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INDIA'S ARCTIC POLICY: DETERRENT AGAINST CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE?

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse India's Arctic policy, along with its historical background, and discusses whether it has a deterrent structure against Chinese policies in the Arctic. Typically, innovation programs are instrumental methods for countries to develop their economies. However, driven by apprehensions that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project may potentially impact the autonomy of other nations in the region, India has assumed a supporting role within the Arctic context in relation to China. In the international arena, it has become evident that other countries can be alternative allies against China's foreign policies. In this study, employing qualitative research methods, an in-depth examination of the historical background of India's Arctic policy has been conducted, encompassing a comprehensive literature review. Subsequently, using a comparative analysis method, these policies have been evaluated by juxtaposing various facets of the policies with analogous policies pursued by other nations. Finally, a comprehensive regional and international data analysis has been executed to assess the ramifications and potential outcomes of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) within the region. This approach has facilitated a nuanced comprehension of India's role in the Arctic and the rationale underpinning India's stance vis-à-vis the policies pursued by China.

Keywords

Arctic, India, China, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Make in India

Resumo

O presente estudo tem por objetivo analisar a política da Índia para o Ártico, bem como os seus antecedentes históricos, e discutir se esta tem uma estrutura de dissuasão contra as políticas chinesas no Ártico. Normalmente, os programas de inovação são métodos instrumentais para os países desenvolverem as suas economias. No entanto, devido a receios de que o projeto chinês da Iniciativa Uma Faixa, Uma Rota (BRI) possa ter um impacto potencial na autonomia de outras nações da região, a Índia assumiu um papel de apoio no contexto do Ártico em relação à China. Na arena internacional, tornou-se evidente que outros

países podem ser aliados alternativos contra as políticas externas da China. Neste estudo, que utiliza métodos de investigação qualitativos, foi efectuada uma análise aprofundada dos antecedentes históricos da política indiana para o Ártico, incluindo uma revisão exaustiva da literatura. Posteriormente, utilizando um método de análise comparativa, estas políticas foram avaliadas através da justaposição de várias facetas com políticas análogas adoptadas por outras nações. Por último, foi efectuada uma análise exaustiva de dados regionais e internacionais para avaliar as ramificações e os potenciais resultados da Iniciativa Uma Faixa, Uma Rota (BRI) da China na região. Esta abordagem facilitou uma compreensão matizada do papel da Índia no Ártico e a lógica subjacente à posição da Índia face às políticas seguidas pela China.

Palavras chave
Ártico, Índia, China, Iniciativa "Uma Faixa, Uma Rota" (BRI), "Make in India.

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Introduction

The Arctic is increasingly valuable in the world due to its strategic and economic importance, natural resources, scientific research opportunities, new sea routes, and environmental security. Recently, there has been a considerable increase in the number of countries interested in developments and activities in the Arctic. This concern does not only cover the eight countries with sovereign territories within the Arctic Circle; many countries that are observers of the Arctic Council, which are not directly connected to the Arctic but seek commercial opportunities in this region, are also trying to increase their activities in the Arctic.

The changes brought about by climate change in the Arctic allow for more oil, gas, and other natural resources to be discovered and more opportunities for commercial shipping, fishing, and tourism. However, these changes can also negatively affect the Arctic and remote regions. While the eight Arctic states closely control activities in this region today, observer states (Germany, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, France, Spain, China, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Switzerland) outside the Arctic Council have established their presence in the region through their observatories since 2019. These states have launched regional research stations, evaluated its resources, and identified new research areas in politics, law, and diplomacy with states. They have also worked to develop trade and economic relations by making the Northern Sea Route suitable for transportation.

Countries outside the Arctic, such as India and China, which have commercial and strategic interests, are in contact with this region for fear of being excluded from the management of the unused resources of the Arctic. India's interest in the Arctic began when it recognized rising sea levels as a global problem due to melting Arctic glaciers. Likewise, China commenced transferring the BRI route towards the North Sea, aiming to expand its innovation program network and hinterland more swiftly and securely. The climate change of the monsoon has created severe food insecurity in India, while rising sea levels have flooded the subcontinent's vast coastal roads, putting many natural

structures at risk. Although India's scientific purpose was initially for research, with the increase in commercial opportunities, the region has become an area where India should engage in commercial relationships. The belief that not being included in the Arctic would harm India's global interests has also been questioned recently due to the contradictory and controversial views of Indian scholars. It is crucial to explain and clarify India's interest in the Arctic with a holistic perspective in line with emerging engagements, to see the limitations of India's interest in the region, and to understand its rivalry with China in the Arctic.

Since December 2020, the government of India, with input from academics and stakeholders, has taken a step towards making India's Arctic Policy an official government target. Likewise, China had a White Book (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2018) prepared for this region in previous periods. In this context, India and China are competitive in economic cooperation, transportation and connectivity, international cooperation, and national capacity building. Since India's initiatives are not yet fully clarified, they can be considered a working draft. However, within the scope of China's 2030 vision (The World Bank, 2013), it has included the Arctic in all its long-term plans and programs, including the Polar Silk Road (PSR) in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and regional initiatives, supporting this position.

With this understanding, this article analyses India's initiatives in the Arctic, the historical origins of the policies followed, and whether the ground movements of the government's foreign policy regarding the Arctic can rival China's Arctic policy, both at the regional and global level. On the one hand, the initiatives of both countries are evaluated in the context of the interests of their innovation programs. On the other hand, the traces of global competition in the Arctic are discussed. Before these inferences, in the first part, the historical ties of India with the Arctic region and the logical grounds for these ties are discussed. The fact that the references made while searching for historical roots with the region of India are based on Tilak (1903) comes from the desire to prove that the relations between the Arctic and South Asia are not a new phenomenon but have a historical basis. In the second part, what kind of effort India has made to improve its relations with the region, how it has tried to use scientific research as a soft power policy, and how its commercial and economic ties with this region are discussed on an analytical basis. The last part discusses the possible future global opportunities expected in the Arctic and what kind of foreign policy China follows to take advantage of these opportunities. It has been debated whether India can be seen as a competitor in balancing the expansionist foreign policy of China in the Arctic. To be a part of the commercial opportunities that will emerge in a conjuncture where the Arctic's growth and life are more possible, the article discusses what kind of opportunities India can have under the Make in India program and how it can evaluate these opportunities from the regional context to the global level. It is crucial to analyse the international competitive areas of both states.

Exploring India's strategy for securing its interests and opportunities in the Arctic, measuring its ability to seize opportunities for regional cooperation, and understanding how it is coping with difficulties are all critical in demonstrating India's capabilities in foreign policy. This research will directly address the deficiencies in understanding India's

Arctic policy and analysing the state policy. Analysing the existing forms of cooperation in the region will also contribute to understanding the causes and origins of confusion and disagreement in the literature.

1. Historical Background

India's first bilateral relations with the Arctic began when India, as part of the British Empire, signed the Svalbard Agreement in 1920 (Agarwala, 2021, p. 14). This agreement, which entered into force in 1925, was the first agreement in which all signatories allowed the same rightful use of all resources in the Arctic. However, according to this treaty, the utilization of various resources and acquired products was solely by the administrations established within the framework of the Svalbard draft. This agreement also allowed for the militarization of the region. In this case, when another state intervened, it unveiled the vulnerable and exploitable aspects of the area. Due to this situation, India, like other states that are party to the agreement, stayed away from the Arctic region for a long time. For this reason, India continued all of its scientific activities related to the poles at the South Pole, Antarctica.

India first sent its research team to Antarctica in 1981 to study physical and environmental changes. The exclusive economic zone problems of that period led India to work at the South Pole at that time. Therefore, India began its studies on the poles in Antarctica for scientific studies at the Dakshin Gangotri in 1983, then with the Maitri in 1989, and the Bharati research station in 2012 (Agarwala, 2021, p. 14). The expeditions to Antarctica were based on scientific, economic, strategic, and political prospects. During this period, India's expeditions were designed to take advantage in case it became a possible mining and trade centre; to conduct scientific research to examine climate changes; to determine the effects of Antarctica on monsoons; and to take precautions in case of a possible climate change (Chaturvedi, 1986, p. 360). As a nation on the rise in the political arena, these efforts have provided India with essential access to international forums when required. This strategic evolution has enabled India to establish and underscore its influential standing, particularly in remote diplomatic ventures.

Although Antarctica did not receive much attention until the beginning of the 2000s and was valued as a study area afterward, there was no development in the Arctic for India during this period. After 2007, the decreasing snow and glaciers in the Arctic began to be measured, and the plans to connect the poles and the rest of the world globally increased in importance. As a result of the discoveries made after partnership studies in the political field, the growing India had much-needed access to international forums (A. Sinha et al., 2007, p. 880).

Until the mid-2000s, Antarctica was studied and visited historically by scientists from various countries, while the North Pole did not receive sufficient attention until 2007. As a result of the efforts initiated in 2007 as the "4th International Polar Year", the shrinking snow and ice cover in the polar regions brought with it the global connection between the poles and the rest of the world, the resilience of local lands to environmental and social change, and the efforts to explore the depths of the poles (Kruptik, 2011, p. 525). With a knowledge base of scientific achievements in Antarctica, Indian scientists camped

in a research village on the island of Spitsbergen in 2007 (Khare, 2008, p. 442). Then, in 2008, India established a research station called Himadri in Ny-Alesund to work on ice science and marine research (Agarwala, 2021). The main focus of the work at that time was to examine the relationship between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon, primarily by analysing the rates of change in climate change and the size of glaciers. Unlike today's commercial and strategic partnerships, the relations of that period were generally focused on obtaining scientific data. However, this scientific focus also helped India become a full Ny-Alesund Science Managers Committee (NySMAC) member (Khare, 2008).

While the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 helped recognize Antarctica as a region for science and cooperation, it should only be used for peaceful purposes and not become the scene or object of international conflict. Studies and interests in the Arctic have been equally important. Most regions surrounding the Arctic are under member states' control. However, with the possibility of opening new and shorter sea routes through the region, the Arctic Sea has gradually become a hotbed of international conflict. In addition, the Arctic's natural resources, such as oil, gas, and minerals, have made it a conflict zone, leading to increased militarization (Chaturvedi, 2014, p. 75).

India's growing scientific participation and financial assistance in Arctic research led to its election to the International "Arctic Science Committee" Commissioner in 2012. For India, these studies were not isolated developments but are part of its global economic interests, which form the main focus of its approach to the Arctic. Today, India's global vision of the Arctic is scientific in orientation. This situation is akin to an autobiography; it is an inextricably complex situation where India must write its policies from its perspective, adopt a foreign policy understanding, and have it accepted by the world. As a result, no state can claim that its foreign policy is purely selfless. Every state claims its foreign policy is the most humane and logical understanding. However, India's choices regarding Arctic policy should be viewed as political self-interest and a rational choice between scientific idealism and the reality of economic and strategic issues. India's Arctic Policy can gain greater significance by asserting influence in a borderless region. This can be achieved by adopting a reasoned foreign policy approach through multilateral competition, dispersing regional issues rather than consolidating them within a single area.

The theses and claims defended in this text form the basis of India's existence in the Arctic region. Some researchers claim that India's interest in the Arctic dates back to pre-colonial times (Zaikov & Bhagwat, 2022, p. 265), (Kumar, 2019, p. 115), (Saran, 2013). Recent references to India's historical ties with the Arctic prove this claim. In particular, during the SAGA-3 Conference held in Delhi, Bal Gangadhar's work was referenced, which traced the origins of India's ties with the Arctic region back to the early 20th century (*Science & Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya*, 2015). Tilak (1903), one of the crucial figures in India's freedom struggle, explained how India viewed the Arctic in his work and emphasized why Indian history and culture are essential for the Arctic. Tilak claimed that the Aryans lived in the Arctic historically and later migrated to Europe and the Indian subcontinent (Tilak, 1903). It is a fact that Tilak tried to establish a connection between the Arctic region and India by spreading this idea. Another

prominent issue discussed at the SAGA-3 Conference held in Delhi is the thesis that India, which signed the Spitsbergen Agreement in 1920 during British rule, is not foreign to the Arctic. At this conference, Gupta and Sinha (U. K. Sinha & Gupta, 2015) stated that India had adopted a non-colonial foreign policy understanding based on racial unity for its Arctic Policy. Similarly, Chaturvedi (2014), at the same conference, referred to the Arctic roots of India and Tilak's book, saying that the people of the region had a place in Indian history and that this historical structure was connected with the distant regions in the north of the Eurasian continent (*Science & Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya*, 2015).

Despite all these historical root-seeking searches, India's current presence and involvement in the Arctic are reasonably recent, about 15 years. India's participation in developments in the Arctic is not very active, as it is far from the region and has little influence. However, as Tilak (1903) states, it is interesting to relate to contemporary Indian foreign policy priorities. When India cannot find a ground for a close relationship in foreign policy, it often turns to historical materialism. The main reason behind Tilak's Vedic presence and means of establishing racial unity for India to connect with the region stems from the fact that India had almost no political relations with the region except for the past 15 years (Sinha, 2020). Linking contemporary foreign policy issues with India's cultural and civilizational heritage has also emerged frequently in recent discussions and discourses, especially regarding the Indian foreign policy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Narendra Modi. The Modi government, which seeks historical background from its relations, follows the same path in its Arctic Policy and tries to claim rights by finding a link from historical roots to be effective (Government of India, 2022).

The BJP government employed this historical bond-building strategy in 2014 to improve its relations with Israel, even before the energy security talks with Central Asian countries. Therefore, the reference to Tilak (1903) can also be seen as an attempt to establish a historical link to gain power and claim rights. The fact that there is no other source related to this racial unity and connection except Tilak's book, which is written in a language far from scientific reality, and that only inferences can be drawn from Tilak's ideas support this argument (Tilak, 1903). However, this viewpoint contradicts India's foreign policy interests in certain aspects. Gokhale argues that the reference to the imaginary lines of China's BRI project and the BJP government's foreign policy perception regarding free movement undermine India's interest in pursuing this historical link (Gokhale, 2021). Nonetheless, creating an official Arctic Policy of India demonstrates that India has officially adopted a regional foreign policy understanding and has a roadmap for future actions.

2. India's Search for Historical Links to the Arctic: Informal Links to Official Politics

India does not have a culture of institutionalized doctrinal approaches, often called official papers (Sinha & Gupta, 2015, p. 112). This is because its infrastructure only works in specific sectors and produces policy outputs. As a result, official foreign policy outputs on any issue are usually improvised and have the nature of a roadmap, but their outcomes

do not consistently achieve their intended purposes. For this reason, India's political decisions are strongly influenced by the political elite and bureaucracy.

There has been no official document on India's national security nor severe public pressure to create one. The report completed in 2022 on the Arctic is a publication, not a roadmap, and is produced for propaganda. Despite low interest in public and policy circles, India needs to play an active role in the Arctic Council and engage actively in diplomacy for regional politics. This involves more than just organizing irregular briefings, papers, and conferences. To be effective in developing other regions, quickly setting the country's economy, and using the Indian diaspora effectively, the government has established new units in various ministries to work in these areas and follow an effective way in foreign policy.

However, vital interrelated perspectives can be used as policy tools. For example, it is essential to search for economic opportunities in maritime routes, develop natural resources, and create a policy tool in which the financial interests of the regional states will be observed. Similarly, it is essential to establish a coordination unit between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MoEA), as well as a cooperation and coordination unit to develop cross-border science and technological cooperation, to establish an effective instrumental structure in policies related to the Arctic. An Arctic policy that ignores security developments in the Arctic and emphasizes scientific developments refers to India's soft power capacity. However, a foreign policy that includes the creation of an intelligent power capacity may result in India's maximum benefit in the long run.

There were several disagreements before the publication of an official Arctic Policy document outlining what foreign policy instruments India should implement regarding the Arctic. Parmar claimed that India did not have the resources to make a significant initiative in the Arctic and suggested that India could participate in the Arctic with observer status and be involved in resource management through working groups (Parmar, 2020, p. 6). Similarly, Saran (2013) advocated cooperation with the Arctic Council and sustainable resource cooperation with regional countries (*Policy Watch*, 2021). Kumar aimed to make India a centre of competition by establishing various cooperations with states with good relations and with states in the region that do not have the power to provide capacity, technology, financial support, and incentives to protect the ecosystem in the Arctic (Kumar, 2019, p. 116). These ideas of Kumar might be a reasonable proposition in a large-scale global political order. Notably, participating in scientific activities in the Arctic and trying to cooperate with countries in the region may strengthen India's regional role in the Himalayas and bring positive political attitudes towards improving cooperation with scientific workouts.

India's Arctic engagement has been essential to its bilateral relations with Norway over the past decade, particularly in trade, investment, and technology transfer in maritime, hydroelectric, and ocean mining sectors. Since its establishment, Norway has been India's leading partner in the Arctic. Norway's partnership with India has spread across many areas rather than being a strategic alliance specific to the Arctic (Kumar, 2019, p. 123). For example, the fishing project that started in Kerala continues in many sectors with joint efforts, and the same spiral of relationships is reflected in scientific research in

the Arctic. Additionally, both countries have explicitly supported each other globally since the 1950s.

In March 2022, India published its Arctic Policy, aiming to develop cooperation with the resource-rich and rapidly transforming the Arctic. Titled "India's Arctic Policy: Building a Partnership for Sustainable Development," the policy is built on six key areas: Science, Climate and Environmental Protection, Economic and Human Development, Transportation and Connectivity, Governance and International Cooperation, and National Capacity Building (Government of India, 2022). The most striking aspect of this policy is its goal to combat climate change and protect the environment in a region warming three times faster than the rest of the world. The Minister of Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh, made this policy public. However, it is worth noting that the Ministry of Earth Sciences, not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced the policy, indicating that relevant units and ministries have not yet cooperated on this concerning India's foreign policy. This suggests the view that the policy was created without explicit collaboration.

The Arctic, rich in mineral and oil resources, has recently gained strategic importance for many states due to its numerous shipping routes. However, according to a report by the Manohar Institute, the adverse effects of climate change affect the availability of mineral and hydrocarbon resources and transform global shipping routes (Bisen, 2022, p. 6). In this regard, India has included plans to improve its science and research capabilities and deploy space technology to align its research with the priorities of the Arctic. India has been examining climate changes in the Arctic since 2012, including determining the melting route of glaciers, making it one of the few countries with comprehensive information for calculating and researching new global shipping routes ('The Indian Express, 2022). India aims to use this information to analyse better the effects of melting glaciers on international shipping routes, energy security, and mineral wealth exploitation. With this roadmap, India also aims to establish the infrastructure to effectively engage with China on a significant scale through new trade routes. Moreover, India seeks to examine the connections and relations between the polar regions and the Himalayas and has shared the outline of the studies required to increase its national capacity by forming the basis of essential infrastructure works.

Countries like India and China have established closer relations and alliances with states in the current Arctic. India opened Himadri (Ministry of Earth Sciences of India, 2008), the only regional research station, in 2008, demonstrating substantial efforts to promote scientific research and various projects and investments. However, despite establishing the Norwegian Programme for Research Cooperation with India (INDNOR) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018) to promote bilateral research and cooperation with Norway, India does not have sufficient infrastructure and equipment to be more effective. India plans to increase its scientific research activities in the Arctic by purchasing a Pole Research Tool. The National Centre for Polar and Oceanic Research (NCPOR) has collaborated with the Fesco transportation group (AK&M, 2020) to develop a regional transportation network and provide icebreaker vehicles. Initially, the NCPOR started working in Antarctica. With new contracts, India aims to increase its scientific research output in the region and carry out many cooperation activities with the countries in the Arctic (Zaikov & Bhagwat, 2022, p. 263).

India's official Arctic Policy, published in March 2022, demonstrates its commitment to combating climate change and protecting the environment in the rapidly transforming Arctic region. However, India seems to prioritize environmental and scientific potential more among the observer states, with some reservations about engagement and borders to support these factors. This could be due to the importance of agriculture in the Indian economy's dependency on monsoons and the country's long coastline with a high population, which makes climatic changes in this region a development that will threaten the coastal states the most, including India.

In the field of economy, particularly in energy, India attempts to establish a strong relationship with the region through its ties with Russia. Since the start of the Ukraine war, India has been purchasing the cheapest energy from Russia, making their relationship in the energy sector stable and longstanding. India has signed agreements with Russia's leading oil and gas companies to continue their relationship in the Arctic, which includes cooperation in joint production and offshore exploration. India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has a significant stake in Russia's Vankor oil field. Moreover, India is the co-executive director of many Arctic observer countries' projects and has adopted a foreign policy approach to pursue its strategic partnership in the context of American sanctions with these agreements and partnerships.

Diversifying energy imports always requires compatibility with a strong state and taking a stand in conflicts. This approach enabled India to avoid the Countering America's Adversaries Though Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions without harm. The diplomatic steps taken to obtain the maximum benefit from the region's energy resources and natural mines also necessitate continuing this understanding. Mineral resources such as gold, nickel, copper, granite, and uranium in the Arctic region are crucial for producing high-tech products, including nuclear energy and mobile phones, the primary source of raw materials India needs to advance its Make in India Initiative. Increasing cooperation and alliance efforts with the region may also be constructive in this respect for the future of the Make in India program.

Observing the Arctic has become crucial for India to have a say in the region. Typically, the most effective way to propose a project or work in the Arctic is through an Arctic or permanent participating member. India's funding and support are limited, and any opinion, statement, or document presented by India in the Arctic Council meetings requires approval. India's lack of veto power in the United Nations is similar to the power wielded by states with veto power, such as Russia. India may need the support of one or more conditions to make any progress in the Arctic, which would mean entering into a limited relationship with the region. However, commercial competition with Russia and Sino-Russian cooperation makes it difficult for India to have a say in the council. While Norway could potentially support India, its tense relationship with Russia and China makes Norway hesitant to keep any initiatives favouring India.

Nevertheless, the council is responsible for broader regulations governing maritime routes and resources. Enjoying these general rights and influences alongside other Asian observers can prevent the division of the Arctic's resources and decision-making. Furthermore, this obstruction is not limited to the region's states but includes countries with few commercial relations.

The only thing clear in this scenario is that India, like other Asian observers, requires energy, new markets, and resources. However, China's increasing efficiency makes it a more significant commercial threat and a more considerable danger to itself. Consequently, China aims to establish global partnerships to control the Arctic, as demonstrated by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. India's dream of establishing hegemony in the region by adopting a similar stance could damage its relations with Arctic states, resulting in distrust of indigenous rights and weakening India's global position. A more realistic approach for India would be to avoid openly partnering with the region to resolve territorial disputes and focus on inclusion in a legal framework.

Regardless of the circumstances, India must continue to create a favourable environment for itself. As the Arctic's commercial potential grows, there is general agreement that India will not be able to reap as many gains and benefits as China, Japan, and South Korea (Zaikov & Bhagwat, 2022, p. 270). This strengthens the argument that India should focus on energizing science and environmental issues. Additionally, developed countries tend to impose various sanctions on developing countries to take responsibility for reducing their carbon emissions. Given that India is engaged in similar activities, a more radical stance towards Arctic resource exploration and extraction activities may not be wise. Despite the lack of significant economic gains, India can still reap some benefits in real terms. Today, India's goal continues to follow the sustainable development path shared by most Arctic actors. Efforts to increase India's influence in the region should take a more holistic and inclusive stance by presenting environmental arguments against the materialist approach. The growing Chinese presence and influence could encourage other states to attract global attention to the Arctic. It is of great importance that this attitude turns into radical steps to prevent the Arctic targets that China will address within the scope of the BRI project, offset the concerns India has regarding the BRI, and mitigate any unfavourable consequences that might arise.

3. Quests to Stabilize China in the Arctic: Can India's Arctic Policy Restrain China?

China's engagement in the Arctic is driven by long-term economic opportunities and the desire to establish a platform for scientific research. The Arctic's shorter and more reliable shipping route, easy access to natural resources, and climate change considerations have prompted China to become involved (Lim, 2021, p. 40). Following an extended diplomatic initiative, China's inclusion in the Arctic Council as an observer in 2013 could be considered a late decision, given its potential contribution to the Arctic's international decisions. The primary reason for granting observer status to China and five other states at the cabinet meeting in Kiruna was to strengthen the position of the Arctic Council and ensure its credibility and legitimacy (Ingimundarson, 2014, p. 190). As a non-Arctic actor, China's participation in the council as an observer provides an ideal way for China to gain authorized access to the governance and decision-making process of the Arctic. Although observer states are often perceived as weak due to the lack of voting rights in the Arctic Council's decision-making process, China's observer status is expected to provide significant benefits and influence on the Arctic Council without setting its future agendas for the Arctic (Chen, 2012, p. 366).

Furthermore, China regards the Arctic Council as a critical policy forum for addressing Arctic-related issues. In its efforts to join the Arctic Council, China adopted a rigid and stable foreign policy approach, despite facing complex diplomatic challenges (Pursiainen et al., 2021, p. 36). China applied to join the council four times from 2006 to 2013 and was initially held in an ad-hoc status because it did not meet several admission procedures observed within the council. Many of these procedures continue to form the basis for significant challenges regarding China's interests in the Arctic today.

The fact that significant issues regarding China's interest in the Arctic have increased in recent times necessitates a comparative analysis of China's Arctic ambitions and a discussion of the interests of Arctic states in the literary discourse (Andersson, 2021, p. 13). The existing literature contains numerous ideas about China's Arctic ambitions. China's White Paper on the Arctic has not changed this literature and its views; on the contrary, it further divides the existing literature into idealists and pragmatists alike. However, it is helpful to place those who interpret China's Arctic policy in the literature by generalizing the literature as collaborative and pragmatists who interpret China's Arctic policy as deductive and use these policies in the right place.

In the White Paper, China is an essential stakeholder in the Arctic. Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou stated at a press conference on the publication of the White Paper that China adopted two basic policies as an Arctic stakeholder (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Xuanyou explained that the first policy is China's borders, and the other is not ignoring China. He added that the behaviour of Chinese organizations and individuals in the Arctic respects international law and relevant laws and that China also accepts that it is a country outside this region. However, he stated that no regional security and order could be established without China (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Nevertheless, these statements do not necessarily reflect China's participation as an observer state or its absolute acceptance of the Arctic Council's stake and interests in the Arctic. Like other observer states in the Arctic Council, China is involved in managing global environmental issues, taking advantage of the economic potential of the Arctic, and protecting its commercial interests (Hossain et al., 2019, p. 4).

The natural conditions and climate changes in the Arctic directly impact China's climate system and ecological environment (Chater, 2016, p. 176). Therefore, China closely monitors interregional and global issues in the Arctic. These issues are crucial for the existence and well-being of all countries and peoples. Although the effects of climate change can harm China's economic growth, they can also jeopardize the political stability of the Chinese Communist Party, which relies on robust economic growth as the basis of its strength (Lim, 2021, p. 44). Moreover, China's broad interest in utilizing the Arctic's energy potential is well-known and depends on abundant energy resources. As the world's largest energy consumer, China needs a continuous energy source to sustain its economic growth. The Arctic's untapped energy resources will help China diversify its resources and supply (Liu, 2017, p. 62).

Additionally, China views the shipping sector as a vital part of the Arctic's economic future and the North Sea route as the golden route for shipping to the region. This route is the shortest shipping route connecting Europe and North America. Since 2016, the most

noteworthy advancement that China has witnessed in global politics is the development of its trade routes within the framework of the BRI. China has mobilized all its energy for the security of these routes and has created a separate security strategy for each region where the route passes. Within the context of selling its production products to the world, BRI finds itself with a rival having an alternative policy on the North Sea route.

The security of China's foreign trade currently passes through the Straits of Malacca and the Suez Strait, where traffic capacity is at its peak (Gavrilov & Kripakova, 2017, p. 74). In this context, China, which aims to expand the BRI to the poles, plans to carry out its transportation services, especially between the eastern coasts of North America, through this region. This new route is expected to be 40% shorter than the Suez and Panama Canal routes (Chen, 2012, p. 360). The North Sea route also provides a shorter route to reach countries in the north-eastern region of China. In this respect, the North Sea route gives China a policy imperative to dominate a new alternative route. This imperative also shows that China's Arctic interests extend beyond its geographical boundaries as it emerges as a global power (Lim, 2021, p. 51). The White Paper on China's Arctic Policy was published at a time when these concerns arose.

Chinese culture generally does not summarize policies in writing unless it is necessary or in its interest to do so. Unlike the great Western powers, China has only published official and translated White Papers on urgent and important policy issues in recent years (Brady, 2017, p. 121). Therefore, the publication of the White Paper demonstrates that the Arctic is important to Chinese policymakers. Based on its preface, China's White Paper aims to dispel the negative perception of China's Arctic interests in the international community and serve as a guiding document for coordination between government agencies. In this respect, this document, which is entirely different from the paper published by India, is vital for all state institutions to work effectively. Given that at least 17 government agencies are involved in China's Arctic affairs, China's policymaking and execution processes are broad and complex. Since there is no specialized agency or unit to carry out China's Arctic Policy, authority has been left to a few government agencies on different subjects. This will require proper coordination to overcome bureaucracy and achieve a common goal (Brady, 2017, p. 141).

Since China needs to have a deeper understanding of the Arctic to ensure its participation in the region, it is apparent that the goals emphasized by China are an inseparable part of its interest-based foreign policy tool. It is a known fact that every state tries to justify its policies based on a justified basis to subsidize its interests and put them on an objective basis. In this respect, China's relationship with the Arctic does not appear to be a challenge to the structure of the international community; on the contrary, China aims to promote equality with other great powers as it rises without disturbing the global balance of power. On the other hand, this foreign policy tool is perceived as part of the Polar Silk Vision.

China sees it as a new alternative route to its grand strategy of connecting the Arctic to the BRI. Given the BRI's idea of ensuring economic security by guaranteeing China's trade routes through improved connectivity and trade flow between Asia, Europe, and Africa, it also requires China to synchronize its development actions and plans for maritime cooperation in advancing the BRI. In this context, China announced this vision

to the world public opinion with a document published in 2017, which included a vision and plan that expanded its economic corridors to Central Asia, the Balkans, Russia, Europe, and North America. In this regard, China calls the White Paper the first official policy document that sets out the Polar Silk Road (PSR) Vision regarding the development of Arctic shipping routes (Loh, 2021, p. 175). According to this document, China recognizes cultural and inferential problems in the relations of the Arctic states with a state that is not in this region. Nevertheless, it is argued that the BRI project could succeed even in the absence of China (Ang, 2019). In this context, China's admission to the Arctic Council as an observer aims to increase its political and economic influence in the region to ensure that China's interests are equally considered and respected.

China's diplomacy with Arctic states demonstrates that the Northern Silk Road, with the characteristics of the Belt and Road Initiative's overarching grand strategy, is an indispensable target. The diplomatic jargon that Chinese officials use when describing BRI principles infers that China aims to facilitate global trade and economic integration in the context of the BRI and Silk Road vision (Clarke, 2017, p. 75). As the Polar Silk Road (PSR) enables China to diversify its sea routes and reduce travel time and fuel costs, it further increases its interest, considering the importance of opening Arctic shipping routes to revive China's export-based economy. Since 2016, the state-owned China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) has sent freighters to the Arctic. Deals for powerful icebreaking ships that can break through glaciers instantly following current routes show China's commercial and economic interests.

China's PSR vision began before the White Paper announced various cooperation initiatives with Arctic states. For example, China and Russia started jointly producing liquefied natural gas on Yamal Island. China's national oil company was involved in the project through the China Silk Road Fund. In addition, China financially supported the LNG project in the Gyan Peninsula. China has also invested in natural resources and minerals in both Yamal Island and various regions. China is currently jointly conducting technology and data operations on PSR with Finland and Norway, which also economically supports their railway projects.

All these steps show China's efforts to intensify its relations and investments in Arctic states, reflecting its strategic priority in the region. However, Chinese investments in infrastructure projects throughout the PSR naturally raise concerns about the future of Arctic security. Chinese construction companies' interest in expanding three airports in the Arctic has met severe opposition in Denmark. Similarly, Chinese investment in the deep-water port in Sweden was withdrawn due to concerns about the environmental impact and national security risks associated with the project (Lim, 2021, p. 53). Moreover, Chinese investments in the Arctic have been criticized for their lack of transparency and disclosure. Allegedly, these investments are often financed by the state, and the nature of these investments, misrepresentations, distortions, and differences in value reported to foreign media, along with the environment that has been blurred to avoid possible competition and to provide manoeuvring for China, naturally disturb other states in the global environment (Yin et al., 2020, p. 390).

Although no Chinese investment in the Arctic has defaulted, the possibility of Chinese intervention in the region, if there is potential debt in the future, raises' questions. Given

the cyclical concern that China may seize control of strategic assets of indebted countries when they fail to pay their debt, including taking over management of infrastructure investments as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project, China's interest in financing the Arctic raises concerns about the sustainability and fragility of their investments. While China's White Paper attempts to alleviate these concerns, the absence of a constructive dialogue with the Arctic states highlights the need for close relationships with other states to balance China.

In this respect, Arctic states may consider preventing the deterrence of China's BRI project and viewing India as a competitor and balancing factor for China. India, like China, is an out-of-regional state and the only state in the world that competes with China regarding population. Needing external resources to develop its economy, India has faced a serious need for help within the scope of the Make in India Initiative program in the last five years. India, which obtains almost 40% of its energy needs from Russia and imports nearly 50% of its natural resource needs for its economy, aims to reduce foreign dependency and prevent its foreign policy moves from causing an economic crisis by diversifying its financial dependencies and attracting more investments to its country (Pema, 2022).

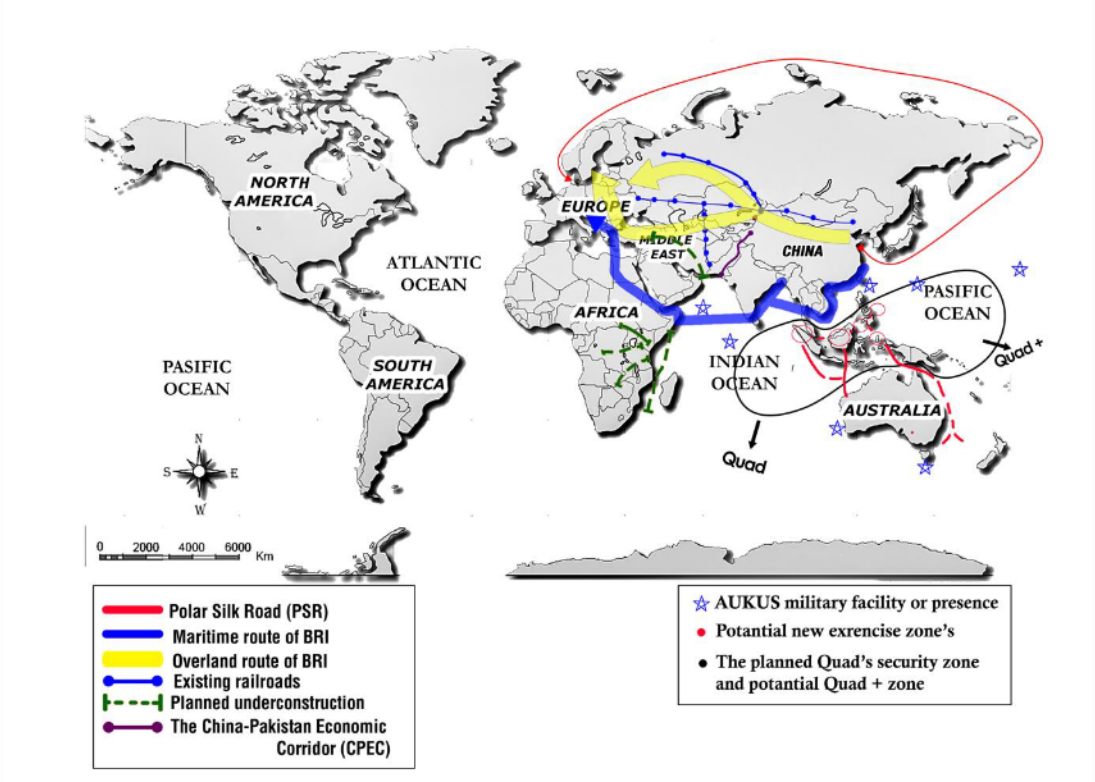
In this context, India is establishing connections with the Arctic region, driven by the belief that it can compete with China across various domains. India is concerned about the possibility of China's increased influence in the regional landscape, which it perceives as a significant threat. To illustrate, India has become a member of the Quad Alliance to counter the challenges posed by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, India actively supports initiatives like Aukus in the Asia-Pacific to curb China's expansionist ambitions. India has announced the Sagarmala Project (Aras & Kandemir, 2023, p.161), an alternative road route to China's BRI project, conveying that it is an alternative production centre to Europe and North America. In the same way, India can be a balancing factor, not an all-out competitor to China, as an alternative to China in the Arctic.

Compared to China's backyard policy in the Arctic, India's primary goal is to engage with regional states on a win-win model and access resources. India already has a scientific and economic alliance with Norway and imports some energy resources extracted by Russian companies. India also entered a bilateral dialogue with Finland and Sweden and is on the way to becoming an alternative for the regional states by increasing its effectiveness. Given the potential challenges China poses to India across diverse sectors and border regions under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it is crucial to have alternative policies in every area where China is present. This will enable India to deter China within its security context, and it is also vital to benefit from the deterrence of global integration in case of any possible conflict or crisis in the global context.

China has close relations with Pakistan and Sri Lanka in South Asia under the BRI framework. With the Gwadar Port and Railway Project financed in Pakistan's BRI context, China broke India's previous influence over the Oman Sea, creating an alternative route. Similarly, China has funded a trade corridor from the Gulf of Oman to Turkey and competed with India for a joint road route project between Greece and Egypt in the

Mediterranean. These events may bring significant economic competition between India and China.

Map 1 - BRI network and potential competition areas



Source: Authors' development

India is investing and entering economic cooperation with relevant countries in these regions, while China makes these countries indispensable by investing in the relevant areas. India aims to encourage other states to support and cooperate economically, whereas China's concerns are economically binding and cooperative. The Sino-Indian rivalry in the Arctic can also be interpreted in this way. China invests in relevant strategic ports and projects and is directly involved in extracting, operating, and purchasing natural resources. Meanwhile, India attracts investments in its own country by entering joint economic cooperation with Arctic states and stabilizes as a potential customer for natural resources and energy.

Conclusion

This study addressed the central research question: Can India's Arctic policy effectively compete with China's Arctic policy on regional and global fronts? India's Arctic policy is a compelling case study highlighting how scientific advancements can significantly influence diplomatic strategies, particularly concerning the intricate relationship between India's monsoons and the melting Arctic glaciers. In response to mounting concerns

about the adverse effects of melting Arctic glaciers on India's critical agriculture industry – essential for its burgeoning population and economy – India established the Himadri research station in the Arctic. Subsequently, this research station has become a vital tool for India's soft power diplomacy efforts.

India's effort to strengthen its international presence by leveraging its position on the Arctic Council and its current activities in the region allows it to adopt a more holistic governance stance and use available opportunities to counterbalance China. This approach benefits India and China: India seeks access to energy and natural resources to develop its industry, while China benefits from having a partner in the region to balance its expansionist policies. The situation is akin to a free market of politics, in which the regional and global balance of power is constantly shifting.

India's role as a balancing factor in the region is reflected in its efforts to form alliances to counter China's expansionist policies. For example, India has organized workshops on the Sagarmala project, which aims to become an international concept within India's Make in India program to balance China's Belt and Road Initiative. India is also part of formations such as Quad and Aukus, which aim to address regional security issues through various alliances.

India's Arctic policy has evolved strategically in response to scientific and economic considerations, with the overarching objective of effectively positioning itself against China in the Arctic region. This analysis affirms that reasoned and strategic foundations underpin India's Arctic policy and directly address the central research question posed at the outset of this study. While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought India to the forefront as an alternative to China for establishing commercial hegemony, it is noteworthy that China continues to invest in economic corridors in the Indo-Pacific, including extensions to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, to mitigate potential security risks. The mutual benefits arising from such alliances can vary significantly in each region. In the Arctic context, India perceives China as a balancing ally, leading to mutual benefits for both nations rather than viewing China solely as a deterrent. This approach enables India to remain a formidable regional ally, capitalizing on the resources and financial flows emanating from the Arctic.

In summary, India's Arctic policy has evolved as a strategic response to scientific and economic considerations, aiming to position itself effectively against China in the Arctic region. The analysis supports the argument that India's Arctic policy has a reasoned and strategic foundation and directly addresses the research question posed at the beginning of this study. India's Arctic policy is a testament to the intricate interplay between science, diplomacy, and global strategy. It showcases how a nation's scientific endeavours can shape its foreign policy, particularly in a rapidly changing Arctic environment. India is working diligently to establish itself as a significant player on regional and global fronts through its active engagement in the Arctic region and its efforts to forge alliances. This evolving policy serves its immediate interests and reflects its broader aspirations of maintaining a balanced and influential presence in an increasingly crucial geopolitical arena. As the Arctic continues to experience unprecedented changes, India's strategic positioning in the region will undoubtedly have

far-reaching implications for its relationship with China and its role in shaping the future of the Arctic itself.

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