is in power, to be bandwagon with India against China. It can be predicted that Bangladesh will continue to pursue hedging between India and China and many-sided relationships with other major powers until any US-led or Chinese-led global war affects the Indo-Pacific region.

Moreover, Bangladesh's upgrading from LDC to middle-income country requires infrastructure development in which China's engagement is the most beneficial one for Bangladesh. As a result, Bangladesh does not want to take any kind of cost by allying either with China or India. The Bangladeshi masses' acute anti-Indian sentiment forces Bangladesh

not to bandwagon with India against China. However, Bangladesh's balancing with China would mean standing directly against India, which surrounds Bangladesh from three sides. Besides, standing against India means standing against America, which may cause the relationship between Bangladesh and the USA to deteriorate. Bangladesh may also lose its largest RMG market to the USA as the latter is China's prime rival today.

It is also true that Bangladesh's adopting hedging between India and China is putting the country under constant pressure from both India and China, complicating Bangladesh's foreign policy decision-making. Any new step for strengthening the relationship with China or India is producing misgivings between the two major powers. Though Mearsheimer did not focus on hedging, one of his stated main principles of Offensive Realism is that states are suspicious about the intents of their opponent, which can be associated with Bangladesh's hedging policy. Bangladesh's hedging may trigger China and India to project more military and economic influence over Bangladesh. It also triggers either India or China to take military steps to keep Bangladesh on its side, which may undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. However, to what extent or whether Bangladesh's sovereignty may be compromised depends on Bangladesh's military capability that Bangladesh can acquire through a many-sided foreign policy.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter argues that there is an explicit rivalry between India and China in various sectors of Bangladesh. However, the result of their rivalry mostly depends on Bangladesh's internal political dynamics, which plays an important role in defining the country's foreign policy. During the BNP's rule from 2001 to 2005, India continued alleging that Bangladesh was harboring its northeastern insurgents, even though Bangladesh denied it. In this period, religious extremism rose on a large scale, reaching an apogee with simultaneous bomb blasts across Bangladesh. Although the BNP eventually suppressed those who were behind such extremism, it cut a big hole in India's trust and India took such incidents very seriously.

The election manifesto of the BAL in 2008 very successfully convinced India on the point of counterterrorism that a government led by the party would not shelter Indian rebels in Bangladesh in any way. This they proved by handing over Anup Chetia, a rebel leader of the ULFA in Assam province of India. As a result, India kept on trusting the Bangladesh Awami League. Apart from this, India is one of America's key counter-terrorism 'partners' in the Asia-Pacific region, a fact which led to unprecedented support for the Bangladesh Awami League.

There is a grave anti-Indian sentiment among the Bangladeshi masses. However, Bangladesh's geographical constraints force the country not to balance with China against India. These constraints also force every political party except the Bangladesh Jamaat Islami to achieve India's favor before a general election. There is also a tendency to hit one's feet in the political arena of Bangladesh. The military rulers Ziaur Rahman and Muhammad Ershad downgraded the country's political institutions. Zia initiated a many-sided foreign policy approach, skipping the over-emphasis on India. His successors Ershad and Khaleda Zia continued this policy. The BAL, with its striking election manifesto that matched well with Indian demand in Bangladesh, could receive solid Indian favor. Astonishingly, the BAL also retained Bangladesh's all-weather friendship with China. In fact, Bangladesh's engagement with China exceeded that with India. India repeatedly expressed its security-related concern over Bangladesh's tilt to China. Nonetheless, the BAL successfully hedged between China and India and maintained many-sided relations with other great powers.

Bangladesh's pursuit of hedging between India and China and its many-sided relationships with other major powers may benefit the country until any US-led or Chinese-led global war affects the Indo-Pacific region. Last but not least, as Bangladesh is in a transitional stage and ventures to become an upper-middle income and developed nations, respectively, by 2031 and 2041. Thus, it would be wise for Bangladesh to pursue hedging and a many-sided foreign policy approach as long as possible.

This hedging strategy by Bangladesh deviates from what one might anticipate from an interpretation on the lines of Mearsheimer. In fact, Mearsheimer's thesis is ambiguous since it

provides no clear guidance on what role a non-great power might choose to play within the rivalry between a would-be hegemon and an extra-regional power (offshore balancer). Nevertheless, we can infer from a few sporadic historical instances that he realized a small power either bands with the would-be hegemon or remains neutral, while an emerging state will balance with the offshore power against the regional hegemon. Bangladesh's status in the regional hierarchy appears to be that of a state rising to the position of a middle power. However, we then come into a theoretical oddity. Bangladesh is hedging rather than balancing with China against India. This pattern contrasts with that of Mearsheimer's vision of an alternative 1950s history, in which Mexico as a rising power is balancing with Germany against the USA. This oddity, once again, can be explained by adding some additional approaches to the Mearsheimerian framework. First, Bangladesh's unique geographical position surrounded by Indian territory would make an anti-Indian balancing policy a hazardous venture. Second, there are economic factors encouraging a hedging policy. Besides the importance of the USA as the market for Bangladesh's RMG exports, which might be endangered by an overtly pro-Chinese orientation, there is the more general fact that Bangladesh, to reach its economic goals, needs investments from both India and China. Choosing between one of them would simply not be advantageous from an economic point of view. And third, there is again the need to account for domestic factors.

As the BAL tends to be more pro-India and the BNP to be more pro-China, a long-term commitment towards either great power is precluded by the fairly frequent changes (at least before 2009) of government in Bangladesh. Furthermore, public opinion in Bangladesh is opposed to an overtly pro-Indian policy (charge of 'India's dalal') or overtly pro-Chinese policy, in the latter case in view of Beijing's close relations with Islamabad (charge of 'Pakistan's razakar'). Consequently, the international-level factors, namely Indian and Chinese desire for cooperation with and influence over Bangladesh, are evaluated at the Bangladeshi domestic level, resulting in a policy of hedging. This pattern can be explained on the line of Neoclassical Realism.

Bangladesh shares the democratic political system with India, although not with China, and it is connected to both great powers through economic links and common membership in international organizations. At the same time, it has generally friendly relations with both powers, which could be interpreted as support for the Liberal assumptions of the benevolent effects of democracy, interdependence and international institutions. Nevertheless, these factors have not prevented Bangladesh-Indian tensions over issues like the border killings. But from the Bangladeshi point of view, the economic links to both India and China are particularly important in view of its own economic growth. As has been argued before, the emphasis upon economic and soft power fits better with Liberalism than with Realism.

To what extent Bangladesh's hedging be explained by Constructivism? Bangabondhu's idea of "Sonar Bangla" (Golden Bangla) inspired the current Hasina regime to define different visions for huge economic development and, therefore, achieving economic benefits from both India and China. These visions broadened the options for Bangladesh's upgrading from LDC to a middle-income country. Moreover, the "Razakar" (Pakistan's broker) discourse triggered the BAL government not to abandon the Indian side. On the other hand, fear of getting stuck in the "India's dalal" (India's broker) discourse and in "historical indebtedness"-the memory of Indian assistance in the 1971 war - encouraged the BAL government not to bandwagon with India. Furthermore, the issue 'religious extremism' (though the term is highly debated in national politics as many think that it was conspiratorially created) aired in the global media with had high importance and caused the BAL to structure their party manifesto accordingly and closely cooperate with India in 'war on terror'.

Bangladesh's partnership with the US-led global war on terrorism generated acute criticism in national politics, forcing the government to bargain with international communities to convince them about Bangladesh's stance. In addition, world recognition of Bangladesh as a refugee-host state also helped the development of bargaining power as the country needed to work with big powers to procure economic as well as diplomatic support for the accommodation and repatriation of the Rohingya. Thus, Bangladesh can be recognized as a middle power along with the ASEAN countries, which could successfully hedge between India and China.

SIXTH CHAPTER

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Main Research Question: The Reasons for Bangladesh's Hedging

Let us repeat the thesis's guiding hypothesis and provisional explanation and then discuss them in light of the empirical evidence of our case.

6.1.1. Hypothesis

Independent Variable: The degree of threat (here: potential but not imminent) that a regional great power (A) competing with an extra-regional great power (B) poses to a regional middle power (C).

Intervening Variable: The degrees of both benefits and costs (here: both high) that close cooperation with either A or B brings to C.

Dependent Variable: The policy C adopts towards A and B (here: hedging) among a set of choices ranging from alliance with either A or B (i.e. bandwagoning or balancing) to no-commitment and neutrality.

Antecedent Conditions: The international distribution of power (here: multipolarity encouraging hedging while bipolarity would have discouraged it).

6.1.2. Provisional Explanation

The South Asian regional sub-system is characterized by a rivalry between India, trying to establish regional hegemony, and China, trying to prevent India from achieving this. For Bangladesh, India constitutes a potential but not imminent security threat.

Bangladesh faces both potentially high benefits (enhanced security and economic growth) and costs (limitation of political autonomy, domestic opposition, counteractions by the competing power) from closely cooperating with either India or China.

In view of this, Bangladesh adopts a policy of hedging between both rival great powers.

Bangladesh's hedging is further encouraged by the multipolar character of the international system.

6.1.3. Findings

As for the parts of the provisional explanation related to the hypothesis's independent variable, the findings confirm an Indian-Chinese rivalry for influence over the South Asian sub-system. Also, Bangladesh is potentially vulnerable to India in view of the latter's vastly greater military and economic resources as well as of geographical conditions, namely that Bangladesh is largely surrounded by Indian territory. On the other hand, India does not have territorial claims upon Bangladesh and both countries have amicably resolved the enclave and maritime border issues. Thus, any security threat that India may pose to Bangladesh is currently of a potential rather than imminent kind.

Those aspects of the provisional explanation drawn from the hypothesis's intervening variable are largely, but not completely, confirmed by the evidence. In the security sphere, Bangladesh's gains from cooperation with India materialize in the shape of New Delhi terminating any support for the CHT uprising. In the case of security cooperation with China, Bangladesh gains Chinese arms deliveries. In the economic sphere, Bangladesh's gains consist of Indian and Chinese investments, which contribute to the country's high economic growth rates. On the debit side, however, is the large trade deficit with both powers. As for costs, Bangladesh suffers little loss of autonomy; the only major instance here is the end of Bangladeshi support for the Assam insurgencies. There are also relatively little coercive counter-reaction of India to Chinese influence in Bangladesh, or vice versa. Among the few instances that can be listed here is Bangladesh's termination of the Sonadia deep seaport project due to Indian pressure in 2012 or, more recently, China's attempted bullying of Bangladesh over the Quad issue. On the other hand, domestic opposition is a very important factor to be taken into account by any Bangladeshi government getting too close to India (charge of being India's *dalal*) or to China (charge of being the *razakar* of China's ally Pakistan). Furthermore, the

relatively frequent changes of government between the pro-Indian BAL and the pro-Chinese military regimes and the BNP have been a contributing factor of preventing Bangladesh taking side with either India or China. More recently, this factor is no longer relevant because the BAL, now in government for the last 15 years, has opened up to China as well. All in all, domestic factors can be identified as the most important aspect of costs that Bangladesh's alignment with India or, respectively, China entail.

The findings contradict the provisional explanation with respect to those parts drawn from the hypothesis's antecedent conditions: In line with the hypothesis, one would expect that Bangladesh's hedging is discouraged as the international system is moving from unipolarity or unbalanced multipolarity towards a US-Chinese bipolarity. And on the regional level, one can argue that the South Asian sub-system has been characterized by Indian-Chinese bipolar rivalry from at least the time of Bangladesh's independence. However, these conditions do not seem to have had any discouraging effect upon Bangladesh's hedging, despite the hypothesis claim that bipolarity discourages hedging.

Instead, the findings point to another antecedent condition encouraging Bangladesh's hedging, this time related to the domestic policies of India and China. In the case of India, Modi's Hindutva ideology as well as the influences of federal states (namely Western Bengal) on foreign policies make India adopt or continue some policies perceived as unfriendly by Bangladesh (water issue, border killings, NRC). Likewise, the CCP's and Xi's authoritarian and aggressive approach led to Chinese policies resented in Bangladesh (Rohingya issue, warning over the QUAD). Taken together, their domestically rooted policies work against any clear alignment of Bangladesh with either India or China and thus further encourage hedging.

6.1.4. Concluding Explanation

In view of these findings, we can revise the provision explanation into the following:

The South Asian regional sub-system is characterized by a rivalry between India, trying to establish regional hegemony, and China, trying to prevent India from achieving this. For Bangladesh, India constitutes a potential but not imminent security threat.

Bangladesh faces both potentially high benefits (military supplies and economic growth) and costs (mainly due to domestic opposition) from closely cooperating with either India or China. In contrast to the domestic factors, costs imposed by India and China (loss of autonomy, coercive reactions) itself are of secondary importance.

In view of this, Bangladesh adopts a policy of hedging between both rival great powers.

Domestically-rooted Indian and Chinese policies resented by Bangladesh discourage any firm alignment with either India or China, thus further encouraging Bangladesh's hedging.

6.2. Sub-question 1: The Relevance of Major IR Theories

This thesis assessed four IR theories - Neorealism, Neo-classical Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism - to explain Bangladesh's hedging as a middle power in response to India and China's rivalry over the former. Thus, the thesis found the topic's full relevance with Neo-classical Realism, large relevance with Offensive Realism, and partial relevance with Liberalism and Constructivism. Offensive Realism mainly focuses on military means for regional rivalry though it does not refuse economic and cultural means for pursuing this rivalry. Neoclassical Realism uses a two-step model, in which the systemic factors (opportunities and challenges) are processed through domestic ones before leading to specific policies on part of a state. Liberalism assumes that binding states by trade, liberal democracy and institutions minimizes, if not uproot, the potential for conflict among them. Moreover, Constructivism explains the environment in the policy of the states is mutually generated without emphasizing systemic or non-systemic factors particularly. The four IR theories mentioned above could explain the topic in the following subsections:

6.2.1. Offensive Realism

The question of which interpretation accounts best for Indian-Chinese rivalry in Bangladesh is connected to the one of whether China's BRI reflects its effort to ensure its uninterrupted trade and commerce with the rest of the world or rather a Chinese strategy to install its dominance over the world (particularly India) through a 'string of pearls'. There is an explicit rivalry between India and China for exerting their sphere of influences - both military and economic (fourth chapter) - over Bangladesh. The Dokhlam standoff, face-offs between Chinese and Indian soldiers at the Himalayan border and Tawang of Arunachal, and Indian concern over taking 'lease' of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port by China, the Sonadia deep seaport cancellation, criticism over the submarine purchase from China and the submarine base construction, and the Teesta River management all further substantiated India's doubts and strengthened the likelihood of confrontation between the two nuclear powers. Though, Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism did not focus upon the India-China rivalry in South Asia, his regional rivalry concept - nations that attain regional hegemony often work to stop other regional great powers from becoming as powerful as they are or, to put it differently, regional hegemons dislike having any rivals (First Chapter) - is largely compatible with Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh.

Mearsheimer is of the opinion that cooperation between great powers would not last long for two reasons: a) a great power thinks that its opponent may juggle with it; b) great powers are alert about relative power and therefore behave realistically (Mearsheimer, 2001: 51-52). India's economic reliance on China is ballooning; the former became the biggest economic partner of the latter, thereby bypassing the USA. Such a big economic relationship is not possible without cooperation. On the other hand, both the countries own nuclear weapons and their relative power is expanding day by day as both keep on increasing their military budgets. They have been weaponizing heavily for decades and they have been exporting their powers to neighboring countries through selling arms or through military partnerships. India has launched its own type of aircraft carrier in late 2022. In terms of arms selling, China is far more advanced than India as the latter itself is largely dependent on weapons of other great powers, particularly Russia. However, arms development has been creating opportunities for applying influences in third

countries against each other's interests because Chinese weapons mean Chinese type of training and influence. So, relations between India and China comprises both cooperation and hostility (fourth Chapter). However, hostility may outweigh cooperation due to reasons mentioned before.

In fact, economic cooperation happens because of varieties of riches or wealth among countries and consequently their inability to satisfy their domestic demand completely on their own. However, relative economic strength will trigger any country to preserve its economic superiority through increasing its military capability. Because it is the only way through which one country can check any possible aggression by its rival as it is, according to Mearsheimer (2001), not possible for any country to know completely what other countries' intentions are. Accordingly, it is very natural that a great power will acquire power as much as possible whenever economic advantage backs that.

But the problem is that Offensive Realism says that a great power will apply all ways to deter its rival from exerting influences or becoming economically beneficial in its surroundings. In line with that, China, the next possible regional power in whole Asia has been pursuing all strategies – economic and military – to counter Indian influences in its surroundings as India is considered the prime partner of the USA's Indo-Pacific policy, which explicitly targets China.

Moreover, the USA is exerting its effort to incorporate Bangladesh to the IPEF, QUAD, GSOMIA and ACSA, in which India has an important stake. All the groups aim at deterring China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. In response, China is backing Bangladesh economically and militarily, however, without offering it to join any military alliance with China. Till date, Bangladesh retained non-alignment and declared it would pursue many-sided relations with the great powers. However, Bangladesh has been hedging (fifth chapter) between India and China. Hedging is a wide-spread policy among middle powers. In our case Bangladesh's hedging contrasts with the behaviour of the other South Asian middle power, namely Pakistan, which balances with China against the would-be regional hegemon India. The causes for Bangladesh's hedging are both systemic (uncertainty about the future behavior of

both India and China) and domestic (unique geographical constraints, political divisions about India, national economic transition, and national consensus about China). Thus, Bangladesh's hedging cannot be explained completely in line with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism as the theory did not say anything about domestic politics' role over great power rivalry.

Mearsheimer's fifth premise suggests that China and India act rationally. However, the relationship between India and Bangladesh is being negatively impacted by the NRC, the border killings, and India's partial implementation of the Ganges and not signing the Teesta water sharing accords. This indirectly benefits China. To put it another way, if India were acting rationally and attempting to advance its interests rationally, it would work with Bangladesh to resolve the conflicting issues, which do not really affect India's core security interests.

There are comparatively fewer opportunities for dispute with Bangladesh on the part of China. No matter how valid it may be in relation to other nations, the 'debt trap' interpretation cannot be used in the context of Bangladesh-China ties. However, China also pursues some policies that, from the perspective of strengthening a state's authority on the international stage, are not entirely rational. One of these policies is China's backing of Myanmar in the Rohingya crisis, and another is the awkward remark by the Chinese ambassador in Bangladesh regarding the QUAD. Both measures have a detrimental effect on Bangladesh-Chinese relations and are therefore ineffective from the standpoint of China's efforts to restrain India's hegemony over South Asia in accordance with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism.

Thus, Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism envisages the rivalry between a great power aspiring for hegemony over its regional neighborhood and an extra-regional great power trying to prevent this hegemony. Mearsheimer has little to say on South Asia and restricts his examples largely to the USA as extra-regional balancer preventing hegemonic bids by Germany for Europe, by Japan for Northeast Asia, by the Soviet Union for both Europe and Northeast Asia, and now by China for Northeast Asia. But the pattern he describes can easily be applied for South Asia, with India acting as the regional would-be hegemon and China as the extra-regional balancer.

On the debit side, Mearsheimer's model focuses upon great power behavior but gives only vague hints on how a middle power would behave. It is thus better suited to interpret the actions of India and China towards Bangladesh than the policies of Bangladesh itself. Furthermore, Mearsheimer gives almost exclusive attention to military matters but has little to say about the kinds of economic or cultural power resources that loom large in India's and China's relations towards Bangladesh. Finally, his assumption that states are rational actors in their relations towards each is ill-suited to explain certain policies by India (border killings, CAA, non-implementation of water sharing) or by China (clumsy bullying over the QUAD and the stance against Bangladesh's interest on the Rohingya issue) unnecessarily annoying Bangladesh and thus indirectly doing a favor to the respective rival great power. It is also ill-suited to deal with, for example, the way public opinion in Bangladesh towards India and towards China's ally Pakistan may affect its foreign alignments. In other words, Mearsheimer – quite intentionally – ignores the domestic level of analysis.

6.2.2. Neoclassical Realism

Indian foreign policy that rivals that of China in Bangladesh is influenced by both systemic and domestic factors. The US-led current international system favors India against China. Bangladesh's geographical constraints gives an extra advantage to India against China. However, China's superior economic performance compared with USA after the 2009 financial crisis as well Xi's assertive and authoritative foreign policy is reflected in China's exerting of influences over South Asian countries - including Bangladesh in particular – through the BRI. This has intensified tension from the side of India. Consequently, India is pursuing its utmost effort to keep Bangladesh under its sphere of influences through bilateral trade, credits and investments, rail, road and river transport cooperation. India's response to systemic challenge and opportunities (second and fourth chapter) are sketched in the table.

INDIA: SYSTEMIC OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

International Level

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Rivalling superpowers offer support	Neutrality, but close relations with one superpower (first SU, later USA).
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Responses</i>
a) India's defeat in India-China war (1962).	a) Military modernization.
b) China's nuclear test (1964).	b) Testing nuclear weapons (1974).
c) Deng Xiaoping's openness and relationship with USA.	c) Friendship with the Soviet Union, promoting 'Indian doctrine'.
d) The end of the Cold War.	d) Closer relations to the USA
<i>South Asian Regional Level (with specific regards for Bangladesh)</i>	
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Bangladesh's geographical constraints.	Keeping Bangladesh under pressure.
India's economic and military rise.	
India's proximity with the CHT.	Harboring PCJSS (1975-1997).
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Nexus between China's and Pakistan's interest in CHT (before 1971).	Direct assistance for Bangladesh's independence (1971)
Concern over territorial integrity in India's northeastern provinces.	Abundant trust with BAL, Counter-terrorism cooperation with Bangladesh
Territorial disputes with Bangladesh.	Exchange of enclaves (2015), Demarcation of maritime border (2015),
Bangladesh's relationship with Muslim states (Pakistan, Turkiye)	Backing BAL and other anti-Pakistani groups in Bangladesh.

Table 13: International Level Factors Influencing Indian Foreign Policy**Source:** Author's Compilation

India's collective memory of the Hindus ruling in the subcontinent and the fear of subjugation based upon the memory of British colonial rule instilled a big brother attitude in India for long. It further intensified during the Modi government as the current BJP is highly influenced by Hindutva, an extreme Hindu religious strand with the hope of a great Hindu state incorporating all states that in old days were politically unified with what is now India. India's recent effort to negatively taint the Mughal emperors - Aurungzeb and Akbar in particular- is highly embedded in BJP's Hindutva root. Although the Hindutva concept existed before Modi's coming to power, it was only taken up by extreme Hindu religious movements like the RSS but was not a national discourse. However, the current positive emphasis upon ancient Hindu rule and the negative highlights on the British colonization and Mughal rule in India's national textbooks has been buttressing BJP's 'Great India' concept. It has also stimulated Indian attempts to exert influence in neighboring countries, based on the feeling that India is no more subjugated to any external power but, rather, that India is a powerful actor in the region and in the globe. Although the BJP government emphasized both on 'Shanti' (peace) and 'Shakti' (power) in Panchmrit, the Shakti concept got the upper hand over the Shanti concept. Moreover, concept of dignity or honor in "Panchamrit" has encouraged the Modi government to delete the memories of Muslim Mughal domination in the subcontinent and to re-energize recollections past Hindu rule. Also, the extreme Hindutva ideology generates Indian concern over their fellow Hindu community in Bangladesh. It forces India to keep pursuing its policy of keeping Bangladesh under its sphere of influence at any cost. All these factors are empowering India's big brother attitude, forcing it to get more and give few to Bangladesh in spite of bilateral dealings.

India's federal states were empowered during the Modi-led BJP rule. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata has twice denied visiting Bangladesh with the Indian Prime Minister to sign the Teesta River water-sharing treaty. Moreover, India is concerned about its economically underdeveloped northeastern provinces. It fears that if separatist insurgents get shelter inside Bangladesh, it will threaten its territorial integrity.

The “Indian doctrine” – India would not allow any extra-regional power in the region –is deeply entrenched in Indian domestic politics, thus influencing the country's foreign policy in the shape of portraying the country as a big brother in South Asia. The ‘Indian doctrine’ and the ‘Great India’ slogan can be seen as two sides of the same coin. The recent Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is the brainchild of the ‘Great India’ slogan and influenced by the Hindutva strand, which drew sharp criticism in Bangladesh and among Indian Muslims. The ‘Indian doctrine’ also had a heavy impact upon framing the world view of Indian elites – not to bow down to external forces and to pursue domination.

The collapse of the Soviet Union turned the world into a unipolar one led by USA. By now, however, the emergence of China through its superior economic performance after the 2009 financial crisis transformed the world into a bipolar structure, meaning that the USA perceives China as its rival in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. As a result, India plays an important role against China in the USA's Indo-Pacific policy. Furthermore, Bangladesh's emergence as a middle power provided opportunities for both India and China against each other. This encouraged Xi to woo Bangladesh through China's BRI, which confronted India's interests in Bangladesh.

Chinese economic strength enabled the country to vigorously promote its BRI. However, India considers port building (Sonadia, Payra) and port use (Mongla and Chittagong) as points of concern and is exerting relentless efforts to deter Bangladesh from getting closer to China. India's recent military treaty with Bangladesh to sell military weapons certainly can be interpreted as the former's effort to decrease Chinese influence and keep Bangladesh under its

sphere of influence. China's response to systemic challenge and Opportunities are sketched in the table.

CHINA: SYSTEMIC OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

International Level

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Responses</i>
China's continuing economic rise despite the Global Financial Crisis 2008.	Exerting influence over the world through BRI, AIIB, BRICS.
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Responses</i>
US-led QUAD, IPEF, GSOMIA, ACSA	Intensification of cooperation with Russia, expansion of SCO and BRICS.
China's being land-locked with South Asia and the Indian Ocean	Efforts for connectivity by BCIM

South Asian Regional Level (with specific regards for Bangladesh)

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Economic success after 2008	Trade and investments in South Asia, including Bangladesh.
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Responses</i>
a) Bangladesh's geographical constraints	a) Military arms provisions to Bangladesh
b) Indian partnership with USA	b) Offering duty-free access to Bangladeshi products in China, connectivity through BCIM.
Hindutva doctrine	Promoting Confucianism
Possibility of Bangladesh-QUAD Cooperation	Warning of worsening of relationship with Bangladesh, Approaching Bangladesh more by strategic partnership

Table 14: International Level Factors Influencing Chinese Foreign Policy

Source: Author's Compilation

Unlike Deng Xiaoping's views on the distinct roles and formation of the Communist Party and State, General Secretary Xi advocates the comprehensive leadership of the CPC in every aspect. On October 24, 2016, Xi Jinping stated that adhering to the “centralized” and “unified leadership” of the CPC and creating the Party’s ‘leading core’ reflect the collective desire of the CPC and the Chinese masses. During a February 13, 2017 speech, Xi Jinping stressed that ‘the Party has comprehensive control over all activities in every region of the country’ (Xi 2017: 20, cited in Guo, 2020).

As Xi emphasized in his political report given at the 19th National Congress of the CPC, the leadership of the CPC is the determining attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the most important asset for this system. It needed to be made sure that the Party would be in charge at all times and that everyone was pulling into the same direction. In 2018, the National People's Congress ratified a new version of the People's Republic of China Constitution that stressed Communist Party leadership in an additional article (Guo, 2020). Above all, a revision of the party constitution in line with Xi’s views, giving him the authority to expel members of the party's Central Committee and thus consolidating his absolute power, is a significant factors influencing China’s foreign policy.

Cold War-style bipolar politics during the liberation war in 1971 encouraged independent Bangladesh to join the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) under the slogan of ‘friendship to all, and malice towards none.’ However, the opening of China’s door to the USA facilitated global economic liberalism that after the death of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 enticed the two military rulers, General Ziaur Rahman and General Hussein Mohammad Ershad. Moreover, the US Asia-Pacific policy (now Indo-Pacific policy) entrusted India with the prime partnership in the region, giving it a tacit approval for its policy to Bangladesh. Thus, India can excessively satisfy its interest in major cases, while overlooking Bangladesh’s.

Like for other countries in the world, China's obviously superior economic performance in the 2008 global financial crisis generated uncertainty and risks for Bangladesh, which affected the shape of its foreign policy. China's tensions with India regarding the string of pearls under the BRI umbrella added extra fervent to that. Unlike many Southeast Asian nation who have territorial dispute with China, Bangladesh simultaneously stuck to already existing predominant power, i.e. India, which surrounds Bangladesh from three sides, and the new economic power China. China's BRI provided great economic opportunities for Bangladesh, encouraging the country to enter the web of the BRI through a strategic partnership with China in 2016. However, India began assuming that as a matter of concern for its own interest and stepped up offering more economic opportunities, criticizing arms purchasing from China and encouraging more arms purchasing from India. As a result, Bangladesh preferred not to take a side either by bandwagoning with India or balancing with China. Instead, Bangladesh retained both economic and military relationships with both India and China.

BANGLADESH: SYSTEMIC OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

International Level

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Responses</i>
China's economic opening (from 1979)	Good relations with China under the Zia and Ershad regimes (1975-1990)
End of Cold War	More cooperation with India, China and the USA
China's economic success (especially since 2008)	Leaning on China for infrastructural investments and arms purchasing
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Responses</i>
USA & China oppose Bangladesh's liberation from Pakistan (1971)	Leaning towards the Soviet Union and India

Cold War constraints upon non-aligned states	Joining the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and maintaining 'friendship to all, and malice to none'
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South Asian Regional Level

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Responses</i>
India-China competition for turning Bangladesh into a sphere of interest	Refocus on non-alignment and hedging
India's 'Big Brother' attitude	Dawdling in buying weapons from India. Purchasing weapons from China and Turkiye instead.

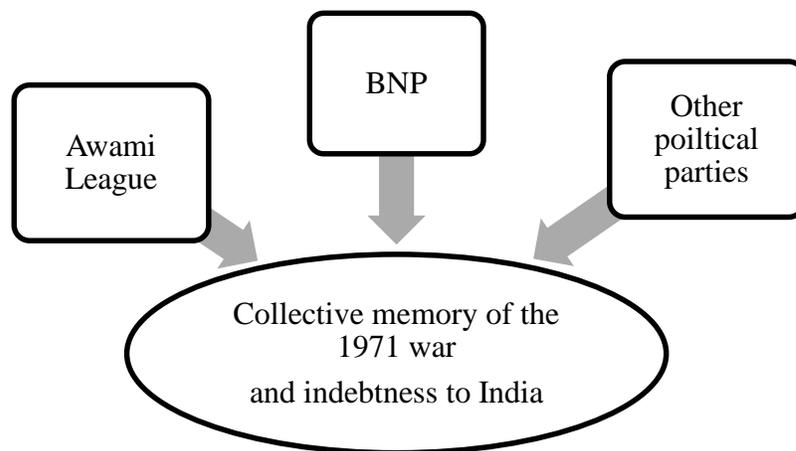
Table 15: International Level Factors Influencing Bangladesh's Foreign Policy

Source: Author's Compilation

6.2.3. Domestic Factors Influencing Bangladesh's policy response

The following domestic factors influenced Bangladesh's policy of not balancing with China:

- a. Collective memory of the 1971 war and moral debt to India



- b. BAL's special connection to India due to the party's leading political role in 1971, (Jamal, 2008), i.e. the promoter of Bangali nationalism, and thus its rivalry with the pro-China/Pakistan and promoter of Bangladeshi nationalism, BNP.

Given Offensive Realism's relevance for understanding Bangladesh's hedging, the Neoclassical school of Realism has additional insights to offer. In contrast to Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism is a broad approach that does not narrow the focus upon great powers and their military activities. Thus, a middle power like Bangladesh as well as economic and soft power resources can easily find place under its roof. Furthermore, from Neoclassical Realism's point of view, the regional rivalry between India and China over Bangladesh presents challenges and opportunities on the international level, which are then processed by factors at the domestic level in all three states. Thus, policies which may appear 'irrational' from the perspective of interstate relations can turn out to be quite rational from the perspective of domestic policies. For example, India's domestic policies are characterized by a federal system, giving the federal states a say in foreign policy decisions. India's foot-dragging over the Ganges and Teesta River treaties, which is a major source of conflict with Bangladesh and indirectly favors China, can be explained by the interests of federal states like West Bengal. Likewise, Bangladesh's failure to clearly align with either India or China against the other can be explained by the fact that either policy would respectively meet severe opposition by a large segment of Bangladesh's public as well as by one of the major political parties. In this way, Neoclassical Realism provides insights particularly with respect to the Intervening Variables and the Antecedent Conditions and of the Thesis.

The local government of West Bengal is opposed to the federal state sharing too much water with Bangladesh, and the current BAL government in Bangladesh wants both Indian and Chinese investments in order to shore up its legitimacy as provider of economic growth. Here, perceived material interests are behind domestic policies affecting foreign policy decisions. However, some of the domestic factors influencing Indian, Chinese and Bangladeshi policies

towards each other cannot be understood purely in terms of material interest like access to water or investments. Rather, factors like Hindutva in India, the narrative of a “century of humiliation” in China, or the competition between a secular Bengali or an Islamic Bangladeshi self-understanding in Bangladesh revolve about non-material issues. The question here is one of identity, that is how people perceive themselves as well as other people and states. This can very well be dealt with under the umbrella of Neoclassical Realism but it is really the bread and butter of Constructivism. Before coming to that, let us however deal with Realism’s prime opponent, i.e. IR Liberalism.

6.2.4. Liberalism

As for India’s foreign policy to Bangladesh, the following assumptions should be pointed out:

- a. Liberalism’s expectation - democratic nations do not embroil in war against each other - fit with India-Bangladesh relationship as there is no imminent threat for Bangladesh. India and Bangladesh have several engagements in several institutions like SAARC, BIMSTEC, NAM, and AIIB. However, with the high trade deficit, border killing, and restricting water sharing, India’s non-collaboration with Bangladesh in SAARC presents a largely one-sided cooperation dependent upon India’s will, which does not fit with what Liberalism makes us expect.
- b. In particular, the claims that countries holding democracy do not go to war against each other - one of the prime principles of Kant-inspired Liberalism -also do not fit with continuous border killing by Indian BSF Bangladesh. Continuous border killing is a solid cause for war. However, it is Bangladesh that does not embroil in war because of its “friendship to all, malice towards none” principle as well as its internal divisions over India.

Concerning China’s foreign policy to Bangladesh, the great volume of trade and common engagement in various international organizations and projects such as the AIIB and the BRI is largely agreeable to another principle of Liberalism: trade links and membership in international

institutions reduce the possibility of war. However, the Chinese vetoes and frequently non-cooperative approach on the Rohingya issue is not compatible with Liberalism.

And what about the Indian-Chinese rivalry? Though there is a high volume of trade and common membership in various international organizations, including the AIIB and the BRICS, the argument of Liberalism - trade links and membership in international institutions reduces the possibility of war - is agreeable as neither India nor China applied coercion against each other. In fact, Liberalism believes in reducing systemic anarchy through cooperation among states. Though there is no imminent warlike situation between China and India, warnings to Bangladesh about China's economic involvement in Bangladesh (non-cooperation regarding the BCIM and forcing the termination of the Sonadia deep sea project), explicit criticism of Bangladesh over the purchase of submarines, and Chinese warning over Bangladesh's possible participation QUAD, in which India is the prime partner of the USA in Indo-Pacific area, indicate the likelihood for future confrontations between China and India in Bangladesh.

What does our case thus show about Liberalism's claim that peace and cooperation between states is fostered by economic links, by participation in international organizations and regimes, and by the spread of liberal democracy? The last argument, i.e. that liberal democracies do not go to war against each other, is not relevant for the relations between India and China, as the latter is a one-party dictatorship. And as far as Indian-Bangladesh relations are concerned, it is questionable whether India under Modi and especially Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina can still count as liberal, rather than illiberal, democracy. Nevertheless, all three countries trade extensively with each other and they also share membership in international organizations, for example India and China in SCO or India and Bangladesh in SAARC. Chinese-Bangladesh relations, despite the Rohingya and Quad controversies, are indeed largely cooperative. But whether the character of Indian-Chinese and Indian-Bangladesh relations supports or rather contradicts the Liberal assumptions about the peace-mongering aspects of economic interdependence and international institutions boils down to the question of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. For sure, despite the vast and expanding trade links between India and China, tensions between these states persist and occasionally erupt into border clashes.

Likewise, despite intense trade and investment links between India and Bangladesh, people are still being killed when illegally trying to cross the border. Arguably, cooperation in the economic sphere as well as joint membership in SCO or SAARC does not erase conflicts in other spheres. But, then again, Liberalism does not claim that economic or institutional links between countries cannot go together with conflict; it merely argues that these links make it less likely for these conflicts to erupt into war. From that perspective, it can be pointed out that there has been no further Indo-China war for more than 60 years while India and Bangladesh always have been at peace with each other.

If the jury is still out on the validity of Liberalism's assumptions of the potentially peace-bringing effects of economic interdependence and international institutions with respect to the Indian-Chinese-Bangladeshi triangle, Liberalism's relevance shows itself more directly with respect to the way of how Bangladesh is hedging. As we have seen, much of the literature on hedging focuses upon the military-security aspects of this type of state behavior. As we have seen, Bangladesh's hedging includes military cooperation with both India and China but falls short of an alliance with either. At the same time, Bangladesh's hedging also materializes itself in extensive trade with both India and China as well as receiving investments from both. Arguably, this economic aspect of Bangladesh's hedging is more important than the military one. In this respect, the case of Bangladesh's hedging is less compatible with Realism's emphasis upon 'high politics' and more with Liberalism's upon 'low politics', i.e. economic relations. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Bangladesh's trade deficit with India and China is among the bones of contention it has with these great powers, it is well to remember that economic interdependence is – contrary to how Liberals would have it – not always a factor leading to harmonious relations between states.

6.2.5. Constructivism

While explaining Bangladesh's middle power hedging vis-à-vis Indian-Chinese rivalry, Constructivism theory can be applied by the following way:

With respect to Indian foreign policy, it can be argued that,

- a. Philosophical thinking (Kautilya) that expansion is a must for safeguarding a state reflecting India's policies to Bangladesh. Indeed, the border killings, the non-implementation of the Ganges River treaty, the failure to sign the Teesta River treaty, and endeavors for the renewal of the 1972 comprehensive military treaty with Bangladesh substantiate India's zero-sum attitude.
- b. The historical roots of India - the assumed glory of the ancient Hindu rulers persuaded the BJP policymakers to implement the following policies: To delete feelings of subjugation through undermining both Mughal and British legacies and thus to embrace the 'Hindu First' principle in both domestic and regional politics; to formulate the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that explicitly targeted Indian Muslims; to replace Panchsheel by Panchmrit, which highlights non-Western culture.
- c. The idea of a great Indian state rooted in Hindutva encouraged economic, military, and cultural cooperation. This was related to the idea that otherwise China would cooperate closely with Bangladesh, which would undermine Indian influence.
- d. The desires to overcome the feeling of a history of subjugation not only persuaded India to wipe out the British and Mughal legacies but also inspired it to force neighboring countries to accept subjugation themselves. Instances of India's non-cooperative attitude – the border killings, the trade deficit, the non-implementation of the water treaty - is also rooted in the feeling that complete cooperation would not keep Bangladesh subservient to India.
- e. The BJP's connection to the RSS and to Hindutva encouraged BJP policymakers to keep their trust in the secular BAL.

Chinese foreign policies to Bangladesh are influenced by philosophical traditions. Confucianism-inspired principles (sovereignty, equality, mutual respect, non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs, and win-win in international relations) are rooted in the ideas of harmony among diversified interests and avoidance of conflict. These principles are deeply entrenched in Chinese foreign policy. However, the 'great power mindset' and the 'victim mentality', together with Communist Party giving priority to the security of the communist

political system as well as China's international standing affect how Chinese policymakers defined China's interests. This was particularly the case with Xi's 'Chinese dream' of achieving prestige at the global level and therefore his venturing the BRI, the AIIB and connectivity with the rest of the world.

As for Indian and Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh, the following factors are important:

- a. India's doubts over Chinese intentions in constructing the deep seaport and the submarine base, its non-cooperation with BCIM, the promotion of BBIN and of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor with Japan, the opposition to Chinese engagement in Bangladesh and to the Chinese ambassador's remark on the consequence of Bangladesh's joining QUAD are all inspired by 'Great India' concept.
- b. Though Sun Zi's doctrine suggested 'breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting as the highest form of excellence', it left room for considering the possibility of harmony.
- c. The philosophy of Kautilya concerning the unavoidability of a state's territorial expansion against another aggressor and, if necessary, war led to an Indian mindset that naturally viewed the Chinese presence in Bangladesh as a threat.
- d. Some factors in the foreign policies of India (the northeastern provinces' susceptibility to separatism and their closeness to Bangladesh), China (the landlocked position of Yunnan province), and Bangladesh (being surrounded by India) cannot be explained by Constructivism.

More than Neoclassical Realism, a Constructivist interpretation would highlight ideational domestic factors and the way they affect foreign policy. Thus, it would emphasize that India's Modi government is driven by the Hindutva-inspired understanding of India as a Hindu state, with potential claims over all areas which had once been Hindu in the past – which would also include Bangladesh. Policies like the CAA or the border killings may not foster India's interest of gaining Bangladesh as an ally against China but they satisfy the Hindutva sentiments of the BJP's rank and file in making it difficult for Muslims (including those of Bengali background) entering India or becoming Indian citizens. Likewise, China may not necessarily do itself a favor

by some of its bullying diplomacy. However, this kind of diplomacy can be interpreted in terms of China's self-perception as a great civilization that has suffered more than hundred years of unjust humiliation by others and that now needs to show strength in order never to be subjected to this experience again. Finally, a Constructivist interpretation of Bangladesh's self-identity would give great importance to the collective memories of the independence war in 1971. The Pakistani atrocities during that war make it difficult for Bangladesh to develop a close alliance with current Pakistan. And as long as Pakistan is one of China's closest allies, this configuration inevitably also works against any potential alliance between Bangladesh and China. As for India, Bangladesh public opinion approaches it with a mixture of gratitude for the help given during the independence war and of resentment towards India's big brother attitude. This resentment works against a potential alliance with India. Thus, Constructivism elaborates certain topics covered by Neoclassical Realism but ignored by Offensive Realism.

Overall, the findings of the Thesis are largely compatible with all the four major theoretical approaches: Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. Each approach highlights an important aspect of Indian-Chinese-Bangladeshi relations, whether that of the regional power configurations and rivalries, the processing of international-level factors at the domestic level, the importance of the economic aspect of hedging, and the influence of identities and collective memories upon foreign policy. In the light of these theoretical insights, we can now also briefly answer the remaining two sub-questions.

6.3. Sub-Question 2: Means of pursuing great power rivalry

In contrast to what seems to be the underlying assumption of Mearsheimer, that is that great powers pursue their regional rivalries through military alliances and armed interventions, India and China try to gain influence over Bangladesh by peaceful means. There is certainly the factor of military cooperation, but short of formal alliances. It is supplemented by other forms of power, foremost economic power (trade and investments) but also soft power (education, culture, health, etc.).

6.4. Sub-Question 3: Importance of the domestic level

In line with Neoclassical Realism, how to respond to the opportunities and challenges arising from the regional rivalry between India and China is decided on the domestic level, whether in New Delhi, Beijing or Dhaka. Besides considerations of material interest, issues of identity and collective memory exert a strong influence over what policies are pursued and how, which is in line with Constructivist assumptions.

6.5. Final Remarks

The issue of China's national interest - safeguarding territorial integrity and sovereignty - forced Xi to take a turn from Deng Xiaoping's policy stance. That stance had been an emphasis upon economic growth and modernization under the slogan of 'keeping a low profile and do something' while participating in the America-led liberal order with the slogan of 'strive for achievement.' China's strong economic performance after the 2008 global financial crisis encouraged the Xi government to attempt deleting the feeling of deprivation and reviving the 'great power mindset' through takeoff into the global stage through the BRI, the BRICS, and the AIIB. India's redefining its 'Look East' policy as 'Act East' policy aiming at external policy activism in whole Asia-Pacific region can also be seen as a foreign policy shift by the Modi regime. Until Modi came to power in 2014, Indian foreign policy was based on Idealism, Realism and pragmatism. However, Idealism waned while Realism and pragmatism continued during the Modi regime, which largely backed the concept "Great India" embedded in Hindutva, an extreme Hindu religious identity. China's BCIM connectivity project under the BRI, the Payra deep seaport building, the submarine base construction for the two submarines Bangladesh purchased from China, the Teesta River management, and the Chinese use of Chittagong and Mongla port rivalled Indian interest in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's cancellation of the Sonadia deep seaport contract with China and the Chinese ambassador's warning over potential deterioration of relationship if Bangladesh joins QUAD substantiated the regional rivalry.

Though, apparently, hedging is the most suitable policy response for Bangladesh to Indian-Chinese rivalry, it may give rise to India alleging that Bangladesh has been pursuing a pro-Chinese policy and, conversely, China alleging a pro-Indian policy. This would further complicate Bangladesh's policies towards India and China. Systemic factors (China's rise and its attempts to prevent Indian influence in Bangladesh, in accordance with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism) and domestic factors in both India (Hindutva and the idea of 'Great India', provincial-level factors) and China (the landlocked position of Yunan province, smooth economic growth, Xi's visionary, assertive and authoritative leadership as well as the emphasis upon preserving national sovereignty) inspired them to exert their influences over Bangladesh. However, the outcome of the rivalry between India and China is largely dependent on Bangladesh's response, i.e. a hedging policy backed by systemic uncertainty and some domestic factors. This thesis presented Bangladesh as a middle power, which should have either balanced with China or bandwagoned with India. Instead, Bangladesh has been hedging between India and China like some other ASEAN nations' between China and USA, though Bangladesh has no territorial issue with India and does not face an imminent threat by it..

Given the land border with China and territorial as well as political problems with India, Pakistan felt encouraged to be balanced with China. Bangladesh also has multiple issues of conflict with India: the border killings, not sharing water, etc. These issues can be marked as a semi-potential threat for Bangladesh that should have triggered Bangladesh's bandwagoning with India or balancing with China. The Chinese stand against Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue in the UN goes against the very premise of Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism because it explicitly seems irrational state behavior while China keeps Myanmar in its hand as a card for keeping Bangladesh under its influence. It is worth mentioning that the Rohingya issue alone is not enough for not balancing with China because of established all-weather friendship with China.

As mentioned before, the Sonadia deep seaport project of Bangladesh that was supposed to be given to a Chinese company was canceled because of pressure from India. The USA-led QUAD, GSOMIA, ACSA, and IPEF, each of which incorporated India, are also attempting to

include of Bangladesh. The remark by the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh crystalized former's concern about Bangladesh's likelihood to join QUAD. However, Bangladesh's immediate objection to the Chinese ambassador's remarks and the emphasis on Bangladesh's non-alignment and multi-partnership substantiate that Bangladesh has no intention to balance with China against India or bandwagon with India. Also, it does not seem possible to be balanced with China against India as India has been declared America's chief partner in Indo-Pacific region. So, until China forms a military alliance like NATO, which can assure security of the countries that are balanced with China, hedging between China and India and many-side relations with other major powers is the most rational foreign policy option for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has a big volume of business with its immediate neighbor India that may be hampered once Bangladesh balanced with China. India also can instigate insurgents groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which would cause much unrest and become a national security issue for Bangladesh. A very recent human chain demonstration in India, demanding the CHT's incorporation into India, further strengthened Bangladesh's concern. So, Bangladesh thought it wise to maintain equidistance from both China and India and to retain its non-alignment and multi-partnership approach along the lines of 'friendship to all, malice towards none.' In fact, Bangladesh will be able to retain its diversified relations with major powers and hedging between China and India as long as a) the international system is still in the process of moving from unbalanced multipolarity to bipolarity and b) there is no imminent threat from India. However, whether hedging will persist if these conditions change remains to be seen. When China will cross the USA in terms of their relative power, then its geostrategic location may compel Bangladesh to bandwagon with India or balance with China. Otherwise, either China or India may be encouraged to take military steps to keep Bangladesh under its influence as hedging sends ambiguous message to both the countries. The nature of the international system and history of the world from the end of the Second World War to the fading out of the Cold War give reason to predicts that the current multipolar world will not exist for long and will turn into a bipolar or perhaps even unipolar world.

This thesis argues that the case of Indian-Chinese rivalry over Bangladesh broadly confirms Mearsheimer's theory of Offensive Realism, albeit with some different nuances. In the theory, the USA has been characterized as a regional hegemon and China as the rival of the USA in Asia. As India ultimately serves the interest of the USA in the Asia-Pacific, India's upper hand in Bangladesh over that of China can satisfy both the USA and India.

However, on its own, Mearsheimer's theory is not sufficient to fully understand China's and India's rivalry over Bangladesh. The following shortcomings of the theory can be noted: First, the limitation of the discussion to only two regions: Northeast Asia and Europe. But Mearsheimer's argument can easily be applied to other world regions, like South Asia. Second, the restriction of the discussion to the great powers and thereby neglecting the actions of those states which are not great powers. This can be rectified by integrating the concept of middle powers into the theoretical framework. Third, the overemphasis upon military means of power and the disregard for economic and cultural means, leading to an uncertainty about how to achieve or avoid regional dominance. However, focusing upon economic and cultural means of power is not in explicit contradiction to Mearsheimer's framework. The fourth is the disregard for domestic policy issues, both with respect to great power rivalry as well as to the decisions of non-great powers whether to bandwagon, balance or hedge. This limitation suggests that Mearsheimer's framework would be enriched by taking in the domestic level as a secondary factor supplementing international-level explanations. Thus revised, the framework would move into the direction of Neoclassical Realism. The case of Indian-Chinese rivalry in Bangladesh consequently suggests that Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism is a highly appropriate explanatory framework but that it might gain by the incorporation of Neoclassical Realism as an additional approach into the original model.

The thesis also argues that Liberalism can only analyze cooperation, mentioning India's and China's participation in BRI, AIIB, BRICS and both countries' utilization of Bangladeshi ports. But Indian criticism and pressure for abandoning Chinese engagement in Bangladesh do not go with the very principles of Liberalism. Where Liberalism is relevant for the thesis is its emphasis upon the importance of 'low politics' like economic interaction, which play a large

role in Bangladesh's hedging behavior. Under a Constructivist explanation, ideas, discourses, leadership trait and style in domestic level are the key factors for defining India's, China's, and Bangladesh's foreign policies and giving the meaning of anarchy. However, a system-level static understanding like geographical vulnerability in the case of India's northeastern provinces, geographical constraints in the case of Bangladesh, or China's economic and military rise that very naturally intensifies Chinese presence in Bangladesh, etc. cannot be explained by Constructivism. Apparently, it is unlikely that any government other than the BJP would be inspired to generate a different interpretation of the Chinese presence in Bangladesh. At the same time, it is also unlikely that a Chinese government other than Xi would generate a different interpretation of India's surrounding of Bangladesh and of arranging "joint military exercise" (Negi, 2022) with Bangladesh. Also, there is little possibility of a different interpretation of China's dependency on the oil route through the Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca, which encourages the country to take measures securing the route and, therefore, connecting with Bangladesh. This is the most significant weakness of Constructivism.

In conclusion, the thesis has shown that Bangladesh is hedging between India and China. The regional rivalry between these great powers brings both opportunities and challenges to Bangladesh. These regional systemic factors are processed on the Bangladeshi domestic level, especially in view of identity politics, in a way that results in Bangladesh opting for a hedging strategy. This explanation of Bangladesh's hedging owes something to several major IR perspectives, i.e. Offensive Realism, Neoclassical Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism.

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