

One Belt, One Road: Changing Asian Geo-Politics and India

Raviprasad Narayanan

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Tel. +46-841056953; Fax. +46-86403370

Email: info@isdp.eu

Editorial correspondence should be directed to the address provided above (preferably by email).

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Executive Summary

- One Belt, One Road (OBOR) is China's leitmotif combining economic leverage with strategic advances.
- Xi Jinping as supreme leader wants China to become the new age leader in technology with foremost digital technologies.
- The amorphous nature of the Indo-Pacific, makes China conceptualize and create alternative economic, strategic, and quasi-judicial legalities, bypassing conventional structures.
- Xi Jinping's centrality has been evident since a decade and will continue, with his personality stamped on the Communist Party of China's lexicon, rivalling founder leader Mao Zedong.
- India is flummoxed by China's centrality in economic and strategic realms of Asia, leading to gradual trivialization in South Asia, and making China decisive in economic issues and growing its strategic influence, through OBOR.
- Foreign policy and decisions taken in India are in lacunae, with domestic politics and personalities being the deciding factor, leading to inchoateness in structures of foreign policy making, and living in the past.
- Non-alignment since independence in 1947 has evolved in the past decade to become multi-alignment, complemented by informal groupings like Quad with other democracies of the Indo-Pacific and the United States as ballast.
- India has to consolidate itself by continuous economic growth, yielding larger heft in strategic policy with regard to territorial and maritime security that abides by scrupulous adherence to international covenants.
- It is time for India to decide its role amongst the comity of nations as the world's largest populated democracy, by firmly articulating beyond supplication, revealing professionalism of structures not constrained by individualistic histories and views.
- Ideas are to be encouraged, debated, and structurally introduced with overall domestic political support, not just implemented by centralized whims and fancies.
- The Indo-Pacific is reality beyond ephemeral, with the beginnings of coalescing by long-term democracies against ideological rigidities and personality centric absolutism.

Introduction

Xi Jinping is at the helm of all speculation, domestic and international, for what he says and does not. His appearances and statements reflect a newer version of a persona larger than everything he lords over. As President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Chairman, Central Military Commission (CMC) and General Secretary, Communist Party of China (CPC), he is central to politics in China. The recently concluded 20th National Congress of the CPC endorsed a third term for Xi, breaking past continuity of two five-year terms for President. With him as the fulcrum of China's political template, the country is witnessing the eclipse of limited constitutional flexibility and emergence of authoritarian grandeur, a newer version of Mao Tse Tung, who presided over a successful revolution and frittered away a lot. Xi Jinping, to us, is reflecting an assertive China that is focused on reorienting the world in economic and strategic terms. An indication of Xi Jinping's goals is his One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative with deeply embedded characteristics of enforcing global change. To quote:

"The initiative to jointly build the Belt and Road, embracing the trend towards a multipolar world, economic globalization, cultural diversity and greater IT application, is designed to uphold the global free trade regime and the open world economy in the spirit of open regional cooperation. It is aimed at promoting orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets; encouraging the countries along the Belt and Road to achieve economic policy coordination and carry out broader and more in-depth regional cooperation of higher standards; and jointly creating an open, inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all. Jointly building the Belt and Road is in the interests of the world community. Reflecting the common ideals and pursuit of human societies, it is a positive endeavor to seek new models of international cooperation and global governance, and will inject new positive energy into world peace and development."¹

1 "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China, with State Council authorization, March 2015, 3.

The above captures the theology behind OBOR, stamped with imprimatur of the current leadership led by Xi Jinping. If history were to be seen as elliptical, China's epochal economic growth and consequent spread of geopolitical influence is undoubtedly a determining factor influencing major shifts in the Indo-Pacific region in "economic, technological, legal, diplomatic and security alignments."² Interestingly, the "political" influence of China's otherwise comprehensive influence in the region (and beyond?) is absent!

This paper argues in broadly contrarian terms that OBOR is, perhaps, a riposte from Beijing since September–October 2013 to the 'pivot' proposed and articulated by the United States in January 2012. The rationale grounding my arguments are: Would OBOR have gained salience without the 'provocation' (for Beijing) of the 'pivot'? Has OBOR gained traction in Asia owing to the hesitancy displayed by the United States after laying out the 'pivot' in 2012, not entirely recovering from the financial crisis of 2008? Is OBOR the vision of a personality centric leadership markedly different from Hu Jintao and an attempt by Beijing to bring back the cult of 'supremo', after two decades of technocratic governance?

At the outset, a perusal of literature on OBOR reveals an overarching template designed to secure a 'cordon sanitaire' for Beijing thereby preventing it from being in a strategic cul-de-sac. OBOR, it could be argued, is not the first time a China inspired 'outward' momentum has been witnessed by history. The Song (960–1279 AD), Yuan (1271–1368 AD) and Ming (1368–1644 AD) dynasties had encouraged outward oriented centrifugal forces along what we today term as the maritime Silk Road – the 'belt' in today's OBOR. Admiral Zheng He's voyages (1405–1433 AD) are also an illustration of seeing the world in a wider canvas, a campaign radiating outwards with China at the center.³ The cartographic intent of

2 William W. Keller and Thomas G. Rawski (ed.) *China's Rise and the Balance of Influence in Asia* (Pittsburgh, PA: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 3.

3 It was Baron Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen who coined "Seidenstraße" and "Seidenstraßen" in 1877. These meant 'Silk Roads / Silk Routes' since antiquity being a conveyor of trade and ideas.

OBOR reveals long-term intentions as “China fronts the Western Pacific”⁴ and possesses the landmass extending to resource-rich Central Asia. From a Chinese perspective, OBOR is a “key element of a ‘new round of opening to the world’ (新一轮对外开放, *xinyilunduiwaikafang*), a phrase used by Xi Jinping to describe his economic strategy.⁵ The salience of OBOR to Beijing can be gauged by the establishment of a special leading group supervising implementation of the Belt and Road initiatives. This group was placed under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).⁶

A development often glossed over by analysts is the legal sanctity given to OBOR by the Supreme People’s Court in China. In a ruling, the Supreme People’s Court issued “Several Opinions on Providing Judicial Services and Guarantee for the Building of One Belt One Road by People’s Courts” to guarantee the smooth building of OBOR by applying international treaties and practice thereby increasing credibility of the judgments passed by the Supreme People’s Court.⁷ Is OBOR then, a new interpretation where domestic law is sought to give legal sanction to an international initiative? This might also ensure that any legal challenges and disputes related to OBOR would have to be routed through Beijing thereby circumventing established legal convention and the emergence of a new arbitration and dispute settlement architecture based in Beijing.

4 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography – What the Map tells us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012), 31.

5 Xi Jinping, “Accelerating the implementation of a free-trade zone strategy, accelerating the construction of a new economic model based on openness,” *Xinhua*, 6 December 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-12/06/c_1113546075.htm. Also see, China Analysis, “One Belt One Road”: China’s Great Leap Outward,” European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2015, 3.

6 Michael Swaine, “Chinese Views and Commentary on the “One Belt One Road” Initiative,” *China Leadership Monitor* 47, May (2015), <http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm47ms.pdf> (accessed June 18, 2022).

7 Ma Yanhui, Liu Xiaowen, and Ian Liu, “Conflict of laws and solutions in One Belt One Road,” King and Wood Mallesons (Beijing), August 3, 2015, <http://www.kwm.com/en/knowledge/insights/analysis-of-typical-case-issued-by-the-supreme-people-court-on-one-belt-one-road-20150803> (accessed May 14, 2022).

A cursory glance at the maps in Figure 1 reveals the vastness of OBOR, both as an idea and as a tangible prospect.

OBOR could be described as representing the temperament of an Asia-Pacific order—amorphous at present—where geopolitical and geo-economic considerations influence identity. This goes beyond mere ‘common interests’ and is apposite of conflict-like postures, accommodation of interests and re-defining of established norms of international security. To quote Michael Yahuda:

“China’s international relations must be seen as inherently dynamic and unsettled, as they reflect the imperatives of domestic renewal and the yearning to achieve the genuine standing as a country of the first rank in terms of cultural and scientific achievement as well as in economics and power politics.”⁸

The variables make OBOR fit the category of ‘soft-balancing’ so beloved of strategic pundits! Soft-balancing is a “non-military form of balancing, which aims to frustrate and impose additional costs on the dominant state that, due to its preponderance of power, cannot be opposed in a traditional way.”⁹ This approach arises when a ‘weaker’ state decides to counter the influence and stratagems of a stronger state and impose costs, political and economic. To Robert Pape, there are four indicators of a soft-balancing strategy: territorial denial; entangling diplomacy; economic statecraft; and a signaling resolve to balance.¹⁰ The jury is however yet to decide on whether OBOR satisfies conditions of ‘soft-balancing’ or something else altogether.

8 Michael Yahuda, *The International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 2011), 138.

9 Milosz Kucharski, “China in the Age of American Primacy,” *International Relations* 26, no.1, March (2012): 61.

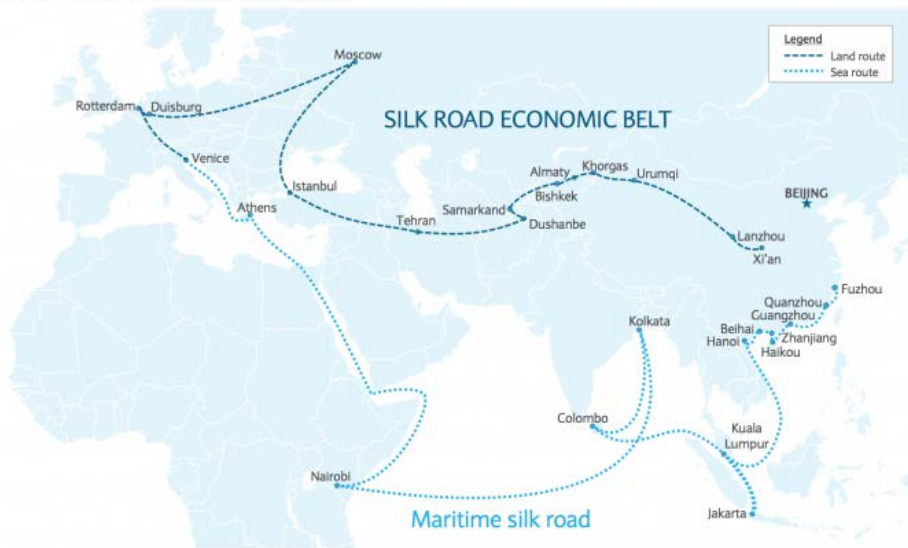
10 Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States” *International Security* 30, no.1, Summer (2005): 10.

Figure 1: The One Belt, One Road



Source: Shanghai International Studies University, en.shisu.edu.cn.

Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road



Source: Xinhua, Barclays Research

OBOR: The View from New Delhi

China's economic success and larger strategic persona in Asia has made India appear very wary, living in an alternative world. It was the ever growing imports of China-made economic goods in the domestic market, forcing out existing manufacturers that made the local and central governments wake up to an existential reality.

The breadth and sweep of OBOR has left New Delhi wondering where it stands in the Chinese *weltanschauung*—as a partner, participant or an ignored entity! The map of OBOR reveals in its entirety the inclusion of only one Indian city, Kolkata. As the former capital of British India, Kolkata rapidly lost its pre-eminence with the emergence of New Delhi as the political capital in 1911. The inclusion of Kolkata in the maritime Silk Road has more to do with the salience of this city in China's plans at creating a resource-access corridor from South Asia into its southwestern region comprising the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan. Kolkata could evolve into a lynchpin and transit hub satisfying the economic integration of northeastern India with southwestern China. This is not a new formulation as there exists the Kunming Initiative, a sub-regional initiative promoted by China since 1999. On August 17, 1999, a conference on Regional Cooperation and Development was held in Kunming with Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar as participants. This conference approved the Kunming Initiative calling upon the respective governments to "improve communications between the southwestern region of China and the northeastern region of India by developing appropriate road, rail, waterway and air links."¹¹ Significantly a call was made to "revive the ancient Southern Silk Route" between the Indian state of Assam and Kunming.

11 P.V. Indiresan, "The Kunming Initiative," *Frontline* (Chennai) 17, no. 7, April 1–14 (2000).

If there is a laggard in bringing to fruition the Kunming Initiative, it has to do with New Delhi's tardiness at several levels. First, Kolkata represents the hub and gateway to northeast India, a region lagging behind the rest of India on most possible development parameters. Linking this region to economic sub-regionalism is beyond the limited comprehension of most policy-makers in New Delhi especially when large parts of India do not seem to benefit from the spin-offs of such an arrangement. Second, as an idea originating from China, the Kunming Initiative runs into the formidable Indian bureaucracy who will stonewall any initiative that (they believe) goes against established norms of bilateral interaction. What are these established norms? Third, New Delhi cannot countenance the emergence of economic inter-linkages proposed by China, a country with whom the military defeat of 1962 rankles as part of the national narrative on security on a daily basis. Fourth, the Kunming Initiative brought to light the relative stagnancy of New Delhi's economic diplomacy and complete bypassing of the provinces when it comes to making foreign policy. As a centralized domain, foreign policy in India is yet to come of age and is reflected in the paucity of ideas and vision in articulating what the country wants and how it will go about policy proclamations. Fifth, the Kunming Initiative is seen by New Delhi as embracing northeast India where, to put it bluntly, the writ of the Indian state is tenuous in some parts and the central government would be loath to introduce a development program scripted by another country. To put it simply, India's hesitant acceptance of the Kunming Initiative is what is being repeated when it comes to OBOR—willing to grudgingly participate, and yet disturbed by its own irrelevance in the larger scheme of things.

To New Delhi, the rapidity of OBOR in its implementation has led to its identification with the current leadership.¹² The visits made by President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang to many countries promoting OBOR lend credence to a rationale that an ostensibly economic thread binding

12 Nadege Rolland, "Beijing's response to the Belt and Road Initiative's "Pushback": A story of assessment and adaptation," *Asian Affairs* 50, no.2: 216-235.

nations of the Eurasian heartland and a maritime expression to boot will evolve into something more—should OBOR succeed. There are skeptics in New Delhi who would endorse the argument that OBOR is designed to facilitate China’s overcapacity in select sectors like steel and iron, as was mentioned in an article by He Yafei, Vice-Minister of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council.¹³

OBOR is witnessing harmonization between various ministries in Beijing and massive infrastructure investments in countries as diverse as Sri Lanka and Greece, make the economic aspects of OBOR an attractive incentive.¹⁴ The economic underpinnings of OBOR are complemented by a financial architecture like the BRICS Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to rival existing international arrangements like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which for Beijing represent an inflexible order designed to marginalize China’s growing influence. OBOR has seemingly inspired a plethora of new institutions and a multiplicity of views, both for and against, and a test for Beijing to create a new order with participation based on “win-win” logic more than narrow “interests only” approach.

The broad sweep of OBOR also has been introduced at a time when the United States had been highlighting the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)¹⁵ as a panacea facilitating trade arrangement that has kept China out.¹⁶ The TPP has been succeeded by a new template where the Indo-Pacific is label

13 He Yafei, “China’s overcapacity crisis can spur growth through overseas expansion,” *South China Morning Post*, January 7, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1399681/chinas-overcapacity-crisis-can-spur-growth-through-overseas> (accessed August 8, 2021).

14 Hemant Chandak, “India and the One Belt One Road Paradigm,” Logos The Takshashila Community Blog, July 14, 2015, <http://logos.nationalinterest.in/2015/07/one-belt-one-road-and-india/> (accessed August 23, 2021).

15 The United States withdrew from TPP in 2017, with other 11 members reviving TPP as Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership in January 2018.

16 David Dollar, “China’s rise as a regional and global power enters a new phase,” Brookings (New York), July 20, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2015/07/20-china-aiib-one-belt-one-road-dollar> (accessed January 13, 2022).

for an Asian EU+NATO minus China! It would appear that OBOR has embedded within it contestations that rival and outdo what the United States did post World War II.

Surprisingly, maps of OBOR leave out China's all-weather friend and India's nemesis Pakistan! Does this reflect Beijing's apprehensions about an ally and client displaying 'flailing state' tendencies or is it recognition that for all the vaunted metaphors describing the China-Pakistan bilateral ("higher than the mountains, deeper than the sea, sweeter than honey, etc.) hard-headed realism precludes integrating a country known mainly for negative value features in the international system. Not quite. The USD 46 billion promised by Beijing to Pakistan as part of a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an add-on to the OBOR and one that ensures that Islamabad is a crucial cog in Beijing's economic transit corridor that bypasses possible sea-lane choke-points especially the Malacca Straits and the relatively quiet Palk Strait where India and Sri Lanka contest maritime zone. For Islamabad, and more importantly Rawalpindi, where army headquarters are, if the CPEC corridor were to materialize it would ensure that Pakistan emerges as a logistical hub for China, and a 'protector' at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Gwadar port emerging as a central trans-shipment point for crude oil from the Middle East and railroads across Pakistan carrying minerals from Afghanistan where Chinese investments have spiked recently in the resources sector are variables now.

The only inconsistency remains that of security in this region with its plethora of violent groups who have embraced many a cause—religious fundamentalism is anathema to Beijing. In addition, sub-national groups are fighting for independence in Baluchistan, and Afghanistan continues to be a perplexing entity, where peace is considered a metaphor and hence not tangible! The return of Taliban and its ideology, mirroring a Sunni version of Shia Iran, is proving itself as being wantonly inscrutable, masking itself with socio-religious tenor of a different age.

Figure 2: China–Pakistan Economic Corridor



Economist.com

India's reactions to the CPEC are conformist and support the thesis that Islamabad has always been a 'rentier' state to powerful patrons—the United States during the Cold War and now China since Washington realizes the double game Pakistan has played for long. The establishment of a special paramilitary force to 'protect' the infrastructure of the economic corridor is for India the limits of Pakistan's contribution to the project and reflective of the hazy and inchoate state of central control within its territorial domain.

It is pertinent at this stage to establish the conundrums facing India on not only how to predicate a response to OBOR but also to weigh the posturing adopted by the United States as part of its pivot to the region and where India can play a salient role. This section is to establish the argument made early on that India has to see OBOR as a response to the pivot and India's decision-making should revolve around the necessity to maintain 'strategic autonomy' as befits an aspiring global power. The aspect of bandwagoning finds few takers in New Delhi.

The Obverse of OBOR: U.S.-India relations

It was in January 2012 while delivering an address at the Pentagon that U.S. President Barack Obama outlined a new strategic plan highlighting U.S. defense priorities in the coming years.¹⁷ The document stated, “We will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.”¹⁸ Labeled ‘pivot’, this strategy unveiled the earnestness of the U.S. to focus its energies towards Asia after a decade of the ‘war on terror’ whose results were at best mixed – terrorism having metastasized into a powerful vector challenging the state system so carefully created and nurtured over several centuries, through war, colonialism and institutional interdependence, by a Westphalian order, falling from favor in some geographical parts especially the Middle East.

The announcement of a strategic policy that sought to ‘rebalance’ by the Obama administration came at a critical juncture when the U.S., was reproached of turning its back on international affairs following the financial crisis of 2008, a catastrophe in which it was ironically the European Union that suffered maximum collateral damage. Afghanistan 2021 is another instance of a chary U.S. giving space for ‘others’ (read China) to step into vacated realms with strategic import. The salience of the ‘pivot’ during Obama was its timing, an aspect not lost on the Asia-Pacific region where many interpretations and commentaries have linked renewed U.S. interest in the region to the beginning of a new chapter in geopolitical rivalry with China being the main ‘target’ to be sequestered in strategic terms. The Quadrilateral announced during the Trump

17 Barack Obama, Remarks by the President on the Defence Strategic Review, The Pentagon, January 5, 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/05/remarks-president-defense-strategic-review> (accessed March 12, 2022).

18 “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” Department of Defense, January 2012, 2.

administration continued the policy pursued in the Obama years. Is the current Biden administration any different?

If the 'rebalancing' by the U.S. was to be taken as an article of faith, does it not behoove the U.S. to clearly articulate the object of its renewed attention in the Asia/Indo-Pacific region?¹⁹ If indeed the intention to 'rebalance' is being implemented, perhaps the U.S. might want to explain to its allies and friends why in the first place did the region drop off the U.S. radar, so to speak, thereby permitting the emergence of a 'challenger' to its primacy in the region. Also, is it not presumptuous to assume that countries of the region while welcoming the renewed attention might not exactly want to take sides since there are genuine grievances regarding the U.S. history of intervention in the region, subversion of political regimes, and repeated disengagement leaving behind fractured polities, societies and economies.

As a rising power in the Asia-Pacific with a voice that is increasingly being heard, India considers itself an actor with heft in the Indo-Pacific, albeit one that has to dexterously play its cards at a level different from that of China, Japan, Korea, and the ASEAN in the region.

¹⁹ Antony J. Blinken, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific." December 14, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/> (accessed March 1, 2022).

Indo-Pacific Security: The U.S. and India

Beijing's OBOR has had influence on changing the gears of international security arrangements and accommodations. The U.S. pivot towards Asia hinges on a few important bilateral and multilateral relationships that can broadly be divided into two categories: 'established' and 'under construction'.²⁰ The U.S. 'established' relations in the region comprise those with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Relations 'under construction' are most evident in the manner in which the U.S. interacts with Vietnam,²¹ the Philippines²² and India. Relations with Vietnam and the Philippines are conditioned by the proclivity of the two countries to adhere to an atypical norm-construction influenced by the ASEAN—'the ASEAN way'—and also determined by the geopolitics of a region largely overshadowed by whatever China does. It also helps that both these Southeast Asian countries have an ambivalent relationship with Beijing. India on the other hand is akin to a 'free radical', not really constrained by any institutional norms (there exists no SAARC way!) or convention and displays aspirations of wanting to become a global power, and yet falling short owing to its becoming hostage to a grandiose vision for itself without much substantial leverage. But is India really a 'free radical'? Is it a swing player or is there something more?

20 The 'construction' primarily refers to the Quad, comprising United States, Australia, Japan, and India.

21 For U.S.–Vietnam relations, see Mark E. Manyin, "U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2014: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service* 7-5700, www.crs.gov, R40208, June 24, 2014; Murray Hiebert, Phuong Nguyen, and Gregory B. Poling, "A New Era in U.S.-Vietnam Relations: Deepening Ties Two Decades After Normalization," Report of the Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies, CSIS Washington and Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Boulder, June 2014.

22 For U.S.–Philippines relations, see, Sheldon Simon, "US-Southeast Asia Relations: Philippines – An Exemplar of the US Rebalance," *Comparative Connections*, September 2013; Richard Javad Heydarian, "The Philippines-China-U.S. Triangle: A Precarious Relationship," *National Interest*, May 1, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-philippines-china-us-triangle-precious-relationship-10342> (accessed June 17, 2022)

Unlike the U.S. that renews its commitment to Asia-Pacific security, and is seen legitimately as belonging to the region, owing to its colonial legacy in the Philippines and sacrifices of “blood and treasure” (as we are reminded very often) in the sphere during the World War II, India faces the challenge of being labeled a non-Pacific power or even worse, an interloper, if it were to visibly enhance its profile in the region. Even as the U.S. might want India to assume a higher profile in the region the question that arises is whether the region would want India playing an expanded role? Opinion in Washington oscillates between a greater role for India and despair, since every ‘strategic moment’ India and the U.S. have had, has flattered to deceive; the most recent being the Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal of 2005, which is on the backburner, apart from a welter of other issues that have equally piqued Washington and New Delhi .

The rise of China has undoubtedly motivated influential sections in Washington to coalesce their concerns and translate the same into a policy document calling for a ‘rebalancing’ towards Asia. It is interesting to note that of the several strategies to corral China in strategic terms, India registers strongly to the U.S. as a hedge or check to growing Chinese power. This has been witnessed for close to two decades with the National Security Strategy 2002 making it clear that India could aid the U.S. in creating a “strategically stable Asia.”²³ Earlier, Condoleezza Rice, in a *Foreign Affairs* article written during the 2000 presidential campaign had observed rather bluntly that:

“China is a great power with unresolved vital interests, particularly concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. China resents the role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. This means that China is not a “status quo” power but one that would like to alter Asia’s balance of power in its own favor. That alone makes it a strategic competitor, not the “strategic partner” the Clinton administration once called it. Add to this China’s record of cooperation with Iran and Pakistan in the

23 Shehzad H. Qazi, “Hedging Bets: Washington’s Pivot to India,” *World Affairs*, November/December 2012, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/hedging-bets-washington%E2%80%99s-pivot-india>(accessed June 18, 2022).

proliferation of ballistic-missile technology, and the security problem is obvious...It (the US) should pay closer attention to India's role in the regional balance... India is an element in China's calculation, and it should be in America's, too. India is not a great power yet, but it has the potential to emerge as one."²⁴

This undoubtedly was music to Indian strategic experts, floundering in a world without patrons following the eclipse of the Soviet Union and signified the continuation of the rehabilitation process India was undergoing in Washington following the May 1998 nuclear tests and subsequent opprobrium.

There is no shortage of support (and detractors!) in the 'Beltway' across the political spectrum for India as an actor to reckon with in the Asia-Pacific and to quote former National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon, "U.S. and Indian interests powerfully converge in the Asia-Pacific, where India has much to give and much to gain."²⁵ During a visit to the southern city of Chennai in India for the 2nd Strategic Dialogue, between the two countries, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had made a strong pitch for India in the Asia-Pacific by stating:

"India's leadership will help to shape positively the future of the Asia Pacific. That's why the United States supports India's Look East policy, and we encourage India not just to look east, but to engage east and act east as well."²⁶

Pro-India sentiment also came from former US Ambassador to India Timothy Roemer, who in a commentary, said:

"Indeed, U.S. vital national security interests around the world are increasingly linked to India's success. Investing time, resources, and capital in India's future will help the American economy, add to global peace, and pay dividends for decades to come."²⁷

24 See Condoleeza Rice, "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000.

25 Karl F. Inderfurth and Ted Osius, "India's 'Look East' and America's 'Asia Pivot': Converging Interests India's Response to US Rebalancing Strategy," *U.S.-India Insight* 3, no. 3, March (2013).

26 Sarah Parnass, "Hillary Clinton Urges India to Lead in China's Neighborhood," ABC News, July 20, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/07/hillary-clinton-urges-india-to-lead-in-chinas-neighborhood/> (accessed September 7, 2021).

27 Tim Roemer, "The Linchpin: Why India needs to be at the center of the U.S. pivot to Asia," *Foreign Policy*, December 4 2013.

With powerful sentiment in India's favor at a time when the U.S. seeks to not just 'rebalance' towards the Asia-Pacific (now Indo-Pacific), but also renew, re-engage and commit itself to a longer and more focused strategic objective in the region, one would have expected India to have quickly responded to the serenading from Washington. That has not happened and there are qualified and unqualified aspects dictating the hesitancy shown by New Delhi in committing itself to the U.S. strategy for the Asia-Pacific.

For India to be an intrinsic part of the U.S. pivot to Asia, it requires the resolute support of ASEAN as a seamless connectivity corridor in economic and strategic terms. Much has been spoken and elucidated about India's 'Look East Policy' and if it has been a success, this has more to do with India emerging as an growing economic power in the past two decades more than any strategic connotations. The relative success of the 'Look East Policy' and its fulcrum of economic diplomacy is acknowledged as having been a game changer for India and its interactions with the ASEAN and East Asia. Rephrasing 'Look East Policy' as 'Act East Policy' has to go beyond verbal semantics. A serious lacuna that India faces is a policy-making process that belongs to another era! It was only in April 2014 and after two decades of the 'Look East Policy' that New Delhi finally appointed an ambassador to the ASEAN Secretariat!²⁸ It is precisely this politico-institutional tentativeness that backfires for New Delhi.

Much has been made about the 'shared values' and 'interests' driving India's relations with the U.S., yet, behind the new-found bonhomie lies decades of suspicion and resentment.²⁹ Paul S. Kapur argues that structural, domestic, and personal qualities of leadership have transformed

28 Suresh Reddy was appointed envoy to the ASEAN and EAS. See "India names first ever envoy to ASEAN," *Times of India* (New Delhi), April 24, 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-names-first-ever-envoy-to-Asean/articleshow/34126010.cms> (accessed June 6, 2022).

29 S. Paul Kapur, "India and the United States from World War II to the Present – A Relationship Transformed," in *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Sumit Ganguly (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 251.

bilateral relations and it is difficult to disprove this hypothesis. Structural changes following the end of the Cold War forced an about turn in India's foreign policy with the era of leaning to the Soviet Union becoming a non-existent card. New Delhi's foreign policy bureaucracy—at its best an insipid cocooned cabal³⁰ in thrall with 'Nehruvianism' minus Nehru—surprisingly managed to conflate India's newly announced economic reforms by outlining a 'Look East' policy that not only reflected domestic voices for a new outward policy but one that was also stamped with the imprimatur of then prime minister Narasimha Rao, who with his understated personality changed the contours of not only the country's economy forever, but also, unhinged its foreign policy of 'bandwagoning' with the erstwhile Soviet bloc. It is a sad tribute to India's policy makers of today, especially the previous UPA government, that the architect of India's twin reforms, economic and strategic, Narasimha Rao is largely forgotten and all praise and credit is directed towards personages who had nothing to do with the initiation of economic reforms and strategic rethink in the early 1990s.

³⁰ 'Cabal' is an acronym of the first alphabets of Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington and Lauderdale, advisors to Queen Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558–1603.

‘Rebalance’: The Conundrums facing India

Post-independence since 1947, India-U.S. relations have been marked by short periods of extreme warmth and longer periods of drift and dither. The reasons for drift and dither are not to be blamed on one side only, but both, since there appears to be a glaring lack of appreciation and understanding of the fundamental interests and ideologies motivating both the countries and are often dictated by powerful domestic constituencies and international goalposts. The challenge India faces is not just whether it wants to be a dynamic agent of enhanced securitization in the Indo-Pacific, but one which is more serious and troubling – that of credibility. Hopes and encouragement apart, New Delhi’s credibility in Washington owes more to the contribution made by Indian-Americans to the U.S. than any political/strategic initiative from India.

The nonchalance in bilateral relations is eclipsed by the stunning contrast provided by this important variable. India and Indians in particular have endeared themselves to the U.S. more by way of the stellar contribution Indian-Americans have made to the U.S. in diverse fields, especially academia, science, medicine, information technology, business, law, and politics more than the bilateral relations the two countries have had for close to seven decades.

The seeds of misgiving regarding India’s strategic orientation looms large within U.S. policy-making circles and despite sentiment favoring closer and deeper engagement with India, strategic bureaucracies (State and Defense), elected representatives (Senators and Congress), think-tanks (across the political spectrum) and opinion builders (academicians and strategic experts) are hesitant in terming India a reliable partner. If the India-China bilateral has always been overshadowed by the conflict the two countries had in 1962, the India-U.S. bilateral has an inescapable

shadow of the Cold War about it, when the two were on opposite sides and there were instances when New Delhi felt it was being taken for granted by Washington.

New Delhi often reminds Washington of the manner in which it sent the Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal in 1971 to support Pakistan even as genocide was happening in East Pakistan, so amply detailed in Gary Bass' book.³¹ This residual thought process influenced by events of the past appears to encroach upon the India-U.S. equation. For hardliners in Washington, the Indian approach to foreign policy during the Cold War was a chimera. "Non-Alignment" provided a way in which leaders of 'third world' states could tilt without toppling: the idea was to commit to neither side in the Cold War, but to leave open the possibility of such commitment. That way, if pressure from one superpower became too great, a smaller power could defend itself by *threatening* (italics in original) to align with the other superpower."³² As Gaddis interprets it, "For Nehru, aligning India with 'non-alignment' was a way to rebuke the Americans and the Pakistanis, while also making the point, to the rest of the 'third world,' that there were alternatives to taking sides in the Cold War."³³

From the U.S. viewpoint, non-alignment as a policy was fine as long as it remained a portmanteau living up to its meaning of genuine neutrality. The moment India visibly tilted towards the Soviet Union, non-alignment lost its *raison d'être*. Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi had once held the view that the U.S. does not need "to worry about India's relations with the Soviet Union, since India was a democracy like the United States."³⁴ This was however lost on a U.S. led by two complex individuals – President

31 Gary J. Bass, *The Blood Telegram: India's Secret War in East Pakistan* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2013).

32 John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War – A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 124.

33 *Ibid.*, 125. Also see Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

34 Bass, n. 30, 135.

Richard Nixon (with his well-documented personal antipathy towards anything to do with India!) and his wily National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger.³⁵

Conservative voices in New Delhi speak of how the U.S. seems to ignore the emergence of Pakistan as a client state of Beijing and increased Chinese influence in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.³⁶ Well-informed commentators and even elected representatives in India like Shashi Tharoor have opined that “an America in decline, if that is indeed what transpires, will both have less interest in India and be of less use to it in the world as a partner in its own rise.”³⁷ The litany of complaints New Delhi has with Washington would make any analyst ponder whether these two celebrated democracies are ever going to perform in harmony!

A brief digression may be permitted here. For New Delhi, the complaints against Washington include the Union Carbide gas tragedy in Bhopal in 1984 when thousands of innocent people died following a gas leak from a chemical plant and restitution was paltry; the imposition of sanctions on Indian state-owned entities following nuclear tests in 1998; the sorry manner in which the David Hadley / Dawood Gilani link to the Mumbai terror attacks was camouflaged by U.S. agencies; the strip search of an Indian diplomat in 2013 following unverified claims of human trafficking; restrictions imposed on software professionals from India; and non-tariff barriers on imports from India. For Washington, the main complaints have been that India has not delivered on promises like opening up the nuclear sector for civilian use and the failure of the passage of the Nuclear Liability Bill in the Indian parliament; opening up the domestic market

35 The economic rise of India however brought about an epiphany in Henry Kissinger who has lobbied quietly for better relations between the two countries and lauded India for being a democratic superpower like the United States!

36 Robert M. Hathaway, “India and the US Pivot to Asia,” Yale Global Online, February 12, 2012, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/india-and-us-pivot-asia> (accessed May 3, 2022).

37 Shashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Allen Lane, 2012), 233.

to giant retailers like Walmart; and opening up the banking/insurance sectors to U.S. companies.

In contemporary times, the buzzword dominating strategic thinking in New Delhi is the term 'strategic autonomy' that gained currency when several leading foreign policy commentators comprising retired diplomats, retired military officers, public intellectuals, and newspaper columnists came together and authored a document titled "Non-Alignment 2.0" (sic).³⁸ This document authored by individuals of repute from New Delhi's rarefied intellectual circles and comprising diversified political persuasions was celebrated as being India's best locus on what it wants in the international arena and how it is going to go about it. Sadly, the term 'strategic autonomy' could also be seen as a newer justification of an older virtue: non-alignment (version 2), as explained by the very title of this non-official document, carried the stamp of several who served in official capacities not long ago. To any India watcher in Washington, 'Non-Alignment 2.0' would only firm up the opinion that India's credibility quotient as a partner is indeed questionable.

The credibility aspect comes into focus if one were to read what Salman Khurshid, the former foreign minister of the Manmohan Singh government had to say in Singapore about the 'rebalancing' and 'pivot.' To quote:

"People speculate in this part of the world about US position on pivot, US position on rebalancing towards Asia; ... and there are, obviously, methodologies of and connectivity that this part of the world has with China despite differences on certain dimensions. But we are, I think, lucky in that our position is that we will not be part of anybody else's scheme of things; and, therefore, we are not... We will never be allies of the US; we will be friends, strategic partners, not allies. And similarly we will be strategic partners with China; hopefully, we will become friends with China when all our issues are resolved; we have a very good working relationship with them, but we have things to resolve with them."³⁹

38 Sunil Khilnani, Rajiv Kumar, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Lt. Gen. (Ret'd) Prakash Menon, Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan, Shyam Saran, Siddharth Varadarajan, "Non-Alignment 2.0 – A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century," Centre for Policy Research (New Delhi), 2012, http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf.

39 "Not part of US' Asia Pivot- India FM," *The BRICS Post* (London), November 20, 2013, <http://>

From New Delhi's perspective, a fundamental question challenging the very 'rebalancing' is how serious is the U.S. about its intention towards the Indo-Pacific region? There are legitimate grounds for this agitating line of reasoning since senior commanders of the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Pacific Command have aired opinions that point to the paucity of resources and the U.S. inability to launch amphibious assaults. Sections within the Pentagon also consider the ongoing implosion of the Middle East as a more tangible and existential threat than China.⁴⁰ The lack of a theology supporting the U.S. new-found 'pivot' except for fevered commentaries across the region also brings to light another inconsistency – the doublespeak and half-hearted approach adopted by the U.S. that invokes negative imagery of a strategic ambiguity posture. While taking pains to assure Beijing that a policy of 'containment' is not on, the U.S. also tries to assuage its long-standing security partners in the region of its commitment to defend all territories administered by Japan, a veiled suggestion that also includes the Senkakus.⁴¹ If anything, the quadrilateral grouping of Australia, Japan, India, and the United States, came into being with China being the animus making this grouping, a beginning of an Indo-Pacific NATO, beyond the pious statements of diplomatese.

India is also cognizant of the reality that closer security engagement with ASEAN and its individual members especially Singapore, Vietnam, and to a lesser extent Indonesia and the Philippines is not going to be matched by a downscaling of relations by these countries towards Beijing irrespective and independent of the concerns they share about Beijing's periodic attempts at rewriting the rules of the game in the maritime sphere of the South China Sea.

thebricspost.com/not-part-of-us-asia-pivot-india-fm/#.U-23WcWSySp (accessed July 23, 2021).

40 Himanil Raina, "India's Role in the U.S. Pivot to Asia?" *International Policy Digest*, August 14, 2014, <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2014/08/14/indias-role-u-s-pivot-asia/> (accessed May 3, 2022).

41 Krista E. Weigland, "China's Strategy in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute: Issue Linkage and Coercive Diplomacy," *Asian Security* 5, no. 2 (2009):171.

If one were to assume that the positive synchrony emerging from Washington calling for a more robust engagement with India and expecting in return a more forthcoming and spirited acceptance from New Delhi of its growing responsibilities commensurate with its stature was one side of the story, it is pertinent to note the caution with which New Delhi has responded to U.S. overtures. C. Raja Mohan, one of India's most prominent strategic experts, and a long time votary of closer ties with the U.S. explained that:

"The new U.S. strategy calls for deploying 60 per cent of all American naval forces in Asia in the coming years, strengthening its traditional alliances in the region and building new partnerships, including with India. This has opened simultaneously for India a rare opportunity to shape the Asian balance of power and the real danger of being drawn into the conflict between the world's foremost power and the rising challenger."⁴²

He further added "Delhi has neither endorsed the U.S. pivot to Asia nor criticized it."⁴³ The caution in C. Raja Mohan's tone is also reciprocated in Washington with Ashley Tellis of the Carnegie Endowment, a passionate advocate for closer bilateral ties saying:

"Modi's ascension to the office of prime minister is also being watched closely by India's friends and partners who have often been chagrined by New Delhi's recent failure to play the confident role that they had imagined would accompany India's emergence on the global stage. Nowhere have these expectations been dashed more grievously than in the United States, where successive administrations since 1998 have attempted to rejuvenate bilateral ties in the hope that India would become an effective strategic partner. Many Americans and Indians alike have concluded that the partnership has flagged considerably—though obviously not entirely—in recent times because of the political miasma in New Delhi."⁴⁴

42 C. Raja Mohan, "China's rise, America's pivot, and India's Asian ambiguity," *Seminar* (New Delhi) 641, January 2013.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Ashley J. Tellis, "Productive but Joyless? Narendra Modi and U.S.-India Relations," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 12, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/12/productive-but-joyless-narendra-modi-and-u.s.-india-relations> (accessed May 12, 2022).

The non-committal by India undoubtedly annoys Washington, but, it has to be reasoned that for the strategic thinker in India, China is the fulcrum of a national security policy or agenda (if there is one, I wish to add!). Beijing is to the conservative Indian national security establishment an existential nightmare sitting over disputed territory lost in the 1962 conflict and a prickly neighbor that spares no effort in shoring up countries like Pakistan that apart from possessing nuclear weapons, attempts to subvert India in South Asia by subsidizing other South Asian countries through hard-to-refuse economic inducements. A contrarian argument I put forward is that India could have also nurtured its immediate neighbors with care and caution, and the sheer haughtiness with which New Delhi permitted its bilateral relations to lapse into somnolence has led to the situation where not only is India on the back foot in its own geographical terrain, but also facing a predicament where it is taken more seriously beyond South Asia. Can a country with diminishing clout and heft in its own geographical spread succeed in imposing its footprint in another geographical locale?

Conclusion

It would be an epochal development if New Delhi were to wholly endorse the U.S. pivot and 'rebalancing' towards Asia without considering its own considerable security conundrums. It would also be out of order for New Delhi to acquiesce in Beijing's plans for the region and beyond as that would relegate India to the rank of regional powers in uncomfortable league with Pakistan.

Several considerations slacken New Delhi's chances of throwing in its lot entirely, with the U.S. strategic re-orientation towards the region. First, the emphasis by the Narendra Modi government to strengthen ties with all neighbors, except China and Pakistan, has given India a head start in the region to repair bilateral relationships the Manmohan Singh government had unwisely and rather naïvely allowed to deteriorate. Second, India's gradually growing heft in the Indo-Pacific region would get circumscribed were it to ally with the U.S. overtly and reverse the gains accrued over the last two decades by its Look East and now, Act East Policy. Third, proud of its own independence in strategic matters and not missing any opportunity to highlight its strategic autonomy, India's strategic space for maneuvering gets reduced when it is seen as being the junior partner of a global superpower like the U.S. Fourth, with ghosts of the 1962 debacle with China still haunting policy makers in New Delhi, it would be unwise for New Delhi to be caught on the frontlines of a potential cold war (version 2) with the U.S. and China being the primary antagonists. Fifth, if New Delhi was to expand its strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific, will it not encourage a reciprocal gesture by China to expand its strategic space in the Indian Ocean Region? Sixth, New Delhi's stuttering economic growth and the express need for a sustained economic revival after a lost half-decade (2009-2014), coinciding with the ineptness of the UPA-2 led by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, was its primary national interest. Foreign policy was not a priority. Seventh, has India's foreign policy abandoned erstwhile 'non-alignment' and adopted 'multi-

alignment' representing a new domestic political template going beyond shibboleths of the past?

The greatest impact of OBOR on New Delhi has been the manner in which India's foreign policy finds itself wanting for ideas and willing partners. India's lack of economic clout is also noteworthy as it does not have the wherewithal to invest tens of billions in creating a new set of institutions or infrastructure corridors. The Bombay (Mumbai) Stock Exchange was established in 1875, much before Shanghai in 1891. Following the economic reforms in India since 1991, this city could have emerged as financial magnet to global financial flows, complementing globalization, yet it has not.

New Delhi's hesitancy comes as no surprise as it has allowed itself to be held hostage by the insecurities plaguing the region and the lack of a weltanschauung that in any case is the domain of only one ministry loathe to accept any competing views that has led to a strategic insularism prevailing upon the decision-making elite. The intellectual domain is also cautious and expresses concern about China's recent endeavors to re-order the international system by labeling it as 'Tianxia.'⁴⁵

The need to provide social and economic opportunities takes precedence in New Delhi today and the BJP government led by Narendra Modi has made it clear that it is open to doing business with everyone, China included!⁴⁶ The discourse in New Delhi is no longer about China as a strategic threat, but intriguingly as a strategic economic opportunity with Beijing taking renewed interest in India as a location for its investments. Nearly a decade ago, of the close to USD 900 million invested in India by Chinese firms, most were located in the western state of Gujarat,⁴⁷ whose

45 Itty Abraham, "Tianxia – A distinctly Chinese vision of Global hegemony," *Economic & Political Weekly* 50, no.25, June 20 (2015): 10-11.

46 In 2021, China-India bilateral trade was USD 125.7 billion, with Indian exports being only USD 28.1 billion.

47 Yu Lintao, "Modi moment," *Beijing Review*, no.24, June 12, 2014, <http://www.bjreview.com.cn/>

previous provincial leader was Narendra Modi. A more tantalizing proposition for New Delhi was China's reported offer to fund 30 percent of its estimated USD 1 trillion required for infrastructure development for the period 2012-2017.⁴⁸ Greater investments by global corporates, from developed countries, would circumvent the negative impressions China has in India's domestic economy and political culture.

Regarding the United States, while it is undeniable that the "history of past estrangement has left its scars"⁴⁹ not everything is dire in the India-U.S. bilateral. Over the last decade, India has made a subtle but significant change in preferring American defense materiel for its vast military, making the arms equipment sector the most robust component of the bilateral. The Indian military, it appears, is finally shaking off the exclusive reliance it had for Soviet and Russian weaponry in its inventory. With no state-of-the-art indigenous defense industry to speak of, it is left with no other option but to look for vendors elsewhere. The prospect of more than \$100 billion in future deals is alluring to defense contractors in the U.S. to bet on India. The devil however lies in the finer details as India insists on transfer of technology (especially for drones) that the U.S. is worried about. The US on its part insists India sign three separate agreements—End-Use Monitoring Agreement, Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement, and Mutual Logistics Support Agreement. While India is open to the first, it is hesitant to sign the other two fearing violation of its sovereignty.⁵⁰ This does not

world/txt/2014-06/09/content_623173_2.htm (accessed July 8, 2022)

48 A Chinese working group submitted a five-year trade and economic planning cooperation plan to the Indian government in the first week of February 2014, offering to finance as much as 30 per cent of the \$1trillion targeted investment in infrastructure during the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-17) to the tune of about \$300 billion. See, Dilasha Seth and Yogima Seth Sharma, "China offers to finance 30 per cent of India's infrastructure development plan," *Economic Times* (New Delhi), February 20, 2014, http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2014-02-20/news/47527235_1_india-s-infrastructure-development-plan-infrastructure-sector (accessed June 13, 2022).

49 Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (Washington D.C / Fort Leslie McNair: National Defense University Press, 1993), 451.

50 Kenneth I. Juster and Ajay Kuntamukkala, "U.S.-India Initiative Series: Unleashing U.S.-India

in any way impose any influence on the manner in which the U.S. and India conduct joint military exercises, which are quite regular, but lack a strategic and political underpinning.⁵¹

Regular military cooperation between the United States and India began in the early 1990s, with the navies leading the way. The annual Malabar exercises have been in place since 1992 with a brief hiatus following India's 1998 nuclear tests. Joint exercises were resumed in 2002 and the following years witnessed an increase in the specialization and sophistication of the joint exercises with full-blown war games involving aircraft carriers and satellite communications by 2005. Since 2003, the two armies also began joint counterinsurgency exercises in Vairengte, Mizoram at the Indian Army's highly specialized and legendary Jungle Warfare School. The Indian Air Force has also been invited on several occasions since 2008 to participate in the Red Flag exercises in Nevada.⁵² The Malabar exercises continue, with Quad group navies wanting to have interoperability.

India is also playing for more robust forums of engagement with the U.S. and is keen to enhance coordination and build understanding across the Indo-Pacific with trilateral dialogue forums involving Japan as well, of which there have been four successful rounds.⁵³ Regular visits by defense secretaries of US, Japan, Australia, France, and UK are acknowledgement that a re-engage with New Delhi, especially under the Modi-led BJP, is taking place and is being seen as a refreshing change from the indolent UPA-2 (2009-2014) led by Manmohan Singh. In New Delhi, Hagel had stated:

Defense Trade," Working Paper, October 2010, Center for a New American Security, 7.

51 Simon Denyer and Rama Lakshmi, "India appears ambivalent about role as U.S. strategy pivots toward Asia," *Washington Post*, October 13, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-appears-ambivalent-as-us-strategy-pivots-toward-asia/2012/10/13/254b05d0-0e18-11e2-bb5e-492c0d30bff6_story.html (accessed June 27, 2022).

52 Stephen P. Cohen and Dhruva Jaishankar, "Indo-U.S. Ties: The Ugly, the Bad and the Good," *Brookings*, February 2009, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2009/02/india-cohen> (accessed July 14, 2022).

53 Kurt Campbell and Brian Andrews, "Explaining the US 'Pivot' to Asia," *Americas* 2013/01/August 2013, Chatham House, London, 4-5.

“India and the US must work towards transforming our nations’ defence cooperation from simply buying and selling to co-production, co-development, and freer exchange of technology.”⁵⁴

Lassitude apart, the Manmohan Singh led UPA-1 (2004-2009) presided over a remarkable phase of India-U.S. relations that witnessed a positive upsurge in understanding one another with mutual strategic gains, highlighted by the India-U.S. nuclear agreement of 2005. These gains were frittered away in subsequent years by intransigence on both sides with Washington and New Delhi displaying a paranoid streak reflected worryingly by institutional structures in both capitals.

What and where is India’s foreign policy decision-making? OBOR has brought out the ineptness of India’s foreign policy decision-making in many ways, requiring deep institutional structural reforms.

The first reason lies in history, where the erstwhile External Affairs Department became the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations in 1947. Known as the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) today, it is reputed for its adeptness in continuing administrative continuity, inspired by laws and rules of an earlier epoch. Second, the MEA is forever iterating statements with minimal changes, of just names and places. This reveals a foreign policy making process where administrative fealty to political personalities is central, and limited meaningful verbal and written transgressions permitted. Being extremely Weberian and very hierarchical, the MEA prides itself on being separate and not in cahoots with other civil services. Third, the MEA is not known for encouraging theoretical frameworks, outlining India’s foreign policy. How could an aspirant to global power recognition, not have a foreign policy that looks beyond five-year electoral terms? Lack of official appreciation makes the world’s largest democracy practice foreign policy as a narrative, without

54 Suhasini Haider, “Hagel sees need to jointly develop defence equipment,” *The Hindu* (New Delhi), August 10, 2014. U.S. Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel made this statement while delivering a lecture at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi.

substance. Fourth, as an institution, the MEA has preferred to constrain itself by following what personalities proclaim. India's active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), was welcomed by many newly independent countries in the past, dissipating over time. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, managed to transform the MEA into a ministry cheering and applauding whatever he had to say about India's foreign policy. This trait continued with his daughter, Indira Gandhi, who as Prime Minister brooked no dissent. Personality perspectives were made central in the past, which continues. The 'Look East Policy' of the 1990s has had a name change in the past decade as 'Act East.' Sixth, true to its earlier form before the country became independent, views on foreign policy in India are reflected upon largely by 'foreign policy experts' who are largely from the Indian Foreign Service. The work of area professionals – epistemic, corporate, societal and media – is devalued and not considered, for the simple reason that these are dismissed as being non-batch/cadre views! No wonder, India's foreign policy is yet to be considered seriously. Seventh, in continuity with the earlier point, is that foreign policy hardly finds any traction beyond a few metropolitan areas. Most of country's foreign and defense policy courses at universities are taught in these parts, just as how security policy think tanks are headed and administered by fealties. A limited discussion on foreign policy exists, only in these areas, dominated by 'batch' and 'cadre' types. In domestic elections, foreign policy is not important, leading to a predicament where disputed boundary issues with neighboring countries does not solicit or encourage opinions from regions where families are living in different states owing to un-demarcated maps.

In conclusion and abiding by the critical tone adopted all through, I wish to advance a contrarian hypothesis: Even as international geopolitics has settled into a phase where Cold War assumptions are a footnote in history, they are precisely the prism through which India views its relations with China and to a lesser extent the United States leading to a stasis in overall strategic relations.

Author Bio

Raviprasad Narayanan, PhD, is Associate Professor, Center for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He can be reached at: raviprasad.narayanan@gmail.com