

Indian Security Strategy in the 21st Century

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Introduction

It is an oft-cited cliché that the rise of India and China will portend seismic shifts in the international distribution of power, as the two modernizing giants will form the pillars of a coming “Asian Century.”¹ Indeed, there is little doubt that America’s international political hegemony will inevitably erode with the rise of these two Asian powers; even if they fail to eclipse the American economy in the next several decades, they will certainly have increasing influence over both global economic and military affairs. Wary of the uncertainties and pressures generated by China’s domestic politics, the United States since the Clinton administration has responded to Chinese economic and military growth by, in part, attempting to diplomatically court India. America has pursued India because—the narrative goes—the two democratic nations have a sufficient array of overlapping interests on which to form a geopolitical alliance. India and the United States, it is often-argued—from Presidents Clinton to Bush to Obama—are ‘natural allies’ and it is commonly heard in policy circles that the two states should overcome their historical mistrust to forge a friendship founded on their shared democratic norms.²

The highest profile gambit in America’s effort to cement a ‘special relationship’ with India was the Bush administration’s so-called Indo-US nuclear deal which would carve out an exemption for India in US domestic law to enable civil nuclear cooperation, and thereby legitimize India as a responsible nuclear power; however, this episode revealed that large swaths of India’s political class were much less eager to consummate a strategic relationship with the US. Although the Bush administration shouldered tremendous burden in carving out an exception for India with the Nuclear Suppliers Group, India responded tepidly to the United States and ultimately passed a stringent nuclear liability bill in Parliament which effectively exposed American nuclear operators to unlimited liability, making it potentially very difficult for US firms—as opposed to France or Russia which

¹ See for example, Robert Kaplan, “Center Stage for the Twenty-First Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009; Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: WW Norton, 2008); Bill Emmott, *Rivals: How the Power Struggle Between China, India, and Japan will Shape our Next Decade* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Press, 2008); Stanley Weiss, “Wary on Obama”, *The New York Times*, April 17, 2009.

² President Obama referred to the two nations as natural allies himself, see Robert Gibbs, White House Press Briefing, January 28, 2009; also see Stephen J. Blank, *Natural Allies? Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005); Henry Sokolski, ed., *Gauging U.S.-Indian Strategic Cooperation* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007); Ashton Carter, “America’s New Strategic Partner?”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2006; Richard Armitage, R. Nicholas Burns, and Richard Fontaine, *Natural Allies: A Blueprint for the Future of US-India Relations* (Washington, DC: Center for New American Security, 2010).

cover their operators' liability—to reap substantial commercial benefit from the deal.³ It also exposed, in public and dramatic fashion, the largely cacophonous and chaotic way in which Indian foreign and security policy is decided. President Obama attempted to match the Bush administration's largesse by publicly endorsing India for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council in November 2010, and the Indian media was predictably ecstatic, though it is unlikely to materialize anytime soon, if at all.

Washington was at times extremely disappointed with India during the Indo-US nuclear deal saga, but should it really have been surprised? The view that India has an overriding incentive or desire to become strategic partners with the United States in the post-Cold War era is surprisingly pervasive.⁴ But this view, as is often the case, fails to appreciate Delhi's preferences.⁵ Indeed, Washington's reaction reveals a lack of understanding of a question of critical importance to scholars and practitioners alike: how will *India* respond to the impending changes in the global order? That is, what is the content of India's "grand strategy"—the prioritized ends that Delhi seeks in the international landscape and the means it will likely employ to achieve them—what are its sources, and what has and what will India's external and internal security strategy look like? In this paper, we study India's grand strategy, its drivers, and explore how its foreign and security policy might evolve in its immediate security environment—Pakistan, China, and the Indian Ocean sphere—and in its larger global ambitions.

Grand strategy is the highest level of abstraction when analyzing a state's foreign policy.⁶ It characterizes a state's overarching goals in the international landscape and specifies the means—economic, military, or diplomatic—by which those goals may be achieved. An assessment of Indian grand strategy rests on the twin questions: 'What does India want?' and 'How will it get what it wants?' Answers to these questions are presently glib, poorly understood, or simply misleading. Very little systematic analysis has been done to determine what ends, precisely, India seeks to achieve as a regional and global power.⁷ Similarly, very little work has examined whether, and how, India is able to effectively align foreign and security means to achieve its desired ends.

In this paper, we examine the content and domestic sources of India's rank-ordered grand strategic preferences which include maintaining territorial integrity against both internal and external threats, regional stability and development, and becoming an independent responsible global power in a multipolar world with an emphasis on economic power. India's perception of external threat is not nearly as intense as Western analysts often assume, and the most important drivers of India's grand strategy are ideational—the battle between the Nehruvian legacy which is global-looking and a more hawkish *realpolitik* that is more narrowly focused toward Pakistan—and domestic-political. Ideas drive India's view of itself and others, while intense electoral competition determines who will

³ Though India subsequently signed the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage in October 2010, the consensus is that India's domestic laws trump whatever obligations might flow from this international instrument.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ There are obviously exceptions to this, most notably Ashley Tellis, "What Should we Expect from India as a Strategic Partner", in Sokolski, ed., pp. 231-258.

⁶ For general works on grand strategy see Barry R. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Barry R. Posen, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy", *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 5-53.

⁷ Recent work has primarily focused on the US-India relationship or the India-Pakistan strategic competition. We hope here to provide a more encompassing study.

pursue these visions and with what level of ambition. To achieve its rather modest aims, we argue that India's evolution as a military and nuclear power will be much more deliberate and limited than Washington may anticipate or hope, and the US may find Delhi unwilling to do much heavy-lifting on its behalf in the region. This has implications for India's relationship with Pakistan, China, and its broader Indian Ocean environment.

With respect to its relationship with the United States, we argue that it is unlikely that India and the United States will establish a "special relationship" akin to the Anglo-American partnership. To be sure, there are strong pressures across a diverse array of issues—from economic to military affairs to regional terrorism—on which India and the US have common ground. Where interests overlap, India and the US will continue to enjoy significant cooperation. However, we believe it is premature to hope that India and the United States will form a grand strategic alliance, either naturally or to balance against a rising China. Points of friction still remain over, for example, the US's relationship with Pakistan, the US being perceived as an unreliable military partner and supplier, India's strong relationships with Iran and Myanmar, and outsourcing as well as H1B visas for Indian workers in the US. Thus, we argue that, while India and the United States will cooperate on discrete issues, Delhi in particular will view each opportunity for cooperation in piecemeal fashion and not in the broader context of a strategic alliance that might force it to sacrifice its highly prized and hard-won foreign policy independence. India will retain a distinctively Indian approach to international security, grounded in an overwhelming desire for autonomy and a foreign policy profoundly constrained by the compulsions of domestic politics on the home front. In this way, the relationship may be closer to the Franco-American relationship, which is marked by periods of stark mutual frustration, but where substantive cooperation nevertheless occurs.

The paper proceeds in five major sections. First, we discuss the dominant strands of Indian foreign policy ideology, with a focus on the visions of India's two dominant national political parties: the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Second, we discuss the international implications of India's numerous internal security challenges. Third, we outline India's views of its major external threats, China and Pakistan, and its military responses to these perceived threats. Fourth, we discuss India's broader strategy towards Pakistan and Afghanistan, and its likely future. Fifth, we briefly highlight India's major goals and interests regarding a set of regional and global players – China, the US, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. We conclude with thoughts on the causes and future of Indian security strategy.

I. Indian Grand Strategy and its Sources

An assessment of Indian grand strategy rests on the twin questions: "What does India want?" and "How will it get what it wants?" With respect to the first question, a systematic examination of Indian goals reveals that it now has a consistent set of ordered broad preferences in the post-Cold War era that transcend domestic politics, though the tenor of these—and the means employed to achieve them—may vary depending on the domestic political configuration in Delhi:

1. Achieving sustained and manageable economic growth

2. Maintaining its territorial integrity against, and preventing terrorism by, internal and external militant groups
3. Maintaining its territorial integrity against external threats, notably Pakistan and China
4. Spearheading the maintenance of stability in the broader South Asian region, especially Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh

In terms of grand orientation, this set of preferences suggests that India has little appetite for external territorial expansion. It has little ambition to revise the status quo distribution of local territory and professes to seek diplomatic resolutions to outstanding territorial disputes with its neighbors. However, it does seek to revise the distribution of international economic and political power to become one of the engines of global economic growth, especially in technology, medicine, and services. Indian grand strategy therefore specifies a set of narrow, largely defensive, international interests that largely prioritizes domestic economic modernization and growth. As a result, the military and diplomatic postures that Delhi evolves and adopts should largely support this set of goals.

Where do these preferences come from? Though structural pressures set the broad parameters of Indian international behavior, we argue that structural pressures are channeled through two distinct ideational strands in India's world-view, and the expression of that ideology is mediated by domestic political variables. For several decades after independence in 1947, India was imbued with a Nehruvian worldview—promulgated by Jawaharlal Nehru and then his daughter Indira Gandhi and grandson Rajiv Gandhi—that privileged socialism, secularism, and development at home and a defensively oriented non-alignment foreign policy strategy abroad.⁸ Through domestic development and indigenous modernization, Nehruvianism believed that India could become a self-sufficient and independent global power. That view inherently prioritized India's grand strategy for over four decades, with a primary focus on sustainable (a.k.a. slow, or the "Hindu rate of growth") domestic development, indigenous technological capacity, and avoiding costly foreign policy adventures. Though Nehru's socialism naturally caused him to gravitate toward the Soviet Union, India remained a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, much to the frustration of the United States. Further, India's wars were largely wars of defense against Pakistani or Chinese breaches of India's territorial integrity in 1962, 1965, and 1971. Since India was effectively under one-party Congress rule until 1989, there was little challenge to this broad foreign policy orientation until Congress dominance eroded at that time.

The second strand of India's world view found expression in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), founded in 1980, though with roots that stretches back for decades to pre-independence Hindu nationalists.⁹ Though the BJP privileges economic growth as well, it largely rejects the socialist

⁸ See Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: MacMillan, 2007); Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); JN Dixit, *India's Foreign Policy: 1947-2003* (New Delhi: Picus Books, 2003); J.N. Dixit, *Across Borders: Fifty Years of Indian Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Picus Books, 1998); Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989). We also explore this in a second paper, see Paul Staniland and Vipin Narang, "The Wary Titan: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Indian Grand Strategy," Working Paper, November 2010.

⁹ See, for example, BJP Election Manifestos, 1991, 1996, 1998, 2004, and 2009; Bharatiya Janata Party, *Foreign Policy Resolutions and Statements 1980-1999*; Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: PUP, 1999); Dr. CP Thakur and Davendra Sharma, *India Under Atal Behari Vajpayee: The BJP Era* (Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1999); Madhusadan Mishra, *BJP and India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Uppal Publishers, 1997).

vehicles Congress pursues, favoring instead private sector growth. The founding ideology of the BJP finds its roots in the Hindu-nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which views India as the vessel for a resurgent Hindu civilization. The BJP's largely communal orientation in opposition to Islam and foreign intervention shapes its approach to India's external security environment: Pakistan is viewed as a threat to India's identity as a Hindu nation and must be defeated. The dark shadow of the Partition lies heavy over the Indo-Pakistan relationship.

The BJP also embraces a strongly zero-sum *realpolitik* view of power politics, viewing China as a great power with whom India must compete and balance against and the other major powers as malignly intentioned hypocrites seeking to impede India's and Hinduism's resurgence into its "rightful place in the sun." As such, the BJP views India's neighborhood with greater suspicion and global politics as a nasty game; a quest for civilizational (Hindu) prestige underpins much BJP rhetoric. With respect to internal security, the BJP's communalist tendencies often result in more aggressive tactics after terrorist or militant attacks, especially if they involve Muslims. Recent scholarship on the BJP's security decisions focus on a virulent 'oppositional nationalism' that drives its approach to nuclear weapons, domestic threats, Pakistan, and the broader international community.¹⁰

These strands are "ideal" types and only the Congress Party, when it ruled virtually unopposed under Nehru and Indira Gandhi (minus the Morarji Desai interruption), was able to implement a pure form of its grand strategy and foreign policy. Technically since 1977, but most starkly since 1989, India has entered the era of coalition politics where neither Congress nor the BJP—India's two largest political parties—can form a parliamentary majority without some association of strange bedfellows, usually involving an acronymphomania of regional parties and/or the broad Left front (which is more socialist-leaning than Congress).¹¹ For the past decade, both the Congress and the BJP held the reins of coalition governments as minority parties, and this trend is likely to be an enduring feature of Indian politics. And as Bidyut Chakrabarty notes, a "coalition—whether led by the Congress or BJP—is hardly ideology based, for what drives the regional partners is not ideological compatibility but pragmatic political considerations."¹² This would suggest that ideology is moderated in favor of electoral practicalities and lowest-common-denominator policies, particularly welfare and development schemes. The result is that foreign policy is relegated to secondary status and is moderated and slowed down in favor of domestic policy and internal security challenges.

Indeed, this is precisely what has happened in the last two coalition governments, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Congress-led United Progressive Alliances (UPA I and II). In particular, the era of coalition politics has mediated Indian foreign policy to the point where there is actually substantial *continuity* in grand strategic preferences—though the tenor and character of approaches certainly varies by government. When the BJP won a relatively large victory in 1998 and 1999, its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition of 303 seats was only 31 seats

¹⁰ See Jacques Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Vipin Narang, "Pride and Prejudice and Prithvis: Strategic Weapons Behavior in South Asia" in Scott D. Sagan, *Inside Nuclear South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹¹ See Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Forging Power: Coalition Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Katharine Adeney and Lawrence Saez, eds., *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2005); Atul Kohli, ed., *The Success of Indian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Zoya Hasan, *Parties and Party Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹² Chakrabarty, p. 205.

above the majority level of 272 and the BJP itself constituted only 183 seats; this meant that the defection of any one of a number of regional parties across India's wide political spectrum could threaten the stability of the government. These constraints shaped the BJP's foreign policy, led by the erudite and centrist Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in such a way that its ideal, communally-oriented preferences could not be pursued without risking the stability of the coalition itself.¹³ Though the BJP's most dramatic foreign policy move was to test nuclear weapons in May 1998, India's nuclear program grew considerably under Congress governments as well and several Congress prime ministers came within a hair's breadth of testing themselves; without Congress the BJP would not have had anything to test in May 1998, so even in this issue, there was more continuity than disjunction.¹⁴ In this way, the Hindu chauvinism found in BJP manifestos in the 1980s and 1990s were tempered by electoral realities that pushed the BJP to the center of the foreign policy spectrum.

The same is true of the successor United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalitions led by the Congress, which only bested the BJP by seven seats in the 2004 Lok Sabha (lower house) election (145 to 138 in a Lok Sabha with an effective size of 543 seats). In order to achieve the 272 seat majority, Congress had to rely on a coalition that included the Left as well as regional parties that had once supported the BJP, though the UPA coalition sported 334 members, well above the majority mark. Nevertheless, the fragility of relying on external support to form a coalition came to a head in the Indo-US nuclear deal vote-of-confidence after the Left, led by the Communist Party of India (CPI), withdrew its 59-seat support from the UPA in protest of a deal with the US. The ugly internal workings of India's coalition building exercises was on display for all the world to witness on live television on July 22, 2008 when the UPA survived a vote of confidence by bartering with regional parties such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and by trucking hospitalized and jailed MPs (some on murder charges), not to mention fistfuls of rupees, to Parliament to vote.

The UPA's operationalization of the nuclear deal was thus delayed by almost a year as Congress was forced to shelve it owing to the Left's opposition; it was only when an opening emerged to court the SP due to electoral math considerations in the state of Uttar Pradesh that Congress was able to ditch the Left for a party that was more concerned about state vote share than the intricacies of a civil nuclear deal. The episode revealed just how significantly domestic politics can intervene in an Indian foreign policy decision that was widely viewed across most of the Indian political spectrum (save the irreconcilable Left) to be overwhelmingly in India's national interest. In the second incarnation of the UPA since May 2009, the Congress won a surprising 206 seats on its own, and had a stable coalition with a substantial margin over 272 until the SP and RJD (another regional party from Bihar) withdrew support in March 2010, leaving the coalition vulnerable to collapse if another major regional party defects.¹⁵

The critical point is that domestic political changes in India since 1989, which have since launched India into the era of coalition politics where it is unlikely that the Congress or the BJP can ever achieve outright majorities in the Lok Sabha, persistently generate hodge-podge assemblies of governments where the broad spectrum of ideologies represented constrains India's foreign policy behavior in several ways. First, coalition politics in which the stability of a government depends on

¹³ Dr. CP Thakur and Devendra P. Sharma, *India Under Atal Behari Vajpayee* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers 1999), especially Chapters 7 & 8.

¹⁴ See K Subrahmanyam, "Narasimha Rao and the Bomb", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2004), pp. 593-5; K. Subrahmanyam, "From Indira to Gowda it was Bomb All the Way", *The Times of India*, April 17, 2000.

¹⁵ See Vidya Subrahmaniam, "One Year of UPA II: Numbers without Comfort," *The Hindu*, May 14, 2010.

small regional parties with parochial interests means that foreign policy will always be a secondary priority to equitable economic development, the only thing that unifies all political parties in India. Second, to the extent that security policy will matter to coalition governments, the thrust must be on *internal security* first—the prevention and response to terrorism and separatism, in Kashmir and elsewhere, particularly the so-called “Naxal Belt” in central India. Internal security matters still generate some domestic political charge, so there is likely to be greater political will to prevent and tackle internal security threats to the Indian state.

Third, external security policy will tend to move at a glacial pace and though there might be some variation in the *tenor* of India’s external security policy depending on whether Congress or the BJP is in power, there is likely to be more continuity than discontinuity between them because of the *centrifuging* effect of their coalition partners.¹⁶ This centrifuging effect is magnified by the peculiar way in which India’s parliamentary democracy blunts anything resembling “democratic audience costs”—the prime minister often holds a safe seat or, in Manmohan Singh’s case, is not even an elected member of Parliament (he is an appointed member of the Rajya Sabha, or upper house). As such, foreign policy is neither a salient election issue nor is there any credible way to hold individual leaders—just parties—accountable for foreign policy decisions given the structure of Indian democracy. In addition, given the designed subservience of the military to civilian politicians in India which results in a largely dysfunctional civil-military relationship, the military’s strategic and organizational preferences are likely to meet with the same level of irrelevance regardless of which party leads a parliamentary coalition. As such, there will likely be little appetite for anything but status-quo preferences, military capabilities will tend to remain defensively oriented, and India will largely pursue foreign policy strategies that allow it to be viewed as an *independent responsible* global power. This “lowest-common-denominator foreign policy” should be largely consistent across political coalitions and gives rise to the basic grand strategy outlined above.

In the following sections we focus on the implications of this lowest-common denominator grand strategy on India’s foreign policy. We start with India’s internal security challenges that have implications for its foreign policy—those conflicts with significant external support and/or secessionist potential (we bracket off India’s domestic terrorist threats)—since this is the most critical priority for India’s political bodies. We then explore India’s perception of its immediate security environment, notably Pakistan and China, and the military responses one might expect to see from India in the coming decade. The combination of these internal and external threats shape India’s broad strategy toward its immediate neighborhood, which is the focus of the subsequent section. We then explore India’s diplomatic strategy beyond South Asia—toward China, the US, and the Middle East.

II. Internal Threats with International Implications

India’s domestic politics cannot be cleanly separated from its international position. As noted above, electoral compulsions and domestic ideologies are powerful influences on Indian behavior. The most pressing threats to India, and the ones that generates the most political attention, are also domestic—the numerous *internal* armed challenges to the writ of the Indian state. While these conflicts are largely counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, they are primarily located in or spawned from India’s vulnerable periphery, where the distinction between internal and external security

¹⁶ See Chakrabarty, Chapters 1, 5, and 6, especially pp. 187-194.

disintegrates. South Asia's borders do not insulate countries from one another; rather, disputes about and spanning borders are common. There are three particularly important areas of India where domestic unrest and international politics are intertwined – Kashmir, the “Naxal Belt” across central India, and the seven states of the Northeast. In addition to these regions of unrest is more diffuse terrorism throughout urban India, most dramatically exemplified in the November 2008 attacks on Mumbai by the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Kashmir and Islamist terror could both trigger major conflict with Pakistan, while the conflicts in the Northeast and, to a lesser extent, Naxal areas affect international investment, the Indian “Look East” policy to Southeast Asia, and Sino-Indian ties.

Like India's foreign security policy, internal security considerations tend to be pervasively refracted through domestic political competition and a sclerotic bureaucracy. A common pattern emerges in India's reactions to internal challenges – slow, chaotic response, followed by a massive infusion of security forces, and a prolonged insurgency and counterinsurgency that slowly blunts but often does not eliminate the conflict as the center attempts political integration of disaffected groups (as in Punjab and Kashmir, but which is proving difficult in the latter and with the Naxals). The task of containment and counterinsurgency is made more challenging by the porous borders of the Indian periphery. Of India's major insurgencies, most endure in some form and they seem unlikely to be decisively resolved in the near future. The extraordinary resources of the Indian state, when focused and mobilized, allow it to endlessly hurl waves of security forces at internal challenges for decades at a time, containing but not resolving the dangers to territorial integrity.

Kashmir. The enduring conflict over Kashmir has pitted an irredentist Pakistan against an India intent on maintaining control of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. At the time of independence in 1947, the Hindu maharajah of the Muslim-majority princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, chose to accede to India after a rebellion backed by Pakistani tribesmen and then the Pakistani state. The conflict escalated from the use of irregular troops into a conventional war in 1947-48. Another conflict broke out in 1965 that centered on Kashmir, resulting in a stalemate but which was perceived largely as an Indian victory. After Pakistan's decisive defeat in 1971, a period of relative stability ensued despite rigged elections and poor governance.

Since 1988, however, an extremely violent period of insurgency and terrorism has wracked the state. The insurgency's real onset in 1989/1990 helped to trigger a major Indo-Pakistan crisis as India accused Pakistan of backing and instigating the revolt. Like the tension caused by the Punjab militancy in the mid/late 1980s, India's bleeding periphery led to increased Indo-Pakistan hostility and the region's first overt nuclear crisis, the “compound crisis” of 1990. The rebellion was originally waged by pro-independence Kashmiris of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), backed by Pakistani weapons and training. The JKLF fell by the wayside fairly soon, however, caught between its own organizational failures, Indian counterinsurgency, and its marginalization by Pakistan. India's response was inept, with the central government in Delhi weak and obsessed with its own coalitional maneuverings. A free hand was then given to the security apparatus in 1990, leading to the saturation of the state with troops and the consolidation of a political economy of insurgency.

Over time Pakistan began nurturing an array of pro-Pakistan groups, which hoped to merge Kashmir with Pakistan (in contrast to the JKLF's goal of an independent Kashmir). The most important of these groups was, and is, the Hizbul Mujahideen, which received high levels of Pakistani support but drew the bulk of its cadres from Indian-administered Kashmir. The Hizb was eventually contained

by the Indians, who used “flipped” former insurgents to target Hizb members and their political supporters in the Jamaat-e-Islami on the ground in Indian Kashmir. The Hizb remains a player, backed by the Pakistani Jamaat and Pakistan’s ISI intelligence agency, but the major sources of militancy have shifted into the Pakistani heartland.

With the Hizb at bay, since the late 1990s the militancy has come to be dominated by Islamist groups with a predominantly Pakistani recruiting base, particularly the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. These groups find recruits in the Pakistani Punjab, Karachi, and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) drawing on networks of religious organizations and extensive state sponsorship.¹⁷ Some of the organizations previously focused on Kashmir have splintered and become enemies of the Pakistani state itself, showing the international spillover of the war. They were also involved in the 1999 India-Pakistan Kargil War, as Pakistani formations of the Northern Light Infantry and jihadi militants established positions on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LOC) during the winter, and then held on for a substantial period of time before being withdrawn by Nawaz Sharif, then the Pakistani prime minister.¹⁸

Violence has declined substantially in recent years, but Kashmir remains a dangerous place for civilians and for the hundreds of thousands of Indian security forces in the state. India is the status quo power – it seeks simply to maintain what it currently has. This means its strategic preferences lie in stability, and extremely high levels of resolve have been shown in the costs it has been willing to bear in Kashmir. A sophisticated counterinsurgency grid is in place, along with continuous area dominance operations and a regular troop rotation. This COIN force is shielded along the LOC by the massive conventional forces of XV (in Srinagar) and XVI (in Udhampur) Corps, as well as deployments of the Border Security Force (BSF). In Jammu and Kashmir state proper, security is provided by the Army, BSF, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and Jammu and Kashmir Police, as well as smaller specialized formations.

The overall prospects for settlement in Kashmir are uncertain – unrest in Pakistan (and the existence of highly violent veto-players under dubious control and of Pakistan’s own making, such as the LeT) makes it a dubious partner, Indian elites are clearly willing to absorb the costs of a continued military presence, and local politicians have not shown an ability to generate a credible consensus. Kashmir and Indian policy are likely to remain locked in place, with continuing low-level violence and a fragmented polity split among several political parties. There are some positive signs of increasing electoral participation, but past gains have proven fragile in the face of enduring political instability. The ruling coalition of the Congress and People’s Democratic Party between 2002 and 2008 eventually broke down in recriminations, and the new National Conference-Congress government faces significant challenges in governance. Containment will characterize Indian Kashmir policy well into the future, with sporadic mass protests, peaks and valleys of insurgent violence, and intense electoral maneuvering. While India maintains formal claim to areas of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir under Pakistani and Chinese control, there is little expectation of regaining this – rather, India appears to be quite content for the current Kashmir LOC to be converted into the international border.

¹⁷ Rana 2004; Mir 2006.

¹⁸ Sood and Sawhney 2003.

Islamist Terrorism. Kashmir itself is no longer likely to be a flashpoint for major India-Pakistan conventional or nuclear confrontation. Indian security forces can contain even a significant upsurge in violence, and the pervasive panic and lack of preparedness in the state that contributed to the 1990 “compound crisis” between India and Pakistan is unlikely to be repeated. Indians have become almost inured to violence in Kashmir, the Kargil War showed India’s ability to engage in conflict over Kashmir without rapid escalation, and crucial local insurgent networks (mainly of the Hizbul Mujahideen) have been hammered by Indian counterinsurgency. It is possible that a massive upsurge in insurgent infiltration will send the state spinning into chaos once more, but this seems highly unlikely.

Instead, the major danger arising from threat to internal security comes from the militant groups that emerged from the Kashmir (and 1980s Afghanistan) conflict and that are now reaching deeper into India. The Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami, and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen have all launched terrorist strikes in major Indian cities, including the Indian Parliament. The dramatic attack on Parliament nearly took India and Pakistan to war in 2001-2002, triggering Operation Parakram and a variety of ultimately-unsuccessful coercive threats. The aftermath of the November 2008 attacks on Mumbai has seen a more restrained strategy aimed at putting pressure on Pakistan’s international supporters (the US above all) to induce shifts in Pakistani strategy. The ultimate outcomes of both of these crises were driven by India’s powerlessness in the face of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent.¹⁹

India’s broader strategy to deal with Islamist terrorism now has two prongs. The first prong of Indian strategy is to improve its ability to coerce Pakistan by the manipulation of conventional and nuclear risk, discussed in more detail below as part of a broader strategy to deal with conventional war in a nuclear era. The aim is to credibly threaten limited conventional war in retaliation for unacceptable terrorist attacks; India is desperate to find a way to escape the constraints of nuclear deterrence. As we detail in the next section, while India is attempting to put the pieces of such a conventional posture in place, it is many years from being able to successfully do so and runs intolerable risks of uncontrollable escalation.

The second strategy is internal, continuing to augment internal security and intelligence forces to deal with militant organizations operating on Indian soil. A major reform effort is at least rhetorically being launched to deal with the failures of the security forces in anticipating and responding to the Mumbai attacks. A new National Investigating Agency (NIA) is being set up to deal with national-level terrorism, and there have been vows of resource investments and improved intelligence-sharing both at the federal and state levels. Some promising initial steps have been taken, but the challenge is so enormous and the effectiveness of the security apparatus so uneven that it is hard to imagine rapid systematic reform. Successful terrorist attacks in India in future are inevitable, and hold the potential to trigger major new crises between India and Pakistan that also threaten to unsettle the situation in Afghanistan. Islamist terrorism will be of fact of life for Indian policymakers for the foreseeable future.

The Northeast. An even more complex set of insurgencies have been waged in the Indian Northeast, a collection of seven states connected to India by a narrow corridor passing between Bangladesh and

¹⁹ See Vipin Narang, “Posturing for Peace?: Pakistan’s Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability,” *International Security*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Winter 2010).

Bhutan.²⁰ Many of the inhabitants of the Northeast do not view themselves as bound to India by ties of heritage or blood. Rather, a series of tribal and ethnic insurgencies have rocked the region since the mid-1950s. The Northeast now involves a dizzying mixture of politicians, insurgents, illicit economies, and military presence. The Indian army and paramilitaries are highly active in the region, which is likely to remain troubled indefinitely.

The *international* dimensions of the Northeast's chronic instability are three-fold. The first is the effect of illegal immigration from Bangladesh and West Bengal on the ethnic balance of the Northeast's communities. Resentment of the inflow of Bengali-speakers has triggered often-grotesque violence in Assam and elsewhere as tribal and ethnic "sons of the soil" fight against what they see as encroachment of their land and resources by outsiders. This has increased tension with Bangladesh, a desperately poor state rocked by entrenched corruption, troubled civil-military relations, and natural disasters. Cooperation between Bangladesh and India on border issues has been sporadic and had unclear results. In addition, competition between the indigenous groups of the Northeast has provided further spur to violence, including between tribes within the same broad ethnic category.

In addition to these ethnic and tribal motivations for violence, the porous borders of the region have provided the opportunity for insurgent groups to find resources and sanctuaries. This has been particularly true in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, which have both voluntarily and involuntarily been insurgent havens.²¹ India's unwillingness to vigorously confront Myanmar's military regime over human rights has much to do with hopes that Myanmar will at least half-heartedly restrain insurgent groups operating from its soil. Thus far this policy has borne, at best, limited success, but is seen by many as better than the alternative of a hostile Burmese regime actively assisting militancy. In addition to its needs for mineral and energy resources, internal conflict is a cause of India's unwillingness to put pressure on the military junta over its human rights abuses. Future repression by the military regime will probably be met with a similarly ambivalent and half-hearted response by an Indian state more worried about maintaining its borders than protecting Burmese civilians.

Second, the Northeast is a gateway to the burgeoning markets of Southeast Asia, and thus forms a key part of the Indian Look East policy. It is a site for external investment by ASEAN countries, and a physical route for shipment into Myanmar and beyond. Instability in the Northeast thus may affect the success of India's efforts to build closer economic and political ties with the countries of Southeast Asia. The Northeast will grow significantly in importance if Myanmar's regime changes, which would open the country as a transit point into markets in the region. In the meantime, the resilience of Myanmar's regime leaves India's Southeast Asia policy perpetually partial, hoping that trading and transportation corridors will open to augment sea-based shipping out of Kolkata and Orissa. The Look East policy is discussed more below.

Third, the Northeast was the frontier battleground in India's 1962 war with China, and parts of Arunachal Pradesh remain contested between the two countries. Maintaining control of the region is

²⁰ These seven states are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura. All but Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have witnessed significant insurgent violence since independence.

²¹ Bhutan was largely cleared in a 2003 Bhutan Army offensive, backed by India. Myanmar remains a major sanctuary, while Bangladesh's complex relationship with India makes it hard to tell how much sanctuary remains and whether it is voluntary or not.

essential to hold the Indian position in the far northeast, and spirals of instability and unrest in the Northeast (particularly the Assam hills and any nascent militancy in Arunachal Pradesh) will raise India's perception of vulnerability towards China. There are deep fears of Chinese infrastructure enhancements along the border, and Indian elites perceive themselves as on the wrong side of a highly asymmetrical development balance in the region. This provides further incentives for India to both entrench its security position in the Northeast and to react with alarm to Chinese moves on the other side of the border. The border dispute over Arunachal Pradesh has been sporadically used by China to poke at India, leading to frustration and resentment on the part of Indian security managers, who feel that they are the supporters of a simple and reasonable status quo in the face of a belligerent China. Temptations to return to a policy of supporting Tibetan activists have thus far been firmly avoided and will likely continue to be, but Tibet remains an issue that India could reactivate under extreme circumstances.

The Naxal Belt. Unlike Kashmir and the Northeast, Maoist militancy in the center of the country – generally within a corridor stretching from Bihar to Andhra Pradesh – does not have foreign sponsors or sanctuaries. Its international significance lies in the fact that this area is also home to India's most bountiful natural resources. A variety of left-wing armed groups, collectively known as "Naxalites," have become increasingly popular over the past decade, extending their control of distant rural areas to touch on approximately 10% of the country's districts. The states most affected are poor and badly (indeed, barely) governed, and have large tribal populations that are marginalized and disenfranchised. Naxalite militancy has recently—after a massacre of security forces at Dantewada—reached the point of a crisis in which the central government seriously debated, but for now opted against, sending in large-scale military or paramilitary forces – it is seen by many political elites as more of a nuisance than a threat, but the scale of Naxalism suggests that this dismissal may be premature.

The Naxalites in their various forms are not supported by external states nor do their claims touch on sensitive borders. Rather, they matter for India's international security posture because they threaten stability in the mineral-rich regions of eastern and northern India, particularly in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa, as well as parts of Andhra Pradesh. These areas have generally not shared the economic prosperity of the west and south, but are becoming sites of external investment aimed at tapping into their mineral wealth. Foreign companies are partnering with Indian firms and governments to build infrastructure and begin extraction. Continued violence threatens this process of expansion and thus may seriously slow or halt international involvement in this impoverished part of the country.

III. Territorial Integrity against External Threats

In this section we examine India's perceptions of its two primary *external* threats, Pakistan and China, and its likely conventional military and nuclear evolution in response to them over the next decade or so. Indian domestic politics demand that India adopts a relatively status quo view with respect to both Pakistan and China, since there is little appetite to divert significant capital away from development projects to military materiel.²² Most of India's conventional military

²² India's defense spending is estimated to be around \$40 billion, or about 2-3% of GDP; however, the Ministry of Defence is pressured to not spend its entire allocation and return the balance (almost \$1 billion in FY2007-08) to the

developments—despite what the military may claim about China—are focused on Pakistan, owing to the historical enmity between the two states and the higher likelihood of conflict with her than any other state, especially with the increasingly deep penetration of Pakistan-based militant groups such as the LeT into the Indian heartland. With respect to China, other than the Indian Navy which for bureaucratic political reasons obsesses over the Chinese threat, both the Congress and BJP governments have had—and will likely continue to have—a rather sanguine view of the India-China relationship due to the trade potential the two states share. So while the political leadership might indulge the Navy’s anxiety for big-ticket platforms that improve India’s naval prestige, it is unlikely to support rapid modernization of a blue-water navy due to a fear of conflict with China.

Pakistan. Although India has been locked in a seemingly “conflict unending” with Pakistan over the fate of Kashmir, as noted above, India seeks no permanent territorial acquisitions in Pakistan and has adopted a largely defensive military posture against Pakistan to protect its borders against Pakistani-backed infiltrations. There is no desire by any Indian government, across the entire swath of the ideological spectrum in Delhi, to bear the burden of stewarding the Pakistani state or to incorporate its population of 160 million into the Indian polity. The cost of, and disarray that would result from, cutting a nuclear-armed Pakistan into pieces is simply too great to fathom; India’s overriding interest is therefore political stability in Pakistan, but not at the cost of administering the state itself. While a democratic Pakistan is widely viewed as a desirable end-state in India, Indian political leaders are unwilling to privilege democracy over stability when it comes to their volatile neighbor—as long as a Pakistani leadership is able to maintain sovereign control over the state and its nuclear assets and not export terrorism, India’s political leadership is happy to abide by the Huntingtonian axiom that the form of government is less relevant than the “degree of government.”²³

While, *ceteris paribus*, the domestic political configuration in Delhi results in some variation in the intensity of focus on Pakistan—with the BJP historically being slightly more rhetorically aggressive—there are certain enduring realities which hedge against any major conventional conflict between the two states, which was once described as “communal riots with tanks” or a public school boxing match where the two opponents give each other a bloody nose but then “kiss and make up.”²⁴ In addition to the lack of any domestic political impetus to administer a defeated Pakistani state, Pakistan’s first-use nuclear posture which is intentionally ambiguous about its ‘red-lines’—somewhere between trip-wire and last resort, though in Pakistan that distance is literally only several tens-of-kilometers in practice—significantly constrains Indian retaliatory action. Although that has partly limited Indian military action after spectacular terrorist attacks in 2001 and 2008, Indian political leaders may not be able to afford to be so restrained after another Mumbai.

For decades, India was able to effectively deter large-scale Pakistani or Pakistani-backed infiltration through its sheer conventional military advantage (which varied in numbers between 1.5:1 and 2.5:1). Though there are local equilibria in the theater, especially in the event of a short conflict, India’s ability to generate conventional power in any lengthy or decisive conflict was believed to be

federal budget. See Rahul Bedi, “Homeland Defence: India Country Briefing”, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, January 19, 2009.

²³ See Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 1; also see Steve Coll, “The Back Channel”, *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2009.

²⁴ A colorful phrase coined by Indian Major General D.K. Palit, see Bharat Karnad, “Conventional Stick and a Nuclear Carrot”, *Tehelka Magazine*, August 12, 2006.

overwhelming.²⁵ The traditional Indian defensive deployment scheme called for a series of 7-10 holding units along the India-Pakistan border to blunt any Pakistani offensive, with three large strike corps capable of being mobilized from India's interior to counterstrike, with Indian Air Force (IAF) and Navy (blockading Karachi) support, if necessary. In any large conventional contingency, this deployment scheme was believed to be sufficient to repel and defeat any Pakistani attempt to achieve a decisive military solution to Kashmir or to detach a Punjab led by Khalistani Sikh separatists from India.

Nuclearization in 1998, which was hoped to establish relative stability at high-levels of conventional conflict on the subcontinent, dampened India's conventional superiority by providing Pakistan with a nuclear umbrella under which it could "bleed India by a thousand cuts."²⁶ While there is a vigorous debate about the applicability of the 'stability-instability', or what some have characterized as "instability-instability", paradox to the South Asia context, the empirical frequency of Pakistani-backed infiltration has certainly increased since 1998—the 1999 Kargil War, the 2001-2002 Operation Parakram crisis, and the 26 November 2008 Mumbai siege being the most visible examples.²⁷ Pakistani boldness was backed by a nuclear doctrine that defines one of its "redlines" as conventional Indian forces crossing some unspecified several tens of kilometers into Pakistani territory—roughly the depth required by short thrusts designed to encircle and cut off infiltrators' bases of support and/or conventional Pakistani support lines. Pakistan's nuclear posture which threatens the first use of nuclear weapons, and institutes weak negative controls to make that posture credible, has thus largely blunted India's conventional power.²⁸

The post-nuclearization state of affairs created a dilemma for India's traditional deterrent deployment scheme because in the 10-21 days it takes India to mobilize its massive strike corps from the interior to the border, Pakistan can both pull back its irregular forces and remove the justification and targets for an Indian cross-border response as well as countermobilize its conventional and nuclear assets (Pakistan operates on interior lines of communication which means it can mobilize its Army Reserves North and South quicker than India can mobilize its three strike corps). This paralytic pathology was demonstrated twice. First, in Operation Parakram in 2001-2002 following a Pakistani-backed attack on India's Parliament, the three Indian strike corps took almost a month to mobilize, during which period Pakistan had time to counter-mobilize and purportedly engage in nuclear signaling to deter Indian retaliation. Once fully amassed, India's 800,000 troops were ordered to simply stay deployed at border locations while the BJP government wavered on its commitment to use the blunt sledgehammer, as it were, of three armored strike corps to disrupt Pakistani-backed ragtag insurgent lines. Ten months later, after a costly mobilization, the Indian strike corps were ignominiously ordered back to their home cantonments as the BJP was deterred from executing any offensive operations against Pakistan.²⁹

²⁵ See John H. Gill, "Brasstacks: Prudently Pessimistic", in Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behavior and the Bomb*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), Chapter 3

²⁶ This has been Pakistan's strategy, as described by former Pakistani leader General Zia ul-Haq, since the 1980s.

²⁷ See S. Paul Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in South Asia", *International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Fall 2008), pp. 71-94.

²⁸ See Narang, "Posturing for Peace?: Pakistan's Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability."

²⁹ See Lt General VK Sood and Pravin Sawhney, *Operation Parakram: The War Unfinished* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), especially p. 83.

Second, after the Lashkar-e-Taiba siege of Mumbai in November 2008, India's Congress-led government was also inhibited from launching retaliatory military strikes for fear of triggering Pakistan's nuclear threshold; furthermore, the Army indicated that it needed several weeks to mobilize even after Mumbai, which effectively took ground options off the table. Former Army Chief of Staff Shankar Rowchowdhury has noted that, "Pakistan's nuclear weapons deterred India from attacking that country after the Mumbai strikes...[and] it was due to Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons that India stopped short of a military retaliation following the attack on Parliament in 2001."³⁰ So even across political lines, the combination of domestic political pressure and Pakistan's nuclear deterrent have rendered even the more hawkish BJP relatively hamstrung with respect to conventional military options against Pakistan.

As a correction to the low levels of strategic instability introduced by nuclearization, the Indian military called for a revision, termed Cold Start by the media but referred to as "proactive strategy" in internal Army writings, to its traditional conventional military deployment scheme, the erstwhile Sundarji Doctrine, in 2004.³¹ In order to shorten mobilization times to allow Indian forces to conduct short thrusts (aka "salami slices") into Pakistani territory *before* Pakistan has a chance to move conventional or nuclear assets, the Indian armed forces are presently developing an integrated deployment procedure where offensive assets and support platforms required of the strike corps in any limited war contingency would be integrated into so-called pivot corps (division level forces formerly charged as holding units) which are positioned closer to the border. This would supposedly allow the Indian military to conduct initial operations from a "cold" state while strike corps elements could serve as surge capability, rather than requiring a lengthy and costly full mobilization of the three strike corps from the outset. In addition, the reorganization takes advantage of India's superiority in maneuver capability by subdividing some of the existing strike corps into follow-on forces to augment the offensive thrusts initiated by the pivot units; as before, all offensive operations would in theory be supported by the Indian Air Force and Navy.

Although advertised as a new *doctrine*, this shift is less a doctrinal change than a logistical and organizational correction to enable existing limited war doctrine under the shadow of nuclear weapons.³² In particular, it corrects what the army deemed to be two critical shortcomings in Operation Parakram's lengthy mobilization time which allowed: (1) international pressure to hamstring India's options and, relatedly, (2) the political leadership time to dither and abort planned offensives. The shift to "proactive strategy" options is aimed at allowing India's armed forces to reassert its conventional deterrent by re-establishing a credible capability to disrupt low levels of infiltration across the Pakistani border at the sub-nuclear strata. It is *intentionally* designed by the military to exploit the political leadership's emotions following a catastrophic attack and force their hand with the logic of short mobilization timetables. Though the Indian Army denies that "Cold Start" exists—the current Chief of Army Staff VK Singh explicitly disavowed its existence in September 2010—it seems to be playing "who's on first" with the existence of the strategy. Cold

³⁰ General (Retd) Shankar Rowchowdhury quoted in "Pak's N-Bomb Prevented India from Attacking it after 26/11", *Press Trust of India*, March 9, 2009. Available at <http://www.ptinews.com/pti%5Cptisite.nsf/0/44975AB7E2577539652575740022C9B7?OpenDocument>.

³¹ See Gurmeet Kanwal, "Cold Start and Battle Groups for Offensive Operations", *Strategic Trend (Observer Research Foundation)*, vol. 4, issue 18; Walter C. Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? India's New Limited War Doctrine", *International Security*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/2008), pp. 158-190; Tariq Ashraf, "Doctrinal Reawakening of the Indian Armed Forces", *Military Review*, November/December 2004, pp.53-62.

³² Bharat Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), Ch. 4

Start is the term ascribed to the strategy developed by a quasi-official think tank (The Centre for Land Warfare Studies, or CLAWS, headed by Brigadier (Retd) Gurmeet Kanwal). The army simply calls the doctrine “proactive strategy” which *definitely* exists in the doctrinal writings from 2004 and 2010. The assumptions involved in any proactive options are hefty (can discuss this more in Q&A) and the implications for subcontinental stability are grim.

Regardless of the nomenclature, as far as India is concerned, the acquisitions and evolution of the military will likely be along the lines required to establish something like Cold Start, emphasizing improvements in communication and command and control technology to support inter-service operability and real-time combined arms operations. All three services are upgrading their mainstay platforms, with the army recently upgrading its armored punch by taking delivery of 347 T-90 main battle tanks. The Indian Air Force has received approval to buy 126 multi-role combat aircraft and has already incorporated 124 Su-30 MKI heavier multirole combat aircraft into its inventory, with the total to be over 250 by 2015.

In addition, the Indian Navy is expanding its surface fleet to support integrated service combat operations and expand to a 140-145 vessel blue-water navy force capable of extended-reach operations, most notably by adding two aircraft carrier battle groups: the erstwhile *Admiral Gorshkov*, which India bought from Russia in 2004 for roughly \$2.9 billion (including retrofit costs) and which will be re-commissioned as the INS *Vikramaditya*; and the indigenously build *Vikrant*-class aircraft carrier which is scheduled to replace the INS *Viraat* in 2012. Though the Indian Navy is attempting to expand into a true blue water naval force as per its 2004 Maritime Doctrine, even with these service upgrades, India presently lacks the power projection capability to mount extended offensive operations far from the homeland, other than the occasional anti-piracy operation to protect Indian merchant ships. Rather, these developments seem to be part of a broad modernization effort to support India’s traditional military missions vis-à-vis Pakistan (e.g. blockading Karachi, providing strategic air support for the army) and protect its interests in the Indian Ocean region.

But one should not underestimate just how far away India is from being able to field a “Cold Start” force or a true blue-water navy. Problems with indigenous development and a bloated acquisition process which flow from the paralytic chokehold that domestic politics puts on defense modernization mean that India’s conventional capabilities have evolved at a glacial pace. As Stephen Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta point out, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has not delivered a single major military platform for any of the services in fifty years.³³ For example, the saga of the Arjun main battle tank (MBT) exemplifies just how disastrous the indigenous development process can be. In 2000, the Ministry of Defence along with the army awarded a contract to India’s indigenous development organization, the DRDO, to produce 124 Arjun tanks. The first five units were not delivered to the army until 2004, after which they performed disastrously in the desert environment in which any India-Pakistan conventional conflict would take place—overheating, a thermal imaging system rendered ineffective by the desert heat, and an erratic fire control system. As a result, the army revolted against the Arjun and sought the acquisition of the 347 Russian T-90s in December 2007, although it has also agreed to purchase a handful of Arjuns; India hopes to have 3000 MBTs in service by 2020.

³³ Stephen Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming* (Washington DC: Brookings University Press)

And though the Indian Navy is attempting to aggressively expand as it tries to make the transition from a so-called brown water force limited to coastal operations to a blue-water navy, with the acquisition of additional carriers and destroyers, eight sub-hunting Boeing P-8s from the US, and the indigenous push for larger nuclear powered submarine (SSN) and ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) force, it has similarly had serious trouble with its planned modernization effort. For example, India's lone aircraft carrier, the INS *Viraat* had to have a life-extension because India's acquisition of the *Admiral Gorshkov* in 2004 has been delayed for years due to Russian demands on the retrofit price, which have increased by almost \$2 billion. The *Vikramaditya* will not enter service until at least 2012. And an indigenous carrier project has run into several-year delays due to "technical glitches" and a lack of high-quality steel.³⁴

The Indian services thus face two key problems: indigenous development is unreliable, at best, and foreign acquisition procedures "have led to ad hoc-ism in decision making, creating a stumbling block in the path of modernisation and overall defence preparedness" according to India's own defense parliamentary committee.³⁵ That is, while domestic development has historically been invariably plagued by significant delays, unreliable platforms, and undelivered promises, the foreign acquisition process is also bedeviled by domestic and bureaucratic politics that usually result in inaction. So even though India's conventional force posture developments seek the modernization of capabilities, with the army and air force singularly focused on achieving a Cold Start capability and the navy focused on extended blue water operations, they are all a long way from achieving these aims.

Although Cold Start is India's conventional force response to address the lower levels of conflict that were introduced post-nuclearization, there is little evidence that India seeks to revise its nuclear posture with respect to Pakistan. India's current nuclear posture can best be characterized as a recessed assured retaliation posture where the warheads are unassembled and in the custody of civilian agencies—the Department of Atomic Energy stewards the fissile cores, the Defence Research and Development Organisation possesses the triggers, and the armed services maintain the delivery platforms. Assets require significant lead-time to be assembled and deployed, establishing a costly signal to India's opponents that India only intends to retaliate against a nuclear first strike against Indian territory or assets. India's delivery vehicles can currently target the whole of Pakistan through a mix of aircraft, short-range Prithvi ballistic missiles, and with the induction of the Agni family of missiles, particularly the Agni I which was developed under the BJP to fill the gaps in India's strategic delivery capabilities against Pakistan. This posture is currently believed to deter the Pakistani use of nuclear weapons against the Indian homeland. While the systems reliability, delivery vehicles, and command and control procedures of India's nuclear assets will surely evolve, Indian strategists believe that the basic state of strategic deterrence against Pakistan has already obtained. A potentially destabilizing addition to India's posture would be the introduction of limited theater missile defense systems which could neutralize Pakistan's nuclear umbrella, such as Israel's Patriot-derived Arrow missile defense system, whose sale to India is currently being blocked by the US (India is, however, developing an indigenous system, Akash, but it is not believed to be as advanced as the Patriot system).

³⁴ See Rahul Bedi, "Homeland Defence: India Country Briefing", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 19, 2009; also Rahul Bedi, "Force of Reckoning: India Bulks up its Maritime Muscle", *Jane's Navy International*, May 23, 2008.

³⁵ Ibid.

All of this suggests that, in the medium-term, India's security strategy with respect to Pakistan will not look very different from the past ten years. Regardless of whether Congress or the BJP leads a parliamentary coalition, Indian military responses to Pakistani sub-conventional provocation will likely be inhibited by Pakistan's putative nuclear deterrent and by a broad consensus that, in such a context, India has few viable retaliatory options against Pakistan. Indeed, despite higher intensity rhetoric from the BJP during the Operation Parakram crisis in 2001-2002, neither the BJP nor Congress ultimately resorted to military retaliation against Pakistan in response to the 2001 Parliament attack or the 2008 Mumbai attacks, respectively. Even if faced with a persistent Pakistani-backed terrorist threat, India will neither have the capability to engage in surprise limited retaliation against Pakistan for awhile nor have the political will for such action even if it was a possibility, since neither the BJP nor Congress wish to be saddled with stewarding a Pakistan that they themselves destroyed. There is widespread agreement across the political spectrum that a *stable* Pakistan is in India's national interest. As such, India will likely continue to adopt a defensive posture and orientation toward Pakistan at the *political level*, deterring large-scale infiltration and absorbing periodic provocations with measured frustration.

China. India's major objective with respect to China is economic engagement which is hoped to have the twin effects of stimulating Indian growth and providing Beijing incentives to loosen its patronage of Islamabad, a persistent thorn in the side of India-China relations. Nevertheless, while India may have achieved a stable conventional and nuclear balance with Pakistan, it is believed to be on the short-end of both balances vis-à-vis China. While Western net assessment analyses might predict that India should expand its conventional and nuclear capabilities to balance its larger neighbor to the east, India's political parties (including the BJP) are currently, and surprisingly, relatively nonchalant about the prospect of a more muscular China. Bilateral trade between the two countries burgeoned under the NDA, and the UPA government continued that trend and undertook historic naval exercises between the two countries.³⁶ Confident that a land conflict with China is unlikely over the high passes in the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau (be it in Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh, or Sikkim), and confident that the naval balance is favorable over India's sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and over most likely points of tension, India's elites are hard-pressed to see any conflict with China erupting in the relevant force-planning timeframe.³⁷ It should be noted that the military diverges with this assessment and highlights increasing People's Liberation Army (PLA) "engagements" across the McMahon Line separating India and Tibet—driving the Indian armed forces to deploy two Su-30MKI squadrons in the Northeast. However, while both China and India have been competing—and will likely continue to do so—over diplomatic issues and energy resources in Central Asia and Africa, few in India's political class worry that this political and commercial competition will spark a land conflict.³⁸ In addition, India's fears of China's military modernization program are allayed by the belief that the clear target of that

³⁶ "India PM Visits China for Summit", *BBC News*, January 14, 2008. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7185620.stm>.

³⁷ Though India detected an increase in the number of PLA 'incursions' in the disputed territories in Arunachal Pradesh and the Line of Actual Control in Aksai Chin from 170 in 2007 to 213 in 2008, the Indian Chief of Army Staff Deepak Kapoor noted that this increase was due to 'differing perceptions' of where the LAC lies and due to increased Indian capacity to monitor and detect PLA movements, so he denied any substantive increase. See Bedi, "Homeland Defence: India Country Briefing" and Deepak Kapoor paraphrased in "India Needs to be Wary of China's Military Modernization", *The Indian Express*, July 3, 2008.

³⁸ Bedi, "Homeland Defence: India Country Briefing"

modernization program is the US presence in East Asia, not India. They are happy to pass the buck to the US on this score.

Nevertheless, while a land conventional conflict is unlikely, Chinese naval modernization—even if targeted at US deployments in East Asia—is sounding alarm bells amongst some quarters of India’s strategic community. In particular, Indian naval analysts fear that China is pursuing what they term a ‘string of pearls’ strategy to protect its sea lines of communication to the Middle East for energy resources, including the construction of deep water ports in Hambantota, Sri Lanka, Sittwe, Myanmar and Gwadar, Pakistan as well as facilities in Chittagong, Bangladesh—these cross India’s traditional sphere of naval influence in the Indian Ocean.³⁹ From the Chinese perspective, friendly access along these routes is critical to avoid vulnerability in the Strait of Malacca, through which currently 80% of its oil passes.⁴⁰

But to Indian naval analysts, China’s moves in the Indian Ocean region have the potential to encircle India. The Chinese naval facility in Pakistan, which is actually being developed by a private Singaporean company, reinforces Indian naval analysts’ fears of a Chinese-Pakistani axis as well and, by providing Pakistan naval strategic depth away from Karachi, alters India’s blockade strategies against Pakistan. It is not difficult to discern a clear bureaucratic political motive for the Indian Navy’s hyperbolic view of China—while the army and air force can claim large portions of the defense budget owing to the Pakistani threat, the navy faces no competitors in the Indian Ocean besides a future potential Chinese blue-water force. Although presently non-confrontational, the Indian Navy has little difficulty imagining contingencies where Indian and Chinese interests diverge and these SLOCs become points of contestation or armed conflict in the future, especially in the 15-20 year timeframe. However, given India’s existing maritime capability and its planned modernization, India should be more than able to secure its naval interests in the Indian Ocean region for the foreseeable future. The invocation of the Chinese naval threat, however, will likely be an effective bureaucratic justification for the necessity and urgency of India’s naval modernization. Delhi’s political leadership may indulge the navy in its expansion effort since the ability to conduct naval exercises with other countries (e.g. Russia, China, France, Japan and the US) and extended anti-piracy or humanitarian operations are believed to be a source of prestige for the state. But it is unlikely that either a BJP or Congress-led coalition government will view naval expansion with the same sense of urgency as the Indian Navy.

Furthermore, while India has been cooperating with Southeast and East Asian countries in the naval sphere, even the Indian Navy, as specified in its 2004 Maritime Doctrine, defines its “legitimate areas of interest” as “the region stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca,” and not beyond into the Asia-Pacific region.⁴¹ Though the Indian Navy has increased contacts and exercises with the Southeast Asia region, thus far, it has not envisioned operations east of the Straits of Malacca and seems to be quite content to buck-pass to the US in the Asia-Pacific region as a hedge against China. The Indian Navy has been conducting annual regional navy meetings and limited

³⁹ See, for example, Christopher J. Person, *String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China’s Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, July 2006); Gurmeet Kanwal, “Countering China’s Strategic Encirclement of India”, *Bharat Rakshak Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 3 (November/December 2000); Gurmeet Kanwal and Monika Chansoria, “Red Dragon Rising”, *The Chandigarh Tribune*, March 28, 2009.

⁴⁰ See Trefor Moss, “Power to the People: China’s Military Modernisation, Part One”, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, July 21, 2008.

⁴¹ See Rahul Bedi, “India Outlines Vision of Future Nuclear Navy”, *Jane’s Navy International*, September 1, 2004.

exercises with the states of Southeast Asia since the 1990s (including Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia, and even Australia and New Zealand), known as the *Milan* meetings. These are not naval exercises so much as a chance for the region's navies to participate in meetings at various exotic locations in the Indian Ocean region, often the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The emphasis is deliberately on cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, rather than the Asia-Pacific., for missions such as the 2004-2005 tsunami relief operations. In addition, while the US and India have now participated in twelve joint *Malabar* naval exercises, sometimes with Japan, even these have taken place mostly in the Western Indian Ocean or the Bay of Bengal, not yet in the Asia-Pacific region, though there are plans to do so off of Okinawa in the near future.⁴² Nevertheless, while the Indian Navy is wary of Chinese naval expansion, it envisions a force and a doctrine to secure its interests in the Indian Ocean region, but not beyond in any formal forward presence, thereby hoping to avoid direct competition with the People's Liberation Army Navy in the Asia-Pacific region.

At the nuclear level, India is clearly on the short end of the balance against China. While India is yet to have any delivery vehicle capable of targeting China's major strategic centers or to demonstrate a capacity to develop, let alone deliver, thermonuclear warheads, Chinese DF-21 deployments in Delingha/Xining are capable of targeting India's key metropolises with 2-5 megaton warheads, which are two full orders of magnitude more powerful than India's fission devices. And though China's nuclear modernization seems to be designed to offset the US, there are loud cries from India's hawks, notably Bharat Karnad, that this state of affairs potentially leaves India vulnerable to Chinese nuclear coercion in any crisis or conventional conflict, since China could hold India's cities hostage while India lacked a reciprocal capability.⁴³ As such, although India's nuclear doctrine of assured second-strike retaliation requires no revision over time to avoid Chinese nuclear coercion, its posture requires significant evolution. Notably, the longer-range Agni-III and a potential sea-based capability will have to be developed in order to give India survivable strategic reach against China; but an Indian SSBN force is at least ten years away, and probably even longer.⁴⁴

In addition, if India wants to match China's megaton-order thermonuclear capability, it will almost certainly have to conduct further nuclear tests; because of the opprobrium that would be leveled at Delhi if it were to do so, however—especially if India requires fuel supplies for its civil nuclear reactors—and the relatively favorable yield-to-weight ratios India claims to be currently achieving on its fission devices, it is more likely that India will rely on sub-megaton boosted fission devices mated with the Agni and possible sea-based systems to establish an assured second-strike capability against China. There seems to be widespread belief amongst political leaders that once this balance is obtained, improvements or expansion of the Chinese arsenal directed toward the US would have little marginal value against India, limiting India's need to move toward a more modernized or ready deterrent. Other than the fringe of nuclear analysts in India, most believe—as do political leaders—that India already possesses a sufficiently credible minimum capability to deter nuclear coercion and use against her from China.

⁴² Gavin Greenwood, "Under the Influence—India Remains Wary of China's Regional Policy", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 9, 2009.

⁴³ Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy*; also see Bharat Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy*, 2nd Edition (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2005).

⁴⁴ Vice Admiral AK Singh quoted in Bedi, "Force of Reckoning"

Thus, from India's perspective there are few structural or domestic political pressures at present driving it to balance against China. Indeed, given the areas of potential cooperation and a burgeoning bilateral trade flow—roughly \$40 billion in 2007 and currently growing at annual rate of almost 20%⁴⁵—India has been resistant to enter into any instruments which may impinge her ability to engage China. And the powerful Left front in India is tremendously sympathetic to communist China. As a result, it is unrealistic to hope that India would join the US in a formal alliance arrangement to contain or balance China—not only does the Left categorically oppose such a strategy, but it would it sacrifice India's traditional policy of non-alignment. Further, India seems quite content to buck-pass to the US and lock down both Chinese and American naval forces in the Pacific rather than the Indian Ocean. This is not to say that conflict between India and China is impossible, but India's short-term strategy is to resolve outstanding border disputes through diplomatic means, engage Beijing economically, and to keep China itself “looking East”. This also seems to be the common denominator position between India's major political parties—there is little push in either the Congress or the BJP to pick a fight with a more powerful China in the foreseeable future.

IV. Diplomacy and Strategy: Pakistan and Afghanistan

With these threats and capabilities in mind, this section examines India's broader strategic and diplomatic approach to Pakistan and, closely related, Afghanistan. We initially proceed under the assumption that Pakistan's domestic politics will remain roughly the same as in the past – tumultuous and unpredictable, dominated by the Pakistani Army, but not in a state of total collapse. Under these circumstances, Indian policy is likely to look very much like it has in the past, marked by pervasive suspicion but sporadic peace processes and controlled crises. A low-level proxy war will continue in Afghanistan, as it has for decades. However, we also briefly consider India's strategic response to Pakistani state failure, which would unsettle many of the core assumptions of India's Pakistan policy and force very difficult choices on an Indian government.

Pakistan as a Stable Competitor. India's diplomatic strategies toward Pakistan have varied dramatically, from long periods of essentially no serious engagement to high-level summits, as in 1965, 1972, 1999, and 2001. The 1965 Tashkent and 1972 Simla summits followed Indo-Pakistan wars, and both were relatively successful because of their focus on specific issues surrounding the previous wars that could be reasonably explicitly and clearly bargained over. By contrast, the Lahore summit of 1999 and Agra meeting of 2001 occurred under Vajpayee's BJP government as part of a more amorphous, and ambitious, peace initiative, and led to frustration and disappointment. A ceasefire along the Kashmir Line of Control since 2003, however, has led to a significant drop in violence in the state. The record of Indo-Pakistan diplomacy suggests that small, concrete discussions are more likely to bear fruit than grand plans; while the latter would obviously be preferable, there are so many domestic constraints and much deep mutual distrust that even agreements signed in good faith have run into immediate obstacles.

In the near- to medium-term, it is unlikely that significant diplomatic progress will be made between India and Pakistan. Indeed, the so-called “backchannel” talks between the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and then Singh recognized that both parties

⁴⁵ See Anil K. Gupta, “The Future of India-China Trade”, *The Economic Times*, January 14, 2008. Available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/View Point/The future of India-China trade/articleshow/2697720.cms>.

essentially know what a deal on Kashmir would look like, but neither side possesses the domestic political capacity to successfully *implement* it. Much of this is because the Pakistani domestic political scene is so volatile – no Pakistani leader has the credibility and clout to make a deal that will stick, and violent “spoilers” opposed to conciliation are rife. Within India, there are many who believe that the situation in Kashmir has reached a manageable level, minimizing the importance of diplomatically engaging Pakistan. Skeptics of diplomatic engagement point to the troubled recent history of India-Pakistan negotiation. In 1999, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee went to Lahore to initiate a peace process, which was scuttled by the Kargil War later in the year. In 2001, Vajpayee again tried to build something like peace by inviting Musharraf to a summit at Agra, which also failed. Others disagree, arguing that only a mutually-acceptable settlement with Pakistan can stabilize Kashmir in the long-run. Yet others believe that a settlement is necessary, but that because of the current Pakistani context it cannot be arrived at until there are major changes in Pakistani domestic politics. Recent reports suggest that the final opinion is probably correct – India and Pakistan were edging towards a major agreement on Kashmir by 2007, but Musharraf’s domestic weakness precluded it from being consummated.

Smaller measures have been taken, including bus and train lines connecting India and Pakistan, but these have not resulted in any great breakthroughs (and have been targets of occasional terrorist attacks). Regardless of their opinion, Indian elites are generally intent on keeping any negotiations bilateral, avoiding US, UN, or other third-party involvement. The peace process is essentially dead in the water as of 2009, in the wake of Mumbai and in the context of Pakistan’s troubled internal security. The Pakistan issue is highly salient in the electoral arena, making diplomacy a fraught affair best carried out by strong, credible national leaders. Accusations of softness and weakness are potent electoral devices, reducing politicians’ willingness to engage in negotiations with Pakistan over Kashmir and other issues. This is even true at the state level, as Narendra Modi’s successful campaign diatribes against “Mian Musharraf” in Gujarat state elections have shown in 2002 and 2007. Weak governments or those led by regional satraps lacking a serious interest or background in international affairs have, and will, make serious bargaining with Pakistan enormously difficult.

As a result of these factors, it is unlikely that there will be much diplomatic progress between India and Pakistan in the next decade. The old, pre-1999 pattern of tension and recurrent crisis is more likely than a sustained peace process, particularly if the Pakistani political scene remains uncertain. India will probably avoid confrontation as long as there are no further dramatic terrorist attacks like the Parliament or Mumbai assaults. But a cold stability is not the same as active engagement, and both Kashmir and the international border will remain highly militarized. Third-party efforts to build peace are, and will be, viewed with utmost suspicion by Indian political and opinion leaders.

Afghanistan as a Proxy Battleground. Along with a lack of engagement with Pakistan, India will continue its diplomatic strategies to encircle and contain Pakistan in the broader region. Previously confined largely to the subcontinent, the rivalry now reaches from the Persian Gulf to Beijing. As discussed below, India is building strong ties with Iran, in large part because of Iran’s position on Pakistan’s western flank. More importantly, India is also active in Afghanistan through development work and intelligence operations. India hopes to avoid the return to power in Kabul of a pro-Pakistani regime like that of the Taliban. Before the fall of the Taliban, India joined Russia in supporting the Northern Alliance, which already embroiled India in shadow wars within conflict-prone Afghanistan. India had also lent tacit support to the Soviet military occupation of the country as part of India’s tilt to the Soviets in the 1980s.

This involvement has expanded dramatically since 2001, with consulates, aid, and development assistance throughout Afghanistan showing the rise of Indian power and reach. The flow of Indian commerce is another route to influence. This Indian effort is, unsurprisingly, being vehemently contested by Pakistan, turning Afghanistan into yet another forum for Indo-Pakistani conflict, and directly destabilizing the region. Pakistan's security service has been accused by multiple sources of involvement in the bombing of India's embassy in Kabul. Neither country seems likely to abandon its goals in Afghanistan, with India seeing its activities as entirely legitimate and Pakistan viewing those same activities with unshakeable suspicion. A proxy war is brewing in Afghanistan and will continue indefinitely.

Even as the US increasingly places its bets on reforming Pakistan, India continues to tell its American allies that they should not put faith in Pakistan and its leaders. While fatalistic about American support for Pakistan, they hope to at least influence US policy with an eye to decreasing Pakistani military capability and diplomatic influence. With this in mind, Indian skepticism about President Obama's plans for Afghanistan reflects the fear of US aid bolstering Pakistan's military strength and reducing the pressure on Pakistan for domestic retrenchment. If history in the region is any indication, India and Pakistan's competition will drive their broader regional strategy and make things far more difficult for external actors.

Pakistani State Collapse. However, over the next decade a grimmer contingency (unthinkable a decade ago) is also possible – a Pakistan progressively flailing as a state, linked to the failure of the US-led stabilization effort in the “Af-Pak” region and the inability of Pakistan's security managers to manipulate and control Islamist forces straddling the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.⁴⁶ This would take the form of the army's weakening ability to provide even basic order in the country's periphery combined with sustained terrorism and unrest further spiraling into major urban centers. Balochistan is a tinderbox of tribal resentment, and the North-West Frontier Province has been the site of a major insurgency linked to the Taliban during the past several years. Karachi and urban Sindh have consistently suffered from ethnic conflict, and the nation's Punjabi core has been hit hard by a string of bombings and shootings, including the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in Karachi.

A failing Pakistan would pose enormous threats to India, along several dimensions. The first is anxiety over the control of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Given the army's stewardship procedures and increasingly tight Personnel Reliability Program, it is unlikely that nuclear components or weapons will fall into the hands of non-state terrorists under most likely circumstances, but it is nevertheless possible that more radical factions within the army seize control and proceed to use this as leverage in aggressive coercive diplomacy; or, possibly pass them off to the LeT, which is a de facto paramilitary arm of the state.⁴⁷ Though the US is understandably concerned about the security of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal, it is India that would be the primary target of any unauthorized use due to its proximity and the fact that Pakistan's delivery capabilities are all India-centric. Second, Pakistani control of jihadist groups operating in Kashmir and throughout India will weaken as the state

⁴⁶ See, for example, Jonathan S Landay, “Pakistan on course to become Islamist State, U.S. experts say”, *McClatchy News*, April 16, 2009. Available at http://news.yahoo.com/s/mcclatchy/20090416/wl_mcclatchy/3214054.

⁴⁷ For a chilling account of the LeT's relationship with the Pakistan Army and ISI, and its increasingly global targeting, see Sebastian Rotella, “On the Trail of Pakistani Terror Group's Elusive Mastermind behind the Mumbai Seige,” *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2010. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/13/AR2010111304907_pf.html.

weakens—and indeed it may already have, as Pakistan is caught in a paradox about how to sell the army’s relationship with the LeT, which is either on a tight leash and thus attacks such as Mumbai are de facto declarations of war, or it is now rogue and the army has lost control of a potentially violent game-changing proxy force. A flailing Pakistan could unleash a devastating wave of terrorist violence against Indian targets, just at a time when Indian economic growth demands stability (particularly in its urban centers) to attract sustained investment. Third, a truly serious Pakistani collapse will create large refugee waves with the potential to put huge financial and administrative burdens on India’s border states. In 1971, the refugee outflows from an East Pakistan in turmoil were hugely destabilizing.

India’s response to this scenario is likely to be extremely cautious, hoping that the United States and other states with ties to Pakistan like China can salvage some kind of order. Pakistan’s almost-all-weather friends are China and Saudi Arabia, periodically backstopped by the US, and in Indian eyes it is they who bear the responsibility for Pakistan’s behavior since 1979. The Indian government’s reaction to Musharraf’s imposition of a state of emergency in 2007 was telling—a muted and non-provocative hope for stability and good governance. If anti-India rhetoric is not too excessive within Pakistan, it is possible that India will engage in confidence-building measures (particularly regarding the posture of conventional strike forces) to try to reassure Pakistani elites that they are not threatened from the eastern front during a time of crisis. This would also require a permissive political environment within India—a campaign season or weak coalition threatened by nationalist outbidding would make it difficult to exercise restraint.

Military intervention is highly unlikely except in the most extreme case. The Indian military has no apparent desire (understandably) to find itself controlling and governing large swathes of a crumbling Pakistan awash in weapons and discontent. Only if true disintegration threatens control of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal are we likely to see direct Indian military action aimed to ensuring these weapons do not fall into the wrong hands. And even then, members of India’s strategic elite tend to buck-pass on this scenario to the US.⁴⁸ Short of this dramatic confirmation of state failure, India is likely to watch and wait. However, it will continue to deploy its intelligence services within Pakistan, hoping to gain a sense of future trends and, where possible, influence ongoing events. If America continues to view itself as a Pakistani patron, India will expect the US to bear the cost of containing and managing a collapsing Pakistan, and will vociferously blame American policy for any spillover that bloodies India.

V. Diplomacy: China, the Middle East, and the US

China. Engage, resolve points of conflict (border disputes), but engage in prudent alliances, e.g. with Japan. Attempt to split China-Pakistan axis by creating economic leverage against Beijing. Continue with naval modernization to ensure India can control its SLOCs and the Indian Ocean littoral but avoid provoking China militarily. India has no interest in getting involved with Taiwan or North Korea; it lacks presence and influence in these areas and stands to benefit in absolutely no way. As mentioned, Tibet and border disputes remain possible flashpoints but the geography of the region and the conventional balance militate against any significant conflict.

⁴⁸ Author interviews with Manoj Joshi and Raj Chengappa in New Delhi, July-August 2006.

Something worth emphasizing is the nature of Indian threat perception toward China. Leaving aside hard military issues discussed above, China is seen by many Indian elites and English-newspaper reading middle class citizens as an iron monolith that has successfully bent China's society to its will in pursuit of growth and power. There is frequently awe and admiration in discussing China's ability to modernize its infrastructure and forge a coherent, assertive security strategy from East Asia to Africa. This leads to perceptions of Chinese military might and strategic resolve that may not actually reflect reality. On the other hand, Indians are not remotely jealous of China's political system, and despite infrastructural inadequacies there is little sentiment in favor of emulating it. Nevertheless, the perception of material inferiority that dominates much Indian thinking towards China (matched by a remarkable lack of expertise on the country except the humiliation of getting whacked in the 1962 war) may encourage future misperceptions and excessive suspicion.

Japan. Engage, keep as a soft-balancer against China. The Malabar naval exercises with US and Japan this year is a big step in that direction, though the Indian Navy will attempt to allay Chinese concerns by simultaneously participating in an international fleet review with China.⁴⁹ Improve interoperability by conducting joint anti-piracy missions off of Somalia. Some Japanese policymakers see India (with the US and Australia) as a naval partner in response to China, but these security elites may be on the decline in Japan at present. There are significant development aid ties that provide another loose but lasting basis for common alignment – Japan has been a generous donor to India, and is viewed positively within India. However, India-Japan trade remains tiny, in part due to the domestically-driven nature of India's economic growth. Any relationship that emerges will be driven primarily by strategic concerns.

Southeast Asia. When discussing the Indian Northeast above, we mentioned the Look East policy India has adopted towards Southeast Asia. This is a strategy established in the last decade to build closer political, military, and economic ties with the large markets of Southeast Asia. India has slowly increased its role in ASEAN and pushed bilateral trade deals with several countries in the region, while also engaging in naval cooperation with Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, and even Myanmar given its strategic importance in the Bay of Bengal. Vietnam and Singapore are viewed as particularly promising future partners. The navy is the key military asset in building these relationships, with its regional reach and professionalism, particularly with an eye to Chinese movement into the area. While the Look East policy involves a military element, this is mainly symbolic at the moment – showing the flag, building relationships, and establishing a presence. The major components are economic and diplomatic, trying to gain access to markets in the region and to become an accepted voice in Southeast Asia, an area the Indian subcontinent has deep historical, but relatively weak political, ties to.

*Iran and the Persian Gulf*⁵⁰. American politicians and pundits have criticized India for its political ties to Iran, which take the form of Indian military presence in Iran and energy and investment deals. Indians respond that they have not given Iran a free ride on its nuclear program, voting against it in the IAEA in 2005. They reject American demands that India move away from Iran, and in the wake of 2007 NIE on Iran are even more vehement in this rejection. For both economic and geopolitical reasons this will not change. Iran is a major supplier of oil and natural gas, which are absolutely

⁴⁹ Rajat Pandit, "India, US, and Japan to undertake Malabar Naval Wargames off Okinawa", *The Times of India*, April 10, 2009.

⁵⁰ Fair 2007; Kronstadt and Katzman 2006.

integral to future Indian growth. Under almost no circumstances will any Indian government antagonize an Iran that has shown historical willingness to manipulate energy as a tool of leverage. Iran is simply not seen as a threat to India, and this greatly limits the willingness of Indian leaders to suffer economic costs to punish or contain Iran. Though its fate remains unclear, there has been an attempt to build a natural gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan to India that would tie India and Iran together more clearly.

Strategically, Iran has a great deal to offer India. It occupies much of Pakistan's western border and lies on the Persian Gulf, a region that the Indian Navy has targeted for power projection. Iran also has significant influence in Afghanistan, where Indian intelligence is extremely active. Iran has reportedly provided India with alleged intelligence basing (via consulates) at Bandar Abbas and Zahedan, and the two countries have engaged in joint naval exercises. To India, Iran is potentially valuable for containing Pakistan, shaping the future of Afghanistan, and maintaining military access to the Persian Gulf in the face of possible Chinese naval expansion or Middle Eastern instability. India's fundamental strategic interests point strongly towards partnership with Iran, and no amount of American criticism is likely to alter this loose, but enduring, strategic alignment. India will not help Iran get nuclear weapons, and on balance it certainly would prefer Iran remain non-nuclear, but this is very different than cutting ties or putting serious leverage on the Iranians.

India has also maintained very good relations with the oil monarchies in the Gulf. The Indian Navy views itself as a potential partner for stability in the Gulf, and with its status quo orientation and generally positive image in the region (competition with Muslim Pakistan notwithstanding), this is likely to come to pass, in partnership with the US. The large South Asian diaspora in these countries both ties them to India and also limits India's influence, with migrant workers as hostages to any Indian attempts to be assertive against the interests of the Gulf monarchies. Energy security will lead India to continue to pursue an unobtrusive role in the Gulf, trying to maintain ties with both Iran and its Gulf rivals while also establishing a naval presence as an unthreatening junior partner to America.

United States. Delhi does not perceive any structural pressure to align with the US yet. For foreign policy managers at the Ministry of External Affairs, diplomatic flexibility is more important than any inducements the US can offer at this point. Historical non-alignment, and the persistent role of Left parties, on which most non-BJP governments will be dependent, weigh against a deep strategic alliance with the US. In addition, significant sources of friction remain between the two countries, including: (1) the disapproval of Indian security and foreign policy elites at US military aid to Pakistan, which is viewed as a symptom of the US's myopic strategic calculations and which mitigates India's motivation to rely too heavily on the US; (2) the perceived unreliability of the US as a military supplier which, many critical decisionmakers believe, will cut off spares and logistics in the event of a crisis or if the whims of American foreign policy feel like it; (3) India's relationship with Iran and Burma; and (4) friction over outsourcing of American jobs to India—and accusations that India is “stealing” those jobs—as well as increasing restrictions on H1B visas which hits Indian skilled workers hard generates a lot of ill-will in both countries.

The saga of the Indo-US nuclear deal is instructive: Washington viewed it as a vehicle and an opening-move in a larger strategic realignment against China; India viewed it simply as a vehicle to acquire advanced civilian nuclear technology and be recognized as a responsible nuclear power. These misreadings of each other generated discrepant expectations and ultimately disappointment on both sides. Washington's best strategy is perhaps to let India be India and not have unrealistic

expectations about what Delhi can or will deliver. Its primary foreign policy concerns are in the Indian Ocean region; attempts to bully India into sacrificing diplomatic flexibility will likely backfire and only harden Indian domestic political opposition to Washington. In other words, measures viewed in Delhi as the US trying to rope India into a “balancing” role against China will likely only ossify Indian suspicion of the US. The perception in India—which is probably historically correct—is that the US is a fair-weather friend, at best, and that it is therefore in Delhi’s interests to keep Washington at arms-length on most issues; Washington likewise finds India frustrating and whimsical to deal with. It is difficult to envision a deep strategic partnership between the two states under such circumstances.

VI. Conclusion: A Rising, but Constrained, Power

We have tried to trace out the ideational and domestic political drivers of India’s internal and external security strategy. The Congress and the BJP, India’s two dominant national political parties, have starkly different ideologies but, in the era of coalition politics where neither can achieve an outright parliamentary majority, those ideologies are centrifuged by the myriad regional parties upon whom each party depends at the center in modern Indian politics. This has resulted in a lowest-common denominator grand strategy where inertia tends to guide Indian internal and external security policy. Because internal security and terrorism are critical domestic political issues, they have taken—and will continue to take—priority. With respect to the evolution of India’s conventional military and nuclear forces in response to Pakistan and China, India will likely continue to meander along with dysfunction in its civil-military relationship, indigenous production, and foreign acquisition processes. India’s political leadership will attempt, over the years, to revise the international allocation of status, particularly in international institutions such as the UN. But, a relatively inertial grand strategy is perhaps the most apt description for India’s approach to external affairs—neither Congress nor BJP-led governments will likely risk the stability of their coalitions for risky foreign policy gambits that lack broad political support. Outreach to other states will increase as Indian power expands, but India will not be an ambitious entrepreneur or pivotal in creating grand new security alignments or underpinning regional orders.

As such, the hallmark features of Indian foreign policy will likely continue to be non-alignment—passive in Congress-led governments, with perhaps a more muscular assertion of independence in BJP-led governments—and a focus on its neighborhood. India will spread its bets across a variety of partners, from Iran to Vietnam, firmly committing to none while continuing to be friendly with many. The overriding quest for autonomy and a diversified strategic portfolio means that India is unlikely to accede to an alliance with the United States, or any other state for that matter, akin to the US-UK relationship. It will continue to view cooperation with the US in piecemeal fashion, asking whether a particular initiative is in India’s specific interests, particularly with respect to economic growth. Though this will dash the hopes of some of India’s more ardent boosters in the US, it is a perfectly reasonable posture driven by the demands of domestic politics and the opportunities and threats present in its environment. India will be India: lumbering, inward looking, frustrating, yet independent, and thus unlikely to allow itself to be constrained in its foreign policy by forming tight “special relationships” with any state. The model for India-US relations is not likely to be America’s relationship with the United Kingdom, but perhaps rather with France which, like India, valued its autonomy and independence more than the spoils of a subordinate relationship with the US.