INDIA’S SECURITY CHALLENGES
AT HOME AND ABROAD

By C. Raja Mohan and Ajai Sahni
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# India’s Security Challenges at Home and Abroad

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The analyses contained in this NBR Special Report examining India’s strategic environment and U.S.-India relations could not come at a more timely moment. The world continues to witness the ongoing shift in the concentration of power and wealth from West to East, and the United States in response has declared its intention to “rebalance” its strategic orientation toward rising Asia. While Washington warily eyes Beijing as a competitor for supremacy in a variety of areas, stronger U.S.-Indian ties are viewed in contrast as both desirable and urgent. Most recently, India’s test of the Agni-V long-range ballistic missile put an international spotlight on India’s defense modernization efforts, especially vis-à-vis China, given that this new missile brings most of the Chinese mainland within range of India’s land-based nuclear forces. The test was reflective of India’s complex efforts at internal and external balancing and has important implications for both the country’s regional relations and the U.S.-India relationship.

The two essays presented here focus on exploring India’s pressing national security challenges. Specifically, Ajai Sahni expertly examines both the internal security challenges facing India and the country’s relative success in dealing with them despite a fractious domestic system. C. Raja Mohan then provides clear and concise insights into the changes in India’s external environment, particularly as they relate to the impact of China’s rise, as well as future prospects for further development of the U.S.-Indian strategic relationship.

These essays arose out of a 2009 workshop titled “India’s Strategic Environment and Defense Policies,” which was held in New Delhi and organized by The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) in partnership with India’s Observer Research Foundation (ORF). The purpose of the workshop was to examine India’s emergence as an Asian power in the context of the country’s military modernization efforts.

I would like to express my appreciation to ORF and NBR, especially my co-chair from ORF, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Vinayak Patankar, as well as my NBR colleagues Roy Kamphausen, Travis Tanner, and Tim Cook. ORF and NBR did an excellent job organizing this very successful workshop. I would also like to thank the authors of the two essays contained in this report, Ajai Sahni and C. Raja Mohan, for their efforts in conducting incredibly high-quality research and for sharing their expertise in this way. In addition, I am sincerely grateful to all the other experts who presented papers at the workshop and who added tremendous value to the overall initiative—without their substantial contributions, the project could never have been successful. Special thanks go to Lockheed-Martin, the lead sponsor and main source of financial support for the workshop. We also express gratitude to the other sponsors, including the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Russell Family Foundation, Boeing, and Northrop Grumman, for their support of this initiative.

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India’s Internal Security Challenges

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India's fractious democracy faces numerous internal security challenges and is hobbled by incoherent policy responses and enduring deficits in capacity. The system has, nevertheless, demonstrated extraordinary resilience and has several dramatic successes to its credit.

MAIN ARGUMENT

India is a study in contrasts, if not contradictions. Extreme poverty and lack of opportunities coexist with rapid economic growth and obscene wealth, creating what commentators have often conceptualized as “two Indias.” These discrepancies, compounded by a wide range of external and internal destabilizers, produce enormous potential for discord as well as a number of enduring internal conflicts.

The state’s responses to existing and emerging challenges of internal security have been marked by a high measure of incoherence, structural infirmities, and a growing crisis of capacities. Despite these deficits and vulnerabilities, India has extraordinary experience in defeating some of the most virulent insurgent and terrorist movements. Unfortunately, the lessons of successful counterinsurgency (CI) and counterterrorism (CT) campaigns have not been transferred efficiently to other theaters.

While rapid economic growth has increased state resources, the policy environment remains crippled by the lack of a strategic culture and foresight. Nevertheless, there is increasing awareness of the urgency of a coherent strategic response. Ultimately, India's political environment has demonstrated tremendous resilience, justifying the expectation that, in spite of its difficulties, the country will sustain its positive trajectory.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

• A coherent policy framework is a precondition to the resolution of India’s internal security challenges.

• India's enduring conflicts must be assessed and countered within a protracted-war paradigm, not the present and dominant emergency-response paradigm.

• A police-led response has been the most successful template in CI-CT campaigns, which are small commanders' wars. The challenge for policy and generalship is to develop comprehensive response capabilities.

• While extreme inequalities are major sources of tension, the developmental deficits in the country are too great to allow developmental interventions to play any defining role in the resolution of existing and protracted conflicts within a reasonable time frame.
India is today an astounding study in contrasts. International pundits have predicted a “global power shift,” with a “transfer of power from West to East,” and some have already anointed India as one of the “great powers” of the proximate future. Among the Indian elite, there is a surging confidence, backed by sustained growth of the economy—a steady 6% growth rate between 1993 and 2003, and a remarkable 9% thereafter. Indeed, despite the global meltdown of 2008, India has sustained a 6%–7% growth rate, notwithstanding the widespread contraction of economies and apprehensions of an enveloping recession in the West. At the same time, a succession of dramatic global acquisitions by Indian companies have forced even the most incredulous to revise their assessments of India’s future. The transformations that underwrite these trends are structural and, most economists believe, irreversible. The consequence, one eminent economist notes, is that “a simple back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that by 2030 India will have a per-capita income of $20,000, which will place us in the category of industrialized nations.”

All of this is very real. But there is another India to which the country’s vaunting elite and much of the world is blind. It is an India of grinding poverty for millions, increasing rural distress, mass suicides by bankrupted farmers, chronic and endemic malnutrition, and vast developmental dislocations that punish the poor. It is an India in which governance is conspicuous by its absence or is experienced only in its most neglectful, callous, and oppressive manifestations.

It must be evident that the tensions between these “two Indias” are fraught with political and security risks, and that the dynamism and growth of the first is potentially jeopardized by the stagnation, inertial resistance, and violent reaction of the second. It is within the context of this entrenched and underlying friction that threats to India’s internal security need to be evaluated.

Assessments of India’s internal security challenges have varied widely over time, often determined by the intensity and lethality of the most recent terrorist outrage—of which there has been a continuous string over the past decades. A succession of high-profile terrorist attacks across India—outside the areas of chronic terrorist and insurgent conflict—through 2008, culminating in the dramatic and devastating attacks in Mumbai on November 26, 2008, thus created an enveloping atmosphere of insecurity in the country, particularly among its vocal urban middle classes, who abruptly saw themselves at great risk.

These general perceptions are in sharp contrast with the actual trajectory of terrorist and insurgent violence in India, which demonstrates clear trends toward the overall diminution of such incidents—albeit within a context of enormous and augmenting uncertainty. The South Asia Terrorism Portal database indicates a decline in total fatalities in terrorist and insurgent violence in India, from a peak of 5,839 in 2001 to 1,074 in 2011 (see Figure 1). The principal constituent of this declining trajectory has been the steady drop in fatalities in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, from 4,507 in 2001 to 183 in 2011. Fatalities in India’s northeast, after significant declines during 2002–6, escalated in 2007–9—although they still remained well below their peak of 1,667 in 2000—but dropped dramatically to just 247 in 2011. Left-wing extremist (LWE) or Maoist-related

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2 Ibid., 3.
A complex dynamic, often related to a range of external factors, has defined these trends, and it remains the case that significant unrealized reserves of potential violence exist in the country, and at least some of these show signs of augmentation. Of course, terrorism and insurgency are not the only internal security crises in India, and this essay will examine a range of micro-fractures that afflict the social and political fabric and challenge the administrative and enforcement apparatus. By and large, these lesser conflicts—including caste and communal conflicts, as well as criminal disruption—appear to have attained a measure of stability over the decades. While poor governance and declining standards of administration—including within the areas of security and justice—have been visible across wide areas in India, it is also the case that vibrant sectors of the economy have now released vast resources that have fundamentally altered national capacities, which could (though they currently may not) be applied to the resolution of the multiple internal security crises confronting the country.
External Destabilizers

In the realm of security, globalisation has produced a whole new range of interactive threats and risks. Globalisation has also led to a blurring of the distinction between external and internal threats.\(^5\)

While it has enormously benefited many, the unequal and often inequitable process of globalization has at the same time marginalized large populations, generating a widening schism between two emerging worlds. Nowhere is the schism more dramatically manifest than in Asia.

India’s external environment hardly lends itself to stability, and this is demonstrated with particular urgency by the 2009 Failed State Index. According to the index, 25 of the 60 states most at risk of failure are located in Asia. Significantly, every country that shares India’s borders is among those countries listed—Afghanistan ranks 7th; Pakistan, 10th; Myanmar, 13th; Bangladesh, 19th; Sri Lanka, 22nd; Nepal, 25th; Bhutan, 48th; and China, 57th.\(^6\) South Asia is also the new epicenter of global terror—with “Af-Pak” at its core and Bangladesh vying for an honorable mention. This is the quintessential “bad neighborhood,” arguably “the most dangerous place on earth.”\(^7\)

Extreme uncertainty and instability, consequently, afflict all aspects of South Asia’s enveloping geopolitical context. Briefly, the principal elements that compound regional destabilization include:\(^8\)

1. The restructuring of the global geopolitical architecture
2. The release of a variety of violent nationalist and subnationalist movements across Asia and Eastern Europe
3. An increasing polarization between “globalizing powers” and those that are, or perceive themselves as being, marginalized by globalization—stresses that are further aggravated by the inequalities and inequities that characterize contemporary globalization processes
4. The resurgence of radical political ideologies of mass mobilization, including religious—particularly but not exclusively Islamist—extremism, ethnic fundamentalisms, and Maoism, across wide regions
5. The emergence of “new ways of warfare”—specifically terrorism and sub-conventional wars—and their adoption by both nonstate actors and a number of state entities to secure political goals
6. The proliferation of technological force multipliers and sophisticated weapons and explosives among nonstate groups, facilitated by irresponsible, predatory, and rogue states
7. Widening areas of escalating environmental, economic, resource, and social stresses
8. Rising challenges to state power, the progressive weakening of governments, and widening spheres of non-governance and disorder

The situation is all the more fraught as a result of enduring demographic trends in the Asian region and along its European periphery, of which the most dramatic and conflicting patterns are “severe population deficits in the erstwhile power centres of Europe and Russia, on the one

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\(^8\) This descriptive relies on Ajai Sahni, “Terrorism and the Global Powershift,” in Terrorism in South and Southeast Asia in the Coming Decade, ed. Daljit Singh (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2009), 4.
hand, and high or even rampaging population growth in areas of West, South and Central Asia. Demographic pressures in Eurasia threaten to aggravate political and resource crises, environmental degradation, and the growing intensity of natural disasters, potentially provoking widening resource wars and efforts at aggressive demographic re-engineering, diversionary political brinkmanship, extremist mobilization, and covert military adventurism.

Wars within Borders

Three principal streams of conflict presently dominate the Indian internal security scenario: Islamist extremism and terrorism, left-wing (Maoist) insurgency, and ethnic fundamentalisms and militancy. End-of-year assessments for 2011 indicated that as many as 254 of India’s 640 districts are afflicted by chronic conflict variables connected with these various threats. In addition to these theaters of chronic extremism, sporadic attacks have also been executed across the length and breadth of the country, principally by Pakistan-backed Islamist terrorist groups, though now also including at least one attack by an incipient extremist group based in Hindutva (the Hindu right wing).

The Islamist Fasadis

Islamist terrorism, overwhelmingly spawned and supported by Pakistan, finds its principal locus in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, but has seen progressive expansion through terrorist mobilization, subversion, and attacks across the country. India has been confronted with Pakistan-backed Islamist subversion practically since the moment of the twin births of these nations, but it saw an asymmetric escalation after 1988. The result has been unrelenting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir for two decades now, inflicting a total of 42,657 fatalities in the state as of the end of 2009. Gradually, as international pressure to decrease terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir mounted on Pakistan, and as domestic circumstances in the country worsened rapidly, Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) handlers have found it expedient to increasingly redirect the Islamist fasadis into areas outside Jammu and Kashmir within a wider pan-Islamist ideological framework that dovetails more seamlessly with both the psyche of the extremist groups and the logic of the global jihad. A steady stream of Islamist terrorism and subversion has been sustained in widening theaters across India over the past

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10 The end-of-year assessments were performed by the Institute for Conflict Management and its South Asia Terrorism Portal. Of the 254 districts, 182 are afflicted by left-wing extremism, 57 are located in India’s Northeast, and 15 in Jammu and Kashmir.
12 Within the Quran, a clear distinction is made between jihad—which includes legitimate warfare—and fasad, which involves unwarranted disruption and violence. The claims of its perpetrators notwithstanding, current trends in Islamist terrorist violence correspond far more closely to the concept of fasad than to any coherently held concept of jihad. Kilcullen prefers the term tahrir, again more accurate than the general use of jihad. See David Kilcullen, The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009), xviii–xix.
several years, culminating in the startling attacks in Mumbai in November 2008, although 2009 remained free of any major incident outside Jammu and Kashmir.

The networks and support structures of a multiplicity of Islamist terrorist organizations operating in India have been painstakingly constructed by the ISI and, backed by enormous flows of financial support from West Asia and affluent expatriate Muslim communities in the West, are engaged in a sustained strategy of “erosion, encirclement, and penetration” that has been substantially documented elsewhere. There is now no doubt that the Mumbai carnage of November 26–29, 2008, was engineered by the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which has been permitted to operate openly in Pakistan under the name Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) since its supposed ban in 2002. After five U.S. citizens were killed in the Mumbai attacks, U.S. involvement and pressure on Pakistan has forced apparent action against some visible leaders and the Mumbai-accused from the LeT/JuD, although a long process of denial and obfuscation by Pakistan’s top leadership and authorities suggest that the group will be allowed simply to reinvent itself under a new name, as it did under the earlier ban.

In addition to the Lashkar formation, the most significant terrorist groups created by the ISI that operate in India include what can be spoken of as the “Harkat Triad,” comprising the Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami (HuJI), the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), each of which is also linked with the Afghan jihad, the Taliban, and al Qaeda.

There are a number of other Pakistan-based groups operating in India, playing roles of varying significance in the machinery of Islamist terror that has been assembled over the years, including some that have substantial Indian membership. It is neither possible nor useful here to profile each of these diverse groups, but the most important among these in recent years, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), demands attention. SIMI has been involved in terrorist activities—principally as a facilitator for various Pakistan-based groups—since the 1990s, providing a range of services, such as couriers, safe havens, and communication posts for specific terrorist operations or terrorist cells. Since September 11, however, SIMI’s significance in Pakistan’s strategic projections has grown, as Islamabad came under increasing international pressure to dismantle the terrorist networks it had constructed and deployed. Pakistan sought, consequently, to project an increasing proportion of its operations in India as indigenous terrorism, purportedly sparked by discontented Muslims in “Hindu India.” SIMI’s role in operations increased gradually, with cadres initially joining the various Pakistani groups to participate in collaborative operations and eventually collaborating in the Ahmedabad and New Delhi bombings of July and September 2008, respectively—operating independently under the identity of the “Indian Mujahideen.” Crucially, however, it remains the case that the top leadership and cadres of SIMI receive safe haven and training in, and resources from, Pakistan, and it is there that they locate their operational command centers and that their capacities have been transformed into an effective and efficient terrorist organization. Nor, moreover, is the emergence of an Indian face of Islamist terrorism a recent phenomenon.

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There has always been an Indian face to terrorism. Terrorism in Kashmir, which has been unambiguously Islamist despite its subnationalist pretensions, was initiated by Indian cadres. Similarly, the 1993 Mumbai blasts were engineered by an Indian organized-crime group, the Dawood Ibrahim gang. Thereafter, groups such as the al Umma, the Deendar Anjuman, the National Development Front, and the Islamic Sevak Sangh, among others, executed a succession of serial blasts throughout the 1990s. Crucially, however, the transition of each of these groups to terrorist activities—and often the very creation of these groups—has been facilitated and supported by Pakistani agencies and actors. Not one of these movements or groupings could have engaged in significant acts of terrorism absent such active provocation and support.18

*Red Rage*

India’s Naxalite movement—to which contemporary Indian Maoists directly trace their lineage—emerged as a wildfire insurrection in 1967 in the Naxalbari area of North Bengal and spread rapidly to other areas before it was comprehensively suppressed by 1973.19 The movement re-emerged in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh under the banner of the People’s War Group (PWG) in 1980 and with the reorganization of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar in the mid-1980s. The two groups merged to form the Communist Party of India–Maoist (CPI-Maoist) in September 2004. The consolidation of the two most significant Maoist formations in the country (the CPI–Party Unity and the PWG had merged earlier, in August 1998) resulted in augmented capacities to “intensify the people’s war in the country.”20 Despite many reversals of fortune, by October 2011 the Union Ministry of Home Affairs conceded that 182 districts in 20 Indian states (out of a total of 640 districts in 28 states and 7 union territories) were variously affected by Maoist activities.21

Importantly, the phase of violence, which is ordinarily the point at which the state gains cognizance of the problem, comes at the tail end of a protracted process of mass mobilization and at a stage where neutralizing the threat requires considerable, if not massive, use of force. From a preventive perspective, it is useful to notice not merely the current expanse of visible Maoist mobilization and militancy but the extent of their intentions, ambitions, and agenda. Significantly, the CPI-Maoist has established regional bureaus to cover nearly two-thirds of the country’s territory. These regions are further subdivided into state, special-zonal, and special-area committee jurisdictions, where the processes of mobilization have been defined and allocated to local leaders. There is further evidence of preliminary activity for the extension of operations to new areas including Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura, Assam, and Meghalaya, beyond what is reflected in the scope of the various committees.

In 2004, moreover, the Maoists articulated a new strategy in their *Urban Perspective* document to target urban centers, drawing up guidelines for “working in towns and cities” and for the revival of a mobilization targeting students and the urban unemployed. Two principal industrial

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18 See Sahni, “South Asia: Extremist Islamist Terror and Subversion.”
20 See, for instance, “People’s War Intensiﬁes in India,” *People’s March* 7, no. 5 (2006).
belts were also identified as targets for urban mobilization—Bhilai-Ranchi-Dhanbad-Calcutta and Mumbai-Pune-Surat-Ahmedabad.22

The Maoist enterprise has secured fertile ground in the administrative and political vacuum that extends over vast areas of India. The vulnerabilities of the Indian state have been compounded by decades of misgovernance in ever-widening areas of the country, and by the steady erosion of the integrity and efficacy of established institutions of administration and justice. Processes of liberalization and globalization over the past fifteen years have also unleashed a new and fractious dynamic, provoking or intensifying conflict between the beneficiaries of the new economics and those who have been further marginalized by it. These structural vulnerabilities of the Indian system have enormously assisted the Maoists in securing their tremendous and cumulative successes—despite the occasional reversals, as presently seen in Andhra Pradesh.23 These successes are, however, underpinned by the extraordinary strategic and tactical coherence of their movement, which remains little understood within the echelons of power in India and within a large proportion of the security establishment itself.

The Maoist interpretation of protracted war clearly recognizes the strengths and superiority of the state’s present forces and alignments, but recognizes equally its vulnerabilities. The Maoists believe that there is at present an “excellent revolutionary situation in India”24 and have explicitly declared that “the seizure of state power should be the goal of all our activity.”25 Their strategy is clearly to fish in India’s many troubled waters. This strategy has already contributed to abrupt and unexpected violence in a number of cases in the recent past, with the role of Maoist provocateurs often discovered much later after the event. Some of the impeccable causes that were embraced in this cynical strategy include the caste conflict in Khairlanji and the escalating tensions and violence over displacement for major industrial or developmental projects, including those in Singur, Nandigram, and Kalinga Nagar, as well as the opportunistic mobilization in Lalgarh.

These various causes, as already noted, are impeccable. For the Maoists, however, they are an integral component of their strategy of political consolidation, necessarily leading to military mobilization, with no intrinsic value of their own. Army formation, the Maoists insist, is “the precondition for the new political power,” and “all this activity should serve to intensify and extend our armed struggle. Any joint activity or tactical alliances which do not serve the cause of the peoples’ war will be a futile exercise” [emphasis added].26

Ethnic Fundamentalists

Ethnicity-based insurgencies are endemic in India’s northeast region, with Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland being the worst-affected states. A ceasefire exists between the government and the two principal insurgent groups in Nagaland, and a negotiated solution is being sought to the half century–old insurgency in this state. Lesser insurgencies afflict Meghalaya, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh. There is a vast proliferation of ethnic insurgent groupings representing...

26 Ibid., 131.
progressively narrower tribal interests. However, the loss of life in the various insurgencies in the region has seen limited fluctuations within a broadly declining trend, with the exceptions of Manipur (currently the worst-affected state) and Assam. In Nagaland, fratricidal turf wars between rival insurgent groups are the principal killers. A majority of the surviving insurgencies in the region are “degraded”—large organized criminal operations focusing overwhelmingly on extortion, with little coherent ideological or political content or consistency.

The insurgencies in the region are compounded by, and often sourced in, the demographic destabilization that has continued virtually unchecked over the past century and has assumed particularly ominous overtones with the redrawing of political maps after India's partition. The border-management problem in Northeast India is gigantic. The Bangladesh border—a total of 4,095 kilometers long—is by far the most urgent and intractable crisis. Illegal migration, the existence of terrorist safe havens across the border (many of which have recently been dismantled by the Sheikh Hasina government), the growth and entrenchment of organized criminal gangs and syndicates with powerful political and communal influence and patronage along this border, and a strengthening network of well-funded institutions for the communal mobilization of the migrant community—particularly through a growing complex of mosques and madaris (Islamic schools)—are some of the dangerous trends that counterinsurgency forces are required to contend with in the region. Regrettably, the state's responses and policies in Northeast India have been characterized by a great deal of conceptual confusion, generating conflicting initiatives that have often proven counterproductive and whose cumulative impact has failed to contain the proliferation of violent political groups across wide geographical areas.

**Emerging Trends**

While Islamist terrorism will continue to dominate both Indian internal security concerns and international terrorist activities over the coming years, it will not exhaust such activities and concerns. In an uncertain future, the ideological contours of various movements may undergo transformation. Shifts may variously occur toward greater prominence of Islamist, left-wing, or ethnic terrorism. Most such movements, moreover, combine multiple and often conflicting ideological motivations, and this may produce hybrid groups sharing diverse ideologies. Nor can the emergence of religious terrorist groups from other faiths be entirely ruled out—and incipient evidence is even visible in the emergence of nascent Hindutva terrorism.

**Micro-Fractures**

In addition to, and sometimes overlapping with, the specific conflicts that India is currently experiencing, there is also a range of variables that have tremendous conflict potential, although they may only be fitfully or partially realized.

**Disruptive Development**

India's development offers one of the most dramatic studies in contrast. Despite the most extraordinary dynamism in certain thriving sectors of the economy—sectors that appear to have challenged the global financial meltdown with an exceptional measure of success—the reality
amply confirms Michael Renner’s phrase that “scarcity and abundance may very well coexist.”

To take some examples, India’s GDP grew from $331 billion in 1992 (the first year of reforms) to $978 billion in 2008, yet India’s current rank in the UN Human Development Index—126th—is abysmal, falling below Bolivia, Guatemala, and Gabon. In the Global Hunger Index, India ranks 94th out of just 118 countries—behind Ethiopia, among others. There were 48 Indians on Forbes’ 2012 list of billionaires, but 29.8% of the country’s population of 1.19 billion people lived on less than 22.43 rupees ($0.44) per day in rural areas and 28.65 rupees ($0.56) per day in urban areas in 2009–10. In absolute terms, on these official criteria, there were 355 million poor people. According to the 2011 Human Development Report, 41.6% people in India live on less than $1.25 per day, measured by PPP (purchasing power parity).

Developmental disjunctions have been dramatically in evidence in the recent past, particularly in the conflicts that have arisen around land acquisition for various industrial and special economic zone (SEZ) projects—most prominently in Nandigram and Singur—and in farmer suicides, which claimed as many as 16,632 lives in 2007 after 17,060 such suicides in 2006. The total number of farmer suicides during 1997–2007, according to P. Sainath, stands at a staggering 182,936 and is attributable principally to the fact that “peasant households in debt doubled in the first decade of the neoliberal ‘economic reforms,’ from 26% of farm households to 48.6%,” and that “predatory commercialization of the countryside devastated all other aspects of life for peasant farmer and landless workers,” provoking “the biggest displacement in our history.”

The essential lesson here is that “development” is not a smooth, unidirectional process that benefits all and harms none. Indeed, the processes of development within India mirror the broader disjunctions between a globalizing world order and states and societies that are progressively marginalized by or isolated from the processes of globalization. These disjunctions feed into cycles of local violence and radical mobilization across the ideological spectrum.

**Religious Fractures**

India has seen a sustained rise in the proportion of minority populations, particularly Muslims. The Muslim population increased by 2.74% between 1961 and 2001, from 10.69% to 13.43% of the population. There is, however, little danger of Hindus being turned into “a minority in their own land,” as some Hindu Right organizations claim, since both the Hindu and Muslim populations will attain their replacement levels by 2021 and 2031 respectively, and India’s total population is expected to stabilize toward the end of the current century with the Muslim population at 19% of the projected 1.7 billion. Given India’s history of communal polarization and violence, however, component shifts and local demographic transformations can have a significant destabilizing impact. This is particularly the case because—given the trauma of Partition, recurrent communal rioting, and rising extremism—Indian society and politics have yet to become “socially and emotionally secular,” despite constitutional secularism.

It is useful to note that over 80% of the Muslim population in India resides in just twelve states and union territories, and eight states—Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra, Assam, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir—have current Muslim populations of over

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5 million each. Of these states, five have international borders, while the remaining three are coastal states. Recent years have seen a growth of both Muslim and Hindu chauvinistic organizations, and there is also evidence of rising bigotry within other faiths. Indian Muslims have overwhelmingly resisted continuous efforts at subversion and radicalization. Nevertheless, given the global spread of militant Islamism, the increasing efforts of hostile neighbors to mobilize Muslims in proxy sub-conventional wars against India, and other patterns of political and criminal exploitation of communal sentiments, fringe elements within the community remain vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by terrorist and anti-state forces.

Clearly, areas with heavy Muslim concentrations would have greater vulnerabilities to such extremist mobilization, and such susceptibility would be compounded in those areas that lie along porous borders. The growth of madaris, particularly in areas where these are substantially foreign-funded, along and on both sides of India’s borders, is in this context a matter of deep concern, though only a small minority of all madaris in the country have been susceptible to radicalization. Migration from Bangladesh, while relatively insignificant in terms of numbers within an all-India context, has also had a major destabilizing impact, both because of the patterns of concentration of growth that it triggers and because of the ethnic and political sensitivities in border regions that it inflames.

Shifts in the communal distribution of population, as well as changing population profiles, create opportunities for the cynical manipulation of communal sentiments for short-term political objectives, and such proclivities contain significant potential for the aggravation of social tensions, greater polarization, and violence within the existing political context.

Nonreligious Political Mobilization

A second driver of ethnic mobilization in India is the appeal to caste and tribal identity, and this has become an entrenched element within the structural basis of political organization in the country. In 2001, the population of the Scheduled Castes (SC) stood at 166 million (16.2% of the total population), while the population of Scheduled Tribes (ST) stood at 83.6 million (8.1%). While census data on the Other Backward Castes (OBC) is unavailable, the Mandal Commission put the proportion of this category at 52% of the total population. The SC, ST, and OBC thus will likely remain central to a great deal of political mobilization over the coming decades, although it is also the case that emerging political and economic circumstances “may cause elites to downplay or discard the symbolic manipulation” of some of these categories over time. Nevertheless, the intensification of political competition as a result of overall population growth, competition over resources, and the destabilization of established equations of power between specific caste groups in some areas may result in the continued exploitation of caste and tribal identities.

Identity conflicts—both present and emerging—also have the potential to coalesce into other patterns of conflict, such as the mobilization under the Maoist banner, as has already occurred in many states in India’s east, where caste and tribal conflicts have been tapped by the spreading Maoist insurgency. Such patterns of conflict, which simultaneously harness identity and ideology for mass and violent mobilization, could see an extension over the coming decades.

30 There are several methodological difficulties with this figure, but in the absence of any other authoritative estimates or projections of growth patterns, this figure must be the statistic that guides assessments.

Population, Environment, Ecology, and Resource Conflicts

Environmental stresses and resource crises as a result of—all at once—population growth, overexploitation of the natural environment, consequential pollution from the irresponsible utilization of resources, and poor resource and waste management, have significant potential for conflict creation. Further, these factors constitute immediate risks in terms of the broader concept of human security, inflicting enormous distress on large populations and directly jeopardizing the country’s developmental potential. The declining per-capita availability of fresh water is one of the most urgent concerns in this context.

Urban-Rural Polarization

Rampaging and poorly managed urbanization is creating new and urgent security challenges. Urban vulnerability to political destabilization, terrorism, organized criminal violence, and administrative disorders has been one of the most underestimated aspects of urban development in India.

It is significant that the rising proportion of the population in urban centers—projected to rise from 27.8% in 2001 to 40% in 2020—will not result in any relief in rural India, where the population will increase from 742 million in 2001 to 810 million in 2020. As much as 63% of India’s population growth in the first quarter of the present century is expected to be in its most undeveloped states, increasing the share of these states in India’s population from 40% to 50%. These are the areas that have demonstrated the most rapid growth of disorder and misgovernance in the recent past. Moreover, the more progressive states of South India have “completed the demographic transition” with very low growth rates of population and an increasing age profile. This could provoke massive migration from the north to these states, and such migrants could take with them the culture of lawlessness and violence that afflicts so many of their states of origin.

Ghettoization has characterized the political economy of urban settlements in India, with ghettos marked by the “concentration of poverty and de-concentration of opportunity.”32 Caste, communal, and class ghettos are a consistent feature of most Indian cities and create the specter of the “gated city” in a tense standoff between sections of its own people. These broad aspects of the city have given rise to escalating trends in crime and a widening sphere of urban terrorism. The Indian city lends itself far more easily to terrorism than the orderly cities of the West and will prove infinitely more difficult to protect. The sheer size of some Indian cities (Delhi, for instance, has a population greater than 171 of the world’s 227 countries), the pervasive and insidious contempt for law, the scant regard for municipal regulations, the absolute anonymity provided by the city’s chaos and the lack of a centralized and comprehensive identity system, and the indulgent attitudes of officials have contributed to an air of encompassing license and disorder.33

Structures of Response

At the national level, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is charged with the maintenance of internal security and the responsibility of protecting states from “external aggression and internal disturbances” under Article 355 of the Constitution of India. Responsibility for maintenance of

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“public order” and “police,” under List II of the constitution (the State List), is, however, vested in the various state governments. This division of responsibility has created a fragmented system that has contributed enormously to the evasion of responsibility by both the central government and the states, and an enduring neglect of the internal security apparatus. The Union Government has the constitutional authority to seize control of a state under certain circumstances of a breakdown in public order (Articles 257, 258, 365, and 356), and a national emergency can also be declared under Article 352, if “a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India or of any part of the territory thereof is threatened, whether by war or external aggression or armed rebellion.”

Despite these apparently sweeping powers, there has been a progressive decline in the central government’s capacities to influence states on issues relating to internal security management, despite the very significant central outlays supporting police modernization, the augmentation of state security capacities, and the underwriting of the security-related expenditures of the states. The infirmities of the system were highlighted by the Group of Ministers’ 2001 report on internal security, which noted that constitutional, legal, and structural infirmities had “eroded the Union Government’s authority to deal effectively with any threat to the nation’s security” and called for the “appropriate restructuring of the MHA.” The report also underlined the growing incapacity of state governments to “deal with grave offences, which have inter-state and nationwide ramifications.”

The lack of sustained investment in and the neglect of the transforming role of the police within a modernizing state system has enormously compromised the capacities, efficiency, and effectiveness of state police organizations. Constant political interference and a subordination of legal mandate to partisan political objectives has undermined the ability of the police to deal effectively with internal security problems—a reality that was dramatically demonstrated in the rolling debacle of responses to the Mumbai attacks of November 2008. The infirmity of the states’ internal security apparatuses has resulted in a constant clamor for central assistance and the “paramilitary panacea”—the deployment of increasing numbers of Central Paramilitary Forces (CPMF) in local disorders across the country. However, there has been no parallel enthusiasm for any alteration of the constitutional scheme to create a more balanced system of sharing control over the law-and-order apparatus.

It is useful here to provide a brief overview of the internal security apparatus within the jurisdiction, respectively, of the central government and the states. The central government’s MHA presides over a multiplicity of CPMFs, most prominently the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the largest of these forces, with 260,873 personnel in 2007. The CRPF is a “striking reserve to assist the State/Union Territories in Police operations to maintain law and order and contain insurgency,” and in 2006 it was designated the “lead agency” to respond to terrorism and insurgency in the country. It has been used in a wide range of operations, including the guarding of vital government installations and establishments, VIP security, crowd and riot control, rescue and relief operations following natural calamities, border management, and counterinsurgency (CI) and counterterrorism (CT).

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35 See, for instance, Ajai Sahni, “CT Scan,” Defence and Security of India 1, no. 3 (2008).
36 Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs, “Annual Report 2007–08,” 151. An additional 38 battalions were sanctioned in 2009, though only a small fraction of these are currently being raised.
Other CPMFs that play a prominent role in the more acute aspects of internal security management include the Assam Rifles (strength: 65,290), the Border Security Force (210,261), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (50,326), the Central Industrial Security Force (103,860), the Sashastra Seema Bal (armed border police: 48,934), and the National Security Guard (7,334). Total CPMF strength in 2007 was 746,978. In October 2008, reacting to a succession of high-profile terrorist attacks across the country, including a series of attacks in New Delhi in September, then home minister Shivraj Patil announced a 50% augmentation of CPMF strength, taking total strength of forces from about 800,000 to 1.2 million over the succeeding five years.

The MHA also supervises India’s principal domestic intelligence agency, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), which operates across the country through its network of subsidiary intelligence bureaus. In addition to its intelligence-gathering functions across a wide range of parameters—including terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime—the IB also liaises with both central and state police agencies, as well as military intelligence and India’s external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing.

The MHA also maintains a range of specialized technical, forensic, training, and research organizations in support of internal security and policing operations for both central and state organizations. In addition, the National Technical Research Organisation, operating under the national security adviser in the prime minister’s office, provides specialized technical intelligence flows to both internal and external security agencies.

The principal instrument for the projection of a coherent Indian framework of internal security management is the centralized Indian Police Service (IPS), which provides the top leadership cadre for almost all central and state police, paramilitary, and intelligence organizations.

In addition to the various central organizations explicitly involved in internal security operations, forces drawn from the 1.1 million–strong Indian Army can also be called “in aid to civil authority” to deal with a wide range of emergencies and crises, including “maintenance of law and order, maintenance of essential services, disaster relief and other types of assistance.” The army has been deployed over extended periods in theaters of terrorism and insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir and several other states in India’s northeast region. It has also provided assistance for the maintenance of law and order in a range of crises. Central forces and organizations, however, are only intended to provide “assistance” to the internal security apparatus of the states in “emergencies”—though many of the situations originally conceived as emergencies have transformed over time into chronic crises.

It is not the intention here to give a detailed account of the security apparatus in India’s many states and union territories. In aggregate, the strength of state police organizations across the country totals 1,425,181, of which 1,095,818 are in the civil police and 329,363 are in the armed police contingents.

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38 See the official website of the Indian Army, http://indianarmy.nic.in.
Capacity Crunch

While the preceding outline of central and state forces and organizations available for internal security management creates an illusion of great strength, the reality is that India is afflicted by an acute crisis of capacity. At the qualitative level, political interference and corruption have penetrated every level of police administration—recruitments, appointments, transfers, promotions, and the day-to-day functioning of the police. The command and control structures of the state police have been deeply compromised, even as communal and caste considerations further undermine the professionalism and effectiveness of the police forces. The result has been a progressive decline—and, in some states, even a collapse—of policing. Insufficient investment in policing over decades has also created gross deficits of capacities, even as the quality of manpower and training—particularly at leadership levels—has declined. K.P.S. Gill notes:

Our current problems are not a consequence of our current failings. They are rooted in the inability of the police and political leadership of our past to anticipate entirely predictable transformations, and to initiate the requisite responses two, three, even five decades ago...Primitive policing practices are reflected in poor rates of conviction, in deteriorating efficiency and effectiveness, and consequently in a declining respect for the law. This is the essence of the malady.

The direct consequence of the decline in state police formations has been the growing demand for central forces on the first signs of mass violence or disorder. With crises compounding, and despite a continuous enlargement of central forces, these forces are increasingly overstretched, with rising evidence of stress, dilution of standards of training and consequent retraining, and a lack of relief from stressful tours of duty. Discipline and professionalism have inevitably been adversely impacted, even as command and control systems lose their efficacy.

Worse, the tendency of the authorities to fall back constantly on the paramilitary forces and the army for the conduct of major internal security operations further erodes the standing, authority, and legitimacy of the state police with the general public and also contributes to dwindling capacities and confidence levels within the police. In protracted CT and CI campaigns, the local police, who possess greater familiarity with the terrain and the mindset of the actors involved, as well as infinitely better potential to create intelligence resources in local communities, could be the state’s strongest asset. Regrettably, they remain sidelined or in the best of circumstances have played a subsidiary role (with occasional exceptions).

The crisis of the police has been widely and repeatedly recognized at the national level, with numerous national and state police commissions calling for sweeping reforms. Unfortunately, government initiatives in implementing their many recommendations have been worse than tardy. The Supreme Court of India finally intervened in September 2006 with a seven-point directive to immediately secure compliance on a small set of recommendations by the National Police Commission. While this decree was widely welcomed both by the police leadership and the country’s intelligentsia, a section of opinion suggests that the “cafeteria approach” to police reform—i.e., cherry-picking a handful of elements, focusing particularly on political interference, accountability, and specific elements of the organizational structure (such as the separation of law

and order from investigative functions)—can do little to equip the police for facing the challenges of modern law-and-order management, particularly the rising threat of armed political violence and terrorism. There is, moreover, at least some disagreement about whether the recommendations of various police commissions retain relevance and validity in the rapidly changing circumstances of the 21st century, with insurgency, sub-conventional warfare, and terrorism—and the rising specters of WMD terrorism and cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism—increasingly intruding into, if not dominating, any realistic agenda of policing. These deficiencies are compounded further by a criminal justice system that teeters on the verge of collapse, with endemic delays marking the judicial process, and convictions, even for heinous crimes, more an exception than the rule. The conviction rate for all violent crime in 2010, for instance, stood at 27.7%.

Perhaps the most visible and dramatic index of the crisis in policing is the general deficit of manpower in all ranks of the police, both in absolute numbers of sanctioned posts and in the numbers of vacancies that exist against such sanctioned posts. At the level of police leadership, according to the MHA data on the shortage of IPS officers, there is a 28.11% deficiency in the number of IPS officers in position (as of January 1, 2011), against sanctioned strengths, and worse, most states feel that the sanctioned strength is deficient. The overall crisis of manpower in the police is even more acute. According to norms set by the United Nations, a minimum police-to-population ratio of 1 to 450 (222 per 100,000) should be maintained for peacetime policing. Most Western countries maintain ratios well above this minimum standard; for instance, the ratio is as high as 559 per 100,000 in Italy and 465 per 100,000 in Portugal. Significantly, most of these countries have policing needs that are certainly less demanding than those confronting India, where the culture of the rule of law is far from entrenched and virtually all compliance needs enforcement. Yet, India’s police-to-population ratio stands at a bare 125 per 100,000.

As stated above, the army tends to be frequently called “in aid to civil authority” in a multiplicity of crises and has seen protracted deployment in several theaters of terrorism and insurgency. Despite the frequent boast that India has the second-largest standing army in the world, the fact is that the country is acutely under-militarized in terms of its demography and strategic vulnerabilities. Without going into wider issues of the quality of forces available, weaponry, technology, and other factors, it is useful to look at the most basic variable, the ratio of military personnel to population. As can be seen in Table 1, India’s troops-to-population ratio of nearly 1 to 898 is among the worst in the major countries of the world and in South Asia.

As internal security crises multiply, this figure will become crucial. In the past, India’s capacity to deal with emergent insurgencies and disorders has relied on the reserve capacity of CPMFs and the army, which allows a rapid redeployment of forces to tackle any abrupt crisis. However, with a continuous expansion of the theaters of violence and the consolidation of the “protracted war” model of conflict, these reserve capacities are already under severe strain, and there is currently little residual surplus. The augmentation of permanent capacities to deal with any and all projected

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internal and external security threats is, consequently, an imperative if India’s future is to be secured in a planned and ordered trajectory.

As with the larger administrative apparatus in India, there has been a long, slow process of deterioration in India’s intelligence capabilities—perhaps not in absolute terms, but certainly in terms of capacities—lagging well behind the magnitude and pace of emerging challenges. The November 26 attacks in Mumbai were thus blamed by many on apparently conspicuous “intelligence failures,” as has been the case in the wake of virtually every major terrorist attack in India. Despite significant successes,45 India’s intelligence coverage is, at best, paper-thin. This is hardly news now. The Kargil crisis of 1999 exposed glaring gaps in India’s intelligence capacities and establishments. The Kargil Committee Report commented strongly on this loss of field intelligence and the calamitous impact it had on national security. The report called for a massive upgrading of technical, imaging, signal, and electronic counter-intelligence and economic intelligence capabilities, plus a system-wide reform of conventional human-intelligence gathering. Every suggestion in the report was accepted by the Group of Ministers, who released their recommendations in February 2001.

The recommendations of the Kargil report remained overwhelmingly unimplemented until the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, beyond a few symbolic changes. Since 2009, however, urgent efforts to operationalize the Multi Agency Centre (MAC) and the Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) have been initiated. MAC is charged with collecting and coordinating terrorism-related information from across the country, while the JTFI is responsible for passing on this information to the state governments in real time.

Yet despite urgent efforts to expedite these projects, directly spearheaded by Home Minister P. Chidambaram, the principal objective—the creation of a national crime and terrorism database—is still far from attainment. Crucially, the gap between capacities and needs has grown over the years. India’s intelligence penetration is severely inadequate and overwhelmingly limited to urban areas and strategic locations, leaving the vast hinterlands uncovered. After the September 2008

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attacks in New Delhi and the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai, the Union Home Ministry did announce a series of measures, including modernization plans for the IB and the sanctioning of an additional 6,000 personnel in the organization. Structural impediments continue to hobble the implementation of these measures.

Principles of Response

Endemic infirmity infects the Indian security and justice systems, and there is little public confidence today in the capacities and will of the central and state governments to effectively impose the rule of law in the country. It is not possible to examine the health of India’s policing and security systems in any detail here. Nevertheless, with respect to the most significant of internal security challenges—specifically, terrorism and insurgency—it is useful to outline some elements of the Indian experience.

By and large, the emergence of the threat of terrorism or insurgency in new theaters has been met with initial collapse at the level of the states and by an “emergency response” paradigm, often mocked as the “battalion approach,” comprising the shuffling around of Central Paramilitary Forces. But India’s crises of internal security can no longer be appropriately envisaged as transient “emergencies.” They have acquired the nature of a permanent crisis or a chronic succession of crises that cannot be met with the abrupt reallocation or concentration of existing capacities to particular locations. In this sense, the very paradigm of an emergency response approach to internal security crises has collapsed. A tremendous effort of basic capacity-building must precede any attempts to deal effectively with existing and emerging challenges in this context.

This, indeed, has been the clear lesson of CT and CI experiences in India, of which the country has a great deal. Regrettably, a pervasive historical amnesia and an absence of institutional memory have resulted in the forgetting of the most important experiences in a multiplicity of theaters. The experiences in three major and extraordinarily successful campaigns across widely dissimilar theaters hold crucial lessons in this context. The movement for Khalistan in Punjab commenced with a great deal of collusive political mischief and sporadic acts of violence in 1978 and augmented gradually thereafter, to peak with as many as 5,265 fatalities in 1991. A succession of security debacles—including the disastrous Operation Blue Star, which alienated large sections of the Sikh community, the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the anti-Sikh pogrom that followed—brought Punjab to the very edge of separation, thanks to a movement enthusiastically supported across the border in Pakistan. Between 1981 and 1993, a total of 21,443 persons were killed, including 11,694 civilians, 1,746 security-force personnel, and 8,003 terrorists. By 1993, however, the “armies of Khalistan” had been comprehensively defeated by an extraordinary police-led campaign headed by K.P.S. Gill, and there was “no more than a tattered rump of survivors left, most of them skulking in Pakistan.”

The tiny northeastern state of Tripura (2001 population: 3.2 million) suffered from sporadic insurgencies during 1948–51 and 1967–68 and has experienced continuous troubles since 1978.

47 All data is from the South Asia Terrorism Portal, Institute for Conflict Management, http://www.satp.org.
Crucially, the militancy in Tripura found active support and safe haven in adjacent Bangladesh, with which the state shares as much as 84% of its total border, and it was largely thought of as “insoluble,” since, as Chief Minister Manik Sarkar expressed on June 18, 2003, “militancy in Tripura is more of an external than internal affair.”\footnote{We Need Central Help for Tackling ISI-Aided Terror,” Pioneer, June 18, 2003.} Within three years of this declaration, however, the militant groups had been decimated and the insurgency virtually ended under the exceptional command of the state’s director general of police, G.M. Srivastava.\footnote{For a detailed study, see “Project Report on Insurgency and Special Challenges to Policing in India’s Northeast: A Case Study of the Tripura Police,” prepared by the Institute for Conflict Management for the Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2007.} At its peak in the year 2000, as many as 514 fatalities occurred in Tripura. Between 1997 and 2004, the state witnessed 2,278 insurgency-related fatalities. By 2005, fatalities were down to double digits at 73, and declined further to 60 (including 30 militants) in 2006, 36 (including 21 terrorists) in 2007, 28 (including 17 terrorists) in 2008, 11 (including 1 terrorist) in 2009, 3 (including 1 terrorist) in 2010, and 1 civilian in 2011.

Andhra Pradesh has been a dominant locus of left-wing extremism, Naxalism, or Maoism for decades, well before the original Naxalite movement was sparked in 1967 in Naxalbari in West Bengal, and the state has been the principal source of the resurgence of the movement since 1980. By 2004, every one of Andhra Pradesh’s 23 districts was afflicted by Maoist activities. With occasional politically engineered deviations—such as the disastrous “peace talks” of 2004—the state had long accounted for the bulk of all LWE-related fatalities in India. As recently as 2006, it accounted for 147 of a total of 463 fatalities (31.75%); in 2005, this figure was 320 of 717 (44.63%). The numbers were often much higher in earlier years, with 508 fatalities in the state in 1998 and 483 in 1992, the worst years on record. However, these numbers dropped to just 73 out of 650 in the year 2007, 66 out of 638 in 2008, 28 out of 997 in 2009, 33 out of 1,180 in 2010, and 10 out of 602 in 2011. CPI-Maoist Central Committee documents recovered by the police in July-August 2007 conceded that the party had been forced into a “tactical retreat” in Andhra Pradesh, with a “gradual decline of the movement finally resulting in a temporary setback in the State as a whole.”\footnote{See, for example, N. Rahul, “Andhra Pradesh: Down But Not Out,” Frontline 24, no.18 (2007), http://www.lonnet.com/l2418/stories/2007092150061000.htm.} At the core of the turnaround was a sustained reorientation of the Andhra Pradesh police force under a succession of outstanding commanders, creating the capacities necessary to tackle the Maoists on their own terms, in their most established strongholds.

It is not possible here to review the operational details of each of the widely divergent campaigns that secured these three dramatic successes. Crucially, however, despite large variations in context and tactics, critical strategic continuities marked each campaign, with Tripura and Andhra Pradesh clearly following principles that were applied and developed in Punjab. The component principles of the broad approach that marked all three campaigns and that would constitute the underlying structure of all CI-CT responses, include the following:

1. **Crystallization of political will and mandate.** Vacillation and a policy of drift is the default setting of the Indian establishment when confronted with each new crisis. This setting has persisted in many theaters for decades. Each CI-CT success, however, has been preceded by an abrupt—even if transient—refocusing of political resolve and the communication of a clear set of objectives and necessary mandate to the security leadership. Absent such clarity and
commitment, security forces may win numerous battles against terrorists and insurgents but have no capacity to win the war.

2. **Leadership.** Leadership has historically been one of the principal determinants of the outcome of war. The trajectory of CI responses in Punjab, Tripura, and Andhra Pradesh was closely linked to the transfer of command, and in substantial measure reflected the particular vision, dynamism, and motivation of the incumbent director general of police. During the decisive period of the countinsurgency campaigns, the top police leadership in these states established a model of leadership from the front, extensively touring areas of insurgent dominance and inspiring the rank and file of the forces by example.

3. **Police-led response.** Police primacy was the template within which all force disposition took place in each of these theaters, and final responsibility for maintenance of peace and order was vested in the superintendent of police of the particular district. The army, where deployed (the army has no role in the anti-Maoist campaigns in Andhra Pradesh or elsewhere), operated within strategies jointly evolved with the police command, supporting the police, who performed the principal CT tasks.

4. **Capacity creation.** The core of the response was the creation of sufficient capacities—the "conditions of victory"—that were necessary to deal with the challenge. Vast augmentations of police strength in Punjab and Tripura (though not in Andhra Pradesh) and of police capabilities, through training, equipment, weaponry, mobility, fortification of police stations and posts, and—crucially—orientation, gave the security forces the cutting edge over the insurgent and terrorist forces.

5. **Intelligence-led operations.** Tremendous emphasis on creating effective structures of intelligence-gathering and real-time dissemination to response units was the hallmark of each campaign, and is indispensable in any CI-CT war.

6. **Inter-force coordination.** Civil, armed, and intelligence wings of the police operated in close coordination with CPMFs and the army.

7. **Capacity surge.** Surge mechanisms were established for the augmentation of police capacities across the affected areas, ensuring that an emerging deficit was quickly met to guarantee an overwhelming response to any terrorist challenge.

8. **Security grids.** Deployment was designed across interlocking layers or grids of general and mission-specific forces, reinforcing existing structures of civil policing.

9. **Offensive capabilities.** A progressive transition from defensive to offensive operations was engineered as SF capacities were augmented.

10. **Containment across borders.** Both Punjab and Tripura had major problems with the infiltration of terrorists and insurgents across their borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively. Both states fenced off these borders and developed effective measures for border management, which included the additional deployment of forces and the creation of village resistance parties (VRP) in vulnerable areas, successfully blocking off the movement of infiltrators and generating improved intelligence flows to the forces.

11. **Decentralization.** Counterinsurgency was recognized as a “small commander’s war.” Consequently, enabling the first responders was the objective of the state leadership. It was clearly acknowledged that CI campaigns were not amenable to centralized command.

12. **Strategic gains.** The cumulative impact of these various measures rapidly translated into campaigns based on the classic strategic virtues of endurance, projection, mobility, and dominance.
These campaigns clearly recognized that CI-CT campaigns are principally protracted conflicts and that a tremendous effort of basic capacity-building has to precede any attempts to deal effectively and proactively with existing and emerging challenges. The underpinnings of any such fundamental effort of reconstruction must be a clear and utterly unambiguous statement of a policy perspective on terrorism and insurgency. The current establishment’s assessments and understanding of terrorism are riddled with internal contradictions that yield incongruous, wasteful, and conflicting policy impulses. Unless there is greater conceptual clarity on the nature of the beast, there is little possibility of coherence and efficiency in responses.

The institutional apparatus of governance must consequently be equipped to engage in the continuous assessment and analysis of existing and emerging threats, coordinate flows and maximize utilization of available intelligence and resources from a multiplicity of agencies, continuously define policies and protocols for response to each new area or pattern of terrorist activity, and ensure that these are translated into action by the appropriate agency, division, and department of government.

This apparatus must also be backed with a suitable legal mandate and necessary legislation for effective CI-CT action. Mere legislation, however, will prove ineffective, if not meaningless, within the current and degraded justice system in India, where policing, investigative, and prosecuting agencies lack even minimal means and capacities to execute their responsibilities, where witnesses are routinely intimidated and eliminated in the absence of any effective witness protection regime, and where the judicial processes routinely take decades to arrive at a determination—a time frame that is entirely irrelevant within a CI-CT calculus.

CI-CT is a small commander’s war. The role of policy and generalship is to materially and psychologically empower the first responders to deal with all foreseeable contingencies. Centralization of responses and intelligence networks detracts from the efficiency of the CT response. There must, consequently, be a comprehensive decentralization of capacities of response. Force capabilities at police stations and police posts, and at the CPMF company and platoon levels, have to be adequate to respond to every foreseeable eventuality, and the necessary tactical and technological capabilities must be created for immediate responses at this level.

The capacities that are thus created must be deployed within the context of established crisis command structures, a clear chain of accountability and detailed systemic and protocol mechanisms that define strategic goals and tactical objectives in the wake of an incident, graded minimal responses, incident priorities, emergency communication systems, and protocols for notification and coordination. Finally, effective systems for coordination of forces and optimal sharing of intelligence between agencies and departments must be created at the operational level.

How India Survives—and Thrives

It is clear that India’s capacity to secure itself from both external and internal threats is severely deficient, and this deficit is infinitely compounded by infirmities of governance and of the country’s social infrastructure. “The harsh truth,” Gill notes, “is that the weak are never

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52 See, for instance, Ajai Sahni, “Challenging Terrorism,” in India and Global Affairs 2, no. 2 (2009).
India’s vulnerabilities tempt her enemies—both internal and external—to repeated and sustained misadventures, and this is the single most critical factor that underpins the major security threats that confront the country.

This dismal picture is, in some measure, balanced out by India’s extraordinary growth in the recent past and the economic and political resilience that the country has demonstrated in the face of recurring challenges. Financial resource deficits that threatened the very possibility of resolving the country’s many problems are a thing of the past, though a range of other structural impediments persist. There is a real danger, however, that widening spheres of disorder may come to threaten the dynamic core on which India’s successes and future potential are founded.

Nevertheless, a range of factors constrain the scope of extremism in India and favor—although they cannot guarantee—broad stability. Critically, while cyclical conflagrations and radicalization on the fringes—variously supported by external powers and internal elements—remain a reality, extremism fails to secure sufficient traction among the masses to present a coherent and national challenge to the state. The reasons are many. Chief among them is a cultural proclivity to nonviolence, or at least a rejection of extreme violence. The constitutional edifice, for all its political neglect, is extraordinarily inclusive. Democratic processes, imperfect and even occasionally perverse as they are, do create the spaces for the articulation of grievances and the relatively peaceful expression of political discontent. The sheer diversity of the population is a source of manifold frictions, but it also prevents mobilization on a national scale under any single divisive or extremist banner. These and other structural and cultural factors constrain even radical players from their greatest excesses. Thus, for instance, electoral considerations have repeatedly forced the Hindu (majority) Right to accommodate Muslim (minority) concerns. Parties that exploit narrow caste mobilization find it necessary to progressively widen their caste base as their electoral successes open up a larger regional or national platform. Similarly, even where some state agencies have colluded with extremist elements—as, for instance, in the Gujarat riots of 2002—constitutional checks and balances do eventually reassert themselves to bring offenders to some measure of justice.

India’s many contradictions will not simply vanish in the proximate future. The state’s natural responses to crises have historically been sluggish, incoherent, vacillating, and uncertain. The lack of a strategic culture is widely recognized. Nevertheless, deep national, psychological, and civilizational reserves manifest themselves in the face of catastrophic emergencies. Indeed, India has an extraordinary record of defeating a number of the most virulent insurgencies and terrorist movements and of exhausting and outlasting the country’s many adversaries. Harnessing complex national reserves to adopt coherent national perspectives and policies remains a crucial challenge, but it is clear, especially in the wake of the November 26, 2008, attacks in Mumbai and the rising challenge of the Maoist insurgency, that the national leadership now recognizes the core imperatives of response.

Successes in certain spheres—especially in the realms of economic growth and globalization—over the past decade and a half have also fed a surge in confidence, a relative augmentation of competence, and the launch of a wide range of initiatives intended to address the country’s cumulative deficits. While the initial impact has been limited, this combination of factors is expected to snowball once it secures a certain critical mass. Crucially, with a vibrant (and

sometimes raucous) democracy, substantially non-doctrinaire economic perspectives, progressive engagement with modernity and a globalizing order, and a culture of tolerance and pragmatism, the Indian people have positioned themselves on the right side of history. This reality, above all else, warrants the expectation that India, despite a degree of policy incoherence and iterative cycles of failure, will not only endure but flourish.
Managing Multipolarity: India’s Security Strategy in a Changing World

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay discusses the impact of the emerging multipolar world on the foreign and national security policies of India and examines the new imperatives for India to go beyond its enduring strategy of nonalignment.

MAIN FINDINGS

- India, which began its quest for a multipolar world amid fears of American hegemony after the Cold War, is now faced with the prospect of a unipolar Asia that is dominated by China.
- India’s strategy of engagement with all other great powers without having to choose between them paid rich dividends in the first two decades after the Cold War but is not sustainable in the future.
- The compulsions for looking beyond nonalignment do not stem from a prior recasting of India’s foreign policy principles but rather from adapting to the regional consequences of China’s rise for India’s extended neighborhood and to a range of global issues.
- While the logic of circumstances will eventually drive New Delhi closer to Washington, there may be many detours along the way.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- As India rethinks its national security strategy amid the rise of China, the U.S. will have to find ways to deal with New Delhi that are different from its standard approaches to other partners and allies.
- The Obama administration has reaffirmed former president George W. Bush’s commitment to assist India’s rise to power, but must find effective ways to translate that proposition into reality, especially in the domain of defense and security.
- Building on their converging interests in the Indian Ocean and East Asia, New Delhi and Washington must develop a measure of strategic coordination in the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and the “Af-Pak” region.
Since the end of the Cold War, India has steadily improved its relative power position both in the international system and in the theater of primary concern to New Delhi—Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral—thanks to economic reforms and the resulting high-growth rates, which reached an impressive 9% per annum in the mid-2000s. The global economic recession that enveloped the world in 2007 and the fading will in New Delhi for economic reforms slowed the nation’s growth to about 7% in 2011. Even at this reduced pace of growth, India is likely to consolidate its position as one of the world’s leading economies. The country will most certainly move further up from its ranking in 2011 as the ninth-largest economy in the world. With more rapid growth came the necessary financial resources to craft a more ambitious national security strategy. A faster pace of economic development meant that India had the resources for a significant modernization of its armed forces and the development of a range of instruments to convert its growing capabilities into influence. As it broke loose from many of the constraints that had held it back for decades, New Delhi had the opportunity to simultaneously improve relations with all the great powers and the major regional actors in Asia. The image of an emerging India ready to take its rightful position on the world stage gained ground. Yet India will confront significant new challenges arising from the changing nature of the international system.

This essay focuses on one of the challenges at the systemic level—a major change in the distribution of power. Although India’s own emergence as a global power contributes to the reordering of the international hierarchy, the faster and more dramatic rise of China, the relative decline of European powers and Japan, and growing doubts about the United States’ ability to sustain its primacy after the global financial crisis are generating an international environment that will test many of the current premises of Indian foreign and national security policy. This essay is divided into six sections. The first section reviews the unfolding redistribution of global economic power and implications of the emerging multipolar world for India’s international prospects. The second and third sections deal with India’s changing great-power relations. The second section assesses the evolution of India’s ties with Russia, Japan, and Europe after the Cold War, while the third section focuses in particular on the triangular relationship between New Delhi, Beijing, and Washington, which is emerging as the principal dynamic of India’s national security strategy. The fourth section examines the intersection between the triangular dynamic and the geopolitical situation in India’s neighborhood—from Southwest Asia to East Asia through Central and South Asia. The fifth section then looks beyond the regional level at global issues in the Sino-Indian rivalry and how the United States relates to them.

The sixth and final section parses the paradoxical consequences of India’s goal of multipolarity since the end of the Cold War. India, which began pursuing a multipolar policy amid fears of a unipolar world dominated by the United States, is now scrambling to cope with the extraordinary rise of Chinese power and ensure a measure of multipolarity in Asia and the Indian Ocean. This essay concludes that the emerging international and regional distribution of power in favor of China will compel India to abandon the policy of multidirectional engagement and make consequential choices about deepening the strategic partnership with the United States. The pace and scope of India’s transition toward the West will indeed depend on how Washington views New Delhi and

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1 For recent surveys of India’s foreign policy, see Ashok Kapur, India—From Regional to World Power (London: Routledge, 2006); and Harsh Pant, Contemporary Debates in India’s Foreign and Security Policy: India Negotiates Its Rise in the International System (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
Beijing. While the short-term temptations of hedging are real in Washington, over the longer term Washington too might have no choice but to invest in stronger security cooperation with India.

**India in a Multipolar World**

Since the end of the Cold War, India’s grand strategy has concentrated on two important and seemingly contradictory objectives. One is to limit the vulnerabilities that it senses in a unipolar world dominated by the United States by seeking a new partnership with Washington, and the other objective is to promote the construction of a multipolar world with India as one of the poles. Put another way, this strategy involved India befriending the United States as well as building insurance against U.S. hostility. During the last two decades, India did not have to choose between these two approaches. It had the luxury of fusing them by pursuing multidirectional engagement of all the powers while pushing forward wherever an opportunity arose. Because India’s relations with all the great powers, except Russia, were well below their potential during the Cold War, New Delhi has rapidly expanded cooperation with all of them in the last two decades. Meanwhile, the objective of a multipolar world, which seemed largely elusive at the end of the Cold War, seems a lot closer today. This has had little to do with India’s foreign policy design but significantly to do with its economic growth—and even more fundamentally, with the three decades of double-digit growth in China and the economic crisis in the West.

Two reports from the U.S. intelligence community highlight the consequential nature of the unfolding changes in the international power distribution favoring the non-Western world in general and Asia in particular. The first report, released at the end of 2004, argued that Western Europe, Japan, and Russia were relatively declining and that China and India were rapidly rising in the international system. The study pointed out that “by 2020 China’s gross national product (GNP) will exceed that of individual Western economic powers except for the United States. India’s GNP will have overtaken or be on the threshold of overtaking European economies.”\(^2\) It went on to suggest that China and India could be powerful long before they are rich by Western standards: “Because of the sheer size of China’s and India’s populations—projected by the U.S. Census Bureau to be 1.4 billion and almost 1.3 billion respectively by 2020—their standard of living need not approach Western levels for these countries to become important economic powers.” The report, titled “Mapping the Global Future,” argued that the shifting global power balance would “render obsolete the old categories of East and West, North and South, aligned and non-aligned, developed and developing. Traditional geographic groupings will increasingly lose salience in international relations...competition for allegiances will be more open, less fixed than in the past.”\(^3\)

The second report, released in 2008 by the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC), was even more dramatic in its emphasis on the rise of China and India and the accelerated trends toward a multipolar world. Released in the wake of the economic recession, “Global Trends 2025” argued that “in terms of size, speed, and directional flow, the transfer of global wealth and economic power now underway—roughly from West to East—is without precedent in modern history.” The report suggested that China would be one of the world’s leading military powers and could be its

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3 NIC, “Mapping the Global Future.”
largest importer of natural resources and biggest polluter. It also indicated that India will not be too far behind China in these trends and will contribute to the emergence of a multipolar world.\(^4\)

Analysts argue that the global financial crisis that enveloped the entire world at the end of 2008 will only accelerate the trends toward multipolarity and offer significant relative economic and strategic gains for China and India. A former Wall Street banker and former senior White House official observes:

> The financial and economic crash of 2008, the worst in over 75 years, is a major geopolitical setback for the United States and Europe….Although China, too, has been hurt by the crisis, its economic and financial power has been strengthened relative to those of the West. China’s global influence will thus increase, and Beijing will be able to undertake political and economic initiatives to increase it further….India may also survive the crisis relatively unhurt….But India does not have nearly the wealth or the internal cohesion of China….and [is] not particularly equipped to advance its geopolitical standing.\(^5\)

That New Delhi may not be in a position to take full advantage of this power shift in favor of China and India is not widely contested in India and reflects the enduring skepticism about its ability to seize moments of strategic opportunity. The country’s inability to fully leverage the emerging multipolar environment is linked not just to the lack of purposefulness and coherence in New Delhi. It is also related to the structure of the emerging international system and the choices that other important players might make.

As New Delhi debates its choices, political realism would suggest that the rapid rise of China and the seemingly inevitable decline of the United States temper much of India’s recent enthusiasm for promoting multipolarity. If a multipolar world implies an inexorable drift toward a unipolar Asia, there is little reason for India to cheer. That, in turn, raises the question of how India manages the shifting dynamic among the great powers, especially between China and the United States, which is likely to define the international security environment in the early decades of the 21st century.

**India’s Great-Power Relations**

The collapse of its only real strategic partner during the Cold War, the Soviet Union, forced New Delhi to start rebuilding its great-power relations from scratch. Not only was the change of economic orientation at the turn of the 1990s traumatic, occurring amid the bankruptcy of the old order, but it had to be engineered at a time of profound political instability, worsening internal security, and growing tension with Pakistan over Kashmir. Given the difficult conditions under which India had to reorganize its foreign relations at the end of the Cold War, there is no denying the significant achievements of the last two decades. Patient and persistent efforts at cultivating the relationships with great powers, in retrospect, were broadly successful. Central to New Delhi’s great-power diplomacy since the end of the Cold War has been outreach to the United States and China. At the same time, India has revived its partnership with Russia, reached out to Japan, and discovered the emerging European Union (EU). This section will examine the evolution of the country’s relations with these great powers.


Reviving the Russian Partnership

As they both looked to the West in the early 1990s, there seemed little to bind New Delhi and Moscow in the post–Cold War world. New Delhi nevertheless persisted, especially given that India imports nearly 70% of its arms from Russia. As the old order of defense production and supply seemed to collapse, India was determined to salvage what it could. Even more important was the need to protect cooperation with Moscow in such strategic sectors as nuclear and space from the turbulence within Russia and the pressures from without. Washington was mounting relentless pressure on Moscow to sever its nuclear and space cooperation with India. With the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty on Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in the dustbin of history, India took the initiative to draft a new partnership agreement with Russia in 1993 and persuaded then president Boris Yeltsin to sign off on it. By maintaining the engagement with critical state agencies in Russia, New Delhi succeeded in preserving the core of the relationship during the 1990s. When the nationalists led by Vladimir Putin regained power in Moscow at the turn of the new century, India's faith in the relationship seemed to pay off. Dissatisfied with the West and determined to rearm its role as a great power, Putin was ready to devote the political energy necessary for Russia to rebuild strategic ties with India, rejuvenate defense cooperation, and re-emerge as India's main provider of strategic technologies, including the development of cryogenic rockets and nuclear submarines.

While the partnership with Russia was of great value to India throughout the 2000s, it was not without its share of problems. The assertion of Russia vis-à-vis the United States meant that India had to once again look over its shoulder as it engaged Washington on major international issues. Take, for example, missile defense. When the George W. Bush administration announced its controversial missile defense initiative in May 2001, India was the first among the few countries to endorse the idea. As demands of political correctness at home and pressure from Russia mounted, India tended to be less enthusiastic about the initiative in public, even as its own missile defense program gathered momentum. India was also uncomfortable with the direction and pace of the Russian initiative to build a “strategic triangle” that would mobilize New Delhi, Beijing, and Moscow in limiting the dominance of the United States on global affairs. While the broad theme of multipolarity appeared to be in sync with India's interests, New Delhi believed, as the weakest of the three powers, that such an approach would only help China and Russia improve their leverage with the United States. New Delhi also understood that China would be the main beneficiary of Russian fulminations against Washington. The diplomacy of the strategic triangle underlined for Indian decision-makers the challenges of multipolar diplomacy.

On another front, the Indian armed forces began to get restive at the many continuing complications in the defense collaboration with Russia. Moscow, which had found the Indian market useful when the Russian defense industry was down and out, was now focused more on the priority of equipping its own armed forces. Delays in supplies, a huge price escalation, and technological glitches in defense procurement from Russia made the Indian armed forces furious as they began to see the attractive possibilities of sourcing weapons from the United States. When India's then chief of naval staff Admiral Sureesh Mehta went public at the end of 2007 with his complaints against the Russian defense industry, a major political taboo was broken.

political establishment, as well as the civilian leadership in the foreign and defense ministries, was in no mood to sour the relationship with Russia. For them, Russia was a reliable source for advanced defense technologies not available elsewhere—for example, in the construction of a nuclear-powered submarine capable of delivering nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles. This in turn meant finding practical ways to solve the difficulties, maintain the special relationship, and identify common ground on regional and international issues. While the special relationship has survived, the relative weight of other powers in areas such as defense cooperation, where Moscow had a privileged position, has begun to grow rapidly. Israel, France, and the United States have all emerged as important suppliers of advanced weapons and technology to India.

**Discovering Japan**

At the end of the Cold War, New Delhi’s special outreach to Tokyo had an immediate imperative—seeking Japan’s help in easing India’s difficult transition toward economic liberalization and globalization. Japan, which had become India’s biggest aid donor by the end of the 1980s, was a natural partner for New Delhi. To its chagrin, however, New Delhi found Tokyo and its business community extremely skeptical of India’s economic prospects. Worse still, Japan had embarked on an international path that would directly threaten some of India’s core national interests. As the United States prodded Japan to take on a larger political role in the post–Cold War world, Tokyo chose nonproliferation, arms control, and preventive diplomacy. There were no issues more explosive for India after the end of the Cold War. An irritated India would spend much of the 1990s deflecting Japan’s persistent demands to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). When India finally tested a nuclear weapon in May 1998, Japan imposed economic sanctions and cut off political contact. Only Australia and Canada reacted more harshly. To make matters worse, in the two and a half weeks between the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998, Tokyo offered all kind of incentives to dissuade Islamabad from following the Indian example. Among them was the offer to shift all the economic aid earmarked for New Delhi to Islamabad and a promise to take up the Kashmir question in the UN Security Council. It was only when Tokyo saw Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush pursue a partnership with New Delhi, in spite of differences over nonproliferation, that Japan altered its approach to a nuclear India.

The emergence of the Junichiro Koizumi regime in Japan saw a convergence of Tokyo’s views with those of the Bush administration on the need to craft a new balance of power in Asia. This set the stage for a new relationship between Tokyo and New Delhi and the eventual announcement of a strategic partnership in 2005 when Prime Minister Koizumi visited India. The partnership was expanded incrementally over the next few years, including Indian support for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s proposal for a new grouping of Asian democracies in 2006 and Japan’s participation in a trilateral naval exercise with the Indian and U.S. navies in the Pacific. Japan also joined the massive multilateral naval exercises conducted by India in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007.

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10 For an overview from an insider who negotiated India’s defense cooperation with Russia, Europe, and the United States, see Ronen Sen, “India’s Defence Cooperation with Its Major Traditional and New Strategic Partners” (speech at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, April 1, 2011), http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/AmbassadorRonenSen.

and unveiled a declaration on military security cooperation in 2008.\(^\text{12}\) This declaration was only the second of its kind from Japan outside the military alliance with the United States. Tokyo, which had nearly wrecked its ties with India on the nuclear question, was helpful in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which endorsed the India-U.S. civil nuclear initiative in fall 2008. There was growing recognition in both countries of their shared maritime interests in the Indian and Pacific oceans and the need to keep the sea lines of communication open.\(^\text{13}\) With India and Japan positioned at opposite ends of a rising China, their plans for strategic cooperation, which were by no means spectacular, were laying down markers for new strategic alignments in the future. The shift toward a new positive approach to India seemed to survive the historic political change in the 2009 elections, which ousted the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) from power. Under the various Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) governments since then, there has been a steady expansion of defense cooperation and the implementation of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement. Hopes for an early agreement on civil nuclear cooperation were set back, however, by the nuclear accident in Fukushima in March 2011.

**Engaging Europe**

As India restructured its foreign policy in the 1990s, it per force had to deal with the new political entity that was emerging on the world horizon at the end of the Cold War—the European Union. In 2004, India and the EU announced the creation of a strategic dialogue and followed up with an action plan on advancing bilateral relations. While the strategic dialogue went nowhere, India concentrated on building strategic ties with the big three of Europe—Britain, Germany, and France.\(^\text{14}\) While ties with Britain and Germany steadily expanded, it was France that invested the most in building a strategic partnership with India. Reaching out to New Delhi in the late 1990s, Paris began to make the case for ending India's nuclear isolation and reframing the international rules of nuclear commerce to facilitate civilian atomic power cooperation with India. Although not as liberal as Russia in the transfer of advanced defense technologies, France began to emerge as a major source of arms for India. It won the coveted Indian contract for 126 fighter aircraft in 2011. At the collective level, however, it was difficult to reconcile the philosophical divergence between the postmodern pretensions of the EU and the realist orientation of the Indian foreign policy establishment.\(^\text{15}\)

**Dealing with the United States and China**

India’s bilateral relations after the Cold War shifted most significantly with the United States and China. Although the first attempts at improving U.S. ties and normalizing Sino-Indian relations began in the late 1980s under the premiership of Rajiv Gandhi, the structural conditions for expanding the relationship began to emerge only in the 1990s. As India opened up its economy and sought cooperation with both Washington and Beijing, it was possible to add a new and stabilizing dimension to bilateral relationships. Starting from a very low base in the 1990s,
India’s trade with China began to gallop in the 2000s, reaching $74 billion in 2011. China is now India’s largest partner in merchandise trade. Likewise, the United States is one of India’s top trade partners if services are included, with total bilateral trade estimated at $100 billion in 2011. While trade with China is largely in commodities and low-end goods, commercial ties with the United States are being built in new sectors like IT that will elevate India’s global positioning.

Despite the many positive changes in India’s ties with China and the United States, two issues at the heart of Indian security kept relations with both countries tense throughout the 1990s. One issue was nuclear weapons and the other concerned Pakistan. Through the 1990s, the Clinton administration declared that its policy was to cap, roll back, and eliminate India’s nuclear and missile programs. Although the administration was compelled to come to terms with reality after the 1998 tests, it insisted that until the nonproliferation issue was sorted out, the full potential of the relationship would not be realized. While China did not hector India on nuclear issues, it did far more damage to New Delhi’s interests by collaborating with Pakistan’s nuclear and missile programs through the 1990s, despite China becoming a signatory to the NPT and expressing its broad commitment to nonproliferation. Quite clearly, normalization of relations with India did not imply that Beijing would limit its policy of balancing New Delhi by propping up Islamabad. The difference between the policies of the United States and China also came into view during the Indo-Pakistani Kargil War during the summer of 1999, when Washington tilted toward India and Beijing remained neutral.

India’s relations with China and the United States began to acquire a new dynamic during the Bush administration, which visualized India as a potential counterweight to China and cautiously tested the prospects for a triangulation of the ties between Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi. This triangle would turn out to be both the biggest opportunity and the greatest challenge for India.\(^\text{16}\)

**The Strategic Triangle**

While India was pleased with Bush’s new geopolitical approach, New Delhi was by no means certain that this policy enjoyed strong bipartisan support in the United States. Yet there were good reasons to believe that the idea of the United States assisting India’s rise to power in order to preserve the Asian and global balance of power would survive Bush. As elsewhere in the world, the Indian chattering classes welcomed Barack Obama’s election as president in 2008 and his new vision for U.S. foreign policy with its emphasis on multilateralism and preference for international engagement over unilateralism.

The Indian foreign policy establishment, however, was among the few that were skeptical. New Delhi had reasons to worry about Obama’s policies toward the two main sources of India’s security concerns, Pakistan and China. Throughout the 2008 presidential campaign there were hints from the Obama camp that he might depart from his predecessor Bush on issues of key concern to India. In particular, much of the Democratic Party’s foreign policy establishment was not enthusiastic about Bush’s civil nuclear initiative. Many Democrats in Washington also believed in the importance of reviving American activism on promoting a settlement on Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Others saw Bush’s attempt at building India as a counterweight to China as dangerous. They advocated de-emphasizing the Asian balance of power and focusing

\(^\text{16}\) For a broad overview, see Ananya Chatterjee, “India-China-United States: The Post–Cold War Evolution of a Strategic Triangle,” Political Perspectives 5, no. 3 (2011), 74–95.
instead on building a strong relationship with China by redoubling efforts to integrate it into the international system. India’s apprehensions about Obama’s thinking on nuclear cooperation, Pakistan and Kashmir, and China underscored President Bush’s very positive legacy on the U.S. relationship with India. It is not for nothing that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chose to publicly express India’s abiding affection for Bush, who engineered two big changes in U.S. geopolitical thinking about India. Bush declared that he would not view New Delhi through the narrow prism of its conflict with Islamabad. Instead, he promised to deal with India as a rising power that has the potential to reshape the Asian balance of power and contribute to the management of all major global issues.

The Bush Revolution

These two premises were clearly framed during Bush’s presidential campaign in 2000 by his would-be national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice. They were then articulated in the policy domain in the first, controversial national security strategy document of the Bush administration, released in 2002. Under the first premise, Bush took Jammu and Kashmir off the table in the U.S. engagement with India and embarked on separate strategies to improve relations with both Pakistan and India. The second premise led to a conscious strategy of strengthening New Delhi as part of the effort to secure a new balance of power in Asia and the world “in favor of freedom.” Yet in his first term, Bush found it impossible to elevate India to a new level of importance in U.S. strategic policymaking. The events of September 11 helped return Pakistan to the center stage of U.S. policy toward South Asia, and the new preoccupation with Afghanistan and Iraq meant Washington needed a reasonable relationship with Beijing.

It was at the very beginning of his second term that Bush began to put a new emphasis on India, thereby enlarging New Delhi’s room for maneuvering with both Pakistan and China. In March 2005, the Bush administration announced its intent to assist India’s rise to great-power status. This declaration was followed by two very important agreements between Washington and New Delhi. The first was a ten-year defense cooperation framework that opened up the sale of advanced U.S. weapons to India and defined joint missions by the armed forces of the two countries. The other agreement was the now well-debated civil nuclear initiative that sought to end India’s three and a half decades of isolation from the global nonproliferation regime. Together they marked a fundamental transformation in how the United States viewed India. The decision to sell advanced weapons to India and maintain the Western arms embargo against China underlined the essence of the U.S. commitment to alter the Sino-Indian balance in New Delhi’s favor. The nuclear deal in turn ended the long-dominant perception of nuclear equivalence, in U.S. and international eyes, between India and Pakistan. India had long sought a nuclear differentiation between itself and Pakistan, and Bush allowed the realization of this objective, much to the discomfiture of both

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22 For details, see C. Raja Mohan, Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States, and the Global Order (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2006).
Islamabad and Beijing. Not surprisingly, Beijing opposed the Bush nuclear initiative and sought to promote a similar deal with Pakistan. China also warily watched the expanding defense cooperation between India and the United States during the Bush years and the plans of both states to develop better multilateral cooperation with Japan and Australia.

Obama’s Adaptation

Given this background, President Obama’s promise to repudiate many of Bush’s foreign policies did create anxieties in New Delhi that both triangular relationships—the one between the United States, India, and Pakistan and the other between Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi—might face turbulence. Two early gestures from the Obama administration did ease some of India’s concerns, but not entirely. Obama dropped references to Kashmir and Indo-Pakistani mediation when he announced in January 2009 the appointment of Richard Holbrooke as the administration’s special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. As they became aware of India’s concerns about mediation and about the presumed linkage between Afghanistan and Kashmir, President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sought to articulate U.S. policy toward India and Pakistan with care and sensitivity. The China policy of the Obama administration would, however, backfire against New Delhi and Washington at the end of 2009.

The lengthy joint communiqué issued at the end of Obama’s visit to Beijing in November 2009 talked of cooperation with China on issues relating to South Asia. Seemingly innocuous and probably a proposition that was not vetted by anyone in the White House familiar with China’s history in South Asia—particularly the country’s history of enduring conflict with India and a strong alliance with Pakistan—it generated predictable outrage in New Delhi. The Singh government was quick to dismiss the offer of any potential third-party mediation in its disputes with Pakistan by either the United States or China or both. For the Indian security establishment, it confirmed the worst fears about the U.S. Democratic Party and the Obama administration. For India, it was also déjà vu and a return to pre-Bush policies, when the United States privileged its ties with Beijing over those with New Delhi. The comparison to the Clinton administration’s strategic partnership with China was instantaneous in India.

As fears of Sino-U.S. collusion resurfaced in New Delhi, the Obama administration recognized the need for damage control. When Prime Minister Singh arrived in Washington as the first state guest of the Obama administration a few days later, the president made amends by talking of India’s role in Asia and its global significance. On the eve of the first round of strategic dialogue in June 2010, the Obama administration reaffirmed the core premises of the Bush policy—that the United States

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25 A month after India’s nuclear tests in June 1998, then president Bill Clinton traveled to Beijing, where he declared that the United States and China would work together in reversing India’s nuclear program.

would assist India’s rise to great-power status and that Washington sees India as an indispensable power in the future management of Asia. While President Obama’s public pronouncements and private assurances to Singh mitigated the diplomatic problem at hand, Washington was nowhere near addressing the complexity of the triangular dynamic with Beijing and New Delhi.27

The Triangular Dynamic

From the Indian perspective, the following are some of the factors that could shape the triangular relationship with China and the United States in the foreseeable future. The first is the broad philosophical understanding of the U.S. Democratic Party in general and the Obama administration in particular about China and India. Offering the first peek into the foreign policy of the Obama administration, Secretary of State Clinton suggested some continuity with the Bush policy toward India and China. Clinton listed India among U.S. friends and allies in Asia, after Japan, Korea, and Australia. China, however, remained in the ambiguous category of neither friend nor foe. Clinton reaffirmed U.S. commitment to building good relations with Beijing but insisted that “this is not a one-way effort. Much of what we will do depends on the choices China makes about its future at home and abroad.”28 Yet during her first visit to Asia as secretary of state, Clinton’s political message was a mixed one. She also signaled that the administration has no stomach for an argument with Beijing on human rights issues and might prioritize seeking Chinese cooperation in addressing a range of issues, including climate change and management of the global financial crisis, rather than courting confrontation. Beijing’s decision to censor a derogatory reference to Communism in Obama’s inaugural address underlined the irresolvable ideological differences between the two sides.29 Nevertheless the sense that a weakened Washington has no resolve to challenge Beijing has begun to take root. Some have seen Obama’s soft approach to Beijing as “more than a reversal of the neo-conservative muscle-flexing of the administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush. It is an attempt by a declining power to use its restrained capabilities in a more economical way.”30

Second, although both China and India are rising powers, the weight of the former is far stronger in the global economy. Therefore, it is natural that China would gain a higher salience than India in the changing U.S. calculus on global economic management. In the midst of the financial crisis that enveloped the world in 2008, a growing number of U.S. analysts began to call for a deeper partnership between the United States and China to manage and stabilize the world economy. Many of these analysts pointed to the extraordinary complementarity of interests between the two countries and underlined the importance of creating a new structure of Sino-U.S. cooperation. Historian Niall Ferguson has called it “Chimerica,” and other strategic thinkers have declared that Washington must view its relationship with Beijing as the most important 21st-century partnership in the management of the world.31 India has every reason to worry at the

talk of a G-2, or “group of two,” which has the potential to undermine the very basis of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership in Asia. Throughout the Bush period, the U.S. strategy was to hedge against China’s rise by strengthening other powers in the region, especially Japan and India. If the formation of a G-2 were to become the core strategic objective of the United States, the case for a strong Indian counterweight to China could only diminish from the U.S. perspective. It is possible, however, that Washington and Beijing will find it hard to cooperate on global finance, and that discord rather than accord will be the dominant feature of this effort.

The third factor that could affect the triangular relationship between India, China, and the United States is the kind of approach that Washington might adopt toward the construction of a new security architecture for Asia. If the Obama administration persists with the Bush strategy of hedging against the rise of China, the United States is likely to strengthen its traditional alliances in Asia and the new strategic partnership with India. If Washington, however, takes the view that China is the most important interlocutor in Asia, it would be compelled to not just lower the profile of India but also rethink the centrality of its Asian alliances. Put simply, there is no way that the United States can simultaneously accommodate the rise of China and reassure its old allies and new partners in Asia.

The fourth factor concerns the future of defense ties between New Delhi and Washington that were forged under the Bush administration. It is no secret that the Pentagon during the Bush years was a major champion of stronger relations with India and also the most skeptical about the “peaceful rise” of China. In fact, the Office of the Secretary of Defense issued annual reports on China’s expanding military-power capabilities. It is thus reasonable to expect that the Pentagon will resist any attempt in Washington at developing a China-first strategy in Asia. Meanwhile, there are structural problems within the Indo-U.S. defense relationship itself, and progress in this arena could become difficult if the overall tenor of the bilateral ties shows political discordance. India has been reluctant to sign what the United States calls foundational agreements on defense cooperation—such as the Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and the Logistics Support Agreement (LSA)—given the growing political discomfort with the notion of constructing military “interoperability” with the U.S. armed forces. Traditional notions of “strategic autonomy” in New Delhi seem to prevent the expansive possibilities for defense cooperation with Washington.

As the United States juggles its relations with China and India, this triangular relationship has become the principal driver of India’s future great-power relations. Delhi understands that if Washington removes the centrality of India in Asia’s future balance of power, there will be little strategic content in the relationship with the United States. Yet India cannot simply turn to Moscow to balance the tighter relationship between Washington and Beijing, since Russia itself has drawn closer to China in recent years. Even more important, China has steadily become the senior partner in the bilateral ties. New Delhi also cannot bank on Tokyo to compensate for a potential “Sino-U.S. condominium.” To the contrary, there might be temptation in Japan to recognize the inevitability of Chinese primacy in Asia. The rest of Asia then might simply bandwagon with China. While some Indian analysts believe that New Delhi can no longer hope to balance China given the rapid acceleration of Chinese capabilities, there is no way it can abandon the aspiration.

for equivalence with Beijing as India confronts a new distribution of power in Asia and changing relations among the major powers.\(^\text{34}\) Central to the achievement of that objective is a deeper partnership with the United States that will allow both internal and external balancing of China. Despite the difficulties it has had with the Obama administration and the continuing ambivalence in the Congress Party on identifying too closely with the United States, the security establishment in New Delhi is unlikely to lose sight of this reality.

Fortunately for India, the rapid evolution of Sino-U.S. relations during 2010–11 reduced the threat of New Delhi’s worst-case scenarios of where Washington and Beijing were headed under President Obama. For its part, Beijing made clear that it had no interest in working for a G-2 with the United States. Confident about its own growing strength and the presumed weaknesses of the United States, Beijing seemed determined to set its own terms for strategic cooperation with Washington. Given China’s assertiveness on many issues, including Internet freedom, trade, Taiwan, Tibet, territorial claims over the South China Sea, and U.S. freedom to operate in the Asian maritime commons, and its increasingly abrasive conduct of diplomacy, there was mounting pressure—both at home and from U.S. allies in Asia—on President Obama to recast his China policy. The prospect of a Sino-U.S. condominium, “Chimerica,” seems quite elusive.\(^\text{35}\) By mid-2010, the United States was inserting itself into the growing tension between Beijing and its maritime neighbors in the South China Sea. Taken aback by Beijing’s new assertiveness, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) invited the United States, along with Russia, to become members of the East Asia Summit. By the turn of 2012, the United States was formally underlining its renewed strategic commitment to Asia and the importance of its strategic partnership with India.

As Sino-U.S. relations moved from the hopes for a possible condominium in 2009 to a potential confrontation in 2012, it was India that was enveloped by a measure of ambiguity in responding to the new dynamic between Beijing and Washington. New Delhi was quick to take up the U.S. offer to build a triangular strategic dialogue with Japan. But it was also reluctant to be seen as doing the United States’ bidding in Asia against Beijing and as emphasizing its independent role in the Indian and Pacific oceans. There was also some hope in New Delhi that China’s new tensions with the United States might prompt Beijing to be more accommodating of India’s concerns on territorial disputes as well the country’s policy toward Pakistan. Like so many other powers in Asia, India was deeply concerned about a weakened United States ceding primacy to China. At the same time, like all other neighbors of Beijing, India finds that its economic stakes in the relationship have risen rapidly and that it has no interest in seeing an explicit confrontation between the United States and China.

**The Regional Theater**

Meanwhile, China’s rise does more than complicate India’s relations with other great powers. It truly challenges the very basis on which India has managed relations in its own neighborhood. The triangular dynamic between New Delhi, Beijing, and Washington is no longer an abstract proposition but is playing out in what India sees as its extended neighborhood in the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific. If the centrality of China to East Asian security was never in doubt,


its role was relatively marginal to the rest of Asia until the last decade. China’s rapid rise, however, has raised the prospects of Beijing challenging the primacy of the United States in East Asia and emerging as a player of strategic consequence in South Asia, Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. The increasing influence of China in these regions has compelled India to rethink its own strategy toward its neighboring regions and to recalibrate its ties with the United States.

Rebuilding the “India Center”

One of the major consequences of India’s economic globalization since the 1990s was the rediscovery of its so-called extended neighborhood by the country’s security planners. Sections of the Indian strategic community had memories of the expansive sphere in which the British Raj had exercised influence. From the late 18th century to the mid-20th century, British India and its armed forces were the principal providers of security and order in the Indian Ocean littoral.36

The peak of the Raj’s role in international security came when more than a million soldiers from the subcontinent participated in the two world wars of the twentieth century.37 “Aden to Malacca” was the phrase that captured the strategic aspirations of an independent India that saw itself as a successor state to the British Raj. For decades, however, this remained a mere aspiration in New Delhi because of a number of factors. For one, the partition of the subcontinent broke up the “India center” that exercised hegemony along and across the Indian Ocean littoral.38 Furthermore, India’s inward orientation steadily isolated New Delhi from the economic flows in the region. The creation of Pakistan and the entry of China into Tibet necessarily compelled independent India to focus on the defense of its new frontiers while curtailing the expeditionary role of its armed forces. Meanwhile, in line with India’s socialist economic orientation, the active discouragement of trade meant a steady atrophy of centuries-old economic and commercial relationships between India and its abutting regions. India’s engagement with its extended neighborhood was increasingly confined to gatherings of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G-77 (group of 77) at the UN General Assembly in New York.

All of this began to change in the early 1990s, as India began to reorient its economy and refocus on engaging its extended neighborhood. After an initial foray to the east under the “look east” policy, New Delhi began to reach out to all the regions surrounding the subcontinent, including Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, Africa, and the Indian Ocean. That India’s new regional engagement was driven by the quest for markets, resources, and investments is not in doubt. New Delhi was also focused on expanding its political and military influence all across the Indian Ocean littoral. For decades India had shunned the very notion of regionalism, given its preference for the global stage and the platforms of the G-77 and the NAM and a political emphasis on self-reliance. It now sought active membership and engagement with all the regional organizations from the African Union to ASEAN and from the Gulf Cooperation Council to the Pacific Islands Forum. The early 1990s saw India shed its long-standing military isolationism and make a conscious effort to embark on defense diplomacy. What began as a cautious revival of port calls and joint naval exercises in the early 1990s expanded to an impressive portfolio on defense cooperation. India signed formal

agreements with a large number of countries on high-level military exchanges; offered training facilities; conducted joint exercises; frequently deployed the Indian Navy, and more recently air force units, on foreign waters and soil; participated in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations; transferred arms in small quantities; and negotiated turnaround facilities for its naval vessels operating far from national shores.39

Two decades after India launched reforms to promote economic globalization, the rapid improvement in its relative economic weight in the region, its growing trade volumes, more intensive regional diplomacy, and an expanded military diplomacy have made India a noteworthy actor on regional security in different parts of Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral. New Delhi’s ability to consolidate recent gains and acquire real influence over the politics of regional security, however, depends on how its initiatives intersect with the policies of other great powers.

In the past, India’s main regional concerns were framed in opposition to the policies of former colonial powers and the United States, which became the dominant power in the Pacific after World War II and in the Indian Ocean after the British withdrawal from the East of Suez. The North-South framework that dominated India’s worldview in the decades after independence meant that India would be predictable in its consistent opposition to U.S. regional policies in its neighborhood. As relations with the United States began to improve over the last two decades and New Delhi began to define its approach in terms of national interest rather than an ideological framework, India found unexpected convergence with the United States in many parts of Asia. While significant differences remained over Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, New Delhi found ways to work with Washington on many regional issues during the 2000s.40 It was China that now limited, challenged, and undermined India’s strategic aspirations in its own neighborhood. For a long time, India saw China as a partner in balancing the West and in building a new Asia, by Asians for Asians. But as China’s power rose rapidly and its influence expanded in the extended neighborhood of India, the pressures on New Delhi mounted to purposefully compete with Beijing. This in turn changed the complexion of the Sino-Indian relationship and encouraged India to rethink the role of the United States in its extended neighborhood.

U.S. and Sino-Indian Regional Rivalry

The proposition that India and China are irreconcilable rivals is not new. Informed observers of Sino-Indian relations in the twentieth century saw the relationship as a “protracted contest” and an unending rivalry.41 What happened in the first decade of the 21st century was the spread of this rivalry from the Great Himalayas of the subcontinent to all across Asia, even to regions that were historically and geographically closer to India than China—such as the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, the east coast of Africa, and the Western Indian Ocean island states. As New Delhi began to joust with Beijing for influence in this vast space, analysts began to recognize how entrenched the rivalry had become in such a short span of time.42 Since they shared the same space in Asia and both nations sought to expand their influence on the nations across their borders, a contest for influence in Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia became inevitable.


Nor was the rivalry limited to their immediate environs. It expressed itself in far-flung places, from Siberia in the Russian Far East to Columbia in Latin America and from Africa to the South Pacific, thanks to China’s and India’s growing dependence on imports of energy and mineral resources. The manner in which this challenge might manifest itself over the next two decades in different subregions of Asia is bound to vary. It will be shaped by the geopolitical specificity of each region, the local dynamic of great-power relations, and the particular histories of Indian and Chinese engagement with particular countries in the region. Above all, it will depend on how Washington might define its relations with New Delhi and Beijing. The following is a quick survey of the dynamic across the regional theaters.

As India and China seek to expand their influence in Central Asia, U.S. policy has been driven more by the perceived need to promote the independence of the regimes in the region vis-à-vis Russia and to encourage their democratization. This has largely worked to the benefit of Beijing and to the disadvantage of New Delhi. Much as the British-Russian rivalry during the Great Game cut a lot of slack to the Chinese, enduring post–Cold War tensions between Washington and Moscow in Russia’s periphery can only help a rising China expand its influence at the expense of the United States, Russia, and India.43 A genuine reset of U.S.-Russian relations is naturally advantageous to India, but it is not clear if such an outcome is at hand. In the “Af-Pak” region, which connects Central Asia with South Asia, the tactical divergence between the United States and India on how to stabilize Afghanistan and deal with Pakistan also works to the advantage of China. As the Obama administration grapples with an exit strategy in Afghanistan, Washington has sought to enlist China as a partner. India, on the other hand, sees Beijing’s objectives in alignment with those of the Pakistan Army—a convergence that could help carve out a larger role for China in the future of the northwestern subcontinent.44

The perception of U.S. defeat in Afghanistan and Washington’s inability to stabilize Iraq could open the door for China to project its power into the Persian Gulf region from a strengthened position in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The last few years have seen a significant expansion of China’s economic and security profile in the Persian Gulf.45 Like China, India too has sought to raise its engagement with the gulf.46 Despite India’s historic and cultural advantages, its capacity to influence outcomes in the region has been less than that of China. India is also constrained in the gulf by its conflict with Pakistan. Meanwhile, as India and the United States have argued over Iran in recent years, Washington has sought Chinese help in strengthening the international coalition and maintaining UN sanctions against Tehran. While China has managed to leverage its position in the UN Security Council to expand its role in Iran and the Persian Gulf, India is torn between

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its deepening ties with the United States and the need to sustain its position in Iran. With an eye both on Afghanistan after 2014, when the United States expects to end its combat role there, and on gaining the access to Central Asia that Pakistan denies it, New Delhi has been reluctant to follow the United States in isolating Iran. While India has supported the United States at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) against Iran and has been correct in implementing multilateral sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, it has resented the U.S. pressure to abide by the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States.

In Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, there is a greater convergence between Washington and New Delhi in ensuring that the rise of China does not destabilize the region. The United States, which in the past had tended to see India’s role in East Asia and the Pacific as marginal, has begun to pay increasing attention to India’s potential as a balancing force. The element of rivalry between India and China has always expressed itself very clearly in East and Southeast Asia. U.S. relations with China, on the other hand, have oscillated between containment, engagement, and strategic partnership. Amid the rise of China, many in Washington and New Delhi do see the logic of Indo-U.S. collaboration in ensuring a stable Asian order. Yet there are others in Washington who see too strong an interdependence with China and question the wisdom of cultivating India to counter Beijing. In New Delhi, too, as was noted earlier, there are concerns that Washington might choose to accommodate Beijing rather than confront it. The United States and India are thus hedging against China’s rise, but both are also severely constrained in building an explicit alignment against Beijing. While there is growing convergence between India and the United States in the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific more generally, there are many issue areas where Washington values Chinese cooperation, and New Delhi in turn feels that the United States makes India’s neighborhood safe for Chinese domination—for example, in Iran and Burma. New Delhi recalls the lecture on isolating Burma that President Obama delivered to the Indian parliament during his visit to Delhi in November 2010 and the speed with which Washington started reaching out to the nation as part of its pivot to Asia in 2011. New Delhi is also conscious of the possibility of the United States and Iran re-engaging each other and insists on maintaining its independent policy toward Tehran.

### Toward Global Rivalry

Beyond the immediate regional factors driving the Sino-Indian rivalry in Asia, there are broader factors that contribute to the growing tension between Beijing and New Delhi. These in turn are likely to result in an expansion of Sino-Indian rivalry beyond Asia and bring the United States into the global competition between New Delhi and Beijing.

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Resource Security

The first factor is the competitive hunt for energy and mineral resources by China and India that began some years ago, which has acquired a new intensity in recent years and is visible in far corners of the world. Many in the West and in Japan tend to see the Chinese and Indian obsession for oil and mineral assets around the world as ill-conceived. They argue that Beijing and New Delhi may be better positioned to use market mechanisms for ensuring access to natural resources rather than gaining direct control over them. These arguments, however, do not appreciate the profound political concerns in Beijing and New Delhi about their new dependence on external natural resources for sustaining internal economic growth. These concerns are likely to deepen in coming decades, given one simple reality: the prosperity of two billion people is tied to reliable access and supply of natural resources from abroad. Neither the Chinese state nor the Indian one can afford to get off the high-growth path and risk severe internal political turbulence. Given the scale of the stakes involved in resource security, Beijing and New Delhi will find it hard not only to abide by market mechanisms but also to rely on U.S. power to manage their external vulnerabilities. At the same time, China and India may find it increasingly hard to avoid growing competition in their search for resource security.

Imperial Temptations

Second, the Chinese and Indian emphasis on nonmarket mechanisms for ensuring resource security inevitably means fundamental changes in many aspects of their foreign policy. As their dependence on external resources becomes vital and strategic, it would be entirely reasonable to assume that the external orientation of China and India in the next two decades would discard much of the traditional “third worldism” attitude and increasingly reflect great-power approaches to international affairs. While some have seen the rising profile of China and India in Africa as an opportunity to accelerate the development of the vast African continent, others have begun to attack the policies of Beijing and New Delhi as early signs of their inevitable roles as neo-imperialist powers. What is important to note, however, is not the merit of this critique but the likely contours of Chinese and Indian foreign policies in the coming decades.

Maritime Power

Third, Chinese and Indian interests are not limited to equity investments in faraway lands; those must necessarily involve the ability to secure their transportation through high seas to consumption centers in the homeland. This has meant a new urgency to invest not just in building modern navies but also in blue water capabilities. Both Chinese and Indian leaders have increasingly talked about a “manifest destiny” for their navies, emphasizing the importance of naval power as an adjunct to their rise in the international system. Their simultaneous advances on the maritime front are setting the stage for a new arena of rivalry between China and India in the Indian Ocean. While its dependence on the Indian Ocean sea lanes is increasing, Beijing

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has begun to agonize over what is now called the “Malacca dilemma.”

Given the fact that most of China’s seaborne trade with the Indian Ocean littoral and Europe passes through the Strait of Malacca, China wants to make sure that neither the United States nor India would ever be tempted to choke it off. As Beijing explores the prospects for a sustainable permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi sees China’s search for bases and facilities as part of a strategy to encircle India. The notion of a security dilemma that has defined Sino-Indian relations in so many other spheres is enveloping their relationship in the Indian Ocean and is likely to acquire a sharper edge in the next two decades.

**Outer Space**

Fourth, in the next two decades, the Sino-Indian rivalry is likely to encompass yet another realm: outer space. No other arena better reflects the power of techno-nationalism in China and India. Much like the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, China and India will continue to invest heavily in such prestigious projects as manned space programs and lunar missions. Although China is well ahead of India in this arena, the pressure on India to reorient its program to emphasize high-visibility projects and catch up with China has been irresistible. While the public focus in the next two decades is likely to be on manned and lunar missions, the major powers around the world will increasingly concentrate on the military dimensions of the space programs of China and India. China’s growing emphasis on the military uses of outer space, including its testing of an anti-satellite weapon in early 2007 and an interceptor in 2010, have underlined not only Beijing’s extraordinary ambitions but also a potentially destabilizing attempt to develop counter-space capabilities against the United States and deny Washington its current preeminence in outer space.

India meanwhile has begun to move away from its traditional exclusive focus on peaceful uses of outer space and devote significant energy toward acquiring military capabilities in that realm, including the development of missile-defense technologies in cooperation with the United States and Israel.

**Nuclear Questions**

Sino-Indian rivalry in outer space in turn not only reinforces the emerging tensions between Beijing and New Delhi, but also leads to the final factor in our analysis, the nuclear dynamic. It is no secret that China was very unhappy with the Bush administration’s controversial policy to facilitate a significant change in India’s standing in the global nonproliferation order during 2005–8. China’s opposition to the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear initiative at the NSG at the end of 2008 only reflected the profound concerns of Beijing about the unfolding transformation of Indo-U.S. relations under the Bush administration.

Irrespective of the inevitable shifts in the triangular dynamic among the United States, China, and India over the next two decades, the changes in the relationship between New Delhi and Washington during the Bush years gave India greater room to push for...
strategic parity with China. India’s improved access to conventional U.S. military technology, which continues to be denied to China, will create the basis for steady advances in New Delhi’s defense capabilities and capacity to project force well beyond its borders. Meanwhile, India, on its own steam (as the United States is legally barred from cooperation with India on nuclear weapons) will begin to acquire long-range nuclear missile capabilities. It tested the Agni-V long-range missile in April 2012, which when deployed in reasonable numbers will ensure a credible deterrent against China. New Delhi is also building nuclear-powered submarines that can carry medium-range missiles and serve as an invulnerable, sea-borne second-strike capability against China.

President Obama, for his part, traveled the full distance on implementing his predecessor’s controversial civil nuclear initiative with India. During his visit to India in November 2010, he took a step further in promising to work for India’s admission as an equal partner into such global export-control regimes as the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Australia Group, and the Wassenaar Arrangement. China has yet to lend support to India’s aspirations for full integration into the global nuclear order.

Until now, China could easily ignore the small Indian nuclear arsenal and balance it with the Pakistani nuclear program. As India’s nuclear weapon and missile capabilities evolve, Beijing will have to factor them into its strategic calculus. This will produce a new set of consequences for the structure of the two states’ nuclear arsenals, the disposition of their land-based nuclear forces, and the credibility of their sea-based deterrents. India’s evolving nuclear capabilities are also likely to sharpen the already powerful incentives for mutual balancing between China and India in Asia.\(^{57}\) Meanwhile, nuclear weapons are becoming a factor in the military balance between a rising China and the United States, as Washington explores the prospects for radical reductions in its nuclear arsenal.\(^{58}\) The Obama administration’s reluctance to criticize India’s testing of the Agni-V missile has been interpreted by some in Washington as underlining the United States’ interest in New Delhi acquiring strategic deterrence against China: “The lack of U.S. condemnation of India’s latest missile test demonstrates that the U.S. is comfortable with Indian progress in the nuclear and missile fields and appreciates India’s need to meet the emerging strategic challenge posed by rising China.”\(^{59}\)

**The Paradox of India’s Multipolarity**

India’s security strategy since the end of the Cold War has been rightly described as the search for a multipolar world. The Indian quest for multipolarity, however, has had paradoxical outcomes. At the turn of the 1990s, it was driven by the fear of U.S. power. As the liberal internationalists in the United States pursued a triumphalist post–Cold War global agenda, Washington ran right into the heart of India’s security concerns. One of these was the question of India’s territorial integrity, linked to the dispute with Pakistan on Jammu and Kashmir, and the other concerned India’s need to maintain its nuclear equilibrium with China and Pakistan. Spurred by the seeming U.S. insensitivity to these interests, India had to develop insurance by holding onto its old strategic partnership with Russia, normalizing relations with China, and deepening ties with other powers.

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in Europe and Japan. Such moves also involved cultivating constituencies in the United States that would limit some of the excesses of U.S. liberal internationalism. Nearly two decades after launching its policy of multipolar diplomacy, India now finds a strong partnership with the United States to be the key to its own security calculus. Although very few in the Indian strategic community endorse this view and many have attacked the proposition by opposing the civil nuclear initiative with the United States, India’s top leadership and its inner core of advisers appear to have acted on the basis of this proposition. The leadership’s actions during the second half of the 2000s suggest that even if there is uncertainty and variance in U.S. policies toward India from administration to administration, it is in India’s interest to preserve the improvements in the bilateral relationship made during the Bush years and to extend the relationship to defense and security cooperation.

As New Delhi benefited from globalization and the redistribution of power in the international system, it appeared at the turn of the new century that India had the luxury of a multidirectional engagement. The absence of great-power conflict has provided a window for India to strengthen itself. If there were to be a significant disturbance in the global balance of power, India would play a critical role in shaping the new order as the swing state in the international system.

Yet there is no denying that India is also the weakest among the major powers in the international system. Therefore it remains vulnerable to alignments and realignments among the other powers. While these vulnerabilities are no longer existential as they might have been in the early years of the Cold War, changes in great-power relations could have both negative and positive consequences for India. As much as India gained from Bush’s hedging strategy against China’s rise, it will have much to lose if Bush’s successors are compelled to choose China as the United States’ major partner in Asia and the world. The transition from the Bush to the Obama administration did raise concerns in New Delhi about a potential shift in Washington toward a “China first” strategy and away from the importance of India for hedging against that possibility. As the United States moved under President Obama from the notion of a G-2 toward a more muscular pivot to Asia, New Delhi recognized the importance of its own sustained engagement with China, as well as the need to maintain an independent approach toward both Washington and Beijing and reduce its vulnerability to the changing dynamic of Sino-U.S. relations.

Many analysts in India endorse the importance of engaging both China and the United States in order to protect Indian security interests. Such a policy, they argue, has the virtue of hewing to the traditional policy of nonalignment, maintaining a measure of autonomy, minimizing the risks of U.S. policy reversal, and avoiding the political costs—at home and abroad—of aligning with the United States. Analysts also point to the dangers of balancing either China or the United States and call for transcending this dilemma by embracing both. They insist that India “has the opportunity to play a historic role in shaping the future of Asia”:

By building robust political and economic links with both China and the U.S., India could be a catalyst in bringing both countries together in a new cooperative Asia. Indeed, there can be few diplomatic tasks more challenging and worthwhile than to begin the groundwork for the construction of a cooperative mechanism of Asian security. It is also in India’s interest to do

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so: transcending would be a more efficient and effective strategy for India than hiding, balancing or bandwagoning.61

The idea of transcending U.S.-China competition is one that many rising powers, aspiring ones, or newly independent actors tend to pursue. On the face of it, India’s strategy of multidirectional engagement and its search for multipolarity are not dissimilar to the kind of policies that Deng Xiaoping outlined for China in the name of an “independent foreign policy” when he launched economic reforms. Nor is the Indian emphasis on autonomy and nonalignment different from George Washington’s instructions for the young U.S. republic to avoid entangling alliances in the Old World. India of course does not have the luxury of geography—that is, of being isolated from the dominant powers. Furthermore, the policy of maximizing one’s options by avoiding alignment works when the balance of power is reasonably stable or there is a cooperative security system. The recent efforts at building cooperative security in Asia suggest that the very process is shaped by power politics. The idea that India could simply transcend the consequences of the redistribution of power in Asia does not seem credible, especially when the rise of China seems to be occurring with a rapidity that few had expected. Add to it the even less anticipated “relative decline” of the United States in the first decade of the 21st century, and India’s options tend to drift toward an alliance-like relationship with the United States.

As China’s power confronts India from all directions, the emphasis in India’s strategic calculus has shifted subtly from seeking a multipolar world to a multipolar Asia. As the prime minister’s special envoy Shyam Saran, a leading China hand in India, argued, “Our own instinctive preference for a multipolar world…includes a multipolar Asia. We will need to work with other powers who share this objective. Our effort should be to build coalitions on different issues of shared concern and not primarily rely on a more limited range of strategic relationships.”62 This does not mean, however, that India is eager to pick a fight with China. While a segment of the Indian establishment has sought to rouse anti-China passions, those who understand the gravity of the security challenges from China counsel patience and are determined to avoid a premature confrontation. For example, as it sought to tamp down tensions in bilateral relations that surfaced repeatedly during 2008–9, New Delhi was eager to build on whatever areas of cooperation it could find with Beijing. This was especially true of multilateral issues, where India’s difficulties with Washington began to rise under President Obama. The return of liberals to power in Washington saw the re-emergence of multilateral issues, especially global warming. Although unsure of domestic political support for its activism on global warming, the Obama administration mounted enormous pressure on India to change its position. While India was willing to inject considerable flexibility, it was in no position to surrender at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen at the end of 2009. Within weeks of urging President Obama against tilting too close toward China, Prime Minister Singh found himself with the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao in constraining the United States at Copenhagen. India has also found it convenient to work with China in the BRICS Forum, which began as an initiative of Moscow but has increasingly seen Beijing take the lead, especially on issues of global finance and development.63


62 Saran, “Geo-Political Consequences of Current Financial and Economic Crisis.”

63 The BRICS countries are Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
While such Indian tactics on multipolar diplomacy might continue on a range of issues that divide India and the United States, New Delhi appears to have recognized that a strategic shift in the balance of power with China is taking place. The post-1988 normalization with China appears to have run its course. Two decades after Rajiv Gandhi visited Beijing and set the stage for re-engagement with China, Sino-Indian relations seemed to enter one of their best-ever phases. Two-way trade between the two countries galloped from about $1 billion in 1998 to nearly $74 billion in 2011. Sustained high-level exchanges and broadened people-to-people contacts were supplemented by important efforts at military confidence-building and a political effort at resolving the all-important boundary dispute.

However, from the very moment that the two sides announced a strategic partnership in April 2005 and signaled a political commitment to resolve the boundary issue, the Sino-Indian relationship fell into a downward spiral. It might be possible to argue that India’s expanding security cooperation with the United States unveiled in summer 2005 might have had something to do with the negative signals that China began sending. On the boundary issue, Beijing started demanding a reinterpretation of the terms of the 2005 agreement; the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began to more aggressively patrol the border, leveraging its new transport infrastructure along the Himalayas; and China began to treat Indian citizens from Kashmir on a different basis in consular matters. China also undermined India’s efforts, along with those of Japan, Germany, and Brazil, to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; tried to block India’s entry into the East Asia Summit; put a hold on India’s full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; tried to block the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear initiative at the NSG in fall 2008; and after its nuclear and missile cooperation with Islamabad during the 1980s and 1990s, embarked on boosting the conventional military potential of the Pakistan Army in the 2000s.

This litany of grievances has made it inevitable that India is under some political compulsion to seek a new equilibrium with China. India’s hopes that expanded engagement with China would lead to greater sensitivity in Beijing to New Delhi’s core national security interests have not been met. An assertive and self-confident Beijing has made it amply clear that it will not brook a regional rival on its periphery. For New Delhi, it is quite clear that it cannot manage the rise of China either through the construction of a multipolar world or a cooperative security regime in Asia. Like Russia in Europe, China is too large to be boxed into a cooperative regional framework; and unlike Moscow, which is on Europe’s periphery, China is in the heart of continental Asia. New Delhi is also realizing that in a genuinely multipolar world where China dominates Asia and the United States acts as an offshore balancer, India’s options will be severely impaired.

India, then, has no option but to redouble its efforts at catching up with China through both internal and external balancing. The success of this effort will depend on the kind of relationship it has with the United States. Japan, Russia, and Europe might provide a secondary insurance for India, but they cannot sustain its quest for strategic parity with China. India’s ability to transform its economy and the internal sources of power will rest primarily on the partnership with the United States and the ability to create the next generation of technologies. India will also need to develop a joint defense industrial base with the United States that can compete with China. A purely national industrial base never really existed in India, and what New Delhi can do is build

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defense partnerships with the U.S. military industry. All this requires an alliance-like relationship with Washington.

Could India, given its emphasis on autonomy and nonalignment, ever agree to become part of an alliance with the United States, assuming that Washington has a bilateral consensus in favor of it? Traditional studies of Indian foreign policy tend to place considerable emphasis on nonalignment, and some have sought to reinvent it for India’s changed circumstances.65 While nonalignment does often guide India’s conduct of its external relations, New Delhi has not hesitated to join de facto alliances with other states. India’s Cold War partnership with the Soviet Union was an alliance for all practical purposes. The decision to build that alliance did have costs, but New Delhi, having no other option, chose to bear them. The question of circumstance and an assessment of costs and benefits might then decide the future of India’s ties with the United States rather than a principled opposition to alignment. Clearly, India’s decisions on an alliance with the United States cannot be unilateral.

The choices that the United States makes will likewise depend on the cost-benefit calculus in Washington. That takes us back to questions of structure and how the redistribution of international power might set the broad terms under which India’s security cooperation with other states will take place. Within Asia itself and on many global issues, India is bound to run continually into a China that is becoming stronger by the day. Within its own extended neighborhood, as well as on the international stage, India’s contradictions with China are likely to be stronger than those between New Delhi and other major power centers. If the rise of China begins to significantly constrain the United States’ own strategic options, New Delhi and Washington might need each other a lot more than either of them recognizes today. Yet there will be strong temptations in both capitals for finding a separate modus vivendi with Beijing. How Beijing deals with Washington and New Delhi will have a great effect on the triangular dynamic that is beginning to encompass the United States, China, and India. In the end, it will be hard to predict whether the U.S.-India partnership will be built by a conscious grand strategic design in both capitals or will evolve through trial and error and the force of circumstances shaped by China’s rise.

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ASIA Responds to Its Rising Powers
China and India

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