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How India Leads the South Asian Regional Security Complex: Geopolitical and Social Network Analysis

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This research explores the regional security dynamics of South Asia through the lens of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. The research provides a comprehensive geopolitical analysis focusing on India's maritime interests and the broader regional landscape, encompassing both maritime and land-based security aspects. By employing Social Network Analysis (SNA), the study uncovers India's position as a dominant regional power, with Bhutan identified as the most vulnerable state and the Maldives distinguished as a unique entity with no military forces but significant economic growth driven by tourism. The research also includes a detailed examination of the regional security landscape, highlighting key factors such as military expenditure, energy resources, trade flows, and economic growth across South Asian countries. Geographic visualizations are utilized to map these variables, revealing intricate patterns of interdependence and vulnerability. The study extends beyond maritime strategies to analyze how India's military and economic influence shapes regional stability. This dual approach offers a nuanced understanding of South Asia's security environment, demonstrating how both maritime and terrestrial dimensions interplay to affect regional dynamics and contribute to international stability. Through this analysis, the study illustrates the relevance of the RSC theory in addressing complex security challenges in the South Asian context.

Keywords: South Asian Region, Regional Security Complex, India, Maritime Interests, Geopolitical Analysis, Social Network Analysis.

The dynamics of contemporary international relations present complex security challenges, particularly in regions like South Asia, where internal tensions intersect with broader geopolitical rivalries. South Asia remains one of the world's most volatile

regions, characterized by overlapping layers of internal and external security concerns. For instance, the persistent conflict between Afghanistan's Taliban and Pakistan underscores how unresolved historical grievances and cross-border militancy destabilize the region (Rajesh, 2024). Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghan territory, resulting in civilian casualties, and subsequent retaliatory actions illustrate the precarious interplay between state and non-state actors (Ahmed, 2024). These incidents highlight how domestic instability in one state reverberates regionally, requiring a nuanced understanding of interconnected security dynamics. Similarly, internal security challenges, such as communal violence in India, further exacerbate regional instability. The attack on the Anjuman Jama Mosque in Gurugram, allegedly by a Hindu right-wing mob, is not just an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of internal discord that can have cross-border implications (Arbar, 2023). Religious tensions and acts of violence within India often influence its regional interactions, as such incidents are closely monitored and, at times, exploited by neighboring countries to further their own geopolitical narratives.

These examples transcend mere cataloging of security incidents; they underscore the interconnectedness of regional security challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through bilateral or national-level analyses alone. The geopolitical competition between India and China, particularly their influence over smaller South Asian states like Nepal and Sri Lanka, further complicates the regional security landscape (Senanayake, 2020). For example, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has redefined traditional dependencies within the region, transforming China into an internal actor in South Asia's security complex rather than a mere external power (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This raises critical questions about how regional power dynamics are structured and why they require systematic analysis through a theoretical lens such as the Regional Security Complex (RSC).

Moreover, the interconnected nature of security threats in South Asia—ranging from maritime disputes in the Indian Ocean to insurgencies within India's own borders—necessitates an analytical approach that accounts for the interplay of internal and external factors. Social Network Analysis (SNA), with its ability to map and quantify relationships among states, offers unique insights into these multidimensional dynamics (Scott & Carrington, 2014). By visualizing the intricate connections between key actors, resources, and access points, SNA reveals patterns of interdependence that traditional analyses might overlook, making it a compelling tool to study the South Asian security complex.

This research, therefore, seeks to bridge the theoretical framework of RSC with empirical tools like SNA to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how India's strategic role as a regional power shapes South Asia's security dynamics. In doing so, it addresses not only the interconnectedness of regional security challenges but also the broader implications for stability and cooperation in an increasingly multipolar world.

Theoretical Framework

This research **uses** the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, pioneered by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, as a seminal framework within the realm of international security studies. This theoretical construct seeks to elucidate the intricate dynamics of security within regional contexts. Central to the RSC theory is the premise that a nation's security posture is not solely shaped by internal determinants but is profoundly influenced by the broader regional milieu in which it operates (Buzan, 2003). Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory emphasizes heightened security interdependence among states within a particular region. They specify that this interactivity is stronger within the region due to geographical proximity and shared security dynamics, while interactions with actors outside the region tend to be more diffuse. At the core of the RSC theory lie two pivotal concepts: interdependence and security. Interdependence manifests through multifaceted dimensions such as energy interconnections and economic linkages, while security considerations encompass a spectrum of traditional and non-traditional threats that permeate the regional security landscape. For example, Buzan identifies South Asia as a distinct RSC due to the enduring security rivalry between India and Pakistan, which not only influences regional stability but also diminishes the influence of external powers like the United States or China in resolving core issues (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This framework is critical because it explains why certain conflicts, such as the Kashmir issue, persist despite international mediation attempts; it is the regional security dynamics that primarily dictate the trajectory of such conflicts. By delineating the structural interdependencies within an RSC, this theory provides an essential lens for understanding the unique security challenges and cooperative opportunities within South Asia.

The South Asian region serves as a compelling case study for exploring regional security dynamics through the lens of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory. Comprising eight nations—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—South Asia is united under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985 to foster regional collaboration.

While the signing of the SAARC Charter and the establishment of its Secretariat marked significant steps toward institutionalizing cooperation, the region remains characterized by complex security challenges, including inter-state conflicts, cross-border terrorism, and nuclear rivalries. Its strategic geographical location as a crossroads between Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean further heightens its importance in global security dynamics (SAARC, 2020; Paul, 2005).

South Asia's unique blend of historical tensions and modern geopolitical pressures makes it particularly relevant for studying RSC theory. The region's internal conflicts, such as domestic insurgencies and ethnic tensions, are deeply intertwined with external influences, including the strategic involvement of major powers like China and the United States. These dynamics align with RSC theory's emphasis on the interconnectedness of regional security and the diminished interaction with actors outside the complex. By situating South Asia within this framework, this research seeks to illustrate how regional security is shaped by both cooperative and competitive forces, offering insights into broader patterns of regional interdependence and conflict (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Acharya, 2007).

Maritime diplomacy plays a crucial role in this research as a strategy to address regional security and foster cooperation in South Asia. It encompasses diverse actions, from collaborative initiatives like port visits, joint naval exercises, and humanitarian missions to more assertive strategies involving naval deployments and coercive signaling. This form of diplomacy is vital for addressing both traditional security threats, such as territorial disputes and piracy, and non-traditional challenges, including illegal fishing and environmental degradation. India, as a regional power, employs maritime diplomacy not only to assert its dominance but also to counterbalance China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (Brewster, 2014). Maritime diplomacy also extends beyond state-centric activities, involving civilian maritime actors, coastguards, and multilateral platforms, reflecting the complexity of contemporary maritime governance (Mière, 2014).

In the context of South Asia's Regional Security Complex, maritime diplomacy serves as a dual instrument of hard and soft power, allowing states to navigate the intricate dynamics of regional security. For India, it is both a defensive measure and a proactive tool to shape the regional order by fostering cooperation with countries like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Indonesia. These partnerships secure critical maritime routes and resources while addressing shared security challenges. As Barry Buzan (2003) emphasizes, heightened interactivity among states in a geographically connected region

like South Asia is pivotal for addressing interdependent security concerns. India's use of maritime diplomacy thus exemplifies how states can balance regional competition with collaboration, reinforcing both their national security and the broader stability of the region.

On the other hand, this study employs the expertise of Geopolitics Analysts to examine the geopolitical landscape of South Asia. Geopolitics entails analyzing the geographic context vis-à-vis the economic, political, military, and cultural factors of a nation or group of nations, considering their evolving strategic goals and their ability to implement these goals effectively. The research draws upon various sources, including firsthand visits to the region, academic and public policy articles, as well as unclassified reports detailing the military capabilities of the involved parties, to analyze developments in South Asia within the provided conceptual framework. In the realm of international relations, geopolitics offers a methodological lens through which foreign policies are scrutinized. It seeks to grasp, interpret, and anticipate global political conduct by taking into account a range of geographical factors. These factors encompass diverse facets such as regional intricacies, environmental landscapes, geographic configurations, demographic compositions, natural resource endowments, and the practical utilization of scientific advancements within the specific geographical domain under examination (Evans, 1998). Osterud (1998) states that in its conventional sense, geopolitics delves into the interconnections between political influence and geographical context. It explores strategic recommendations founded on the historical significance of both land-based dominance and maritime supremacy. Throughout its tradition, geopolitics has maintained a steadfast focus on analyzing the power dynamics in global affairs, pinpointing pivotal international hubs, and understanding the interplay between naval prowess and terrestrial capabilities.

Lastly, this research incorporates Social Network Analysis (SNA) as outlined by Scott and Carrington (2014) to study the structure and dynamics of relationships among states in South Asia. SNA provides a methodological framework to identify key actors, measure interaction strength, and visualize networks of cooperation and conflict. By mapping these relationships, SNA captures the interconnectedness of states, illustrating how their roles and behaviors are shaped within a broader network. This aligns with Wendt's (1992) constructivist perspective, which argues that international politics is not merely dictated by material capabilities but also by social interactions that form shared norms and identities.

Wendt's theory emphasizes that state behavior is socially constructed through processes of socialization and norm diffusion. SNA operationalizes this by empirically examining how states interact, form alliances, and influence each other's identities and interests. For instance, states with high centrality in a network often act as norm-setters or brokers of cooperation, reinforcing their strategic importance. In South Asia, where India plays a central role, SNA helps illustrate how India's dominance is reinforced not only by its material power but also by its ability to shape regional norms and security dynamics through networked interactions.

By integrating Wendt's theoretical insights with SNA's empirical tools, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the South Asian security complex. It bridges qualitative theories of social construction with quantitative network analysis, offering a dual lens to explore how states like India and its neighbors navigate interdependencies, conflicts, and power dynamics. This synthesis enhances the theoretical rigor and empirical depth of the study, making abstract concepts like socialization and norm diffusion measurable and actionable in the context of regional security.

Literature Review

Previous research has extensively explored the regional security complex (RSC) in South Asia, yet there is limited engagement with alternative theoretical frameworks or interdisciplinary approaches. While focusing on the RSC framework allows for a detailed examination of security interdependencies within the region, integrating perspectives from other theoretical lenses, such as balance of power theory or constructivist approaches, could provide valuable comparative insights and enhance the research gap. For instance, Sultan's (2021) study, "Changing Regional Security Complexes, Rising Powers and the Future of Strategic Stability in South Asia," highlights the dynamics of great power competition, particularly between the United States and China, and India's role in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Sultan emphasizes hybrid security challenges, such as non-traditional threats and foundational agreements between India and the U.S., but does not explore how methods like social network analysis (SNA) could quantify these dynamics. This gap underscores the need for methodological innovation in analyzing regional power structures.

Similarly, Sudirman's (2018) study, "The India-Pakistani Military and Nuclear Arms Race in Post-Cold War Period," uses RSC theory to address the nuclear arms race

and its impact on regional stability. While this research effectively examines the interplay of traditional and non-traditional security threats in a multipolar system, it does not account for the role of maritime diplomacy or networked economic interactions, both of which are critical to South Asia's security environment. By incorporating these elements, the current research aims to address a gap in the literature: the lack of an integrated analysis of maritime strategies and their implications for regional security dynamics. This approach not only expands the scope of the RSC framework but also highlights its practical application in understanding security interdependencies in a geographically and geopolitically complex region.

Furthermore, Senanayake's (2020) study, "Understanding The Dragon's Entry To South Asia: Revisiting The Regional Security Complex Theory," provides a valuable perspective on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its impact on South Asia's RSC. While Senanayake identifies China's transition from an external to an internal actor in the region, the study largely focuses on economic and infrastructural influences without addressing how India's maritime diplomacy and social network positioning challenge or reinforce these shifts. The current research builds on Senanayake's findings by incorporating tools like SNA to visualize and analyze India's dominant role in shaping regional dynamics. This methodological addition reveals not only India's bilateral and multilateral engagements but also its strategic use of maritime networks to counterbalance external actors like China.

By positioning South Asia as a unique case study, this research highlights the region's complex interplay of traditional and non-traditional threats, which are amplified by geopolitical rivalries and interdependencies. The focus on Social Network Analysis (SNA) and maritime diplomacy provides a fresh lens for understanding these dynamics, filling a significant gap in the literature. This dual approach strengthens the paper's contribution to both the theoretical development of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory and its empirical application to South Asia's evolving security landscape.

Research Methodology

This research specifically focuses on the South Asia region, comprising eight countries: India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The scope of the study is limited to this regional context to provide an in-depth analysis of the security dynamics and interactions among these countries. To map the regional landscape visually, data collection centers around nine key indicators for the year 2022.

These indicators include military expenditure, military GDP, energy resources (fossil and mineral), trade exports, trade imports, tourist arrivals, tourist departures, and economic growth (GDP). By utilizing this data, a comprehensive regional mapping visualization will be built to gain insights into the relative strengths and vulnerabilities of each country in South Asia.

To produce accurate and informative map visualizations, the researchers use QGIS (Quantum Geographic Information System) software, which enables geographic mapping by incorporating various data layers encompassing these indicators. Each data layer can be adjusted to display specific information such as the distribution of energy resources, trade flows, and military statistics. The use of QGIS also facilitates the integration of spatial and non-spatial data, resulting in interactive maps that can be used for further analysis.

In addition to mapping, this study employs Social Network Analysis (SNA) to analyze India's role as a major power in South Asia, particularly focusing on its maritime interests. SNA is particularly suited to this research because it provides a structural perspective on the complex relationships that define the region's security dynamics. By visualizing connections between states, access points, and resources, SNA reveals the hierarchical position of actors like India, highlighting their dominance or vulnerabilities. This method aligns closely with the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which emphasizes the interplay of interdependence and security within regional complexes.

Several relevant news articles were collected (as shown in Appendix 1) and analyzed using MAXQDA tools for coding with keywords like "access" and "resources," as well as the actors (countries) involved in India's maritime engagements. The results of this coding were then exported into a format suitable for social network analysis, such as CSV or Excel, containing information about actors, access points, and resources, as well as the relationships between them.

Subsequently, the data was visualized using Gephi, where each actor, access point, and resource was represented as nodes, and their relationships were depicted as edges. Centrality measures such as degree, betweenness, and closeness centrality were calculated to identify the most influential actors. For example, India's high degree centrality reflects its extensive bilateral and multilateral engagements, while its betweenness centrality highlights its role as a mediator and facilitator in the regional security network.

Through this process, SNA facilitates the examination of India's bilateral and multilateral relationships with other countries, identifying key maritime routes and how natural resources are transported and managed. This dual focus on connectivity and resource flows enhances our understanding of India's strategic role in South Asia. Furthermore, the visualizations generated through SNA serve as an analytical tool, uncovering latent patterns within the security network. For instance, the size of nodes and the thickness of edges in the network diagrams indicate the degree of influence and strength of relationships, respectively, offering immediate insights into the hierarchical structure of South Asia's security dynamics. This integrated approach of SNA and RSC theory not only strengthens the validity of the findings but also bridges theoretical insights with empirical data. The results underscore India's pivotal role in the South Asian security complex, highlighting the interplay between its leadership position and the region's interdependent security landscape.

Geopolitics Analysis

Table 1.1. GDP of South Asian's Countries

Countries	Military Expenditure (USD) 2022	Military Expenditure (GDP) 2022	Energy Fossil 2018	Energy Mineral 2018	Trade Export 2022	Trade Import 2022	Tourist Arrival 2022	Tourist Departure 2022	Economic Growth by GDP 2022
Afghanistan	0,0	0,00%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0
Bangladesh	4806,3	1,13%	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,1
Bhutan	0,0	0,00%	0	0	0	0	2.090.000	0	0,0
India	81363,2	2,43%	276.915.201	908.499.215	452.684.213.646.747	732.565.993.392.928	1.433.000	21.600.000	7,2
Maldives	0,0	0,00%	0	0	158.399.891.643	3522642777.19	1.675.000	0	13,9
Nepal	428,3	1,14%	0	0	1.300.469.756.499	13.743.903.611.893	615.000	0	5,6
Pakistan	10337,5	2,63%	156.419.295	122.691.994	30.769.091.836	70.175.991.322.898	0	0	4,7
Sri Lanka	1053,5	1,43%	1	0	13.592.124.433	17.559.536.533.469	759.000	1.128.000	-7,8

Source: Gathered by the researchers from various sources including the World Bank, UNWTO, COMTRADE, OEC, and SIPRI.

In the context of South Asian regional data analysis, a comprehensive examination of nine distinct metrics collected from reputable sources, including the World Bank, UNWTO, COMTRADE, OEC, and SIPRI, underscores the multifaceted nature of economic and geopolitical assessments (OEC, 2018; World Bank, 2022; SIPRI, 2022; COMTRADE, 2022; UNWTO, 2022). It is noteworthy to mention that while the majority of the data pertains to the year 2022, certain variables, such as Energy Fossil and Energy Mineral, are sourced from 2018 due to limited availability from OEC. The findings of each data analysis are accompanied by a color-coded distribution, where darker hues correspond to higher values. This visual representation elucidates the nuances of each metric, accentuating the variations across countries within the South Asian region. Through this method, intricate patterns and disparities in data are rendered more discernible. Consequently, the data-driven insights combined with geopolitical

analysis provide a nuanced understanding of how economic conditions and strategic goals coalesce to shape the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, influencing both regional stability and international relations.

a) Military Expenditure (USD and GDP)

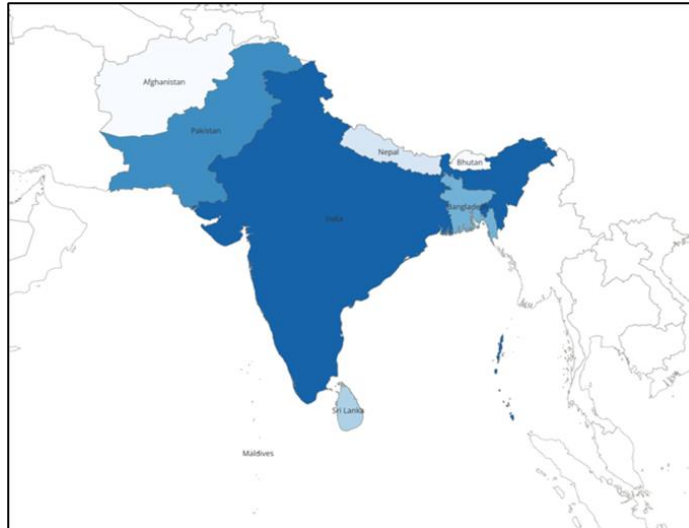


Figure 1. Geographical Visualization for Military Expenditure in USD

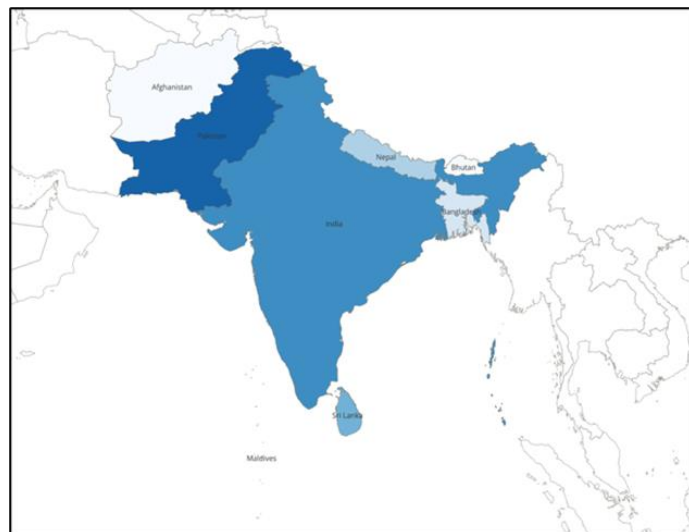


Figure 2. Geographical Visualization for Military Expenditure from Percent of GDP

Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide a visual representation of military expenditure in USD and as a percentage of GDP, respectively, across South Asian countries. The data reveals that India allocated the largest absolute amount to military spending in 2022, reflecting its role as the dominant power in the region. In contrast, Pakistan's military expenditure constitutes the highest proportion of its GDP, signifying a prioritization of defense relative to its overall economic size. These visualizations are not merely

descriptive; they substantiate the study's broader argument by emphasizing the varying strategic priorities within the region. For instance, India's substantial military budget highlights its efforts to maintain regional dominance and address both internal and external security threats. Meanwhile, Pakistan's high defense-to-GDP ratio underscores its focus on perceived security dilemmas, particularly in relation to India. By mapping this data geographically, these figures illuminate regional disparities and interdependencies that are central to understanding the dynamics of the South Asian Regional Security Complex (RSC). The stark contrast between India and Pakistan, as depicted, exemplifies the region's security asymmetries, which in turn shape the interplay of amity and enmity among states, a core tenet of RSC theory.

b) Energy Fossils and Energy Minerals

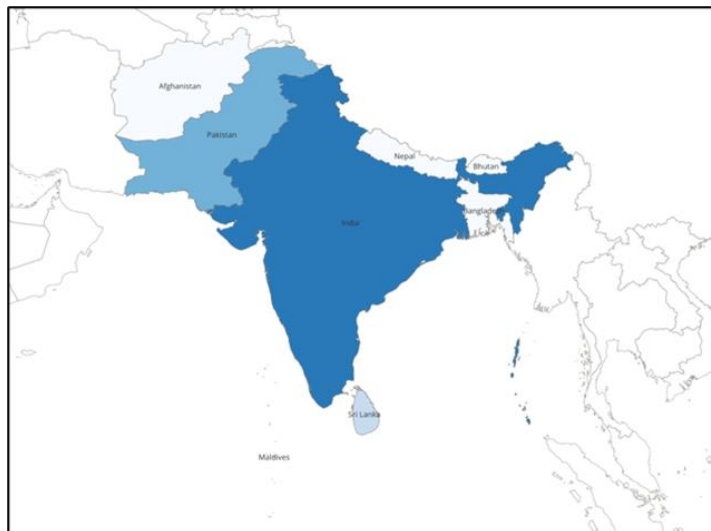


Figure 3. Geographical Visualization for Energy Fossils Income

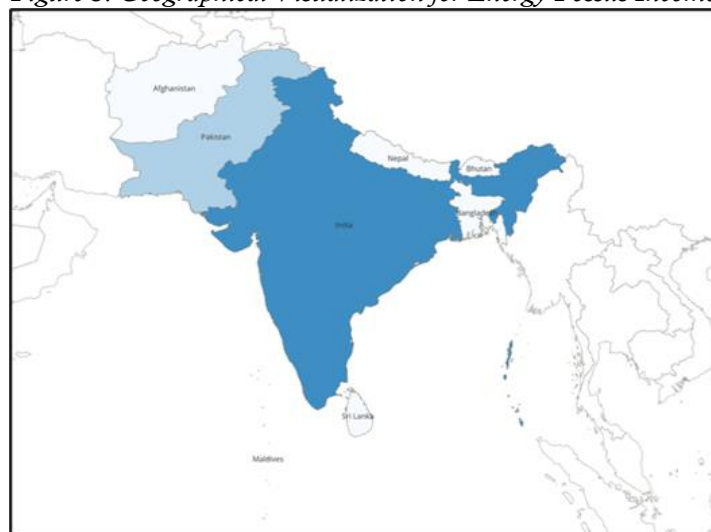


Figure 4. Geographical Visualization for Energy Minerals Income

The geographical visualization of energy fossil and mineral income underscores the profound disparities in resource distribution among South Asian countries. India's dominance in both energy fossils and minerals is a reflection of its vast natural resource base and industrial capacity, enabling it to secure a leading position in the region. This aligns with the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which emphasizes the significance of internal and external interdependencies within a region. India's resource wealth not only sustains its domestic industrial and military needs but also bolsters its geopolitical influence over neighboring countries that lack such resources, fostering economic interdependence.

Pakistan, ranking second, benefits from its moderate resource availability, which it actively exploits to support its energy and economic needs. In contrast, resource-scarce nations such as Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives are heavily reliant on regional collaboration and imports, further enhancing India's role as a central actor in the South Asian security and economic landscape. This resource asymmetry also highlights the interplay between energy security and geopolitical stability within the region.

Geopolitical analysis reveals that resource-rich nations like India are strategically positioned to project power and influence over resource-deficient neighbors, creating a dependency that aligns with the RSC framework's emphasis on interdependence. Furthermore, India's ability to secure and utilize these resources strengthens its maritime and terrestrial strategies, as depicted in the earlier social network analysis. By addressing the energy needs of its neighbors or leveraging its resources in diplomatic engagements, India cements its role as a dominant actor in shaping the South Asian Regional Security Complex. This dynamic reflects how resource distribution not only drives economic priorities but also reinforces security interdependencies, shaping the broader regional order.

c) Trade Export and Trade Import

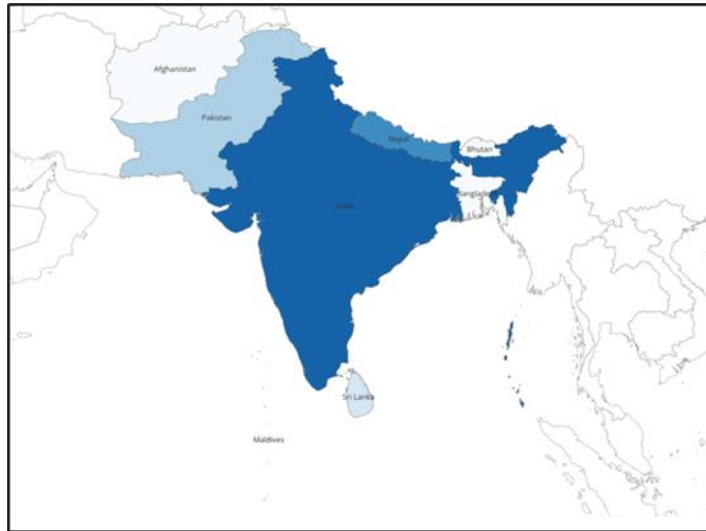


Figure 5. Geographical Visualization for Trade Export

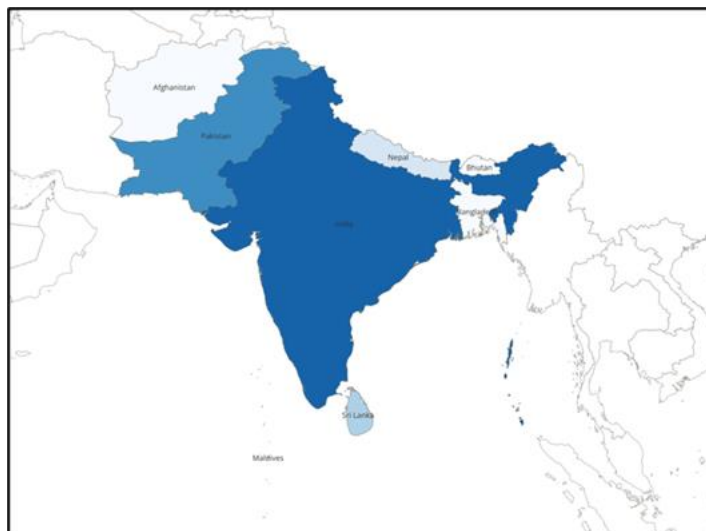


Figure 6. Geographical Visualization for Trade Import

From Figures 5 and 6, it is evident that India holds the leading position in both trade exports and imports within the South Asian region. This dominance can be attributed to its large population, which fuels economic activity across various sectors, and its strategic role as a key importer of advanced weaponry. These factors highlight India's critical role in regional economic and security dynamics, reinforcing its status as the strongest military and economic power in South Asia.

In the context of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, India's trade activities exemplify its central role in shaping interdependencies within the region. The substantial volume of exports and imports underscores India's ability to influence regional economic stability while maintaining its strategic military preparedness. The

focus on weapon imports reflects a proactive approach to security in a region characterized by historical and ongoing conflicts. By leveraging its economic and trade networks, India not only strengthens its economic position but also establishes itself as a pivotal actor in fostering regional security interdependence and stability. This interconnectedness underscores the theoretical concept that regional security is deeply rooted in both economic and military interactions.

d) Tourist Arrival and Tourist Departure

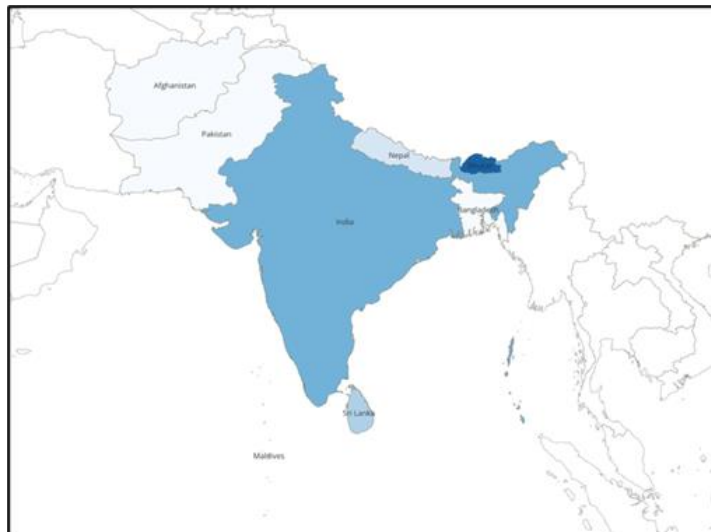


Figure 7. Geographical Visualization for Tourists Arrivals

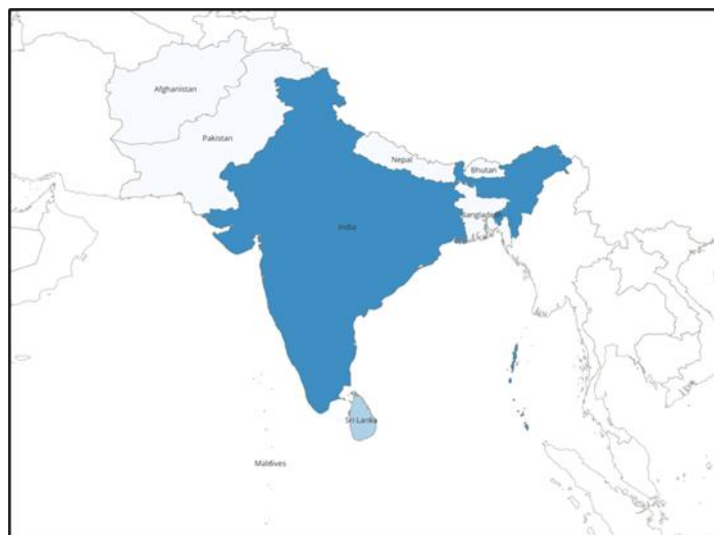


Figure 8. Geographical Visualization for Tourists Departures

Bhutan emerges as a significant outlier in South Asia regarding tourist arrivals, as depicted in Figure 7. This prominence in tourism is tied to the nation's strategic branding as a high-value, low-impact destination, leveraging its pristine environment,

cultural heritage, and spiritual significance. Many visitors flock to Bhutan for pilgrimages and retreats, particularly in the Himalayan monasteries, while others are drawn by the promise of unspoiled nature and clean air. Conversely, Figure 8 reveals Bhutan's minimal outbound tourist activity, underscoring its inward-focused approach to cultural preservation and limited outward connectivity.

This disparity aligns with the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which emphasizes the interdependencies and differentiations among states within a region. Bhutan, as a landlocked country with minimal military spending, relies on its soft power—tourism and cultural diplomacy—rather than conventional security measures. This focus positions Bhutan as an exception within the South Asian security dynamic, where most nations prioritize traditional power projection.

Bhutan's reliance on eco-tourism for economic security further integrates it into the broader South Asian regional framework. However, its dependence on India for infrastructural and strategic support highlights the interconnectedness between economic activities, cultural diplomacy, and security arrangements, reinforcing its role as a cooperative rather than competitive regional actor. This underscores how smaller states leverage their unique advantages to navigate the broader geopolitical framework defined by more dominant states like India.

e) Economic Growth by GDP

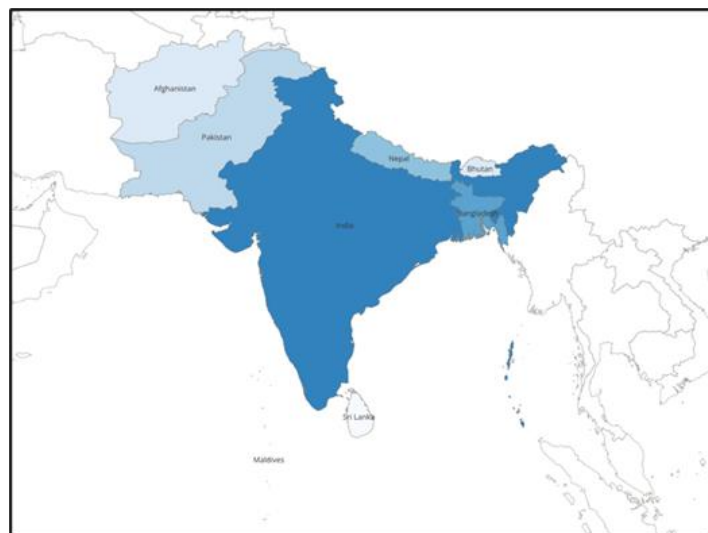


Figure 9. Geographical Visualization for Economic Growth by GDP

The Maldives is unique in the South Asian region for several reasons, particularly its economic model and approach to security. As highlighted in Figure 9, the Maldives achieved the highest economic growth rate in 2022, at 13.9%. This remarkable growth is

primarily driven by its reliance on tourism, unlike most other South Asian countries, where industrialization, agriculture, and trade dominate. The Maldives has tailored its economic strategy to capitalize on its natural resources, particularly its pristine beaches and marine environment, making it a global tourism hub. This dependence on tourism as a primary economic driver sets the Maldives apart, emphasizing a model of soft power and sustainable economic growth rather than traditional industrial or military strength.

Additionally, the Maldives is unique due to its lack of military expenditure and absence of significant military forces. Instead, it relies heavily on India for military training and defense support, showcasing an interdependent regional security arrangement. This distinct approach to security, combined with its economic reliance on tourism, positions the Maldives as a cooperative actor in South Asia's regional framework rather than a competitive one. Its unique circumstances illustrate how smaller nations in South Asia can thrive economically and ensure security through regional partnerships rather than unilateral measures.

Highlighting India, Bhutan, and the Maldives in this analysis serves to illustrate the spectrum of leadership, reliance, and interdependence within South Asia, reflecting the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory. India represents the apex of regional leadership, with its dominant military, economic, and geopolitical influence shaping the South Asian security architecture. Bhutan, on the other hand, exemplifies reliance on soft power, prioritizing diplomacy and environmental preservation over military strength. This contrast underscores how India's influence extends to training and supporting smaller nations like Bhutan in maintaining their security without direct conflict.

The Maldives, as a third focal point, showcases the interplay of economic innovation and regional dependence. Its reliance on India for security, while independently achieving economic success through tourism, reflects the dynamic interdependencies of the region. Together, these three countries highlight the varied ways South Asian states navigate their security and economic challenges. This selection strengthens the argument for India's leadership, as it demonstrates how India's role is pivotal across the spectrum—from direct influence over smaller states' military strategies to indirect support of their economic and security stability.

According to the RSC theory, the interdependent and interconnected nature of regional security is crucial in understanding these countries' security postures. India's robust military capabilities and significant economic indicators reflect its dominant role

in the region, influenced by both internal security challenges and external geopolitical rivalries. The country's need to address separatist movements and terrorism, alongside its border conflicts, necessitates a strong military presence, underscoring the interdependent security dynamics described by the RSC theory. Conversely, Bhutan's focus on diplomacy and minimal military expenditure, supported by Indian military training, highlights its reliance on regional stability and interdependency for security, rather than self-reliance on military prowess. Similarly, the Maldives' absence of a dedicated military budget and its reliance on Indian training further illustrate the region's collective defense strategy and economic interdependence. These countries' strategic choices emphasize the importance of regional security interconnections and collective approaches to address both traditional and non-traditional threats. Thus, the RSC theory adeptly captures the essence of how these nations navigate their security concerns within a complex and interdependent regional framework, highlighting the pivotal role of regional dynamics in shaping national security strategies.

Social Network Analysis

This section delves into India's role as the predominant power in the South Asian region, with a particular focus on its maritime interests. The preceding geopolitical analysis highlights India's superior position and sets the stage for a detailed examination of its strategic networking with other countries in this domain. Researchers have utilized news articles as the primary data source to process and visualize India's maritime engagements. Maritime interest is centered around two primary keywords: "access" and "resources." The analysis identifies three types of relationships based on these keywords: actor-to-actor, actor-to-access, and actor-to-resources. Here, "actor" refers to countries, "access" pertains to maritime routes and infrastructure, and "resources" denotes the natural assets that are either needed or transported via maritime channels.

India's maritime strategy involves building and maintaining relationships with other nations to secure and enhance its access to critical maritime routes and infrastructure. This includes partnerships, agreements, and collaborations that facilitate seamless navigation and operational efficiency in key maritime zones. Furthermore, India actively engages with countries to ensure a steady flow of essential resources, which are vital for its economic and strategic interests. These resources encompass everything from energy supplies to trade goods, underscoring the interconnected nature of maritime commerce and national security. Through this strategic networking, India aims to consolidate its maritime influence, safeguard its economic interests, and reinforce its

geopolitical stance in the region. The research underscores the importance of these relationships, illustrating how India's maritime strategy is pivotal in shaping its regional dominance and addressing the complex dynamics of access and resource distribution in the South Asian maritime landscape.

a) Actor to Actor Relations

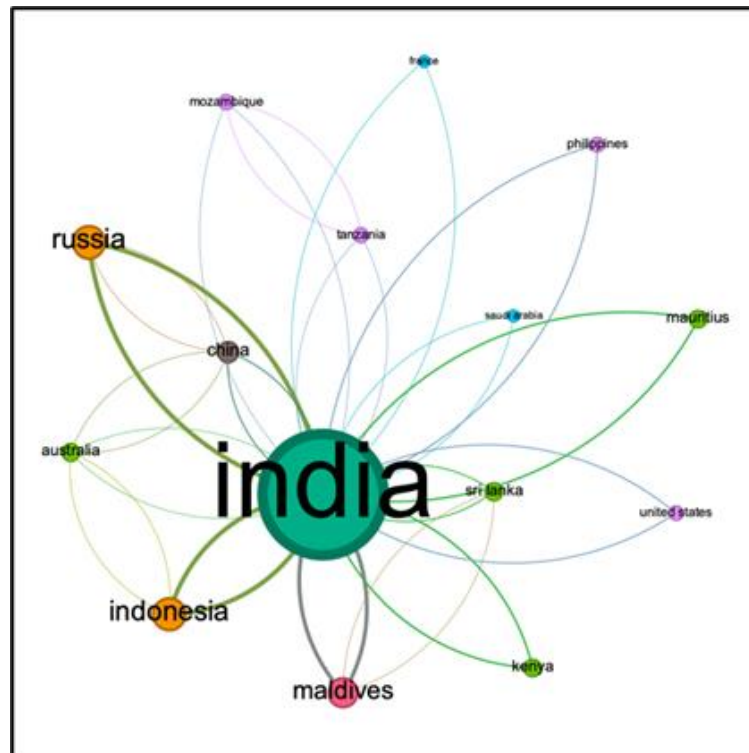


Figure 10. Relations between India and other Countries related to maritime interest

India's maritime interactions, as depicted in Figure 10, reflect a network that extends beyond the South Asian region to encompass a variety of global actors, such as Russia, Indonesia, the United States, and China. Employing Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's concepts of amity and enmity from Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory adds depth to these relationships. Amity, characterized by cooperation and mutual benefits, is visible in India's interactions with Indonesia, Russia, and Mauritius. These relationships focus on shared maritime interests, such as resource utilization, maritime security cooperation, and economic partnerships. For instance, India's extensive collaboration with Russia on maritime routes underscores a mutual amity driven by shared strategic interests in balancing China's growing naval influence.

On the other hand, the enmity between India and China, driven by strategic competition, is a socially constructed response to China's expanding maritime influence in the Indian Ocean. This rivalry is more than just a product of material competition; it is rooted in normative conflicts, where India seeks to redefine the balance of power and establish norms of maritime security that counter China's growing influence. This tension aligns with Wendt's notion that state behavior is shaped by the identities and norms that emerge through socialization, such as India's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its growing naval presence. These dynamics demonstrate how India's maritime network is shaped not only by geographical proximity but also by the interplay of cooperative and competitive relationships, aligning with RSC theory's emphasis on regional interdependencies (Bhaumik, 2024).

India's pronounced interactions with external powers, despite the South Asian region's immediate geographical relevance, are not solely a result of landlocked neighbors' lack of maritime activity. Instead, these interactions stem from India's broader strategic ambitions and the necessity to assert its dominance in the Indian Ocean—a critical global trade artery. Bhaumik (2024) highlights that India's trilateral maritime exercises, such as "Dosti-16" with the Maldives and Sri Lanka, aim to enhance regional security cooperation and interoperability. These drills are part of India's strategic vision to foster stability in its immediate neighborhood while expanding its influence globally.

Additionally, India's "Act East" and "Extended Neighborhood" policies, which focus on diversifying partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and African regions, further illustrate Wendt's constructivist perspective. These policies are not merely about economic or military interests; they are about fostering norms of influence and establishing India as a pivotal maritime power globally. By expanding its network of alliances and interactions, India constructs its role in the global maritime order, aligning its regional dominance with broader international security norms.

In summary, Wendt's theory enriches the understanding of India's maritime strategy by emphasizing how India's identity and actions are shaped through social interactions, the diffusion of norms, and the construction of regional and global security dynamics. This framework allows us to see how India's role as a maritime leader is not just a reflection of its material power but also of its ability to shape and influence the shared norms that govern regional and global security, aligning both its regional and global strategies with its evolving identity.

b) Actor to Resources Relations

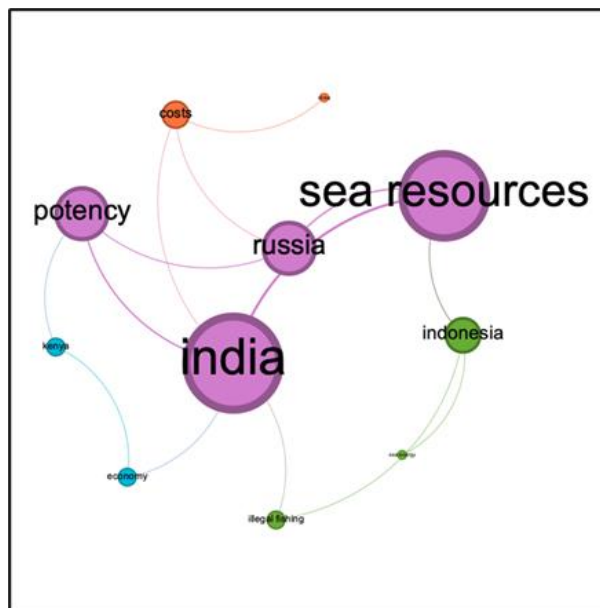


Figure 11. Relations between India and resources aspect of maritime security

Figure 11 illustrates the intricate web of India's maritime interactions centered around resource management, highlighting both collaborative and competitive dynamics. This analysis aligns with Wendt's (1992) assertion that international politics is shaped not just by material capabilities but by social interactions that influence shared norms and identities. Wendt's theory provides a critical lens to understand how India's maritime strategy is socially constructed through its interactions and relationships with other states.

India's frequent engagement with Russia, marked by shared interests in "sea resources," underscores a strategic partnership focused on resource exploitation and shared benefits. This relationship reflects an alignment of interests that fosters mutual amity, as per the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, where interdependence is leveraged to address common goals. Similarly, India's indirect linkage with Indonesia, addressing challenges like "illegal fishing," suggests a cooperative approach to securing maritime sustainability in the Indian Ocean. The ASEAN-India Forum 2023, as highlighted by Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Indonesia (2023), facilitated discussions to optimize resource utilization, demonstrating India's proactive stance in fostering regional partnerships.

However, consistent with Wendt's assertion that state behavior is shaped by social interactions, the dynamics of India's maritime strategy also highlight competitive elements. For instance, India's engagement with China under the keyword "costs" signals

underlying tensions in economic negotiations, such as shipping tariffs or resource allocation. This reflects a socially constructed enmity, where rivalry emerges from competing interests and contested norms of influence in the Indian Ocean Region. Similarly, while India's collaboration with Kenya emphasizes economic partnerships, the competition for maritime trade routes and resource access underscores the complexity of balancing cooperation and competition.

To better understand the dual dynamics of cooperation and competition, the methodological framework emphasizes both quantitative and qualitative data. The Social Network Analysis (SNA) visualization reveals the density of interactions and their thematic connections. Direct links, such as those with Russia, are interpreted as cooperative due to shared strategic objectives. In contrast, indirect connections, such as with China, require deeper contextual analysis, incorporating geopolitical tensions and economic rivalries. Wendt's constructivist perspective adds depth to these observations by explaining how these relationships are shaped through socialization and norm diffusion, highlighting the dual dynamics of amity and enmity in India's maritime strategy.

In conclusion, the emphasis on cooperation within India's maritime strategy does not negate the underlying competition inherent in resource interactions. Rather, it highlights India's ability to navigate these dual dynamics, leveraging cooperation to mitigate conflicts while asserting its leadership in the Indian Ocean Region. While India fosters collaboration to mitigate conflicts and secure resources, the underlying competition inherent in these interactions reflects the interplay of shared norms and contested interests. This nuanced approach aligns with RSC theory's emphasis on the interplay of amity and enmity, showcasing how regional powers balance collaboration and rivalry to achieve strategic objectives.

c) Actor to Access Relations

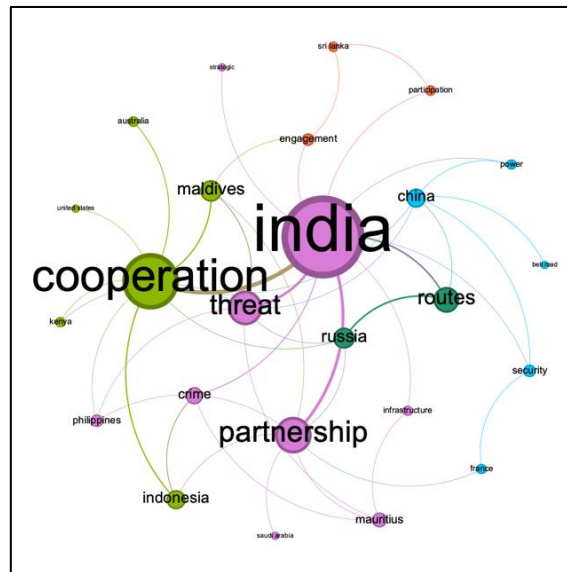


Figure 12. Relations between India and access aspect of maritime security

Figure 12 illustrates five distinct groups, each represented by different colors, with India (pink) as the largest node. This central node is interconnected with light green (Cooperation), dark green (Russia and "routes"), blue (China, France, "security," "power," and "Belt Road"), and orange (Sri Lanka, "participation," and "engagement"). India's centrality, depicted by the largest node, underscores its leadership in managing regional and extra-regional interactions within the maritime domain. The visualization emphasizes India's efforts in fostering cooperation, such as maritime security agreements with Sri Lanka, joint exercises with the Maldives, and energy discussions with Indonesia. However, as the author rightly points out, this visualization omits explicit conflictual dynamics, which are an integral aspect of India's maritime strategy and the broader Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory.

India's cooperative engagements, particularly with Russia, aim to counterbalance China's growing maritime dominance. For example, Russia's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, via the Northern Sea Route (NSR), complements India's strategy to offset China's naval and economic influence in the region (Pasricha, 2023). This cooperation is further emphasized by their mutual interest in developing strategic trade corridors and joint naval initiatives. At the same time, India's relationship with China remains marked by underlying tensions. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's increasing control over ports in Sri Lanka and Myanmar represent direct challenges to India's maritime hegemony. While not explicitly adversarial in the visualization, these interactions embody conflictual elements central to RSC theory's enmity dynamics.

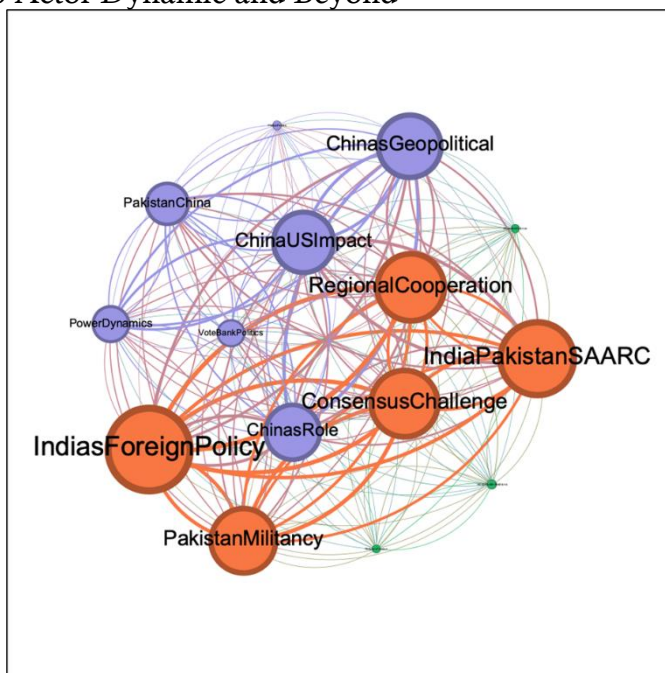
Wendt's theory of social construction is particularly relevant in explaining how India's maritime relationships are not solely shaped by material power or geographic proximity but also by the social dynamics and shared understandings that emerge through interaction. According to Wendt, state behavior is shaped through a process of socialization and norm diffusion, wherein states not only act based on their capabilities but also in response to the identities and norms they share with others. In the case of India, its centrality in the maritime network is reinforced by its ability to act as a norm-setter within the region. For instance, India's efforts to establish maritime security frameworks with countries like Sri Lanka and the Maldives reflect India's role in constructing a shared identity of regional stability, which goes beyond mere economic or military calculations.

The RSC theory's core concepts of amity and enmity are pivotal in analyzing India's maritime strategy. India's cooperative initiatives, such as its engagements with smaller nations like Mauritius and Sri Lanka, are aimed at fostering regional interdependence and securing maritime stability. These align with the "amity" aspect of the theory, where mutual benefits and trust dominate interactions. On the other hand, its relations with China highlight "enmity" through strategic competition. For instance, India's counterstrategies to BRI, including increased naval exercises and port investments, illustrate how rivalry and cooperation coexist within the same regional framework.

By incorporating conflictual dynamics into the analysis, the visualization could better represent India's maritime strategy's dual nature. For example, the interaction with China could include elements of territorial disputes, competition over energy corridors, and naval expansion. Similarly, interactions with countries like Indonesia and Sri Lanka may involve subtle competition for influence over shared maritime resources. These additions would provide a richer, more nuanced depiction of India's maritime network, emphasizing both its leadership in fostering regional stability and its proactive measures to mitigate security threats.

In conclusion, the visualization effectively highlights India's maritime dominance but would benefit from integrating conflictual elements to fully align with RSC theory. This expanded perspective not only underscores India's centrality but also provides deeper insights into the complex interplay of cooperation and competition shaping South Asia's maritime security landscape.

d) Actor to Actor Dynamic and Beyond



Figures 13.

Figure 13 illustrates the interconnectedness of key geopolitical issues in South Asia, segmented into three distinct clusters, each represented by a different color: orange, purple, and green. The central node, India's Foreign Policy, is the largest and most influential, interlinked with significant themes like India-Pakistan relations, SAARC, and Regional Cooperation, emphasizing India's strategic role in regional affairs. This central positioning reflects India's dominance in South Asian geopolitics, navigating complex relationships with neighboring states and managing both cooperation and competition. As highlighted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2022), India's foreign policy has evolved under changing regional dynamics, where "India's engagement with Pakistan and its role within SAARC underscore the challenge of fostering regional consensus amidst growing geopolitical tensions" (Carnegie Endowment, 2022).

The orange cluster highlights issues central to India's foreign policy, such as challenges in fostering regional consensus and the complexity of its relations with neighboring Pakistan. These dynamics are intensified by conflicts like Pakistan's Militancy and Kashmir-related violence, which remain at the heart of India-Pakistan tensions. The relationship between India and Pakistan remains a critical flashpoint in the region, with territorial disputes, terrorism, and the ongoing Kashmir conflict complicating diplomatic efforts (CFR, 2022). This cluster underscores the delicate balancing act India faces, managing cooperation with its regional neighbors while

confronting a persistent strategic rivalry with Pakistan. Moreover, it highlights how India's relationship with Pakistan influences the broader regional security environment, especially regarding nuclear deterrence and military posturing.

The purple cluster is dominated by themes related to China's growing influence in the region, such as China's Geopolitical Role, China-US Impact, and Pakistan-China Relations. China's increasing footprint in South Asia, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), underscores the complexity of India's foreign policy, which must navigate both external threats, particularly from China, and internal political and social dynamics. As a result, India's foreign policy decisions are often a balancing act between asserting regional dominance and responding to the challenges posed by both domestic factors and external pressures (Loc, 2023). China's economic and political influence is reshaping regional dynamics, challenging India's strategic dominance in maritime security. This shift is not without friction, as India perceives China's growing role, particularly in Pakistan, as a direct challenge to its own influence in South Asia. India's response, marked by strategic rivalry, is not explicitly shown in this cluster but remains a critical element of regional power struggles.

The green cluster addresses the internal dynamics within South Asian countries, focusing on domestic issues like Sectarian Violence, Religious Tensions, and Vote Bank Politics. A growing concern is the rise of Islamophobia, reflected in the emergence of a subgenre of music dubbed "Hindutva pop." Artists like Prem Krishnavanshi have produced anti-Muslim songs that have gained traction, particularly in northern states such as Uttar Pradesh. These songs, often shared on social media platforms like YouTube, advocate hate and incite violence against the Muslim minority. As Krishnavanshi's song lyrics suggest, there is an open rejection of Hindu-Muslim unity, promoting divisiveness and fostering a hostile environment (Rehbar, 2022). This cultural shift is part of a broader trend fueled by the political polarization that has intensified since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, leading to heightened religious tensions and complicating India's foreign relations. Such internal issues are deeply connected to the broader geopolitical environment, influencing India's interactions with neighboring countries, including Pakistan and China.

India's central role, as represented by its largest node, underscores its leadership in navigating regional and global challenges. The interaction between themes in the orange, purple, and green clusters highlights the complexity of India's foreign policy. This balancing of cooperation (with regional partners) and competition (particularly with China and Pakistan) shapes South Asia's security and diplomatic landscape. India's

foreign policy is influenced not only by external threats but also by domestic political factors that shape its international actions. According to Khan and Naazer (2020), India's domestic political environment, particularly the rise of religious nationalism and the influence of the BJP, plays a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. India's efforts to maintain regional stability are complicated by its internal diversity and ongoing political debates, making its foreign policy a delicate balance between domestic interests and regional priorities.

Wendt's (1992) constructivist perspective aligns with this understanding of India's foreign policy dynamics, as it emphasizes that state behavior is not solely driven by material power, but also by social interactions that form shared norms and identities. This perspective is critical in understanding how India navigates its relationships with neighbors like Pakistan and China, not just through military might or territorial claims, but through the process of socialization, norm-building, and identity construction in the regional security complex. India's role as a norm-setter within the South Asian geopolitical landscape, particularly in shaping the norms surrounding security cooperation (with SAARC or regional security frameworks), can be seen as a product of these social interactions, as opposed to a purely material-driven strategy.

By integrating Wendt's theory, we can further explore how India's strategic rivalry with Pakistan and China is shaped not only by power dynamics but also by their mutual perceptions and constructed identities within the region. For example, India's ongoing engagement with Pakistan, despite deep-seated rivalry, involves a complex process of norm diffusion, where India attempts to frame the bilateral conflict within a cooperative, regional stability framework. Similarly, its response to China's increasing influence, while competitive, is also influenced by how India and China perceive each other's roles in the broader South Asian security complex, making these interactions a socially constructed battle for influence rather than solely a military contest.

In conclusion, while this visualization effectively captures India's prominent position in South Asia's geopolitics, it would benefit from explicitly representing the conflictual dynamics, particularly India's rivalry with China and Pakistan. Integrating Wendt's theory of social construction into this analysis would enhance the understanding of how these conflicts are not only shaped by material factors but also by the ongoing processes of socialization, identity formation, and norm diffusion that occur in the regional context. This expanded approach would offer a richer view of how India navigates the complex forces of regional integration and strategic rivalry, aligning with

the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which posits that security concerns are interlinked among neighboring states.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the geopolitical and network analysis highlight India's central and dominant role in South Asian geopolitics, both in terms of military power, economic influence, and strategic relations with countries beyond the region. India's prominent position in the geopolitical network is clear, especially when considering its interconnections with key issues such as India-Pakistan relations, regional cooperation through SAARC, and its role in broader security dynamics. India's strategic positioning reflects its ability to navigate both cooperation and competition within the region, as well as its expanding influence globally, as illustrated by its active engagements with countries like Russia and Indonesia.

The network analysis reveals a notable pattern in India's extensive interactions with nations outside South Asia, emphasizing that India's foreign relations are not confined to its immediate neighbors but extend to key global players. This finding underscores India's broader strategic outreach and its importance in shaping the political and economic landscape beyond the region. In contrast, countries like Bhutan and the Maldives, while relatively smaller and less active in global networks, demonstrate that factors such as economic growth (as in the case of the Maldives) or military capacity limitations (as seen with Bhutan) influence their international positioning.

The visualization of the interconnected themes—divided into three color-coded clusters—sheds light on the complexity of India's foreign policy and regional interactions. The orange cluster, focusing on India's foreign policy, highlights the challenges India faces in fostering regional consensus, particularly in its relationship with Pakistan, which remains marked by territorial disputes and violence. The purple cluster, dominated by China's increasing influence, showcases the challenge India faces in the Indian Ocean region, as China's growing presence, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), directly impacts India's maritime security and strategic dominance. Meanwhile, the green cluster, addressing internal issues such as sectarian violence and religious tensions, illustrates how domestic instability in countries like India and Pakistan influences broader geopolitical dynamics.

From the perspective of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which suggests that security concerns are deeply interconnected within a region, India's

centrality within South Asia emphasizes its role in shaping regional stability. India's foreign policy is not only a response to external threats but is also shaped by domestic factors, including political debates and internal diversity. These elements complicate India's international positioning as it strives to balance its domestic priorities with its regional and global ambitions.

Integrating Wendt's (1992) constructivist perspective into this analysis further deepens our understanding of India's foreign policy. Wendt argues that state behavior is socially constructed, shaped not only by material power but also by social interactions, shared norms, and identities. This is particularly relevant in understanding how India navigates its relationships with Pakistan and China, where strategic rivalry is intertwined with processes of norm-building and identity construction. For example, India's engagement with Pakistan, despite ongoing tensions, involves complex efforts to reframe the bilateral conflict within a framework of regional stability. Similarly, its response to China's rising influence is not only driven by power competition but also by the identities that India and China construct in relation to one another within the South Asian security context.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that India's geopolitical influence extends far beyond material power, involving the social processes of norm-building, identity formation, and regional cooperation. Integrating Wendt's theory provides a richer understanding of how India interacts with its neighbors, not just through competition, but through efforts to establish shared norms that support regional stability. This approach aligns with the Regional Security Complex theory, which highlights the interdependence of security concerns among neighboring states and emphasizes the dynamic between cooperation and rivalry in shaping regional outcomes. By expanding on these theories and integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and evolving security landscape in South Asia.

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Appendix I

News Articles with Google Operator of "India" and "Maritime Interest", "Faith Relations in India and Pakistan", "China-Pakistan Relations to India", "India and SAARC", "Vote Bank in India"

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