

**SINO-INDIAN STRATEGIC RELATIONS:
CONSTRAINED COMPETITION,
CONSTRAINED COOPERATION**

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Executive Summary

1. Sino-Indian relations are “between resentment and rapprochement” and handling Beijing is India’s single greatest foreign policy challenge. India views the subcontinent as its “natural security zone” whereas China feels that it cannot allow India to exercise unrestrained dominance on its southern borders.
2. Since 1949, China has participated in twenty-three territorial conflicts with other states but has used force in only six. Although China has been willing to use force in some of its conflicts, it has seized little land that it did not control before the outbreak of combat.
3. China is not a revisionist state operating outside, or barely inside, the boundaries of the international community. Rather, China has become more integrated into and more cooperative with international institutions than ever before.
4. The border dispute over Arunachal Pradesh stems from different fundamental approaches by China and India. India has taken a more legalist approach while China tends to pursue negotiations from a more realist perspective.
5. The Sino-Indian border dispute is a cause of slightly greater concern as the two countries are in mutually antagonistic and unchanging positions, and there is a diplomatic deficit and a growing differential in comprehensive national power which increasingly favors China.
6. China is unlikely to behave aggressively in the Indian Ocean for fear of inadvertently accelerating the development of Indo-American strategic ties. India also enjoys marked geostrategic advantages in the region.

7. In addition, given the nature of international commodities markets and the dynamics of the global supply chain, China and India have a serious incentive to cooperate.
8. Strategic competition in this region will contribute to additional upward pressures on international prices thus damaging the economies of the two countries and the economies of their key export markets in Asia and the West.
9. This constrained cooperation can serve as a powerful incentive for India to accommodate an increased Chinese naval presence and for China to behave in a rational manner with this presence.
10. However, these generally positive assessments are predicated on a continuously stable relationship between the United States and China and the absence of greater systemic pressure in Asia which this produces. As Sino-American relations are fundamentally stable, any Sino-Indian competition is also constrained.