China 2049 vs. India 2047

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China and India, the two most populous nations in the world (World Population Review, 2025), both aspire not only to transform themselves fundamentally but also, each in its own way, to reshape the global order in line with long-term strategies. In their mid-century goals, both governments not only express how they want to shape their domestic realities but also declare how they wish their nations to be perceived on the world stage and, more importantly, how they themselves envisage the world order of tomorrow. However, while both countries share the determination to redefine their role in global affairs, their respective visions diverge significantly.

China and India are united only in their intent to exercise greater influence over the future of the international system. The competition is therefore not limited to domestic development or regional power, but about a rivalry of ideas and whose vision of the future will ultimately prevail. This article will analyse these two distinct visions in terms of their general vision, the economic strategy, the military strategy and the institutional strategy. This comparison will highlight both parallels and contrasts in their long-term perspectives. Therefore the article seeks to answer: What are the plans of the great powers and how do they differ?

Both countries are marking their mid-century goals on deeply symbolic anniversaries. For the Chinese future vision, Xi Jinping guides the country and the world towards the "Two Centenaries" goals. The first being concluded in 2021 by the 100th anniversary of the CCP, the second to be achieved by the year 2049, the centenary of the People's Republic.

China's centenary goal of 2049 is framed to be deeply rooted in its historical narrative of overcoming the so-called "Century of Humiliation." This period began with the Opium Wars in the 1830s and was marked by territorial concessions and foreign invasions, which have shaped China's national consciousness until today (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). According to the government's narrative, this period ends with the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the Communist Party's takeover in 1949. This developmental milestone is therefore also used for the Chinese mission to reclaim great-power status.

By contrast, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has advanced the "Viksit Bharat 2047" vision, or "Developed India," aligning the country's long-term ambitions with the centenary of its independence from colonial rule in 1947. India's centenary goals are presented as the completion of an unfinished national project of development. The initiative reflects an aspiration to transcend the legacies of colonial underdevelopment, poverty, and inequality by positioning India among the world's leading economies.

Therefore, both countries want to make up for a historically missed opportunity and lead the country to new greatness by catching up. While both narratives are based on real historical facts, in both cases history is deliberately used to build national motivation for their visions by building on this national pride. So, by building on a historic motivation for the mid-century visions, they serve as both a response to historical trauma and a legitimizing narrative for present-day governance.

General Vision

China's first centenary goal was to build a "moderately prosperous society in all respects" (The State Council the People's Republic of China, 2021) and was officially declared as fulfilled by Xi. Now, the nation is aiming for a "great modern socialist country in every dimension" (Xi, 2017) until 2049.

As an interim goal, Xi set the year 2035 as a milestone. By then, China is to become a global leader in technological innovation, develop a significantly larger middle-income group, and establish a modern governance system with stronger institutions and greater capacity. In the final stage until mid-century, Xi emphasizes common prosperity for the Chinese people. In concrete terms, this includes growing the middle-income group from 400 million people to about 800 million by 3035 (Global Times, 2021). In his report on the current five-year plan, he added more concrete goals for 2035: a "new industrialization" with per capita GDP reaching the level of a mid-level developed country, while carbon emissions are to decline after peaking. It is suggested that China's GDP could exceed 160 trillion yuan (USD 25 trillion) within the next decade (Global Times, 2021). China's vision for 2049 is characterized by individual plans and sub-targets, focusing on domestic development while it claims to shape international norms.

India's centenary vision on the other hand is defined by clear focus areas. One of the most emphasized areas is economic development and growth, driven by fostering innovation and technology. This is closely tied to visions of social progress and inclusivity, especially in the fields of education and healthcare. The roadmap also includes enhancing India's infrastructure and modernizing transportation systems (Viksit Bharat 2047, 2025).

While India officially aims to achieve net-zero carbon emissions not until 2070 (Mohapatra & Pohit, 2024), environmental sustainability is still a central pillar of the program, emphasizing renewable energy and reduced dependence on fossil fuels. This reflects the tension between India's developmental needs and its climate commitment.

Besides these national goals, the initiative also focuses on security policy and India's role in the world. Thus, it not only plans to modernize the armed forces and pursue military modernization, but also to strengthen multilateral diplomacy and to actively engage in global forums by presenting itself as "the voice of the Global South."

Overall, these visions differ primarily in terms of their ideological components. China bases its claims on the overarching goal of securing socialist rule. In India, this narrative is less ideologically bound, but more nationalistic in terms of the pillars of development.

Economic Strategy

China's economic strategy for the long-term development of the country focuses primarily on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, alongside broader efforts in technological self-reliance. While the BRI began with investments in Kazakhstan and Indonesia, China now established this influence in over 150 countries (Johnston, 2018; Wang, 2025). The initiative is intended not only to foster global connectivity but also to strengthen China's financial sector and internationalize the Renminbi.

Cumulative the initiative has reached USD 1.3 trillion, with Africa and Central Asia being most engaged in the initiative (Wang, 2025). In the first half of 2025 the investment volume set a new record with USD 66.2 billion in construction contracts and USD 58.1 billion in direct investments, increasing China's influence over its partners. While engagement in green energy reached new records with an investment of USD 9.7 billion, oil and gas engagement rose to USD 30 billion. Xi calls this "a more proactive strategy of opening up" (Xi, 2022, p. 8) and claims the Belt and Road Initiative being welcomed by the international community (Xi, 2022).

In contrast, India's economic focus for the mid-century goals emphasizes domestic innovation promotion, aiming to rank among the world's top three economic powers by 2047. The target is to transform India's current US $4 trillion economy into a projected US $30 trillion powerhouse by the independence anniversary, building especially on the tech, pharmaceutical, and manufacturing sectors (Viksit Bharat 2047, 2025). India's share of global GDP has more than tripled since the early 1990s, now around 3.5% in nominal terms, making it the world's fifth-largest economy. The Viksit Bharat vision seeks not only to achieve economic growth but also to push Indian companies in various sectors to become global leaders in strategic sectors (Mohapatra & Pohit, 2024). The ambition is to root India's exports more deeply into global supply chains and foster greater self-reliance and reduce dependence on foreign suppliers. Innovation is a core pillar for this massive growth goal. India's startup ecosystem has grown to become the third largest in the world, with more than 100 unicorns across various sectors. The country climbed in the Global Innovation Index from 81st to 40th place (Chhabra, 2024). This rise is supported not only by private investment but also by extensive government support in research and development.

To achieve this, the outline aims for an annual average GDP-growth rate of 8-10% (Viksit Bharat 2047, 2025). With the annual growth rate ranging from 6.5% to 9.7% since 2021 (World Bank Group, 2025), when the program was launched, this vision might not be so far away. Yet challenges like risk of falling in the middle-income-trap and regional disparities remain.

The comparison of the countries highlights different strategic logics. China projects power outward through massive infrastructure and financial investments, while India pursues a growth model rooted in domestic diversification. Both approaches aim to secure global influence by mid-century, but their effectiveness will depend on how well global markets react to this in the future.

Military Strategy

Figure 1. Military expenditure by country, China and India Comparison, in current US$ m

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2025

China's military strategy is characterized by rapid military buildup, a strong emphasis on maritime power, and the overarching objective of "resolving" the Taiwan question by 2049 (Stahl, 2022). While Beijing officially claims to work "together with Asia-Pacific countries to uphold regional peace and development" (The State Council, People's Republic of China, 2025), developments in the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea suggest a more assertive trajectory (Cordesman, 2017).

In the master plan for 2049, centenary goals for the military include accelerating modernization and enhance combat readiness (Chul, 2025). Between 2010 and 2024 China's defence budget more than tripled (Figure 1). Xi set the goal to "further consolidate national security", by fulfilling "the goals for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army in 2027" to make a progress in "building a Peaceful China" (Xi, 2022). US intelligence estimates say Xi has ordered the PLA to have military readiness to invade Taiwan by 2027, if necessary (Lendon, 2025).

Besides Taiwan, China's 2025 National Security White Paper outlines a holistic approach to security. This concept broadens the definition of threats to include cyberspace, artificial intelligence, biosecurity, and public health. The document underlines the CCP's absolute leadership as the guiding principle and presents China as a stable power in the Asia-Pacific (Koshy, 2025). While the focus on party control and rapid military expansion might increase regional insecurity and undermines trust in China's peaceful intentions.

The Indian strategy for the mid-century also contains important strategic goals in the security sector. It aims to combine a strong international role in military exports and strategic autonomy with capacity-building to secure regional influence and balance China (Choudhury, 2022). Strategic security measures rooted in the Viksit Bharat vision have been taken, for example, through the "Agnipath scheme," a highly controversial recruiting initiative for lower-ranked soldiers (Tiwari, 2025).

On top of that, India also aims to reduce its reliance on foreign suppliers while building up its own defence industry. India ranks second in the share of global arm imports, only outranked by Ukraine. The country still receives its most weapons from Russia (38% of Russian arm exports go to India). It has diversified towards Western suppliers, particularly France, Israel, and the USA. But over the last decade, overall arms imports have declined as India has expanded domestic production capacity (George et al., 2024).

A central element of this strategy is the transformation from a net importer to a net exporter of weapons. The Defence Export Promotion Policy set a target of ₹350 billion (≈ $3.98 billion) in exports by 2025, though actual exports reached only ₹236.22 billion (≈ $2.68 billion), falling short by over 30% (The Economic Times, 2025). Still, defence exports reached an all-time high, underlining progress. The Viksit Bharat vision expects the Indian defence industry to be largely self-reliant by 2047, supported by programs

like iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence), which promotes startups and innovation in the defence sector (Dubey, 2025).

In comparison, China's military vision relies on regional dominance for global influence, while India's focus seems to be more focused on strategic balance through autonomy. So, while China's trajectory raises concerns about regional escalation, India's challenge lies in turning ambitious targets into reality. Strategically, China positions itself as a challenger to the existing order, whereas India up to this point benefits more from shaping and navigating from within, by strengthening its own role. The contrast highlights two divergent approaches both being rooted in coercive capability-building.

Institutional Strategy

China and India pursue different visions in the future of multilateralism and their role in international institutions, because of distinct strategic priorities.

China has shifted its focus toward building an alternative multilateral architecture, most prominently through the expansion of BRICS+, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These initiatives are designed to diversify authority in global governance and increase China's influence in non-Western institutions (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). The AIIB, in particular, serves as a tool to support the Belt and Road Initiative while countering Western dominance in development finance (Qian et al., 2023). It aims to expand the areas influence of these institutions both geographically and politically. BRICS has broadened its agenda beyond trade and has begun discussing security-related issues such as terrorism and institutional reform. However, action remains limited due to divergent national interests and the alliance's constrained mandate (Makhija, 2025).

China's "Global Security Initiative" first proposed in 2023 also advocates for multilateralism by presenting itself as a uniter by including an alternative to western coercion. The initiative also reaffirms China's support for the UN as a central platform for global security governance and explicitly opposes "Cold War mentality" and "bloc confrontation". The paper is an active call on upholding "the international system with the UN at its core (...) and uphold the authority of the UN and its status as the main platform for global security governance." (Ministry of foreign Affairs People's Republic of China, 2023). Critically, this dual approach illustrates China's strategy of engaging with existing institutions while simultaneously building parallel structures to expand its normative and political influence (Ekman, 2025). China is also to enhance soft power through culture, sports and education and, within the next five years, increase its role in global governance (Xi, 2021).

Modi seeks to position India as a leading voice of the Global South. This includes contributing to various global and regional forums such as the G20, BRICS, Quad, and SCO to shape its global agenda. It also plays an important role in the UN as one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations (Singh & Chhering, 2024). Strategically, India stresses autonomy in its foreign policy, building partnerships with both the West and other developing nations, while avoiding over-reliance on any single side (Viksit Bharat 2047, 2025). This echoes the historical doctrine of non-alignment but is reframed in the twenty-first century as "multi-alignment," where India acts as a balancing power.

The Viksit Bharat vision also involves bilateral and multilateral partnerships and active engagement in global forums. Besides that, the vision seeks to make India a key player in global trade by expanding its exports (Viksit Bharat 2047, 2025). India complements these efforts with soft-power initiatives, including diaspora diplomacy, vaccine and technical cooperation, cultural outreach through Yoga, and the promotion of democratic governance as part of its claim to represent developing nations (Modi, 2025).

While China wants to strengthen its role in the UN due to its position of power, India wants to expand its own position of power in this forum by establishing itself as the spokesperson for the global south. Both countries also build on regional organizations in which they participate together, with China placing greater emphasis on expanding the policy areas of these organizations. This strategy reflects the attempt of selective multilateralism from within and beyond existing frameworks through formal participation in established institutions while gradually building a parallel order centered on its own developmental and security narratives. India pursues a multi-alignment policy approach by seeking to amplify its voice in global forums. Participation in both Western-dominated and alternative multilateral activities reflects the country's pragmatic flexibility in order to ensure its strategic autonomy.

Conclusion

China's 2049 vision and India's 2047 vision represent two ambitious and contrasting national projects with international implications. Both are strongly rooted in the histories of their countries, and they seek to secure central roles in shaping the future of the world. China's outlook is framed as a national rebirth, seeking to reclaim a central and dominant role through political, institutional, economic, and military power. India, in contrast, seeks to realize its full potential since independence and to secure a stronger voice as a rising global power, shaped by the legacy of colonial subjugation and post-independence development challenges.

These distinct historic starting points have shaped different strategic approaches. Therefore, the comparison of the nations' long-term visions reveals how both countries approach power and legitimacy differently.

China's military buildup and open communication about wanting to "resolve" the Taiwan issue by 2049 showcase its global power claim in a multipolar order. India openly works on having a say in this multipolar order as well, as ambitious and precise growth goals in the economic and military sphere show.

In many respects, however, the strategies of the respective countries are not mutually exclusive. For example, the domestic economic development goals of the two countries do not appear to interfere with each other. When it comes to international investment and thus the question of influence in the region and in the Global South, however, the countries may find themselves at odds. India's strategy of multi-alignment seems to be an appropriate response to a fragile world order, while China's construction of an alternative order entails more risks. The comparison on the timeline shows, that both countries envisioned their initiatives in specific intermediate goals. While these goals oftentimes differ, it points out a similar time horizon.

Figure 2. Visualization of the Goals as presented in the text

Sources

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