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III. Sample Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines the linkages between China’s national economy and foreign policy over the past 30 years, and assesses the claim that Chinese foreign policy has undergone an important shift in which domestic demand for energy and other raw materials heavily influence foreign policy decisions.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Assessments of Chinese foreign policy intentions and goals are based on the availability of reliable access to oil and other natural resources is a critical factor in Chinese foreign policy and overall strategic considerations. The coherence of China’s economic goals and the coordination needed to achieve them are eroding as multiple competing interests within the Chinese polity emerge to pursue and protect power and resources. This fragmentation of economic policy into multiple competing agendas has to be understood alongside assessments that resource needs drive Chinese foreign policy. The essay first surveys how shifting economic priorities have influenced Chinese foreign policy over the past 30 years. A second section discusses China’s shift from an export-led, resource-dependent growth model to one that is more balanced toward domestic consumption. The essay concludes by noting that China’s search for a rebalanced economy and for a new growth model creates opportunities and constraints on Chinese foreign policy.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- While China’s domestic economic growth remains a key factor in foreign policy, Chinese diplomats are increasingly turning toward oil-producing states are driven by a mix of factors than a simple narrative of energy security.
- China’s pluralized political economy makes it difficult politically, given the potential winners and losers in this process. Those who now urge China to make a shift away from an export-heavy growth pattern are likely to grow increasingly frustrated unless they understand that the central leaders do not possess the instruments to quickly transform the Chinese economy.
- Given that China, like no other economy, has benefitted from the institutions of the global economy, China has a strong interest in maintaining these institutions and their liberal principles, even as the Chinese government seeks to play a stronger role in their operation and governance.

Executive Summary [total length not to exceed 275 words]

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Graeme Cheeseman, “Facing an Uncertain Future: Defence and Security under the Howard Government,” in *The National Interest in the Global Era: Australia in World Affairs 1996–2000*, ed. James Cotton and John Ravenhill (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 207.
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Jingdong Yuan, “The Bush Doctrine: Chinese Perspectives and Responses,” *Asian Perspective* 27, no. 4 (2003): 134–37.
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Joshua Kurlantzick, “China’s Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief, no. 47, June 2006.
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House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment, *International Proliferation of Nuclear Technology*, report prepared by Warren H. Donnelly and Barbara Rafter, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976, Committee Print 15, 5–6.
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Sotōka Hidetoshi, *Nichi-Bei dōmei hanseiki: Anpo to mitsuyaku* [Half-Century of the Japan-U.S. Alliance: Security Treaty and Secret Agreements] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2001), 409–35.

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Liu Jianfei, “Gouzhu chengshu de Zhongmei guanxi” [Developing a Mature Sino-U.S. Relationship], *Zhongguo kexue xuebao* 78, no. 2 (June 2003): 73–87.

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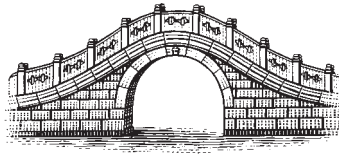
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SPECIAL ISSUE

India and the United States:
The Contours of an Asian Partnership



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SPECIAL ISSUE

India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership

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NOTE ≈ The authors would like to thank the participants at the January 2018 workshop “A Global Partnership or a Relationship Oversold? Taking Stock of the India-U.S. Strategic Relationship,” organized by RSIS, where the papers in this special issue were discussed.

KEYWORDS: INDIA; UNITED STATES; STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP; FOREIGN POLICY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay explains the rationale and assumptions underlying this special issue by examining the concepts of strategic partnership and foreign policy cooperation and situating them within the historical context of Indo-U.S. cooperation in Asia.

MAIN ARGUMENT

This special issue of *Asia Policy* scrutinizes the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership by examining the prospects for bilateral cooperation in Asia. Although peacetime foreign policy collaboration between major powers is a rarity, China's rapid rise in the international system appears to have forced the United States and India into unusually close consultation on regional security issues. Will this consultation mature into active cooperation? To answer this question, this introductory essay first examines the concept of strategic partnership—a nebulous type of political relationship that has proliferated since the end of the Cold War. It then highlights the obstacles to peacetime cooperation between major powers in other regions of the world. Following this, attention turns to the articles in this special issue, which examine the history of Indo-U.S. cooperation in various subregions of Asia. Collectively, these articles challenge misperceptions and misunderstandings of each country's policies and past behavior, as well as identify the differing understandings they have of both the bilateral relationship and the region. Taken together, they provide a clearer sense of the geopolitical scope and depth, as well as the important limitations, of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. This essay concludes by identifying the key insights that come from this collection and offers some thoughts on the overall trajectory of bilateral relations.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Bilateral Indo-U.S. cooperation in Asia is often hindered by an “absent dialogue” between the two sides, highlighting the need for constant communication between officials in both countries.
- Although there is an apparent congruence of interests in the countries' regional and foreign policy objectives, sustaining and developing the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership will require considerable attention and imagination.
- India and the United States urgently need to focus on developing infrastructure and enhancing connectivity in Asia.

One of the key geopolitical developments of the past two decades has been the transformation of the Indo-U.S. relationship from estrangement to strategic partnership. The most commonly held explanation for this development is a changing alignment of interests.¹ Indeed, ahead of a visit with President Donald Trump in June 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that he was “confident in the growing convergence between our two nations.”² The idea that India and the United States are moving closer together has been repeated in a number of official statements and echoed by foreign policy analysts.³ Yet skeptics suggest there are glaring differences between the two sides and that when it comes to foreign policy preferences, India is no closer to the United States than is Russia or China.⁴ This divergence of views raises a number of questions about the state of the Indo-U.S. relationship. When it comes to geopolitical developments in Asia, do U.S. and Indian interests align? In which regions and with which set of countries do the policy priorities of the two states converge and where do differences remain? Where convergences of interest exist, are there indications that the two countries are actively working together? Finally, how is their bilateral partnership perceived by other regional states? This special issue of *Asia Policy* examines the ability of India and the United States to cooperate and manage their differences in a variety of regions in the Indo-Pacific.

To set the stage for this discussion, this introductory essay begins by exploring the concept of strategic partnership and assesses the prospects for such partners to cooperate in a third country or region. As we shall argue, peacetime foreign policy cooperation between major powers is a rarity. At the same time, however, China’s rapid rise in the international system has forced the United States and India to consult more closely in an unprecedented manner. Next, the essay introduces the articles in this special issue, which focus on the history of Indo-U.S. collaboration and the prospects for future

¹ Teresita C. Schaffer, “Security Ties,” in “India-U.S. Relations in Transition,” ed. Dhruva Jaishankar, Brookings India, June 2016, 11.

² Narendra Modi, “For the U.S. and India, a Convergence of Interests and Values,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2017.

³ “The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century,” U.S.-India Joint Statement, June 8, 2016 ~ <https://www.narendramodi.in/india-us-joint-statement-during-the-visit-of-prime-minister-to-usa-the-united-states-and-india-enduring-global-partners-in-the-21st-century--484150>; Jeff Smith, “Assessing U.S.-India Relations: The Strategic Handshake,” *Diplomat*, September 26, 2016; “U.S., India Have Increasing Convergence of Interests: Pentagon,” *Times of India*, Economic Times web log, August 10, 2017; Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Optimising India-U.S. Maritime-Strategic Convergence,” *Strategic Analysis* 41, no. 5 (2017): 433–46; and C. Raja Mohan, “Modi’s American Engagement: Discarding the Defensive Mindset,” Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, Working Paper, no. 203, April 8, 2015.

⁴ Hamza Shad, “Can America and India Really Be Strategic Partners?” *National Interest*, August 29, 2018 ~ <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/can-america-and-india-really-be-strategic-partners-29967>.

cooperation in different subregions of Asia. By examining Indian and U.S. policies toward third countries—some friends, some not—the authors challenge misperceptions and misunderstandings of each country’s policies and past behavior as well as identify the differing understandings of both the bilateral relationship and the region held by each party. Taken together, these articles provide a clearer sense of the geopolitical scope and depth, as well as the important limitations, of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. This introductory essay concludes by offering some thoughts on the key insights from this collection and the overall trajectory of U.S.-India relations.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

It is an exaggeration to say that alliances have become passé in the post-Cold War world, but among the major powers “strategic partnerships” now appear to be the preferred means of forming important bilateral relationships in the 21st century.⁵ Terming a relationship a strategic partnership generally indicates a desire for a more significant level of bilateral engagement than would occur through regular diplomatic interaction.⁶ The prospect of realizing mutually beneficial economic opportunities or reacting to shared security challenges—in a manner that may not be possible alone—is frequently the objective of enhancing the relationship.⁷ Since the focus is on maximizing shared gains in specific areas, strategic partnerships can exist between states whose interests are largely aligned, as well as between those whose relations are characterized by a mix of cooperation and competition.⁸ Countries forming strategic partnerships are clearly not antagonists, but they do not necessarily have to be close friends. Consequently, their interests may overlap and diverge depending on the issue at hand.⁹ As François Godement notes, the use of the

⁵ As Rohan Mukherjee has noted, since 1991 new alliances “have typically featured either minor powers allying with each other or major power allying with one or more minor powers.” Rohan Mukherjee, “Japan’s Strategic Outreach to India and the Prospects of a Japan-India Alliance,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 836.

⁶ Vidya Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing without Alliances* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 48.

⁷ Thomas S. Wilkins, “Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?” *Contemporary Security Policy* 29, no. 2 (2008): 363.

⁸ Sean Kay, “What Is a Strategic Partnership?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, no. 3 (2000): 15.

⁹ Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia*, 48–49.

term “strategic” to describe a partnership refers more to “the absence of divisive issues than to a joint strategy in the traditional sense.”¹⁰

Glenn Snyder defines alliances as “formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.”¹¹ Scholars who study strategic partnerships differentiate them from alliances on several grounds. First, strategic partnerships are seen to focus on the achievement of specific objectives that are “positive” goals, rather than having a “negative” focus on deterring or opposing a hostile state. Whereas alliances are often—though not always—targeted against a specific threat, strategic partnerships do not necessarily identify a particular enemy.¹² Arguably, one of the main reasons these types of relationships have proliferated since the end of the Cold War is the fact that a lack of clarity as to the source of the next major security challenge makes more flexible partnerships preferable to formal commitments.¹³ At the same time, the ambiguity surrounding strategic partnerships may also avoid provoking a countervailing response from countries that feel implicitly targeted by the relationship in the way that a military alliance might. Unlike alliances, which have formal commitments and can require binding responses by parties to specific events, strategic partnerships involve a much lower level of commitment. Whereas the cost of entry into an alliance is the loss of a degree of autonomy and freedom of action, the informality of strategic partnerships places far fewer constraints on states’ independence.¹⁴ In a similar vein, the lack of concrete commitments to the other party makes the entry and exit costs of partnerships much lower than formal alliances. Thus, a strategic partnership is far less than an alliance and the existence of a strategic partnership does not necessarily indicate an intent to form an alliance in the future.¹⁵

As a result of the nebulosity of strategic partnerships, they tend to be open-ended relationships. As long as the collaboration facilitates the achievement of both individual objectives and shared goals for the states

¹⁰ François Godement, “Neither Hegemon nor Soft Power: China’s Rise at the Gate of the West,” in *Facing China’s Rise: Guidelines for an EU Strategy*, ed. Marcin Zaborowski (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2006), 63.

¹¹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.

¹² Thomas S. Wilkins, “Japan’s Alliance Diversification: A Comparative Analysis of the Indian and Australian Strategic Partnerships,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, no. 1 (2011): 123.

¹³ Mukherjee, “Japan’s Strategic Outreach to India,” 837.

¹⁴ James D. Morrow, “Alliances: Why Write Them Down?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2000): 65.

¹⁵ Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia*, 49.

involved, they could persist indefinitely. Consequently, as Thomas Wilkins argues, the durability of strategic partnerships is a product of the degree of alignment between the values and interests of the two partners.¹⁶

In terms of diplomatic practice, two countries forging a strategic partnership seek to establish regular summits between their political and military leaderships, tone down conflicts in favor of cooperation on issues of mutual interest, and generally work to encourage a long-standing economic and political relationship.¹⁷ In other words, the two sides seek to advance their shared interests in specific areas while enabling future cooperation by establishing procedures to cope with disagreements when differing interests come to the fore.¹⁸ Process is often a key focus of bureaucratic efforts between partner states. Thus, strategic partnerships, in Colleen Chidley's words, are "formed in pursuit of cooperation, for the purpose of cooperation."¹⁹ Repeated interactions between pairs of states can increase trust and diminish uncertainty, which in turn reduces the cost of future bilateral cooperation.

Interstate cooperation can be conceived of in two general ways. The more expansive way of understanding cooperation—particularly between major powers—is the mutual acceptance of outcomes, rules, and constraints that result from repeated interactions between pairs of states.²⁰ Though real, the achievement of such tacit cooperation is not necessarily the explicit aim of either side. Indeed, such forms of cooperation often result, in Edward Kolodziej's phraseology, from the "grudging crystallization of compromises" that occurs when each state realizes that it cannot dictate terms to the other or achieve its entire range of objectives in a given situation.²¹ Much of the "cooperation" that occurred between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, for example, was of this type. A second, narrower conception of cooperation, and the one adopted in this series of articles, focuses on the similarity between the two states in terms of both objectives being sought and strategies to achieve them. This latter type of cooperation is

¹⁶ Wilkins, "Japan's Alliance Diversification," 126.

¹⁷ Avery Goldstein, "An Emerging China's Emerging Grand Strategy: A Neo-Bismarckian Turn?" in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 75.

¹⁸ H.D.P. Envall and Ian Hall, "Asian Strategic Partnerships: New Practices and Regional Security Governance," *Asian Politics and Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): 91.

¹⁹ Colleen Chidley, "Towards a Framework of Alignment in International Relations," *Politikon* 41, no. 1 (2014): 154.

²⁰ Edward A. Kolodziej, "The Cold War as Cooperation," in *Cold War as Cooperation: Superpower Cooperation in Regional Conflict Management*, ed. Roger E. Kanet and Edward A. Kolodziej (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

far less common in international politics, at least when it comes to relations between great powers.²²

The existence of common interests between pairs of states is rarely enough on its own to engender cooperation. Commitment problems, lack of information about a partner's true intentions, and the incentives states have to misrepresent themselves are just a few of the obstacles to mutually beneficial cooperation.²³ Even if states could transcend these complications, cooperation may still be rebuffed because the parties are unhappy with the way the benefits of collaboration are distributed.²⁴ Although the two sides may gain in absolute terms from bilateral cooperation, the fact that one of the two gains relatively more may be enough to scupper any deal entirely.²⁵ The question as to whether states are more concerned with absolute or relative gains, and the likelihood of cooperation that this implied, was a key component of the classic paradigmatic debate between neorealists and neoliberals in international relations.²⁶ The two theoretical traditions reached a point of convergence in the recognition that when security concerns dominate international politics, states will be more attuned to relative gains, rendering cooperation more difficult, but in a more benign environment a focus on absolute gains, and thus international cooperation, is possible.²⁷

The expectation that states find it easier to cooperate in the economic sphere than the security domain is borne out by experience.²⁸ Even the most successful wartime military alliance of the twentieth century, that of the Allied powers against Nazi Germany and imperial Japan, was riven by differences over both aims and the strategies to achieve them. As the eventual unfolding of the Cold War demonstrated, theirs was not a cooperation underpinned by shared values and objectives. Even in the face of a powerful military threat, it was difficult to transcend interstate differences and sustain cooperation.²⁹

²² Kolodziej, "The Cold War as Cooperation," 5.

²³ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379–414.

²⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 105.

²⁵ Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 487.

²⁶ For an overview of this debate, see Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

²⁷ Luis Simón, "Neorealism, Security Cooperation, and Europe's Relative Gains Dilemma," *Security Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017): 193.

²⁸ Charles Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," *World Politics* 37, no. 1 (1984): 1–23.

²⁹ William Hardy McNeill, *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict, 1941–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

Cooperation between major powers becomes still more difficult when the domain of action is not on one's border but abroad in a third region. During the Cold War, the United States was able to get some of its allies—notably Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and South Korea—to contribute to the war in Vietnam, but other traditional partners such as the United Kingdom and Canada resisted involvement. After 1991, cooperative military interventions become more commonplace as the United States led, or contributed to, operations in Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. These operations involved participation—real or symbolic—from a number of different countries and organizations, including NATO. Yet the challenges of reconciling differing priorities and preferences that affected the Grand Alliance in World War II remain. To take but one example, in the 1999 Kosovo War, leading European NATO countries and the United States had markedly different positions on the escalation of air strikes against Serbia, targeting of dual-use infrastructure, and potential deployment of ground forces.³⁰ The disputes among allies grew so contentious that at one point the Italian foreign minister warned that his country might leave NATO.³¹

Why would extraregional powers cooperate in a different part of the world? There are three main motives for this type of cooperation. First, they could jointly resist a third, nonresident great power that they feel threatens the region. This might be seen in the various British and U.S. efforts to establish regional defense pacts in the Middle East during the Cold War to deter perceived Soviet aggression.³² A second motivation could be to work against a hostile regime in the region that threatens stability or the local balance of power. The U.S.-led multilateral coalition that came together in 1990 to counter Iraq's annexation of Kuwait is emblematic of this type of purpose. A third motive for cooperative engagement could be to contain a regional crisis that has the potential to escalate. U.S. and British diplomatic efforts, among others, for example, are credited with helping prevent the outbreak of armed conflict between India and Pakistan in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the Indian parliament.³³

³⁰ David P. Auerswald, "Explaining Wars of Choice: An Integrated Decision Model of NATO Policy in Kosovo," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2004): 648–53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 653.

³² Nigel John Ashton, "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955–1958," *Review of International Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 123–37.

³³ P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 164.

If wartime cooperation is challenging, peacetime cooperation among major powers in third countries is a rarity. This is because, in the absence of war, differing national interests are more likely to dominate decision-making. Thus, episodes that appear superficially to be cooperative, such as U.S. and British efforts to establish a defensive perimeter in the Middle East during the 1950s, contain significant elements of rivalry under the surface.³⁴ If it is difficult enough for two allies to cooperate in this manner, the difficulty only increases when the countries are not even in a formal alliance relationship.

The looser ties that characterize strategic partnerships make collaboration complicated as the roles of “leader” and “follower” are not clearly defined in the relationship. Moreover, because the strength of the ties between the states is so ambiguous, it is rarely apparent how countries in a strategic partnership will behave when faced with common threats and challenges. Despite their increasing ubiquity, academic discussion of strategic partnerships and foreign policy remains limited. Under what conditions do strategic partners sharing similar interests cooperate? What forms does this cooperation take, and if it does not occur, why not? What are the sources of change either facilitating or hindering such cooperation? The articles in this special issue examine these questions in the context of the U.S.-India strategic partnership and assess distinct aspects of U.S.-India relations in various subregions of Asia, as well as their bilateral defense relationship.

THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA: DIFFICULT PARTNERS

Despite being two large democracies—or perhaps because of it—the United States and India have not traditionally had an easy relationship. During the Cold War, they were divided in their approach to both regional and global developments.³⁵ At times these differences were magnified by each side’s sense of being an exceptional, exemplary state in the international system.³⁶ Consequently, mistrust and antipathy often obscured the shared values and

³⁴ Ayesha Jalal, “Towards the Baghdad Pact: South Asia and Middle East Defence in the Cold War, 1947–1955,” *International History Review* 11, no. 3 (1989): 409–33.

³⁵ For recent works on Indo-U.S. relations, see Ashley J. Tellis, “U.S.–India Relations: The Struggle for an Enduring Partnership,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Srinath Raghavan, *The Most Dangerous Place: A History of the United States in South Asia* (Gurgaon: Penguin Press, 2018).

³⁶ Anit Mukherjee and Manohar Thyagaraj, “Competing Exceptionalisms: U.S.-India Defense Relationship,” *Journal of Defense Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 12–28.

interests that did exist.³⁷ Since the early 1990s, however, the two countries have found greater freedom to maneuver in the international system and successive governments in both states have worked to forge a robust partnership.³⁸ This transformation has become evident over the last fifteen years as a once tense bilateral relationship metamorphosed into a strategic partnership, complete with close defense ties, frequent joint military exercises, and a civil-nuclear deal that accommodated India into the global nuclear nonproliferation regime. The benefits to both countries from this development are significant. India obtained access to technology and economic assistance to facilitate its rise, while the United States gained the friendship of an emerging democratic partner.³⁹ Although diplomats in both countries may deny it, the U.S.-India bilateral relationship has also taken on greater urgency because of the rise of China.

China's emergence as an economic and military power has brought about systemic and regional challenges. At the systemic level, China's economic growth over the last decade has placed it as the closest peer competitor to the United States.⁴⁰ A number of Chinese schemes, including island building in the disputed South China Sea, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, are perceived in some quarters as challenges to the U.S.-led global order.

At a regional level, the rise of China has created new dynamics in different subregions of Asia, including Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia. The dominant power or powers in each of these regions are dealing with China's rise based on their own bilateral relations with China, the United States, and other key states in the region. India, the leading power in South Asia, has responded with a combination of accommodation and balancing. Like other countries acknowledging China's growing economic interests and capabilities, India has tried to accommodate some aspects of Beijing's expanding foreign policy remit and sought to keep bilateral relations on an even keel. For example, New Delhi has begrudgingly accepted that China will have interests in India's immediate

³⁷ S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Transformation of U.S.-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (2007): 643.

³⁸ C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Viking, 2003), 83–115; and Dinshaw Mistry, *Aligning Unevenly: India and the United States*, Policy Studies 74 (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2016).

³⁹ Dhruva Jaishankar, "Looking Back: Highs, Lows, and Steady Progress," in Jaishankar, "India-U.S. Relations in Transition," 11.

⁴⁰ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival* 60, no. 3 (2018): 7–64.

neighborhood.⁴¹ India also clearly sought to reduce bilateral tensions in the wake of the 2017 Doklam standoff on the China-India border via a private meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Wuhan.

In terms of balancing, India has attempted to undertake extensive military modernization and infrastructure development along the border. Indicative of this, the Indian armed forces are increasingly focused on the threat posed by China and have adjusted their military strategy accordingly.⁴² The most important element of external balancing undertaken by India has been the transformation of its relationship and wide-ranging engagement with the United States.⁴³ This transformation has been neither easy nor assured. Although attitudes toward the United States are mostly positive across the Indian population as a whole, anti-Americanism still retains some currency among opposition parties and foreign policy elites.⁴⁴ In many respects, this reflects a generation that came of age during the estrangement of the Cold War and has failed to update its ideological outlook.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, such actors have the concrete ability to retard cooperation such that a simple logistics agreement of the type that the United States has with more than a hundred countries took over ten years to negotiate with India. Even then, in ratifying such an accord, opposition parties and foreign affairs commentators in India accused Prime Minister Modi of surrendering the country's independence.⁴⁶ Closer ties with the United States, especially on the terms that Americans are used to, do not fit well with India's traditional preference for strategic autonomy. This desire for an independent foreign policy explains the preponderance of strategic partnerships in India's foreign policy discourse but its abhorrence of alliances.⁴⁷ Not all of New Delhi's strategic partnerships are equal, however, and undoubtedly, the partnership with Washington is the most consequential.

⁴¹ Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "India's Perspective towards China in Their Shared South Asian Neighbourhood: Cooperation versus Competition," *Contemporary Politics* 24, no. 1 (2018): 98–112; and "How India and China Are Vying for Influence in South Asia," *Times of India*, May 31, 2018 ~ http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/63395543.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

⁴² Yogesh Joshi and Anit Mukherjee, "From Denial to Punishment: The Security Dilemma and Changes in India's Military Strategy towards China," *Asian Security* 15, no. 1 (2019).

⁴³ Dhruva Jaishankar, "India and the United States in the Trump Era: Re-evaluating Bilateral and Global Relations," Brookings Institution, Policy Paper, no. 37, June 2017.

⁴⁴ Arzan Tarapore, "India's Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2017): 172.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sumit Ganguly, "Has Modi Truly Changed India's Foreign Policy?" *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2017): 138; and Tarapore, "India's Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor," 172.

⁴⁷ Rajesh Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (2017): 7–26.

OUTLINE OF ARTICLES

Constantino Xavier's article examines U.S.-India engagement in India's immediate neighborhood with a focus on their historical and contemporary interactions mainly in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. As is discussed in more detail in the article, U.S.-India relations vis-à-vis Pakistan were deliberately not addressed because the topic dominates extant literature on Indo-U.S. ties, often at the expense of the smaller nations of South Asia examined here. Xavier argues that with China's gradual emergence as a South Asian actor, India is increasingly willing to join forces with outside powers to pursue shared objectives in a region typically seen as its exclusive sphere of influence. This opens a window of opportunity for greater U.S.-India convergence in South Asia, a pivotal region in their joint strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific. While in the past New Delhi's and Washington's policies toward the region's third countries have often coexisted, they are now more willing to join efforts to coordinate and cooperate across South Asia and the Bay of Bengal region. With reference to case studies of Indo-U.S. interactions in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar ranging from the 1950s to the 2000s, Xavier dispels assumptions about constant conflict and instead identifies a range of constructive engagements between U.S. and Indian officials. Based on these patterns, he argues that these past dynamics can pave the way for a more sustained and closer Indo-U.S. engagement and offers concrete recommendations on how to deepen communication, coordination, and cooperation between the two partners in and around the subcontinent.

Our article for this special issue examines U.S. and Indian policies toward Southeast Asia, a region characterized by a congruence of interests between Washington and New Delhi. We argue that there have been extensive diplomatic consultations, leading to a significant convergence in policy statements; however, substantive collaboration between the United States and India in Southeast Asia is constrained by several factors: India's requirement to prioritize foreign policy challenges in South Asia, a fear of provoking China, an institutional mismatch in the foreign and security policy bureaucracies of the two countries, and the possibility of an adverse reaction from countries in the region. Consequently, while offering recommendations for enhancing cooperation, we conclude that, for the time being, Washington and New Delhi will probably work in parallel rather than actively coordinate these regional efforts.

Sinderpal Singh's article examines the perceptions of India and the United States regarding the Indo-Pacific region and assesses the extent of

their strategic convergence and cooperation. He argues that overly optimistic assessments of the Indo-Pacific as an area of cooperation between Washington and New Delhi neglect several significant divergences between the two states. Fundamentally, India and the United States have differing geographic conceptions of the “Indo-Pacific,” which has important implications for broader strategic convergence. Moreover, bilateral coordination of military and diplomatic policies in the region in response to China’s rise is likely to be constrained by different positions on a number of key issues.

Sumitha Narayanan Kutty’s article focuses on a contemporary challenge that has been a cause of much anxiety in both capitals: Iran. Based on field research and interviews, she dispels the myth that policy differences over Iran are a major impediment to the bilateral relationship. Instead, both India and the United States are accommodative of each other’s strategic interests and take the long view when dealing with their differences to avoid major disruptions in ties. They do so through direct, private negotiations at the highest levels of leadership and downplay their disagreements in public. As a regional power with global aspirations, India is willing to adapt and absorb certain costs, such as the U.S. sanctions against Iranian oil imports in 2012 and 2018, in return for U.S. accommodation of its own priorities such as completion of the Chabahar port project.⁴⁸ As India and the United States expand their consultations on the Middle East, the article recommends leveraging differences and identifying complementary strengths that would prove useful to counter China’s growing economic and security presence in this region.

Finally, Cara Abercrombie’s article focuses squarely on the future of the U.S.-India partnership and draws on the author’s personal experience managing the India portfolio at various levels for the U.S. Department of Defense over the past decade. She argues that although the defense and security dimension of the strategic partnership has demonstrated significant growth and progress in recent years, it lacks the elements of a mature partnership that are critical to enabling the type of cooperation envisioned. The two countries have not developed the “habits of cooperation” that the United States typically enjoys with its closest partners. This is not entirely surprising because India’s security partnership with the United States presents a departure from its traditional security partnerships. New Delhi

⁴⁸ The United States granted an exemption to India from sanctions for the development of Chabahar port. Yashwant Raj, “U.S. Exempts India from Sanctions at Chabahar Port in Iran,” *Hindustan Times*, November 7, 2018 ~ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/us-exempts-india-from-sanctions-at-chabahar-port-in-iran/story-KsoiFfwuvjw18mB9Q2wjJ.html>.

is still learning how to cooperate deeply with a foreign counterpart across a broad security agenda. In turn, the United States is also learning how to adapt its established patterns of bilateral cooperation to a model that is acceptable to India. Abercrombie argues that, with additional effort, the United States and India can habituate regular cooperation and realize the full potential of their partnership.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF U.S.-INDIA RELATIONS

What are some of the key insights from this special issue? First, as several of the articles observe, despite a seeming congruence of interests between the two sides, sustaining and developing U.S.-India relations will require considerable attention and imagination in both countries. For some, stronger defense ties—epitomized by the recent signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement—are indicative of a stable and secure strategic partnership. As our authors point out, however, sustaining this relationship requires high-level political and diplomatic attention. Indeed, at the time of this writing, diplomats in both countries are engaged in damage control arising from India's \$5 billion agreement to purchase the S-400 air defense system from Russia, which may lead to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. This follows on earlier disagreements over Iran policy and contentions over trade liberalization and U.S. visas for highly skilled Indian workers that at times have overshadowed the positive developments in the relationship. Given that there are a range of issues on which New Delhi and Washington do not necessarily see eye to eye, sustained political attention and imagination are essential to ensure that the United States and India do not drift apart by accident.⁴⁹

Second, as a number of authors argue, India and the United States urgently need to focus on developing infrastructure and enhancing connectivity in Asia. The issue is important not just for countries in India's immediate neighborhood but also for India's engagement with Southeast Asia and with

⁴⁹ For a cautionary reading of U.S.-India relations, see Ashley J. Tellis, "How Can U.S.-India Relations Survive the S-400 Deal?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 29, 2018 ~ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/08/29/how-can-u.s.-india-relations-survive-s-400-deal-pub-77131>; and Tanvi Madan, "Between a Cold War Ally and an Indo-Pacific Partner: India's U.S.-Russia Balancing Act," War on the Rocks, October 16, 2018 ~ <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/between-a-cold-war-ally-and-an-indo-pacific-partner-indias-u-s-russia-balancing-act>.

Iran, as well as further into Afghanistan and Central Asia. To a significant extent, China's inroads into different subregions of Asia have been facilitated by its promise to improve infrastructure under the controversial Belt and Road Initiative. To address Asia's growing demand for infrastructure, India, the United States, Japan, and even the European Union have all unveiled their respective versions of a "connectivity strategy," but much more remains to be done.⁵⁰ Washington and New Delhi need to engage in a serious discussion of their connectivity plans and strategies, which at some stage may also include like-minded parties such as Japan, Australia, and the EU.

Finally, this special issue highlights the need for constant communication between officials in both countries. India and the United States increasingly share a similar set of objectives in Asia. When disagreements occur, they are more often about means than ends. Nevertheless, as Xavier cogently points out in his article, bilateral cooperation is "hindered by the absence of dialogue." The initial 2+2 meeting held in New Delhi in September 2018 was a positive step, but more engagement is necessary across different bureaucracies. For instance, if the United States and India were to more closely consult about developments in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean littoral, or the Middle East to help mitigate differences in regional policy, it would require direct conversations between the desk officers in the State and Defense Departments of both countries—by no means an easy task. Such consultations can, of course, also be expanded to include like-minded partners sharing similar regional interests. Creating a web of relationships and dialogue mechanisms is necessary to build trust—the cornerstone of any relationship, strategic or otherwise.

Notwithstanding the obstacles identified in these articles, the overall geopolitical trend lines are clear: the United States and India are coming together and slowly and erratically learning to cooperate with each other. Despite the uncertainty surrounding President Trump's foreign policy, there are encouraging signs that his administration is willing to work with India—even on areas of disagreement such as Iran and Russia.⁵¹ The articles in this special issue identify both the potential and the limits of an Asian, if

⁵⁰ To its credit, the Trump administration has set aside funds for an "Indo-Pacific economic vision." See Michael R. Pompeo, "Remarks on 'America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision'" (speech at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Indo-Pacific Business Forum, Washington, D.C., July 30, 2018) ~ <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284722.htm>.

⁵¹ Seema Sirohi, "Strategy, Please, in Strategic Meet," *Times of India*, Economic Times web log, August 22, 2018 ~ <https://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/letterfromwashington/strategy-please-in-strategic-meet>.

not global, partnership between the United States and India. As all the authors readily acknowledge, there are considerable challenges in this understanding, but there is also great potential. We hope that this collection illuminates different aspects of this complex yet promising relationship. ◆

SPECIAL ISSUE

Converting Convergence into Cooperation: The United States and India in South Asia

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KEYWORDS: INDIA; REGIONAL POWERS; STRATEGIC CULTURE; SOUTH ASIA; DEMOCRACY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article examines how the U.S. and India, driven by their converging concerns over China's rise in the Indo-Pacific, are presented with an opportunity to deepen their cooperation in South Asia.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Seeking to counter China's expansionism in South Asia, India's traditional sphere of influence, New Delhi now partners with several "like-minded" countries to offer an alternative source of infrastructure development and connectivity initiatives. This has opened a window of opportunity for the U.S. to cooperate with India in the region. Based on historical case studies in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, with new evidence from primary sources, this article shows how different strategic priorities, capabilities, and perceptual challenges have at times hindered U.S. and Indian policies from aligning. At the same time, however, the article dispels the common assumption that the U.S. and India have always been locked in an inevitably hostile relationship across the region. A detailed analysis of both states' approaches to the region since the 1950s shows that, despite significant challenges and differences, there have been instances of policy coordination that are relevant for today's attempts to facilitate cooperation amid convergence. To work together more efficiently and counter China's rising leverage in South Asia, India and the U.S. will need to learn from past interactions and focus on their communication and coordination of policies in the region.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The U.S. and India must continue improving communication channels to exchange assessments about the region, especially during crises. This is particularly important to prevent China or third states from playing the two off against each other.
- India and the U.S. should engage in a dialogue to flesh out what sustainable connectivity means in practice, including developing infrastructure and setting criteria to allow businesses to benefit from economic liberalization and the rule of law in South Asia.
- The U.S. and India must keep investing in public diplomacy and outreach across South Asia, stimulating wider domestic debates—especially in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka—about the long-term costs of China's influence.

In response to China's rising involvement in its South Asian periphery, India has been revising its long-held policy to limit the influence of extraregional powers in its smaller neighboring states. Although traditionally reluctant to encourage the presence of outsiders in its sphere of influence, India now seeks to join forces with "like-minded" powers from outside the region and even multilateral organizations. For example, it now partners with Japan on joint infrastructure projects in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Through its Act East and "neighborhood first" policies, New Delhi is focusing on regional initiatives to increase economic and security integration.

India's new collaborative disposition also opens up a window of opportunity for regional cooperation between the United States and India. While China's expanding presence around the Indian periphery has emerged as a common concern, the levels of cooperation between the United States and India in South Asia still remain low. Except for Pakistan and Afghanistan, dialogue and cooperation between the two states regarding the rest of the region have rarely taken place, despite an overall flourishing strategic partnership since the 2000s. This contrasts with deepening cooperation in several other issue-areas, such as nuclear energy, counterterrorism, and maritime security, all of which had been points of bilateral contention even after the end of the Cold War. In some instances, U.S. and Indian policies in the region have even diverged, including after the end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009 and during the most recent refugee crisis in Myanmar in 2017 and 2018.

Despite their broadly converging approaches across the Indo-Pacific in recent years, what obstacles hinder U.S.-India cooperation in South Asia's small states, and how can they be overcome? Given their different alignments during much of the Cold War, the United States and India sometimes clashed in the region, most notably during the East Pakistan/Bangladesh conflict in 1971. Does this indicate a constant history of hostility, or are there cases in which both countries have related more positively in the region's small states? And if so, what lessons do these past interactions hold for U.S. and Indian initiatives to overcome such challenges and partner in South Asia today?

This article argues that the rise of China in the region is helping resolve some past differences and recommends concrete measures for the United States and India to translate their broad policy convergence into closer cooperation across South Asia. Based on historical case studies with new evidence from primary sources, the article shows how different strategic priorities, capabilities, and also perceptual challenges have often hindered U.S. and Indian policies from aligning in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar in the past.

At the same time, however, the findings also dispel the assumption that the United States and India have always been, and will continue to be, locked in an inevitably hostile relationship across the region. A closer analysis of each state's approaches to regional crises between the 1950s and 2000s shows that despite significant differences there have also been instances of policy coordination that can be drawn on to facilitate cooperation amid the current convergence. Four such past challenges are of relevance to today's U.S.-India relations in South Asia.

The first challenge relates to the United States' regional threat assessments during the Cold War, which were not always shared by India. In the 1950s, however, U.S. anxiety to contain China in South Asia, for example, was mitigated by a policy of deferral to India, which was seen as the region's predominant power. Washington thus ended up coordinating its policies with New Delhi, including joint economic assistance projects in Nepal, to limit Chinese influence. This precedent holds significant lessons for today's context in which India is more willing and confident to pool efforts to counter China in its own neighborhood.

Second, history also shows how U.S.-India relations have been challenged whenever the region's small states have attempted to play off one against the other. However, rather than jumping at the opportunity to increase its regional influence at India's expense, the United States has often refused to be used as a protective shield against Indian pressure. With an increasingly competitive regional environment, and despite Washington's renewed concern about China, the United States can today benefit from adopting this restrained posture and investing in greater policy coordination with India to jointly engage the region's small states.

Third, in the past U.S. and Indian officials have rarely communicated directly about strategic developments in the region's third countries. By letting India "take the lead" during several recent crises in the region, however, Washington has increased Indian trust and been conducive to establishing new communication channels to exchange assessments about the region. Today, regional cooperation between the United States and India will hinge on the two sides deepening these dialogues, instead of working separately toward the same objective of reducing Chinese leverage over specific regimes.

Finally, cooperation between the United States and India in South Asia also faces the challenge of their differing emphasis on the role of democracy, human rights, and liberal values. The case studies examined in this article, however, show that both countries share a principled understanding of the long-term benefits of political liberalization in the region, and that most

bilateral tensions relate to either the means to support this or to the respective policy priority. Today, with South Asia's unprecedented democratization wave threatened by China's rising political influence, the United States and India can benefit from closer cooperation to support pluralism and the rule of law in the region.

This article is organized as follows:

- ≈ pp. 23–29 place South Asia in the larger context of U.S.-India relations since the 1950s and assess their current moment of convergence, principally driven by the rise of China.
- ≈ pp. 29–47 examine the four challenges laid out above with reference to specific case studies on U.S.-India interactions in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar from the 1950s to the early 2000s.
- ≈ pp. 47–50 draw on these empirical findings to suggest several patterns—beyond mere hostility—and offer policy recommendations on how Washington and New Delhi can translate their converging interests into practical cooperation across the region.

THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA IN SOUTH ASIA

In his analysis of U.S.-India relations just before the 2008 U.S. presidential elections, strategic analyst C. Raja Mohan emphasized that “the United States has emerged as the single-most important external partner of the [Indian] Subcontinent.”¹ Mohan was writing at a time when both countries were engaged in a deepening strategic partnership, culminating in an exceptional civil nuclear cooperation agreement that same year, and the sky seemed to be the limit for Washington and New Delhi. Eight years earlier, India's prime minister Atal B. Vajpayee had symbolically initiated this process of convergence by referring to the United States and India as “natural allies.”²

Such bonhomie was in contrast with decades of a largely fraught relationship, especially during the latter Cold War period, with India and the United States often working at cross-purposes and in opposing geostrategic camps, especially after India aligned with the Soviet Union in 1971. For much of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, India supported diplomatic initiatives to

¹ C. Raja Mohan, “The U.S. Role in South Asia,” in *America's Role in Asia: Asian and American Views* (San Francisco: Asia Foundation, 2008), 56.

² Malini Parthasarathy, “India, U.S. Natural Allies: Vajpayee,” *Hindu*, September 9, 2000 ≈ <https://www.thehindu.com/2000/09/09/stories/01090005.htm>.

limit the U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean region, including at Diego Garcia.³ The end of the Cold War mitigated some of these circumstances but did not immediately resolve them. When India became a declared nuclear weapons state in 1998, the United States imposed sanctions, and it took several years to normalize relations, which paved the way for the strategic engagement of the 2000s.

Against the difficult background through the 1990s, and the high expectations that developed thereafter, this section evaluates how the U.S.-India relationship has developed in South Asia's third countries, what factors are driving the current convergence, and the obstacles ahead for the United States to emerge in practice as India's single-most important external partner in the region.

Setting the Historical Record Straight

U.S.-India relations in South Asia have been examined from a variety of angles, especially from a broader perspective during the Cold War.⁴ On Pakistan, including the 1971 war, there is burgeoning scholarship informed by new Indian archival materials.⁵ The nuclear dimension has attracted disproportionate attention.⁶ There is also new knowledge on how China shaped U.S.-India relations during the Cold War, especially during the 1962 war and the border dispute along the Himalayas.⁷

While there is thus a rich literature on the macro-strategic issues involving the United States and India in South Asia, including on China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, this contrasts with the near absence of scholarship on how both countries have interacted in the region's small states, traditionally more exposed to India's regional predominance. The lack of historical sources and other evidence-based scholarship has consequently reified myths about India and the United States being antagonistically predisposed and irreversibly locked into a hostile relationship. This neglected part of South Asia includes

³ In 1971, India supported Sri Lanka's resolution in the UN General Assembly declaring the Indian Ocean to be a "zone of peace." See K.P. Misra, "Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace: The Concept and Alternatives," *India Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1977): 19–32.

⁴ Srinath Raghavan, *The Most Dangerous Place: A History of the United States in South Asia* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2018).

⁵ Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶ Jayita Sarkar, "Wean Them Away from French Tutelage: Franco-Indian Nuclear Relations and Anglo-American Anxieties during the Early Cold War, 1948–1952," *Cold War History* 15, no. 3 (2015): 375–94.

⁷ Tanvi Madan, "With an Eye to the East: The China Factor and the U.S.-India Relationship, 1949–1979" (PhD diss., University of Texas–Austin, 2012).

Nepal and Bhutan to the north, Bangladesh (after 1971) and Myanmar to the east, and Sri Lanka and Maldives to the south. Beyond Pakistan, owing to its different capabilities and relationship dynamic with India and the United States, these other states of South Asia have been almost completely ignored in the scholarship about U.S.-India relations.⁸

While these smaller countries have perhaps limited strategic salience, this is not the sole reason for such scholarly neglect. With Indian diplomatic records classified or unavailable until recently, scholars were deprived of evidence to examine the factors driving New Delhi's decision-making processes. Historical analysis of U.S.-India relations in South Asia, and India's role as a regional power, thus remained limited to a few pages in key books or interviews with retired policymakers.⁹ In other works, India's approach is therefore frequently dismissed simplistically as a reflexive impulse to control the neighborhood and resist U.S. or other external attempts to penetrate the subcontinent at its own expense.¹⁰ American scholar John Garver, for example, has noted how Beijing sees India as a "regional hegemonist," which "presumes to block the natural and rightful expansion of China's relations with its neighbors."¹¹

Critical narratives from the neighboring small states, which tend to accuse the Indian government of overreacting and bullying in times of crisis, have further contributed to the understanding that India is driven by an obsessive quest to control the region.¹² Scholars thus widely quote a myriad of secondary sources to infer, for example, that "although it was never enunciated explicitly or officially, successive Indian governments have systematically pursued an active policy of denial in South Asia similar to that applied to the

⁸ A few memoirs by retired officials make passing references to Nepal, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka in the context of U.S.-India relations. See, for example, Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994); and J.N. Dixit, *My South Block Years: Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1996).

⁹ See, for example, Sandra Destradi, *Indian Foreign and Security Policy in South Asia: Regional Power Strategies* (New York: Routledge, 2012); M. Ayoob, "India in South Asia: The Quest for Regional Predominance," *World Policy Journal* 7, no. 1 (1989): 107-33; S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993); and Prashant Jha, *Battles of the New Republic: A Contemporary History of Nepal* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2014).

¹⁰ For typical negative assessments of the role of the United States by Indian scholars and practitioners, see U.S. Bajpai, ed., *India and Its Neighbourhood* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1986).

¹¹ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 31.

¹² See, for example, K.M. de Silva, *Regional Powers and Small State Security: India and Sri Lanka, 1977-1990* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1996); and Surya P. Subedi, *Dynamics of Foreign Policy and Law: A Study of Indo-Nepal Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Western Hemisphere by the United States in the nineteenth century.”¹³ Others note that India’s “quest for predominance” in South Asia derives “from the Indian elite’s perception that it inherited the [British colonial] Raj’s strategic and political legacy.”¹⁴

No effort so far, therefore, has been given to find primary sources that explain the causes shaping India’s policy toward extraregional powers in South Asia, and whether there was any aversion to the United States, in particular. Nor is there acknowledgment that India’s posture has varied over time depending on the structural context. For example, until the 1960s, there are several instances of Indian cooperation with the United Kingdom, and to a certain extent with the United States in the region.¹⁵ By offering historical case studies, with primary sources and interviews with decision-makers, this article seeks to develop a deeper assessment that can also contribute lessons for the current convergence between the United States and India in the region.

Drivers of and Obstacles to U.S.-Indian Convergence in the Region

It is in the small states of India’s immediate periphery—including Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives—that Washington and New Delhi increasingly share concerns about the long-term implications of China’s involvement, including its economic leverage, political clout, and security influence in the wider Indian Ocean region.

India has consistently considered China as a security threat along its Himalayan border since the two states’ war of 1962. It is, however, the rising economic asymmetry with China that now increasingly shapes Indian threat assessments in South Asia. Beginning in the late 2000s, and especially after the formal launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017, China significantly deepened its economic relations with India’s neighbors. While New Delhi has legalistic disquiet about Chinese projects running through the Pakistan-held territory it claims, its decision not to join the Belt and Road Initiative was

¹³ Devin T. Hagerty, “India’s Regional Security Doctrine,” *Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (1991): 363. For example, on an alleged “Indira doctrine,” such work often cites a foreign policy analyst in the aftermath of the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka. See Bhabani Sen Gupta, “The Indian Doctrine,” *India Today*, August 31, 1983, 20–21.

¹⁴ Mohammed Ayoob, “India in South Asia: The Quest for Regional Predominance,” *World Policy Journal* 7, no. 1 (1989): 107–33.

¹⁵ Paul M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

primarily driven by a strategic apprehension regarding the long-term security implications of China's expansion in the region.¹⁶

The Indian government seems particularly worried about China converting its economic leverage into political and security influence over neighboring countries. New Delhi is reportedly alarmed about what are popularly known as “debt traps,” which could allow China to seize critical infrastructure, as recently illustrated in the cases of Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka and projects in Maldives, and possibly militarize them.¹⁷ These concerns may not be driving India's neighborhood policy but are certainly helping shape them at the highest level.¹⁸

Whether reflecting India's economic incapacity or security anxieties, China's rapidly expanding presence in South Asia has incentivized New Delhi to open the door to greater collaboration with outside powers. For Shyam Saran, former foreign secretary (2004–6), “India must seek to align with other powerful states to countervail the main adversary [China],” and “this would mean closer relations with the U.S., Japan, Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam.”¹⁹ According to S. Jaishankar, foreign secretary from 2015 to 2018, in its quest for more “people-centric” connectivity projects and a “cooperative regional architecture,” India is “working closely with a number of other international players whose approach is similar.”²⁰ Japan has been the most visible player in this new Indian strategy to partner with “like-minded powers,” leading to joint economic projects in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.²¹ India has also recently reached out to Russia, Australia, France, the United Kingdom, and several other countries and regional organizations to pursue economic and security cooperation in South Asia's third countries.²²

¹⁶ Harsh V. Pant and Ritika Passi, “India's Response to China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Policy in Motion,” *Asia Policy*, no. 24 (2017): 88–95.

¹⁷ Darshana M. Baruah, “India's Answer to the Belt and Road: A Road Map for South Asia,” Carnegie India, August 21, 2008 \approx <https://carnegieindia.org/2018/08/21/india-s-answer-to-belt-and-road-road-map-for-south-asia-pub-77071>.

¹⁸ Prashant Jha, “How India Is Dealing with China: Improve Ties but Stay Alert,” *Hindustan Times*, July 12, 2008 \approx <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-india-is-dealing-with-china-improve-ties-but-stay-alert/story-ej6Dy9PARfncR5qhoxj4PI.html>.

¹⁹ Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017), 148.

²⁰ Ministry of External Affairs (India), “Speech by Foreign Secretary at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries,” August 25, 2017 \approx <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/28888>.

²¹ Darshana Baruah, “Toward Strategic Economic Cooperation between India and Japan,” Carnegie India, December 1, 2016.

²² Constantino Xavier, “India's ‘Likeminded’ Partnerships to Counter China in South Asia,” Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, September 11, 2017 \approx <https://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/constantinoxavier>.

New Delhi's increasingly severe threat assessments about China and its consequent interest to partner with other countries in South Asia dovetail with U.S. geostrategic concerns and reflect the trend of U.S.-India convergence since the 2000s.²³ There are indications that the United States under President Donald Trump is willing to further engage India across the Indo-Pacific in contrast to China. In a rare acknowledgment of this difference, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson noted in 2017 that "China, while rising alongside India, has done so less responsibly, at times undermining the international rules-based order, even as countries like India operate within a framework that protects other nation's sovereignty."²⁴

Even when no direct references are made, the U.S. approach to China's economic entanglement across Asia reflects India's concerns in its own region. Tillerson's successor, Mike Pompeo, thus noted that the United States will work for "a free and open Indo-Pacific" together with "all countries that share our vision of a region rooted in sovereignty, the rule of law, and sustainable prosperity."²⁵ While these statements indicate a growing U.S. disposition to find ways to work with India in South Asia, there is so far only limited evidence of how this has translated into cooperation on the ground. The U.S.-India relationship has flourished into a robust strategic partnership, encompassing more than fifty bilateral dialogue mechanisms and a new Strategic and Commercial Dialogue since 2015.²⁶ But the 2016 joint statement of the second U.S.-India Strategic and Commercial Dialogue, for example, only reserves 1 among 63 points for South Asia.²⁷ Together with Japan, the countries have instituted a trilateral working group on infrastructure financing in Asia, but no project has so far been announced in South Asia, and New Delhi reportedly refused to further expand the group to also include Australia.²⁸ In private conversations, U.S. officials

²³ For an overview of the origins and challenges of this convergence, see Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 175–252.

²⁴ Rex Tillerson, "Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century" (speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., October 18, 2017) ~ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson>.

²⁵ Michael R. Pompeo, "Remarks on America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision" (speech at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C., July 30, 2018) ~ <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284722.htm>.

²⁶ Dhruva Jaishankar, "India and the United States in the Trump Era: Re-evaluating Bilateral and Global Relationships," Brookings India, June 2017 ~ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/india-and-the-united-states-in-the-trump-era-re-evaluating-bilateral-and-global-relations>.

²⁷ "Joint Statement on the Second India-U.S. Strategic and Commercial Dialogue," Ministry of External Affairs (India), August 31, 2016 ~ <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27350/Joint+statement+on+the+Second+IndiaUS+Strategic+and+Commercial+Dialogue>.

²⁸ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, "India Not to Join U.S.-Led Counter to China," *India Times*, Economic Times web log, August 7, 2018 ~ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-not-to-join-us-led-counter-to-chinas-bri/articleshow/65300729.cms>.

often complain about the Indian government's lack of willingness or capacity to follow up and implement joint projects in South Asia.²⁹

Such slow progress indicates that there may still be significant obstacles hindering cooperation. Are delays and reticence merely an expression of the early stage of their strategic convergence and bound to be resolved with time? Or do they reflect a different set of hurdles, based on the two states' specific histories as a global and regional power, respectively? This article proceeds to address these questions through historical case studies of U.S.-India interaction in South Asia's third countries.

SECURING THE SUBCONTINENT: DIFFERENT THREAT ASSESSMENTS

India's quest for a sphere of influence around the subcontinent has been a perennial source of tension in U.S.-India relations. A closer analysis of the early period of Indo-U.S. dynamics in the region, however, may help us understand the different motives, dilemmas, and dynamics on both sides, which are not too different from today's context. By comparing their different threat assessments during the 1950s, especially in Nepal and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), it becomes apparent that both sides were ready to compromise and, to a certain extent, coordinate and cooperate.

Equal Denial and the China Threat (Nepal, 1950s)

After 1957, China began its direct inroads into Nepal. Without India's tutelary role, the India-China diplomatic channel gave way to a competitive security dynamic. The Indian threat assessment of China kept increasing: the dispute along the Sino-Indian border escalated through the 1950s, Beijing formally annexed Tibet in early 1959, and in June 1960 the People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched a military raid into Nepal's strategic Mustang valley, just after signing the Sino-Nepalese Boundary agreement.³⁰ Thereafter, the new threat presented by China would dominate all Indian views on Nepal.³¹

²⁹ Author's interview with a U.S. official, New Delhi, September 6, 2018.

³⁰ On the April 1960 visit of Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and Marshal Chen Yi to India, Indian ambassador to Nepal H. Dayal stated, "This development, which is inevitable with the deterioration in our relations with China, could have grave consequences for us as well as for Nepal." National Archives of India (NAI), File no. 6(27)-R&I/60, 32, New Delhi.

³¹ The director of India's Intelligence Bureau recalls that "China was making a deep dent in an area of undoubted [Indian] influence." B.N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal* (Bombay: Allied, 1971), 269-70.

The centrality of this Chinese threat assessment is confirmed by changing relations with the United States.³² Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's initial skepticism about a U.S. presence in Nepal was shaped by his deeply held strategic concern to insulate the kingdom from the triangular Cold War rivalry between the United States, the Soviet Union, and China that was increasingly competitive and interventionist. In 1952, Nehru even opposed the opening of an American library in Kathmandu on the grounds that "it is rather naïve to think this can come without any [American] conditions or strings being attached to it."³³ These concerns were particularly targeted at Washington because it was the farthest removed from South Asia, and thus seen as having the greatest potential for troublemaking in Nepal, given the absence of any direct regional stakes.³⁴ But Nehru's policy was also one of "equal denial" to any external involvement, as reflected in his equivalent apprehension about the Soviet Union's inroads into Nepal.³⁵

However, while Indian anxieties about Nepal turning into a Cold War proxy battleground were seemingly confirmed by the outreach of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to the Tibetan resistance movement, culminating with the first airdrop of weapons in 1957, they were progressively supplanted by more pressing concerns about China. The United States would therefore be rewarded for its policy of deferring to India as Nehru exhausted his diplomatic capital with Beijing. Washington understood the strategic concern behind India's policy of extraregional denial: a 1957 National Security Council briefing thus noted that "the United States should regulate its activity in Nepal so as not to encourage the Chinese Communists to expand their operations there." Another brief stated that the United States "refrained from establishing a resident diplomatic mission in Nepal because such action would doubtless lead the Communist Chinese, and perhaps also the Soviet Union, to open a similar mission."³⁶

³² For a detailed discussion, see Madan, "Eye to the East," 217–19.

³³ Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *Nepal-India, Nepal-China Relations: Documents, 1947–June 2005*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Geetika, 2005), 65, 233–34.

³⁴ In 1954, Nehru told his ambassador in Nepal that while "there is no present or near danger to Nepal from the so-called [Chinese and Nepalese] Communists, a far greater danger is from the Americans." Bhasin, *Nepal-India*, 233–34.

³⁵ For example, the Indian government opposed the opening of a Soviet embassy in Nepal. On this, see Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 27, second series (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2000), 30.

³⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, vol. 8, *South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), document 168 ~ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d168>.

As China accelerated its independent outreach to Nepal, raising alarm bells in New Delhi, U.S. and Indian views started to converge, leading to a slow but gradual alignment of interests and even punctual cooperation on joint assistance projects.³⁷ This mutual respect developed to such an extent that it even deflected shrewd Nepalese attempts to play off Washington against New Delhi, with U.S. officials concerned about Kathmandu first getting a “clear” on U.S. projects from the Indian government.³⁸

After finally opening its new embassy in Kathmandu in August 1959, with Indian concurrence, the United States hosted King Mahendra for an official visit in April 1960. U.S.-India coordination deepened thereafter, driven by a converging strategic concern about China. A U.S. brief in January 1962 thus recommended that given China’s attempts to “detach Nepal from India’s sphere of influence,” Washington would “continue to favor [Indian] efforts” to engage Nepal’s king and democratic forces.³⁹

The Nepal case in the late 1950s shows that New Delhi was, in principle, driven by the strategic imperative to protect the subcontinent from becoming another proxy theater for extraregional competition and conflict, especially as the Cold War began to take shape there. The policy of equal denial was not always easily achieved. On the one hand, New Delhi preferred to neatly insulate Nepal—and the rest of its periphery—from any external interests and presence. On the other hand, however, given increasing threat assessments about China and its own limited capabilities, New Delhi was also on a convergence path with the United States. This led India to compromise by allowing the United States occasional access to Nepal to balance China’s increasingly hostile incursions. While this reflects an important precedent of Indo-U.S. cooperation in the region, which is too often forgotten, it also indicates that given broader processes of strategic divergence or convergence, India is willing to strike tactical agreements to cooperate with outside powers inside South Asia.

³⁷ See, for example, the December 1956 cable from the U.S. embassy in New Delhi that stated “India is aware of Chinese danger along her northern border and Chinese threat of subverting Nepal and Burma. We believe Nehru highly conscious and worried on these scores.” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, vol. 8, document 160 [~ https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d160](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d160). On joint aid projects after 1956 and a tripartite Nepal-U.S.-India agreement in 1959, see *ibid.*, document 3 [~ https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d3](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d3).

³⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960*, vol. 15, *South and Southeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), document 274 [~ https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v15/ch6](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v15/ch6).

³⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. 19, *South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), document 88 [~ https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v19/d88](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v19/d88).

A Late Geostrategic Tilt (Ceylon, 1956)

The case of Ceylon (later renamed Sri Lanka) reflects the same dynamics as in Nepal but sheds more light on how the United States has benefited from moderating its threat assessments to adapt to India's specific role in South Asia's context. Unlike in Nepal, there was little or no strategic convergence shaping Indo-U.S. interactions on the island in the 1950s. Despite this, the United States realized that in the interest of its broader and long-term relationship with India, it should shed some of its anxieties about Communist influence in Ceylon and instead adopt a more restrained posture.

Ceylon's anglophile elites had only reluctantly agreed to negotiate their independence from the United Kingdom, and, after 1948, the new state's constitution and military forces remained tied to the Crown in London. Indian officials recalled that the first prime minister, D.S. Senanayake (1947–52), unlike most of the other South Asian leaders, remained “singularly immune to the attractions of the contemporary Indian political scene.”⁴⁰ This explains the prevalent Indian view that “Ceylon's ties with Britain in 1948 were generally much closer than those [to] India” and the country thus “continued in a pro-British and culturally Anglo-Saxon orientation.”⁴¹

The latent Indian discomfort was not only ideological, assessing the Ceylonese leadership to be excessively Westernized and conservative, but also strategic, given that the island's political system and leadership privileged proximity with the West rather than the nonaligned block.⁴² Indeed, Colombo's global outlook was informed by a severe suspicion of India that cut across party lines. In a memo to Prime Minister D. Senanayake (1952–53), minister J.R. Jayewardene, who was to become president in the 1980s, concluded that “India should not be allowed to proclaim a ‘Monroe Doctrine’ in the Indian Ocean” and stressed the need for Sri Lanka to find extraregional allies.⁴³

This naturally led to tensions in bilateral relations between Ceylon and India after 1947, which escalated under Ceylonese prime minister John Kotelawala (1953–56), who pursued an aggressive policy of strategic and economic diversification. Most significantly, however, Kotelawala

⁴⁰ K.M. de Silva and W. Howard Wriggins, *J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography*, vol. 1 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 16.

⁴¹ V.H. Coelho, *Across the Palk Straits: India–Sri Lanka Relations* (Dehra Dun: Palit and Palit, 1976), 138–39.

⁴² See, for example, Nehru's reference to Kotelawala as “a landlord and therefore a conservative” in a conversation with Zhou Enlai on October 20, 1954. Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 22.

⁴³ Quoted in a memo to the prime minister on March 19, 1954. Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *India–Sri Lanka Relations and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict Documents, 1947–2000*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Indian Research Press, 2001), 8–9.

pursued association with the emerging security architecture across Asia sponsored by the United States. He allowed U.S. military airplanes carrying French troops to stopover in Colombo en route to Indochina, in August 1954 he lobbied for Ceylon and the other Colombo Powers (including India, Pakistan, and Burma) to join the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and he almost caved in to U.S. pressure to end Ceylon's Rubber-Rice Pact agreement with China (signed in 1952).⁴⁴

The most significant challenge came with the 1950 proposal for a major U.S. air base in Ceylon, initially suggested by Colombo and then insistently pursued by Kotelawala. Washington's response to this offer illustrates a typical dilemma in U.S. policy toward South Asia during the 1950s. On the one hand, skepticism about India's ideological nonalignment and lack of power-projection capabilities drove the U.S. temptation to take advantage of such overtures and enlist Ceylon's support for anti-Communist containment in Asia.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Washington was concerned that an exaggerated threat assessment and increasing U.S. involvement in Ceylon could lead to Indian hostility or destabilize the island's domestic politics to the extent of a Communist takeover.⁴⁶ This was reflected in John Foster Dulles's dual instructions in October 1953 to bring Ceylon "back in step" against Communist China, but at the same time cautioning that "excessive amount of aid to Ceylon at this time might react disadvantage U.S. by damaging our relations with other countries in the area," in an obvious reference to India.⁴⁷

The change in government after the Ceylon's 1956 elections ended this implicit Indo-U.S. tension, as the country ceased tilting to the West under the new prime minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who embraced a nonaligned position and was more willing to defer to Nehru and India's objective to insulate the island from Western influence. New Delhi rejoiced at the prospect of Ceylon finally associating itself with India and nonalignment.

⁴⁴ John L. Kotelawala, *An Asian Prime Minister's Story* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1956), 128. On SEATO, see G.E.P. de S. Wickramaratne, ed., *Ceylon and Kotelawala: A Selection of Speeches Made in the Legislature in Ceylon by John Lionel Kotelawala, 1931–1956* (Dehiwela: Colombo, 1964), 271–77.

⁴⁵ This was reflected, for example, in Dulles's success in 1956 to find a workaround to the Battle Act to supply Ceylon with aid. See *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, vol. 8, document 136 ~ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d136>.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the June 1953 cable by the U.S. ambassador Joseph Satterthwaite in Colombo that the Indian reaction was "almost certain to be negative and should be a matter of some concern." *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954*, vol. 11, part. 2, *Africa and South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), document 964 ~ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v11p2/d964>.

⁴⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954*, vol. 11, part 2, document 968 ~ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v11p2/d968>.

An Indian diplomatic note from Colombo thus described the electoral outcome as being “in a sense, a revolution” because Kotelawala had been “definitely inclined to toe the American line” and “took no sincere steps to settle the Indo-Ceylon problem or to support India and its foreign policies.”⁴⁸ In New Delhi, the new alignment with Bandaranaike was officially welcomed with an enthusiastic announcement about a “general agreement between him [Bandaranaike] and the Prime Minister of India on almost all important international problems.”⁴⁹

Despite occasional concerns about “radical leftist elements” in the “nationalist-neutralist government,” U.S. assessments thereafter concurred that Ceylon’s geostrategic pivot was to be beneficial, given that India “would probably try to bolster Bandaranaike in the event of a major challenge to him by either communist or old-style conservative forces.”⁵⁰ Washington’s concerns were assuaged, and accordingly it let go of the island, thereafter leaving Ceylon mostly to India’s sphere of influence.

As in Nepal, Washington’s posture in Ceylon was driven by a primary concern to contain China or a possible Communist insurgency. But U.S. geostrategic anxiety could not always translate into action on the ground because of India’s opposition and predominant role there. While impatient and not always willing to rely on India to “do the job,” U.S. decision-makers were thus conscious that excessive U.S. involvement could—as New Delhi feared—invite further Chinese involvement, escalate competition, or destabilize these third countries. This would additionally hinder India’s overall benign influence over them and the emergence of moderate “nonaligned” forces, as with Bandaranaike’s election in 1956.

WHEN WASHINGTON DEFERS TO NEW DELHI, TRUST INCREASES

A second challenge in U.S.-India relations in South Asia relates to managing internal conflicts in the region. Especially in crisis moments, when they are on a collision route with India, smaller states such as Nepal or Sri Lanka have often tried to balance pressure from New Delhi by reaching out to external actors. During the Cold War, the United States was often the first

⁴⁸ 1956 assessments by Assistant High Commissioner M.M. Nair. See NAI, File no. 3(8)-R&I/57, 1, 15, New Delhi.

⁴⁹ Ministry of External Affairs (India), *Annual Report 1956–57* (New Delhi, 1957), 13.

⁵⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960*, vol. 15, document 182 ~ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v15/d182>.

choice, given its structural position and superior capabilities in the larger Indian Ocean region.

As reflected in the previous case of Nepal in the 1950s, such balancing behavior naturally heightened Indian threat assessments. This should not, however, be equated with an Indian obsession to control the neighborhood. Given geographic proximity, disputed and porous borders, and often also cross-border ethnic ties, the domestic affairs of its neighbors feature as a cardinal Indian foreign policy concern. Despite principled commitments to noninterference, these factors have led New Delhi to be involved to varying degrees in their internal politics and security. As a consequence, India's reluctance about extraregional involvement, including but not restricted to the United States, reflected its strategic reasoning that such involvement could lead to competition, escalation, and further destabilization. This dynamic may continue to be shaping Indian strategic thinking, posing an obstacle to cooperation with outside powers. The ethnic insurgency—and eventually open war—in Sri Lanka that began in the late 1970s illustrates India's reasoning and, most importantly, U.S. recognition and acceptance of it.

“Go and Talk to the Indians” (Sri Lanka, 1980s)

Nowhere was this policy of U.S. deferral more apparent than in Sri Lanka, where the ethnic conflict escalated after the Black July riots of 1983, involving mass violence between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. In response, India began playing an increasingly coercive role on the island, including by mediating and arming the minority insurgents, which culminated in a military intervention in 1987.

Among other factors, New Delhi's posture was based on the assessment that Colombo was attempting to balance Indian influence by reaching out for extraregional support, which threatened to internationalize the conflict and affect regional security. Reflecting on New Delhi's anxiety about geostrategic competition in the Indian Ocean engulfing the island, one of Sri Lankan president J.R. Jayewardene's biographers recalls the “almost obsessive [Indian] concerns” about the United States' alleged plans to militarize the Trincomalee port or use a Voice of America retransmission station to gather naval intelligence.⁵¹ Especially after 1983, it is recognized in Jayewardene's semi-official biography that Colombo had engaged in an “effort at searching for a countervailing force or forces against Indian pressure,” despite being

⁵¹ De Silva, *Regional Powers and Small State Security*, 25–26, 114–16.

well aware of New Delhi's concern at his attempts "to draw away from the traditional non-aligned positions."⁵²

In India's view, Sri Lanka's balancing strategy risked internationalizing the civil war with a triple negative effect. First, by increasing Colombo's incentive to opt for a military solution, it decreased the chances of Indian mediation to succeed. As early as 1984, such thought is reflected in the statement of Deputy Foreign Minister R. R. Mirdha, who then noted that the "ethnic problem in Sri Lanka cannot be solved by military action."⁵³

Second, by simultaneously involving and playing off rival powers, Colombo threatened to transform the conflict into an arena for superpower rivalries and Cold War competition. Explaining the reasoning behind India's involvement in August 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi emphasized that "the Sri Lankan crisis has shown how hostile forces can exploit difficulties in other regions to introduce unwarranted presences, threatening presences, presences that threaten regional stability and regional security."⁵⁴

And third, by Colombo signaling its commitment to a military solution, New Delhi was concerned that this would drive Tamil insurgents to respond either by falling back even further onto Indian territory for support from their co-ethnic group across the strait or by roping in their own extraregional assistance. One of the key actors in Colombo shaping India's policy at the time, High Commissioner J.N. Dixit, thus recalled the primary factor driving New Delhi's opposition to foreign involvement: "Discrimination [against a minority] backed up by force will only result in, first militancy and terrorism, and then separatism...that minority is [then] bound to seek assistance from foreign sources, who are inimical to your country."⁵⁵

Jayewardene's policy, however, was motivated by the traditionally pro-Western foreign policy of his party, as well as by heightened geopolitical concerns after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the need for reliable partners to assist in military modernization, and a new strategy to liberalize the island's struggling economy.⁵⁶ To achieve this and to reduce Indian pressure, the Sri Lankan president knocked on every possible door for assistance.

⁵² K.M. de Silva and W. Howard Wriggins, *J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography*, vol. 2 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 586, 89.

⁵³ Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *India-Sri Lanka Relations and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict Documents, 1947-2000*, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Indian Research Press, 2001), 1632.

⁵⁴ Ministry of External Affairs (India), *Foreign Affairs Record-1987* (New Delhi, 1988), 273.

⁵⁵ Avtar S. Bhasin, *India-Sri Lanka Relations and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict Documents, 1947-2000*, vol. 4 (New Delhi: Indian Research Press, 2001), 2353.

⁵⁶ On his geopolitical and economic views, see de Silva and Wriggins, *J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka*, vol. 2, 400-422.

The United States initially welcomed such outreach. According to U.S. ambassador W. Howard Wriggins, Washington, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund “thought this was marvelous, to find a democratic government that had seen the light and was really following liberal economic principles.”⁵⁷ The United States also facilitated Sri Lankan outreach to Israel for military and economic assistance. Overriding concerns expressed by several of his area specialists, U.S. secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger decided to deliver on Jayewardene’s request for facilitation with Israel and opened an Israeli interest section at the U.S. embassy in Colombo in June 1984.⁵⁸

However, despite repeated requests from Colombo, Washington eventually denied any direct military assistance, advising Jayewardene instead to respect India’s predominant regional role and concerns. For example, on U.S. secretary of defense Caspar Weinberger’s meeting with Jayewardene in late 1983, U.S. ambassador Joseph Reed recalled that Sri Lankan officials “used every possibility to get us to influence the situation, and to help them out. We were very careful, very even handed. They wanted to buy more arms, and munitions from us...they were looking for help wherever they could get it,” but “we could not get involved.”⁵⁹ Similarly, the Sri Lankan deputy chief of mission in Washington at the time noted that the U.S. State Department’s answer to Colombo’s increasingly desperate calls was always “go and talk to the Indians,” making it clear that it was “not going to come in between India and Sri Lanka.”⁶⁰ Howard Schaffer, the U.S. State Department country director for Sri Lanka at the time, recalled that relations then were “better than they had ever been” and Washington was “enthusiastic” about Jayewardene for his new economic policies. But he added that

Our basic policy was to support the Indians in their mediation efforts...[and] not provide the Sri Lankan government with any military assistance...We believed that the involvement of any outside power should be left to the Indians...It was quite clear that the Indians were deeply involved; there was no reason why we should be as well.⁶¹

⁵⁷ William Howard Wriggins, interview, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, Virginia, March 8, 1995, 11 ~ <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Wriggins,%20William%20Howard.toc.pdf>.

⁵⁸ John H. Reed, interview, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, Virginia, October 21, 1991, 25 ~ <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Reed,%20John%20H.toc.pdf>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁶⁰ Author’s interview with John Gooneratne, Colombo, November 26, 2014.

⁶¹ Howard Schaffer, interview, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, Virginia, March 10, 1997, 93, 118 ~ <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Schaffer,%20Howard%20B.toc.pdf>.

Because of its partial success, New Delhi was initially tolerant of Sri Lanka's balancing strategy, yet as it persisted, India's threat assessment increased. One of India's senior intelligence officials dealing with Sri Lanka at the time, M.K. Narayanan, recalled that Jayewardene was being "extremely shrewd" and "difficult" by "playing American and Pakistani cards."⁶² Despite international accusations of over-sensitiveness, New Delhi had good reason to be worried. By 1986, Sri Lanka had managed to rope in a rising number of Israeli and Pakistani military advisers, adding to the involvement of British and other foreign mercenaries, as well as Chinese weapon supplies.⁶³

The Sri Lankan case in the 1980s illustrates two dynamics. On the Indian side, it details the causal reasoning about India's reluctance to involve or even permit extraregional involvement, in its smaller neighboring states. On the U.S. side, more importantly, it reflects an understanding of such concerns and consequent efforts not to increase Washington's influence at the expense of New Delhi's. Commenting on this trend, Schaffer, who also served as U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for South Asia during this time, recalled that "our policy in general was not to object to what seemed to many—including me—Indian efforts to create hegemony over the smaller countries of the region."⁶⁴

During crisis periods and when push came to shove thereafter, especially in the 1980s, whenever Kathmandu or Colombo was on a collision route with New Delhi, and thus appealed to Washington for support against India, the United States politely refused to get entangled. Rather than exploiting these crises as opportunities to increase its presence around the subcontinent, the United States would instead advise the lobbying Nepalese or Sri Lankans to settle their differences directly with India.

WHEN CAPITALS CONVERGE, DIPLOMATS BEGIN TALKING

The third challenge the United States and India have persistently faced in South Asia is the lack of direct communication channels on developments occurring in the region's third countries. U.S. diplomatic envoys to the region have often bitterly complained about being sidelined by their Indian counterparts. Leon Weil, U.S. ambassador to Kathmandu in 1984–87, for

⁶² Author's interview with M.K. Narayanan, Chennai, November 21, 2014.

⁶³ On the role of Israeli military assistance and British and other foreign mercenaries after 1983, including Pakistani special forces, see Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies* (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1993), 11–13.

⁶⁴ Schaffer, interview, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, 118–19.

example, recalls how his Indian counterpart “rarely showed up” for joint consultations with the Nepalese monarch. He stated that the “the Indian ambassador never liked to become one of many [and]...India always liked to deal one on one with their neighbors.”⁶⁵

From the turn of the century onward, however, there are increasing indications that this began to change as a result of broader bilateral normalization and geostrategic convergence between the United States and India. As New Delhi and Washington began engaging each other more closely at the highest level, culminating in a historic nuclear cooperation deal, Indian and U.S. diplomats on the ground—and officials dealing with South Asian affairs—also began meeting and talking more frequently and frankly. As U.S. and Indian officials posted in these third countries, or dealing specifically with the region from their respective capitals, slowly began to exchange assessments, they were often surprised at their level of agreement. Even when their policy decisions differed, they learned both to sensitize each other about their respective motives and to agree to disagree.

Letting New Delhi Take the Lead (Nepal, 2006)

The case of Nepal in the first decade after 2000 illustrates the positive effects of bilateral normalization at the highest level, with Washington and New Delhi establishing a direct line of communication, which at one point even overrode assessments from the ground in Kathmandu.

With Nepal’s civil war between the Maoist insurgency and the fragile constitutional monarchy led by King Gyanendra escalating after 2001, India’s concern about possible encroachment by external actors such as China heightened once again, and New Delhi warned Kathmandu that it would not tolerate any third-party involvement. In March 2003, for example, Gyanendra’s adviser Prabhakar Rana recalled Indian national security adviser Brajesh Mishra warning him that the Indian government “absolutely would not tolerate any involvement of third parties, either as facilitators or mediators.”⁶⁶

The main concern for India, however, related to Nepal’s military modernization and the risk of competing U.S., Chinese, and other defense suppliers reducing New Delhi’s leverage over Gyanendra in favor of a political

⁶⁵ Leon J. Weil, interview, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, Virginia, May 2, 1991, 13 ~ <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Weil,%20Leon%20J.toc.pdf>.

⁶⁶ “Nepal: King’s Confidant on Indian, European Support for Peace Process,” WikiLeaks cable 03KATHMANDU552_a, March 27, 2003 ~ https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03KATHMANDU552_a.html.

solution rather than a military one.⁶⁷ For New Delhi, Nepal's army had to be strengthened, but only up to the point of a stalemate that would compel the Maoist insurgents to pursue a settlement under Indian supervision. With Washington, this played out concretely in Indian reluctance over U.S. plans to supply the Royal Nepalese Army with M16 rifles and counterinsurgency training. After a series of meetings, U.S. and Indian officials reached an agreement, with New Delhi coming to terms with Washington's security assistance and U.S. ambassador to Nepal Michael Malinowski recognizing that "positive Indian involvement clearly is key to any longer-term resolution of Nepal's political and security problems."⁶⁸

However, after he declared a national emergency and took over power absolutely in February 2005, Gyanendra's attempts to secure extraregional assistance indicated his unwillingness to abide by this strategy and his plans to instead launch a military offensive while keeping democracy in suspension. With the United States, for example, despite his foreign minister openly accusing India of training the Maoist insurgents and threatening Nepal's rising reliance on China, Washington refused assistance and kept pressuring the king to reinstate democracy.⁶⁹

Given the limited success of such balancing strategies, New Delhi was concerned but not alarmed. Despite tactical differences on arms supplies and on the utility of negotiation with the Maoists, India and the United States had developed a firm dialogue on the common strategic objective of ensuring stability in Nepal. In 2004, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh noted that the United States "supported India's approach" in Nepal.⁷⁰

Beyond the diplomatic missions in Kathmandu, such common understanding seems to have developed at the highest level, reflecting the two governments' greater comfort in discussing regional affairs. Shyam Saran, former Indian ambassador to Kathmandu and foreign secretary during the 2005–6 crisis, recalled several meetings with U.S. national security adviser Stephen Hadley and other U.S. officials in Washington, who were "not always happy about the Indian outreach to the Maoists, but allowed us to take a

⁶⁷ See, for example, the May 2004 statement by Indian external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh: "The situation there [Nepal] is frightening for them as well as for us. [If it is not solved], others will come and intervene." Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *India's Foreign Relations—Documents 2004* (New Delhi: Geetika, 2005), 172.

⁶⁸ "U.S.-Indian Cooperation and Military Assistance to Nepal," WikiLeaks cable 03KATHMANDU280_a, February 14, 2003 ~ https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03KATHMANDU280_a.html.

⁶⁹ "Foreign Minister Pandey Seeks Guidance on Way Forward," WikiLeaks cable 06KATHMANDU409_a, February 10, 2006 ~ https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KATHMANDU409_a.html.

⁷⁰ Bhasin, ed., *India's Foreign Relations—Documents 2004*, 1178.

lead...Moriarty may have had occasional reservations, but [Washington] D.C. trusted our judgment.”⁷¹

Saran’s reference to U.S. ambassador James Moriarty (2004–7) is not coincidental. Both Moriarty and his predecessor Malinowski (2001–4) had not always shared India’s confidence in a political settlement reached between the democratic parties and the Maoist insurgents. In December 2005, he even reproached the Indian government for “analyzing the situation through slightly rose-colored glasses.”⁷² However, India did succeed in mediating a deal in late 2005, which led to the king’s abdication and a successful regime change that brought an end to the civil war in 2006. Washington decided to override Moriarty’s warnings and opposition and instead defer to New Delhi’s judgement, which turned out right—the Maoists eventually disarmed and joined the democratic process.

The case of Nepal early in the 2000s reflects how engagement between the United States and India at the highest level has had positive spillover effects for policy coordination on the ground, even in this case overriding bureaucratic policymaking inputs. When there are common or converging concerns, the two states are more likely to establish direct communication channels, share threat assessments, and listen to each other.

“A Little Surreal” (Sri Lanka, 2002–9)

Beyond convergence between the two capitals, and possibly incentivized by high-level strategic engagement, there are indications that Indian and U.S. officials posted to third countries in the region have also begun to informally exchange assessments and even coordinate efforts. This was the case during the Sri Lankan peace process, resumption of hostilities, and eventual government victory, during which an embryonic Indo-U.S. dialogue developed on the ground beginning in 2002.

Among other factors, New Delhi’s posture on Sri Lanka during this period was driven by its traditional concern that the escalating conflict between the government and the Tamil insurgency was an open invitation to internationalization. This was especially acute as the United States after the September 11 attacks accelerated its democracy-promotion campaign and liberal principles of humanitarian interventionism gained ground at the

⁷¹ Author’s interviews with Shyam Saran, New Delhi, November 8, 2014, and Washington, D.C., July 14, 2015.

⁷² This occurred after a meeting with Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran. “Indian FS Saran: King Needs to Reconcile with Parties,” WikiLeaks cable 05KATHMANDU2793_a, December 13, 2005 ~ https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05KATHMANDU2793_a.html.

United Nations and across the West.⁷³ India's continued regional security predominance thus required insulating the island from external pressures, if only to reduce Colombo's incentive to bring in China for alternative support.

Such concerns intensified after the peace process faltered in 2006 and Western governments became increasingly hostile to Sri Lanka, pressuring Colombo to halt its military offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which controlled the northeastern parts of the island. While the Indian government shared many of the United States' concerns about the need for a liberal political process in tandem with the military approach, it disagreed on the effectiveness of external coercion.

Similar to the situation in the 1980s, New Delhi feared that further pressure on Colombo—through condemnatory resolutions, human rights inquiries, or economic and military sanctions—would have a triple negative effect on its security interests in Sri Lanka. First, domestically, it would strengthen President Mahinda Rajapaksa's conservative support base among the ethnic Sinhala majority and decrease his incentives to implement a political settlement, thus perpetuating the conflict. Second, it would further increase Sri Lanka's incentives to rely on China to counterbalance the West, thus augmenting Beijing's strategic foothold in the region. Third, it could turn Sri Lanka into an international pariah, subject to interventionist regime-change policies that risked plunging another of India's neighbor into chronic instability.⁷⁴

This assessment is reflected in India's dialogue with the United States on Sri Lanka, which despite such concerns and disagreements, reflected an extraordinary alignment of views and even occasional coordination until 2008. U.S. ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead (2003–6) thus recalled the U.S.-India dialogue on Sri Lanka being marked by “openness, transparency, and a lack of suspicion... This new atmosphere was bolstered by actions by both sides to share information and, to a lesser extent, to coordinate their policies.”⁷⁵ Such convergence had often become apparent to both sides in a rather surprising way. For example, Lunstead's predecessor, Ashley Wills (2000–2003), recalled a February 2002 meeting with his Indian counterpart Nirupam Sen as extraordinary because “we were so much in accord that it was

⁷³ For a summary of Western pressures at the United Nations, see Dayan Jayatilleka, *Long War, Cold Peace: Sri Lanka's North-South Crisis* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2014), 284–313.

⁷⁴ Author's interview with former national security adviser M.K. Narayanan, Chennai, November 21, 2014; author's interview with former foreign secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, Washington, D.C., July 15, 2015; and author's interview with former Indian high commissioner in Colombo A. Prasad, New Delhi, November 13, 2014.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey J. Lunstead, *The United States' Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process, 2002–2006* (Colombo: Asia Foundation, 2007), 25.

a little surreal.”⁷⁶ Over the following years, as the Sri Lankan Army’s military offensive escalated, the United States and India also began exchanging details on defense supplies and military assistance to Colombo. As an old “India hand” who had previously served in New Delhi, U.S. ambassador to Sri Lanka Robert Blake Jr. (2005–9) played a key role in keeping communication channels open with India, which facilitated pressure against the LTTE.⁷⁷ On the other side, recalling his time dealing with Sri Lanka as India’s foreign secretary and national security adviser, Shivshankar Menon later noted that Washington and Delhi were in “broad convergence.”⁷⁸

In early 2009, however, under President Barack Obama, Washington tilted toward the liberal-internationalist agenda also favored by the European Union, attempting to pressure Colombo into halting its military offensive, returning to the negotiation table, and responding to alleged human rights violations. The split between India and the United States took symbolical effect precisely on May 20, 2009: just as India’s two special envoys arrived in Colombo to congratulate President Rajapaksa on his definitive military victory over the LTTE, Ambassador Blake ended his posting and departed Sri Lanka for Washington.

While 2009 marked a tipping point, with policy divergence between the United States and India subsequently increasing at the multilateral level, the 2002–8 period illustrates an embryonic dialogue on the ground between U.S. and Indian officials posted in South Asia. Ambassador Wills’s confession that it was a “little surreal” how much he agreed with his counterpart once they began to talk openly reflects that despite broad convergence, cooperation is hindered by the absence of dialogue. Strengthening communication channels at the local and inter-bureaucratic level will be key for the United States and India to achieve greater levels of cooperation across South Asia.

THE VALUE OF DEMOCRACY AS AN INTEREST

A fourth and final challenge relates to the role of democratic values in U.S. and Indian policies in South Asia. Reflecting its geographic distance and

⁷⁶ “Indian High Commissioner on Sri Lanka,” WikiLeaks cable 03COLOMBO189_a, February 3, 2003 ~ https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03COLOMBO189_a.html.

⁷⁷ See, for example, “Ambassador Briefs Indian High Commissioner on U.S.–Sri Lankan Military Discussions,” WikiLeaks cable 06COLOMBO2123_a, December 22, 2006 ~ https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO2123_a.html.

⁷⁸ Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2016), 96.

greater economic capacity, the United States has a long and rich history of attempting to promote democracy and political liberalization in the region, through both cooperative and coercive mechanisms. But scholarship has rarely focused on what India thinks about linking regime types with its foreign, security, and economic policies toward the region.⁷⁹ As observed above in the case of Sri Lanka after the end of the civil war, and in the more recent example of the current refugee crisis in Myanmar, it is clear that the role of democratic values in foreign policy has at times created tensions between the United States and India.⁸⁰

The historical record, however, shows that by default their respective assessments betray a rather similar liberal instinct. More than a question of mere principle, New Delhi and Washington both establish a causal link between democratic regimes and internal stability, security, and geostrategic alignment. India and the United States have always understood liberal democracy, inclusiveness, and decentralization in regional countries to be in their own interest. Yet while the United States and India have always shared this liberal instinct, they have not always agreed on when and how best to translate it into policy. This dynamic is illustrated in one of their most contentious differences: whether to engage or coerce the military regime in Myanmar in the mid-2000s.

Same Ends, Different Means (Myanmar, 2007)

In principle, Washington and New Delhi agreed on both the desirability and long-term inevitability of political liberalization in Myanmar, which had been under autocratic and military rule since 1962. Despite its policy of engagement since the early 1990s, India had repeatedly beckoned the Burmese junta to liberalize their regime to avoid popular unrest and political instability. In 2004, for example, Prime Minister Singh assured his parliamentarians that “we conveyed that while India did not wish to interfere in Myanmar’s internal affairs, we would welcome early realization of the goal of multi-party democracy based on national reconciliation and an inclusive approach.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ I examined this issue in detail in my doctoral research. See Constantino Xavier, “From Inaction to Intervention: India’s Strategic Culture of Regional Involvement (Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, 1950s–2000s)” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, 2016).

⁸⁰ For a good discussion of such examples in the neighborhood, see Daniel Twining and Richard Fontaine, “The Ties that Bind? U.S.-Indian Values-Based Cooperation,” *Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2011): 193–205.

⁸¹ Bhasin, ed., *India’s Foreign Relations—Documents 2004*, 414. For a similar statement, see Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *India’s Foreign Relations—Documents 2005* (New Delhi: Geetika, 2006), 785–86.

In practice, however, beyond public statements and friendly advice, New Delhi's decision-makers persisted with their engagement and refused to join Western efforts to pressure Myanmar, including through what they defined as "counter-productive," "intrusive," "country-specific," and "condemnatory" UN resolutions backed by the United States.⁸² Alluding to India's geographic proximity, former national security adviser Shiv Shankar Menon also rejected economic pressure as an option, recalling that the desire for sanctions was "directly proportional to the distance from Myanmar of the country demanding it."⁸³

When Buddhist monks and pro-democracy protestors took to the streets of Yangon in the 2007 "Saffron revolution," India's assessment was surprisingly clear: growing U.S. and European pressure against Myanmar would drive the regime further into Chinese hands. Conversely, New Delhi expected its continued engagement to be rewarded with greater leverage over an increasingly isolated regime. At the height of the 2007 crisis, India's external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee emphasized that "it is for the people of the country to decide what form of arrangement they want."⁸⁴ This marked a definitive, public split between Indian and U.S. policies on Myanmar, which had been diverging over the years as the United States tightened sanctions and opposed Myanmar's entry into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reviled "Burma" as an "outpost of tyranny."⁸⁵ And together, after 2005, Western states began bringing up Myanmar more regularly at the UN Security Council and Human Rights Commission.⁸⁶

Already in 2005, the U.S. *chargé d'affaires* in Yangon had emphasized the "promotion of democracy in Burma [as] this mission's top priority."⁸⁷ Privately, India's ambassador in Yangon, Bhaskar Kumar Mitra, assessed that, "in principle,

⁸² Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *India's Foreign Relations—Documents 2007* (New Delhi: Geetika, 2008), 1667–68.

⁸³ Avtar S. Bhasin, ed., *India's Foreign Relations—Documents 2008* (New Delhi: Geetika, 2009), 1646.

⁸⁴ Utpal Bhaskar, "India Set to Engage Myanmar to Try and Snag More Gas Supply," *Livemint*, September 18, 2007 ~ <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/eoiAQL1wvBc0z7mmEXxAdP/India-set-to-engage-Myanmar-to-try-and-snag-more-gas-supply.html>.

⁸⁵ Condoleezza Rice, "Opening Remarks by Secretary of State-Designate Dr. Condoleezza Rice," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., January 18, 2005 ~ <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/40991.htm>.

⁸⁶ In December 2005 the United States first attempted to include Myanmar on the UN Security Council's formal agenda. See also the January 2007 attempt to adopt a Security Council resolution condemning Myanmar. "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Myanmar, Owing to Negative Votes by China, Russian Federation," Security Council, Press Release, SC/8939, January 12, 2007 ~ <http://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc8939.doc.htm>.

⁸⁷ "Democracy Promotion Strategies: Burma," WikiLeaks cable 05RANGOON1177_a, October 17, 2005 ~ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05RANGOON1177_a.html.

India can't take exception to the U.S. and EU policies of applying pressure on the Burmese regime."⁸⁸ In practice, however, it was equally clear that given its security and economic interests, India could not afford the Western "luxury" of a moral stance.⁸⁹ Shyam Saran, India's foreign secretary until late 2006, recalled that in India's view, the United States was pursuing a "low-cost policy of moral high-ground."⁹⁰ An Indian official dealing with the United Nations at the time noted that it was "easy for the West to adopt a strong position on Myanmar. If something similar happened in Namibia, I could also afford to take a strong moral stance, [but] you can't choose your neighbors."⁹¹

New Delhi's chief concern was that U.S. pressures were proving counterproductive and that sanctions, in particular, would hurt India's attempts to preempt China from gaining "free access" to Myanmar.⁹² Indian officials were therefore privately puzzled by questions of "whether the U.S. denied [neglected], or deliberately chose to ignore the strategic importance of Myanmar in Southeast Asia," and "whether it cared at all that its policy would drive Burma closer into China's arms."⁹³ However, while Washington often berated New Delhi's engagement policy in public, it privately acknowledged that the Indian posture "may serve U.S. interests in terms of providing a counterbalance to China's increasing influence in Burma."⁹⁴ Saran recalled his interaction on Myanmar with national security adviser Stephen Hadley in December 2005 along similar lines:

[He gave me a] lecture on "how can you do this, be in bed with generals, you can't do this as a democracy"...so I gave him a tutorial on Indian interests, border security, the ASEAN link, and the Bay of Bengal. And you talk about China being a major concern in Myanmar, but we're in there....They realized India's interests after that, and while rhetoric continued, [the Americans] never pressured us again to change our policy.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Quoted in "South Asian Views on Burma: Engage the Generals," WikiLeaks cable 05RANGOON1199_a, October 21, 2005 ~ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05RANGOON1199_a.html.

⁸⁹ Author's interview with an Indian government official, New Delhi, November 13, 2014.

⁹⁰ Author's interviews with Saran, November 8, 2014, and July 14, 2015.

⁹¹ Author's interview with an Indian government official, New Delhi, November 13, 2014.

⁹² Author's interview with Menon, July 15, 2015.

⁹³ Rajiv Bhatia, *India-Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016), 65.

⁹⁴ See, for example, U.S. chief of mission Carmen Martinez's comments in 2003 after talking to the Indian ambassador. "India's Ambassador to Burma: Finding a Balance between Engagement and Democracy Support," WikiLeaks cable 03RANGOON1117_a, September 12, 2003 ~ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03RANGOON1117_a.html.

⁹⁵ Author's interviews with Saran, November 8, 2014, and July 14, 2015.

While the case of Myanmar does not reflect positive coordination or cooperation on the role of values, it shows two important dynamics shaping the Indo-U.S. relationship in South Asia. First, different geographic locations, strategic assessments, cost-benefit calculations, and decision-making time horizons have often set the two countries on a collision course. However, even when the state pursued different policies, they disagreed mostly on the means rather than the ends to achieve their common objective. Agreeing to disagree, like Hadley and Saran after sensitizing each other to each state's concerns, is one more example that attests to the importance of direct communication channels and closer dialogue on the region.

Second, and more importantly, this case shows that the United States and India can also cooperate to achieve similar ends, even if through different means. In June 2000, India, along with the United States, became one of eight co-founders of the Community of Democracies, later also joining its Democracy Caucus. And in 2005, a joint proposal from India and the United States led to the creation of the UN Democracy Fund. This attests to their common efforts to support democratization processes in third countries—an increasingly pressing issue with the rise of China's political influence in South Asia.

THE ROAD AHEAD: FROM CONVERGENCE TO COOPERATION

The case studies of Nepal, Ceylon/Sri Lanka, and Myanmar on Indo-U.S. interactions across South Asia from the 1950s to the early 21st century show that both countries have not always been inevitably locked into a hostile relationship. The United States and India have frequently confronted four key challenges in their South Asia relations: (1) differing threat assessments, (2) third states attempting to play the two off against each other, (3) lack of trust and adequate communication channels, and (4) differing policy emphasis on the role of democracy, human rights, and liberal values. A deeper analysis of these four challenges, however, based on historical and other primary evidence presented in the case studies above indicates that the United States and India have in fact often learned to coexist in the region's third countries and to respect each other's strategic priorities.

First, as seen in the 1950s example of Nepal, Washington has learned to appreciate New Delhi's quest to insulate the subcontinent, despite unequal concerns about China. While the U.S. regional threat assessments during the Cold War were not always shared by India, Washington saw the value in mitigating its anxiety to contain China in South Asia with a policy of deferral

to India, seen as the region's predominant power. Washington thus ended up coordinating its policies with New Delhi, including joint economic assistance projects in Nepal, to limit Chinese influence. This precedent holds significant lessons for today's context, in which India is willing to pool efforts with extraregional actors to counter China in its own region.

Second, as seen in the 1980s, when Sri Lanka came knocking on U.S. doors for support in opposition to India, Washington deferred to New Delhi. This is an example of how U.S.-India relations have come under stress whenever the region's small states attempted to play off one against the other. However, rather than jumping at the opportunity to influence regional affairs at India's expense, the United States has often refused to be used as a protective shield against Indian pressure. By declining calls to become more involved despite the capacity to do so, U.S. policymakers have implicitly recognized India as the region's paramount power. With an increasingly competitive regional environment, and despite renewed U.S. concern to limit China's leverage, the United States will benefit from adopting this restrained posture and also from investing in greater policy coordination with India to jointly engage the region's small states.

Third, as seen since the turn of the century, strategic engagement between both countries has led to the establishment of communication channels to exchange assessments about Nepal, Sri Lanka, and even Myanmar. This contrasts with the Cold War period, during which U.S. and Indian officials rarely communicated directly about developments in the region's third countries. By occasionally letting India take the lead in several recent regional crises, however, Washington has increased India's trust in the United States, which has encouraged the establishment of new dialogues to exchange regional assessments. Whether high-level, between officials in their respective capitals, or on the ground, between diplomatic representatives across South Asia, regional cooperation between the United States and India will hinge on deepening and expanding these dialogues, instead of working separately toward the same objective of reducing Chinese leverage over specific regimes.

Finally, while they may have not always agreed on the best timing and methods to incentivize countries to embrace political liberalization, as in the case of Myanmar around 2005, both Indian and U.S. policies toward the region's third countries reflect a strategic preference for democratic regimes. Regional cooperation between the United States and India in South Asia has, in many cases, indeed faced the challenge of differing policy emphases on the role of democracy, human rights, and other liberal values. The case studies examined, however, show that there is a shared and principled understanding about the long-term benefits of political liberalization in the region for both

states' interests, and that most tensions relate either to the means to promote this or to the respective prioritization of these policies. Today, with South Asia's unprecedented democratization wave threatened by China's rising political influence, the United States and India can benefit from closer cooperation in support of pluralist institutions and the rule of law in the region.

These case studies offer significant parallels with today's environment, suggesting that past U.S.-Indian interactions offer lessons on how to further deepen the relationship, moving away from punctual hostility or mere coexistence toward deeper cooperation. But today's context is also different, given China's new economic capabilities and its rapidly expanding influence in South Asia. This offers scope for the United States to partner with India in its extended periphery, across the wider Indian Ocean region, on both maritime security and capacity building for the small and island states. Based on historical parallels identified in this article, there are a few concrete steps that both countries can adopt to explore this potential and enhance their future chances of cooperation.

First, as seen in almost all case studies, the United States and India must invest in improving communication channels to exchange assessments about the region, specifically during crises, and develop new institutional mechanisms for a deeper dialogue on South Asian strategic issues, including the role of China. New Delhi must involve a wider range of actors besides the Ministry of External Affairs in such dialogues, including the defense services, functional ministries, and the internal and external intelligence services. On the U.S. side, Washington will have to mitigate its various organizational divides that separate South and Southeast Asia and hinder engagement with India on Myanmar, for example.

Second, beyond public statements expressing concern over China's Belt and Road Initiative, India and the United States must engage in a dialogue to flesh out what sustainable connectivity means in practice. This should include, for example, concrete criteria to establish a level playing field for both U.S. and Indian private businesses to benefit from economic liberalization and the rule of law in South Asia, making use of Washington's Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act. The United States' recent Millennium Challenge Corporation grants to Nepal and Sri Lanka are a welcome development for Indian attempts to improve regional connectivity and should be replicated and expanded across the region. On infrastructure development, in particular, rather than announcing several ambitious projects and spreading themselves wide, the United States and India should focus on just one large joint project in a third country. This will help focus efforts, increase

learning and trust between both bureaucracies, and create positive synergies among the political leadership.

Third, as seen in the second challenge, the United States and India must sustain communication at the highest level, between their respective bureaucracies and also on the ground to prevent China from playing off India against the United States and vice versa. Even occasional exchanges of assessments between New Delhi and Washington can significantly reduce Beijing's leverage to exploit communication gaps in its efforts to expand its influence over smaller states in the region. Especially during crises in which governments of smaller countries in the region come under pressure, the United States and India must divide labor to achieve the greatest leverage and minimize China's influence over these third countries. If there is coordination between Washington and New Delhi, the U.S. inclination to pressure can align well with the Indian inclination to engage, creating an effective "good cop, bad cop" dynamic.

Fourth, the United States and India should develop trilateral dialogues in South Asia, in which the smaller countries can play the role of an equal, with an active voice in decision-making rather than just serving as subjects of Indo-U.S. policy. This should build on the model of the U.S.-India-Afghanistan trilateral dialogue, first held in 2013. With a focus on maritime security, for example, the two states could expand the new Indian Ocean Dialogue, first held in 2017, to also include Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and other island states.

Finally, the United States and India must also keep investing in public diplomacy and outreach across South Asia, stimulating wider domestic debates—especially in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka—about the long-term costs of China's influence. Strengthening civil societies and pluralism across the region should be seen as a strategic priority shared by the United States and India rather than simply as an expensive moral obligation. This will require a frank and specific dialogue on the strategic objectives, resources, and targets of Indian and U.S. democracy assistance initiatives in the region. ◆

SPECIAL ISSUE

Sailing Together or Ships Passing in the Night? India and the United States in Southeast Asia

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KEYWORDS: INDIA; UNITED STATES; SOUTHEAST ASIA; SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article examines the significant congruence of U.S. and Indian interests in Southeast Asia and assesses both the prospects and constraints that New Delhi and Washington face in coordinating their policies toward the region.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Political leaders and analysts have described U.S.-India relations as a global partnership with the potential to shape the future security architecture of the Indo-Pacific. As is widely acknowledged, the two countries' extraregional interests align most closely in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, this article examines the potential for and limitations of U.S. and Indian cooperation in the region to achieve shared aims. Extensive diplomatic consultations between the two countries have led to a significant convergence in their positions on regional security challenges. Active cooperation, however, remains constrained by a number of factors, including India's need to prioritize foreign policy challenges closer to home, concerns about provoking China, and a discomfort among countries in Southeast Asia regarding the idea of a joint U.S.-India approach toward the region. Due to these limitations, U.S.-India policies in Southeast Asia are expected to continue to operate in parallel instead of becoming a joint endeavor.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The U.S. and India, which are at the initial stages of a cooperative approach to Southeast Asia, should intensify their diplomatic and military exchanges and establish a dedicated forum to share views and information on political and security developments in the region.
- Strengthening the regional security architecture should be a major focus of Indo-U.S. efforts in Southeast Asia. In particular, they should concentrate on assisting the creation of a region-wide maritime domain awareness system, as well as working in parallel to develop the capacity of partner militaries.
- Connectivity and infrastructure projects should be a renewed focus of Indian and U.S. efforts in the region, in partnership with like-minded third countries such as Japan.

The transformation in U.S.-India relations from alienation during the Cold War to a robust strategic partnership is one of the most significant geopolitical development of recent decades. In June 2017, at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first meeting with President Donald Trump, the pair "resolved to expand and deepen the strategic partnership between the two countries and advance common objectives," most notably "promoting stability across the Indo-Pacific region."¹ How likely is it that these two countries can actually cooperate and where is such cooperation most likely to happen? Across the subregions of the Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia would appear to be an area where the transformation of Indo-U.S. strategic ties would have the most significant implications. For India, Southeast Asia is the most geographically proximate subregion and the focus of its efforts to both "look east" and "act east." For the United States, Southeast Asia historically has been a region where Washington's attention has ebbed and flowed.² Under the Obama administration, however, both individual Southeast Asian nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a whole received enhanced attention at the highest levels.

A decade ago, the idea of the United States and India working together in Southeast Asia would have appeared far-fetched. Due to a growing recognition of the congruence of their interests in the region, however, the two countries are increasingly articulating common diplomatic positions on key security challenges. Most prominently, the joint statement made after the Modi-Trump summit in 2017 addressed the maritime disputes in the South China Sea and reiterated "the importance of respecting freedom of navigation, overflight, and commerce throughout the region."³ This high-profile diplomatic signal had been anticipated by some analysts who have long speculated about the close fit between the U.S. "rebalance" to Asia and India's "Act East" policy.⁴ Indeed, according to former U.S. defense secretary Ashton Carter, the United States focusing westward and India acting to its east have resulted in a "strategic

¹ "U.S. India Joint Statement: Prosperity through Partnership," Ministry of External Affairs (India), June 27, 2017 ∼ http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28560/Joint_Statement__United_States_and_India_Prosperty_Through_Partnership.

² Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Ambivalent Engagement: The United States and Regional Security in Southeast Asia after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

³ "U.S. India Joint Statement: Prosperity through Partnership"; and Elizabeth Roche, "Modi-Trump Statement Shows Convergence of Views on China," Livemint, July 3, 2017 ∼ <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/uBMwxBxa0VhuhQTnuNCqSP/ModiTrump-statement-shows-convergence-of-views-on-China.html>.

⁴ Michael Kugelman and Raymond E. Vickery Jr., "From 'Looking' East to 'Acting' East: India's Own Pivot to Asia," *Diplomat*, October 10, 2014 ∼ <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/from-looking-east-to-acting-east-indias-own-pivot-to-asia>.

handshake” between the two nations, reflecting a “broad convergence of geopolitical interests” between the Indian and U.S. strategies.⁵

In particular, U.S. officials have been unusually vocal about the natural congruence between these two policies. In 2010, then assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs Kurt Campbell argued that the United States is “strongly supportive of India playing a major role in the new architecture of the Asia-Pacific region.”⁶ Two years later, then defense secretary Leon Panetta echoed this view, calling defense cooperation with India the “linchpin” of the U.S. rebalance.⁷ Significant continuities exist on this issue in the Trump administration. For example, then secretary of state Rex Tillerson proclaimed in 2017 that “India and the United States should be in the business of equipping other countries to defend their sovereignty, build greater connectivity, and have a louder voice in a regional architecture that promotes their interests and develops their economies. This is a natural complement to India’s Act East policy.”⁸ Indian officials have reciprocated, echoing the U.S. vision of a “free, open, and inclusive” Indo-Pacific—with Southeast Asia at the core—as an objective of regional policy.⁹ With officials in both countries noting, in the words of Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj, “a growing convergence of views between our countries, among others, on the Indo-Pacific,” two key questions emerge: Is the idea of a so-called natural fit between U.S. and Indian policies in Southeast Asia exaggerated? What are the practical limits to Indo-U.S. cooperation in the region?

In examining these questions, this article makes the following arguments. First, a convergence of interests is pushing the United States and India toward closer cooperation in Southeast Asia. For the time being, however, diplomatic consultations have yet to translate to operational policy coordination. Second, a deepening of substantive cooperation between the two countries is constrained by a number of factors, including India’s need to prioritize foreign policy challenges in its immediate region, concerns about provoking

⁵ Jeff M. Smith, “Assessing U.S.-India Relations: The Strategic Handshake,” *Diplomat*, September 16, 2016 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/assessing-us-india-relations-the-strategic-handshake>.

⁶ Robyn Meredith, “America’s Approach to Asia,” *Forbes*, April 27, 2010 ~ <http://www.forbes.com/2010/04/27/asia-united-states-kurt-campbell-opinions-columnists-robyn-meredith.html>.

⁷ Leon E. Panetta, “Partners in the 21st Century” (speech at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses [IDSA], New Delhi, June 6, 2012) ~ <http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/LeonEPanettaonPartnersinthe21stcentury>.

⁸ Rex Tillerson, “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century” (speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], Washington, D.C., October 18, 2017) ~ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson>.

⁹ Sushma Swaraj, “Press Remarks on India-U.S. 2+2 Dialogue,” Ministry of External Relations (India), September 6, 2018 ~ <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/30357/EAMs+Press+Remarks+on+IndiaUS+2432+Dialogue>.

China, and a discomfort among countries in Southeast Asia with the idea of a joint U.S.-India approach to the region. Due to these limitations, U.S. and Indian policies in Southeast Asia are likely to continue to operate in parallel instead of becoming a true joint effort.

This topic is important for two reasons. First, Southeast Asia represents the most likely region for U.S.-Indian cooperation as there are no fundamental disagreements in either country's policy objectives. This is in sharp contrast to other parts of the world, such as the Middle East or Central Asia, where the two states have differing perspectives on Iran, Russia, dialogue with the Taliban, and a host of other issues. Consequently, Southeast Asia represents an ideal case study to begin to evaluate the potential and limitations of a U.S.-India "global partnership."¹⁰ Second, as noted previously, a number of analysts and policymakers assume that there is a natural fit between Indian and U.S. regional policies. This article explicitly evaluates those assumptions, probing both the potential and limits of bilateral cooperation. The argument proceeds as follows:

- ≈ pp. 55–59 provide an overview of the United States' and India's interests and policies toward Southeast Asia.
- ≈ pp. 59–68 examine the convergence of interests between the two states and describe the manner in which they are working together.
- ≈ pp. 68–72 identify the limits to their cooperation.
- ≈ pp. 72–76 offer recommendations to strengthen Indo-U.S. cooperation in Southeast Asia and a brief conclusion.

COOPERATION IN A DISTANT LAND: THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

As noted in the introductory essay, there are three main motives for extraregional powers to cooperate in a different part of the world: (1) to prevent conflict escalation, (2) to work against an indigenous hostile regime, and (3) to jointly resist a third state's actions in the region. In the case of Southeast Asia, the chances of interstate war are remote, the United States and India do not oppose any of the existing regimes, and, to varying degrees, are comfortable with the regional political leaders. Instead, their main motivation to work together is to prevent the region from being

¹⁰ The logic being that if the partnership cannot work here, it is unlikely to work elsewhere. On most likely case design, see Jack S. Levy, "Qualitative Methods in International Relations," in *Millennial Reflections on International Studies*, ed. M. Brecher and F. P. Harvey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 442.

dominated by a single hegemonic power.¹¹ Although countries in Southeast Asia wish to avoid being caught up in it, the region is an emerging theater for great-power rivalry in Asia.

What sort of evidence would indicate a joint or convergent approach to a region by extraregional powers? First, one would expect to see an institutionalization of diplomatic talks and regular exchanges on developments in the region. As part of this, one would also find evidence of prior consultation before major diplomatic events. Second, regular military staff talks and bilateral visits to exchange views and perspectives on the region would occur on a consistent basis. If the partnership is at an advanced stage, then joint military exercises might also occur in the region. Finally, if there are economic complementarities, then one might expect to see close consultations on regional economic developments.

As explained later, the United States and India have regular diplomatic talks and exchanges of views with respect to Southeast Asia in various forums. Their militaries have recurrent staff talks and make frequent visits. The Indian and U.S. navies have taken part in multilateral military drills in Southeast Asia, such as the Indonesian-led Komodo naval exercises, which focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. They have also jointly exercised with Southeast Asian partners outside the region, inviting Singapore to participate in the 2007 Malabar naval maneuvers, for example. Moreover, the two states' militaries have taken part in multilateral exercises under the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) initiative. Finally, the United States and India have each independently articulated the need to enhance connectivity, especially between South and Southeast Asia. The two countries are increasingly speaking in the same language when expressing their apprehensions regarding the China's Belt and Road Initiative and the threat that Beijing's debt-trap diplomacy could pose to the autonomy of small states.¹² In sum, there is growing evidence that Washington and New Delhi are converging with respect to their Southeast Asia policies. To understand where these convergences are happening, it is first necessary to understand the two countries' policies toward the region.

¹¹ A similar aim is professed by other extraregional powers such as Australia and Japan.

¹² For a U.S. view, see Alex N. Wong, "Briefing on the Indo-Pacific Strategy," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, April 2, 2018 ~ <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280134.htm>.

U.S. Interests and Policies toward Southeast Asia

For much of the last century, U.S. policymakers have tended to see Southeast Asia as a vital conduit for pan-Asian trade, a font of economic opportunity, and a source of abundant natural resources that could alter the balance of power in East Asia if they fell into the wrong hands.¹³ From a historical standpoint, U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia has largely been reactive and shaped in key ways by the state of relations with other major powers, be it Japan in the 1930s, the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War, or China alone today. Consequently, Southeast Asia itself is often seen as an afterthought in U.S. Asia policy, leading critics to allege that an inattentive Washington has repeatedly failed to identify its priorities in the region and instead has been forced to improvise policies in response to crises of the moment, rather than adhere to a coherent strategy.¹⁴ With Southeast Asia at the heart of its rebalance strategy, the Obama administration may have been an interlude in this traditional pattern. The significant time and personal attention that President Obama devoted to the countries of the region, however, has not led to a permanent change. Rejecting the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations within days of taking office, President Trump undercut U.S. claims to economic leadership in Asia and renewed concerns about the strength of U.S. commitments to the region and its reliability as a partner.¹⁵ For their part, many states in Southeast Asia remain unconvinced that the region plays a central role in the Trump administration's "free and open Indo-Pacific" concept, leading them to seek partnerships with countries such as Japan, India, and Australia.

Contemporary U.S. interests in Southeast Asia remain in line with their historical antecedents. The region continues to be a vital transit corridor connecting the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. Two-thirds of the world's oil and nearly \$5 trillion in goods pass through the waterways of Southeast Asia on an annual basis. The same sea lanes are also used by the U.S. Navy and other militaries to project power around the globe. In the economic sphere, the United States is already the main source of foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia by a substantial margin.¹⁶ With a collective middle class that

¹³ Melvyn P. Leffler, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–48," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 2 (1984): 359.

¹⁴ Diane K. Mauzy and Brian L. Job, "U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia: Limited Re-engagement after Years of Benign Neglect," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (2007): 622–41.

¹⁵ Joseph Chinyong Liow, "U.S.–Southeast Asia Relations under the Trump Administration," *Asia Policy*, no. 24 (2017): 57.

¹⁶ David Shambaugh, "U.S.–China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?" *International Security* 42, no. 4 (2018): 106.

is roughly the size of the entire U.S. population, Southeast Asia is likely to grow in importance for the United States as a market for both investment and exports. Indeed, with China appearing to enter into a protracted period of economic slowdown, Southeast Asia could re-emerge as a key driver of the global economy. In the security realm, Washington is still averse to seeing the region fall under the sway of a hostile power. In the recent past, Southeast Asia has been an important outpost for groups like al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Given that many security challenges in Southeast Asia are emerging from within states rather than between them, the United States is interested in containing the spread of violent extremism. Washington is also concerned about mitigating any potential political volatility triggered by China's rise. The ultimate aim of U.S. regional policy is to see the emergence of a stable and peaceful Southeast Asia where the centuries-old principle of the freedom of the seas is sustained and existing territorial disputes are resolved lawfully and without coercion.

India's Act East Policy

In 2018, on the 25th anniversary of the India-ASEAN dialogue partnership, Prime Minister Modi took the unprecedented step of inviting all ten regional leaders to be the guests of honor at India's Republic Day parade. Southeast Asia has been an important element in India's global diplomacy ever since the government of P.V. Narasimha Rao initiated its Look East policy in 1991. Now known as Act East under the Modi administration, this policy has consistently sought to bolster economic ties and strategic linkages with countries of East Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular.¹⁷

The first factor driving India's interest in Southeast Asia is the potential opportunities the region offers for India's socio-economic development. ASEAN is India's fourth-largest trading partner (after China, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates)—with bilateral trade exceeding

¹⁷ Apart from Southeast Asia, India's Act East policy includes relations with Japan, Korea, and Australia. See "Act East Policy," Ministry of External Affairs (India), Press Information Bureau, December 23, 2015 ~ <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133837>. For examples of the vast and growing literature on India's engagement with Southeast Asia, see Amitav Acharya, *East of India, South of China: Sino-Indian Encounters in Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017); Frédéric Grare, *India Turns East: International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Isabelle de Saint-Mezard, "India and Southeast Asia: Whither India's Strategic Engagements with ASEAN?" in *Engaging the World: Indian Foreign Policy since 1947*, ed. Sumit Ganguly (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 326–51; and Rouble Sharma, *Dynamics of Cooperation between India-ASEAN since 2000* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2015).

\$70 billion—as well as a significant source of FDI.¹⁸ Infrastructure and digital connectivity are important aspects of these relations. Many in India argue that the best way to address the endemic poverty and underdevelopment of the country's northeastern states is to enhance their ties—geographic, economic, and cultural—with neighboring countries in Southeast Asia.¹⁹

The second reason the region garners India's attention is the diplomatic and strategic advantages that Southeast Asia offers. In contrast to Beijing, New Delhi has gained considerable diplomatic mileage with its peaceful engagement of both ASEAN and individual Southeast Asian states. For their part, these countries have welcomed security cooperation with India, especially in the naval domain, as the presence of multiple major powers in the region reduces the likelihood that any single one could dominate.²⁰ The recognition that India has a legitimate role to play in the region has, in turn, helped build up New Delhi's status as a major power in Asia.²¹ Finally, in so far as India's Act East policy is in part a response to China's growing influence in Asia, an active presence in Southeast Asia gives India some leverage vis-à-vis its relationship with China.²²

WORKING TOGETHER: THE CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS

Despite occasional disagreements—primarily over engagement with the military junta in Myanmar—there is a broad convergence of Indo-U.S. diplomatic positions in Southeast Asia. As recognition of the range of shared objectives has become clearer, Indian strategists have called for a deepening of bilateral ties, both as a response to the aggressive rise of China and to further India's interests. Describing the structural factors pushing the United States and India together, Rajesh Rajagopalan has argued the following:

China's rise and aggressive behavior, coupled with the massive imbalance of power between China and India, leaves India with little choice but to attempt to balance China....Though the

¹⁸ Ministry of External Relations (India), "ASEAN-India Relations" ~ <http://mea.gov.in/aseanindia/20-years.htm>.

¹⁹ "Act East: Centre Plans to Link North East India to South East Asia, Says Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi," Press Trust of India, November 26, 2017 ~ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/act-east-centre-plans-to-link-north-east-india-to-south-east-asia-says-assam-governor-jagdish-mukhi-4955476>.

²⁰ Walter C. Ladwig III, "Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, 'Look East,' and India's Emerging Role in the Asia-Pacific," *Asian Security* 5, no. 2 (2009): 94–95; and C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 94–108.

²¹ The transformation in U.S.-India relations played a key role in facilitating Southeast Asian acceptance of India as an extraregional actor.

²² Tan Tai Yong, "India-ASEAN Relations at Seventy," in *Seven Decades of Independent India: Ideas and Reflections*, ed. Vinod Rai and Amitendu Palit (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2018), 55.

United States can probably still counter China by itself, it would be a lot easier to do this in concert with other Asian powers such as India. This strategic picture suggests significant promise for U.S.-India relations in the longer term.²³

To be fair, there are some Indian pundits and commentators who caution against growing ties with United States. These skeptics raise concerns about U.S. reliability and trustworthiness or express ideologically rooted suspicion of U.S. intentions.²⁴ These minority views, however, are increasingly out of step with both mainstream public opinion and the policy of successive governments, which have favored closer ties with the United States. The Naresh Chandra Committee, established in 2012 to evaluate India's internal and external challenges, for example, forthrightly argued that "the growing strategic partnership with the U.S., based on a convergence of interests, especially in the Asia Pacific region (including the Indian Ocean), offer opportunities for strengthening our national security capacity and capabilities, [shaping] the global security architecture and [seeking] greater U.S. coordination with us."²⁵ In sum, there is a growing consensus, both within the Indian government and in the broader strategic community that partnering with the United States in the Asia-Pacific is a logical long-term strategy for India.²⁶

Such sentiments are mirrored by U.S. assessments, such as the following recent RAND study:

At the regional level, the two nations share fundamental goals including Indo-Pacific stability; secure shipping through the Malacca Straits; increased land, sea, and air connectivity

²³ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "U.S.-India Relations under President Trump: Promise and Peril," *Asia Policy*, no. 24 (2017): 39. See also Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi, "Indo-U.S. Relations under Modi: The Strategic Logic Underlying the Embrace," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (2017): 141-45; and Dhruva Jaishankar, "India and the United States in the Trump Era: Re-Evaluating Bilateral and Global Relations," Brookings Institution, Brookings Policy Paper, no. 37, June 2017, 12-13, 20-21.

²⁴ M.K. Bhadrakumar, "For Modi's India, 2+2=0 as Trump Tightens the Leash," *South China Morning Post*, September 7, 2018 ~ <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2163310/modis-india-220-trump-tightens-leash>; and Bharat Karnad, "New Delhi Must Reset Its Overt Tilt to the U.S.," *Hindustan Times*, July 17, 2018 ~ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/new-delhi-must-reset-its-overt-tilt-to-the-us/story-T0Tc65MTtLY4dVoOLrkqL.html>.

²⁵ National Security Council Secretariat (India), *Report of the Task Force on National Security* (New Delhi, 2012), section 2.31, 10. This report is otherwise known as the Naresh Chandra Committee Report.

²⁶ For example, see Samir Saran and S. Paul Kapur, "How India and the U.S. Can Lead in the Indo-Pacific," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, August 18, 2017 ~ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/how-india-and-us-can-lead-indo-pacific>; Indrani Bagchi, "Two Plus Two Tango: Despite President Trump's Hollering, U.S.-India Ties Have Actually Thrived on His Watch," *Times of India*, September 10, 2018; Center for American Progress, "The United States and India: Forging an Indispensable Democratic Partnership," Task Force Report, January 2018; Abhijit Singh et al., *The New India-U.S. Partnership in the Indo-Pacific: Peace, Prosperity and Security* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2018); and Gautam Banerjee, "U.S.-India 2 Plus 2 Dialogue: Significance of Strategic Partnership," Vivekananda International Foundation, August 22, 2018.

infrastructure; and peaceful settlement of territorial disputes. At the country level, they share the goals of encouraging Myanmar's democratic transition; containing radicalism in Indonesia and Malaysia; increasing Vietnam's external engagement; and ensuring that Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines maintain their traditional relationships.²⁷

As in India, these assessments from the strategic community reflect official thinking. In 2013 the U.S. national security adviser, Thomas Donilon, directly addressed the synergies between the two nation's policies, noting that "U.S. and Indian interests powerfully converge in the Asia-Pacific, where India has much to give and much to gain. Southeast Asia begins in Northeast India, and we welcome India's efforts to 'look East,' from supporting reforms in Burma to trilateral cooperation with Japan to promoting maritime security."²⁸ The Trump administration's first National Security Strategy, issued in December 2017, offered a similar perspective, welcoming "India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner" in the Indo-Pacific and pledging to "support India's growing relationships throughout the region."²⁹

Diplomatic Interests

Perhaps for the first time, the United States and India are in a position wherein they agree on most issues pertaining to Southeast Asia. As a result, their diplomats are increasingly speaking the same language. Most significantly, the September 2014 joint statement by Obama and Modi referred directly to tensions in Southeast Asia:

The leaders expressed concern about rising tensions over maritime territorial disputes, and affirmed the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea. The Prime Minister and President called on all parties to avoid the use, or threat of use, of force in advancing their claims...[and] urged the concerned parties to pursue resolution of their territorial and maritime disputes through all peaceful means, in accordance with

²⁷ Jonah Blank et al., *Look East, Cross Black Waters: India's Interest in Southeast Asia* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), xv-xvi.

²⁸ Tom Donilon, "The United States and the Asia-Pacific in 2013" (remarks at the Asia Society, New York, March 11, 2013) ~ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/11/remarks-tom-donilon-national-security-advisor-president-united-states-an>.

²⁹ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., 2017), 46-47 ~ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

universally recognized principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.³⁰

These same themes were repeated in the communiqué issued after Modi's June 2017 visit to Washington, with the added note that "as responsible stewards in the Indo-Pacific region, Trump and Modi agreed that a close partnership between the United States and India is central to peace and stability in the region."³¹

Such high-profile diplomatic signaling is the result of repeated deliberations between policymakers in both countries who have, over the years, engaged in an unprecedented level of discussion about the Asia-Pacific region. Though prior consultations have occurred sporadically, since the start of the East Asia Dialogue in 2010 the two sides have had an extant forum for regular, high-level discussions about developments in East and Southeast Asia. According to a former U.S. official who participated in these bilateral exchanges, the consultations involved a variety of activities ranging from "how to coordinate policies in multilateral forums" to "exchanging views about the rise of China and maritime disputes in the South China Sea."³² In 2016 the two countries also initiated a maritime security dialogue—which served as an additional forum for exchanging views on Asia-Pacific maritime developments—at the assistant secretary/joint secretary level.³³ Both sides, however, are quick to point out that these talks are not aimed at any third country. According to an unnamed U.S. participant, "we all want to work together in concert to ensure rules-based arbitration of international disputes...No one is isolating anyone. There is no containment taking place here. This is about constructive engagement all around the region."³⁴ Such remarks eschewing any intention to "contain" a third power were aimed at reassuring China about the benign nature of these dialogues.

With changes in governments in both New Delhi and Washington in 2015–16, some of these initiatives fell by the wayside. Reflecting turbulence in staffing and the general policy uncertainty in the early months of the Trump administration, for a time there were just sporadic consultations

³⁰ "Joint Statement during the Visit of Prime Minister to USA," Ministry of External Affairs (India), September 30, 2014 ≈ http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24051/Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_USA.

³¹ "U.S. India Joint Statement: Prosperity through Partnership."

³² Author interview with a former U.S. government official, Washington D.C., November 18, 2014.

³³ For more on the various defense dialogues between the U.S. and India, see Table 1 in Cara Abercrombie's article in this special issue. There were additional dialogues during the Obama administration—for instance, on climate change and on cyber issues, but those are beyond the scope of this article.

³⁴ "India, U.S. Working to Ensure No Disruption to Peace in East Asia," *Economic Times*, April 14, 2014 ≈ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-us-working-to-ensure-no-disruption-to-peace-in-east-asia/articleshow/33736537.cms>.

between the two bureaucracies. More recently, however, the Trump administration has taken a different approach to U.S.-India relations than its predecessor. Under the Obama administration, there were roughly 30 bilateral dialogues between the two states covering a range of topics. To some critics, this amounted to little more than an endless series of “talk about talks” that achieved few substantial outcomes. The Trump administration, in contrast, signaled a desire to focus on only a few, select issue areas. Accordingly, in August 2017, Trump and Modi announced a “2+2” ministerial dialogue involving just the foreign and defense ministries “in a bid to shift bilateral ties to a higher strategic plane.”³⁵ In the first iteration of the 2+2 held in September 2018, the two sides concluded the long-pending Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement that will allow their militaries to share data in real time via specialized secure communications systems rather than the commercial hardware India currently uses. From a diplomatic perspective, what was more significant was the language in the joint statement issued at the meeting, which argued that both countries are “committed to work together and in concert with other partners toward advancing a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, based on recognition of ASEAN centrality and on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, rule of law, good governance, free and fair trade, and freedom of navigation and overflight.”³⁶ Such strong diplomatic language alluding to China’s expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea, unfair trade practices, and efforts to undermine ASEAN clearly indicates shared interests and concerns in both New Delhi and Washington.

Security Interests

In the security realm, the United States and India have rarely cooperated directly in Southeast Asia.³⁷ Driven by convergent regional goals, however, the

³⁵ Elizabeth Roche, “New Dialogue Format to Help Shift India-U.S. Ties to a Higher Plane,” *Livemint*, August 18, 2017 ~ <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/hrsSAywXTBqsuGD2uzn7TO/New-dialogue-format-to-help-shift-IndiaUS.html>. See also Dhruva Jaishankar, “2+ 2 Delay Does Not Mean India-U.S. Ties Are in Trouble,” *NDTV*, June 29, 2018 ~ <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/5-facts-that-prove-india-us-defence-ties-are-growing-1874850>.

³⁶ “Joint Statement on the Inaugural India-U.S 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue,” Ministry of External Affairs (India), September 6, 2018 ~ https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30358/Joint_Statement_on_the_Inaugural_IndiaUS_2432_Ministerial_Dialogue.

³⁷ The notable exceptions were when Indian ships escorted U.S. naval ships through the Strait of Malacca following the attacks on the twin towers in 2001 and during joint relief operations in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Apart from these instances, the navies of the two countries have conducted joint exercises in the Pacific Ocean. See David Scott, “The ‘Indo-Pacific’—New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for U.S.-India Strategic Convergence,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (2012): 98–100.

two countries are working in parallel to support the armed forces of partner states.³⁸ In undertaking these efforts, both countries are pursuing a common aim: to enhance the capacity of, and foster friendly ties with, regional militaries. This is best exemplified in the case of Singapore, which has extensive defense ties with both Washington and New Delhi. The United States' long-standing military cooperation with Singapore allows the U.S. Navy to base a logistical unit on the island and to operate resupply vessels from its ports, as well as position U.S. naval vessels there on a rotational basis. The United States frequently deploys ships and planes to the city state, and the armed forces of the two countries undertake a range of bilateral and multilateral exercises.³⁹ Recently, India has taken its naval cooperation with Singapore to another level with the signing of the India-Singapore Bilateral Agreement for Navy Cooperation in November 2017. This agreement allows Indian naval ships to be replenished at Changi Naval Base and thereby operate for longer periods in the South China Sea.

Beyond Singapore, both New Delhi and Washington are deepening defense ties with other countries in Southeast Asia, with varying degree of success.⁴⁰ In 2016, India and Vietnam upgraded their relationship to that of a comprehensive strategic partnership, and New Delhi offered Hanoi \$500 million in credit to fund the modernization and expansion of the Vietnamese armed forces.⁴¹ In an important effort to help Vietnam develop the ability to protect its territory, the Indian Navy has trained its Vietnamese counterparts to operate advanced Kilo-class submarines that Hanoi acquired from Russia. The Indian Air Force has offered similar instruction for Vietnamese pilots in operating the Russian-built Sukhoi Su-30 multirole fighter. In January 2018 the two armies held their first joint exercise in India, and in May 2018 three ships from the Indian navy held joint maneuvers with

³⁸ For more on the security convergence between the United States and India in the Indo-Pacific, see Scott, "The 'Indo-Pacific.'"

³⁹ Daniel Chua Wei Boon, "Singapore-U.S. Defense Relations: Enhancing Security, Benefiting Region," *Straits Times*, December 9, 2015.

⁴⁰ For more on India's defense ties with ASEAN countries, see Ladwig, "Delhi's Pacific Ambition," 96–98. For views on U.S. ties with the region, see Donald E. Weatherbee, "Political Change in Southeast Asia: Challenges for U.S. Strategy," in *Strategic Asia 2007–08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007), 235–65; and Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia."

⁴¹ "India, Vietnam Sign Defense Agreements to Counter China," NDTV, September 3, 2016 ~ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-vietnam-sign-defense-agreements-to-counter-china-1454059>; and Harsh V. Pant, "India and Vietnam: A 'Strategic Partnership' in the Making," S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Policy Brief, April 2018.

their Vietnamese counterparts in the South China Sea for the first time.⁴² The United States and Vietnam are also slowly reaching out to one another. In 2016, the Obama administration lifted a 50-year-old arms embargo on Vietnam. This followed efforts to forge a bilateral security relationship, including the establishment of a regular forum for direct military-to-military talks and the initiation of joint noncombat naval exercises. In January 2018 a U.S. aircraft carrier made a port call to Da Nang for the first time since the end of the Vietnam War. The U.S. military has also transferred a dozen patrol boats and a secretary-class cutter to the Vietnam Coast Guard. Recently enacted U.S. sanctions on countries purchasing arms from Russia pose a challenge to deepening military cooperation with Hanoi.⁴³ Nevertheless, if Vietnam continues to feel threatened by China, it is possible that the country will strengthen its defense relations with both India and the United States.

With the rest of the ASEAN countries, both India and the United States have had varying levels of success in developing defense relationships. Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto classifies India's defense cooperation with the ten ASEAN states into three categories: probing, developmental, and advanced.⁴⁴ According to this framework, India is at an early stage of defense cooperation (probing) with five of the ten: Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Timor-Leste. Defense ties are somewhat closer (developmental) with four other countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Only cooperation with Singapore can be classified at an advanced stage, since both countries hold regular dialogues and have signed numerous defense cooperation agreements.⁴⁵

⁴² Raju Gopalakrishnan, "India Is Pushing to Be a Bigger Player in Southeast Asia, and It's a Clear Challenge to China," *Business Insider*, June 3, 2018 ~ <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-with-ports-ships-and-promises-india-asserts-role-in-southeast-asia-2018-6/?IR=T>.

⁴³ Ian Storey, "U.S. Assault on Russian Arms Exports Could Misfire in Asia," *Nikkei Asian Review*, November 21, 2018 ~ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/US-assault-on-Russian-arms-exports-could-misfire-in-Asia>; and Le Hong Hiep, "Why Did Vietnam Cancel Its Defence Engagements with the U.S.?" ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, Commentary, December 11, 2018 ~ <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/medias/commentaries/item/8691-why-did-vietnam-cancel-its-defence-engagements-with-the-us-by-le-hong-hiep>.

⁴⁴ Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, "A Sea of Opportunity: Southeast Asia's Growing Naval Cooperation with India," in *India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security*, ed. Anit Mukherjee and C. Raja Mohan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 192–214. For more on India's military ties with the region, see Satu Limaye, "Weighted West, Focused on the Indian Ocean and Cooperating across the Indo-Pacific: The Indian Navy's New Maritime Strategy, Capabilities, and Diplomacy," CNA, April 2017, 45–49; Grare, *India Turns East*, 77–88; Ajaya Kumar Das, ed., *India-ASEAN Defence Relations*, RSIS monograph, no. 28 (Singapore: RSIS, 2013); and Sasiwan Chingchit, *From Looks to Action: Thailand-India Strategic Convergence and Defence Cooperation*, Occasional Paper, no. 40 (New Delhi: IDSA, 2015).

⁴⁵ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Why the New India-Singapore Naval Pact Matters," *Diplomat*, November 30, 2017 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/why-the-new-india-singapore-naval-pact-matters>.

The United States retains a robust program of military exchanges, defense sales, and joint training programs with the majority of Southeast Asian states.⁴⁶ Malaysia was one of the emerging partners embraced by the Obama administration as part of its rebalance strategy and Washington has a healthy security relationship with Kuala Lumpur, although it is purposefully downplayed due to domestic sensitivities in the Muslim-majority nation. The Malaysian military sends dozens of officers annually to professional education programs in the United States, the two countries' armies and navies regularly conduct bilateral and multilateral military exercises, and the U.S. Navy visits Malaysian ports for resupply and maintenance. Washington was able to cultivate warm ties with Kuala Lumpur under the Najib Razak government, which prioritized good relations with the United States; however, the return to power of Mahathir Mohamad—a vocal opponent of including outside powers such as the United States and Australia in pan-Asian regional groupings—raises questions for the future.

A treaty ally of United States, the Philippines is the largest recipient of U.S. foreign military assistance in the region. The U.S. aim is to help the Philippine Armed Forces reorient from domestic security to external threats, as well as to enhance their ability to monitor the country's extensive maritime territory. Although the U.S. military no longer maintains permanent bases in the islands, U.S. aircraft, ships, and soldiers operate from the country on a rotational basis. Despite widespread public support for a close relationship with the United States, U.S.-Philippine relations hit a rough patch during the early years of the Duterte administration. In recent months, however, bilateral relations appear to be on an upswing, as the Philippine president appears to have found a kindred spirit in Trump.⁴⁷

Although neither U.S. nor Indian officials publicly admit it, the main intention behind these endeavors is to show the two countries' presence in the region, both to reassure partners and to provide a degree of balance against China's growing influence. While doing so, the United States and India are also sending a signal that they attach importance to the freedom of navigation and the freedom of the seas. There is little evidence, though, of any direct coordination between the Indian and U.S. militaries in these activities in Southeast Asia. At the same time, the transformation in

⁴⁶ Myanmar is the only country in the region not to send military officers to U.S. professional military education programs, and Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos are the only ones who do not participate in the U.S. Foreign Military Sales and Financing Program. Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," 111.

⁴⁷ Ralph Jennings, "Turnaround Seen for U.S.-Philippine Ties; China Wary," VOA News, February 2, 2018 ~ <https://www.voanews.com/a/turnaround-us-philippines/4235941.html>

U.S.-India ties—particularly in their defense relations—has resulted in considerable bonhomie between the two militaries. This familiarity and the intense dialogues accruing from frequent interactions have resulted in greater bilateral discussions about regional and extraregional affairs. According to a senior U.S. official, both countries have identified two avenues for future cooperation that are pertinent to Southeast Asia: maritime domain awareness (MDA) and capacity building in partner countries.⁴⁸ The latter suggests that in the future the United States and India may actively coordinate their efforts to enhance the capacity of partner militaries in the region.

Economic Interests

In terms of regional economic policy, the United States and India are committed to a connectivity strategy linking South and Southeast Asia. This approach is based on the premise that joining these two regions through an economic and infrastructure corridor is in the interests of both India and the United States. India's development agenda would be facilitated by physically linking its poverty-stricken northeastern region to one of the fastest-growing sets of economies in the world. Such connections would also allow India to assume a more central position in Asia's economic architecture, which would in turn contribute to enhancing the prosperity and security of the continent. In this vein, in 2011 then prime minister Manmohan Singh declared physical connectivity between India and ASEAN to be a "strategic objective."⁴⁹ Echoing a similar view, U.S. State Department officials have argued that connecting the two regions will enhance security and prosperity in Asia—which is in the overall interests of the United States.⁵⁰ This is not just an altruistic endeavor, however, as there is an expectation that "additional infrastructure links and better trade relations [between the two regions] would also help unlock and expand existing markets for U.S. goods and services."⁵¹

While enhancing connectivity between these two areas will be beneficial for all states in the region, an unstated goal is to create a counterbalance to China. Indo-U.S. connectivity projects offer an alternative to Beijing's efforts

⁴⁸ Author interview, New Delhi, December 19, 2014.

⁴⁹ B. Muralidhar Reddy, "India-ASEAN Connectivity Is Our Strategic Objective, Says Manmohan," *Hindu*, November 20, 2011 \approx <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indiaasean-connectivity-is-our-strategic-objective-says-manmohan/article2641786.ece>.

⁵⁰ Fatema Z. Sumar, "Shaping the Future of Trade and Connectivity in the Indo-Pacific" (remarks at the CII Kolkata Business Luncheon, May 8, 2014).

⁵¹ Ted Osius, "Connectivity's Benefits and Challenges," in *Enhancing India-ASEAN Connectivity*, ed. Ted Osius (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2013), 20. This report provides a good overview of issues relating to India-ASEAN connectivity.

to connect southern China with Southeast Asia “to advance regional economic integration and promote greater economic reliance on China.”⁵² Owing to China’s economic weight and a perception of its growing assertiveness, most ASEAN countries welcome a more robust Indian role in the region, even though China’s trade with ASEAN is approximately five times that of India.⁵³ Connectivity, therefore, has not only an economic but also a geopolitical rationale. Yet despite shared visions for regional economic development, there are limitations to U.S.-India cooperation in the region, as discussed in the next section.

LIMITS TO COOPERATION

Despite the positive transformation in bilateral ties and a convergence of regional objectives, there are five major constraints to Indo-U.S. cooperation in Southeast Asia. First, important foreign and domestic policy challenges closer to home limit India’s ability to play a robust role east of Malacca. Although successive governments have endorsed the Look/Act East policy, the priority for both time and resources is necessarily given to the unresolved territorial disputes on India’s land borders with Pakistan and China.⁵⁴ Within the country, armed violence in the northeast and Kashmir has at times proven to be beyond the ability of local police to contain.⁵⁵ To guard against Pakistani revisionism and Chinese adventurism, as well as support local authorities in domestic contingencies, India is compelled to retain a large conventional army that absorbs 55% of the country’s defense spending.⁵⁶ This puts a significant constraint on the growth and development of the branch of the armed forces that is most relevant in Southeast Asia: the navy. The Indian Navy has always been the so-called Cinderella service, receiving the smallest

⁵² Joshua P. Meltzer, “China’s One Belt One Road Initiative: A View from the United States,” Asan Forum, June 19, 2017. ~ <http://www.theasanforum.org/a-view-from-the-united-states-2>.

⁵³ Tan, “India-ASEAN Relations at Seventy,” 50–56; and Grare, *India Turns East*, 72–75.

⁵⁴ Arzan Tarapore, “India’s Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor,” *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2017): 169–70.

⁵⁵ Paul Staniland, “America Has High Expectations for India. Can New Delhi Deliver?” *War on the Rocks*, February 22, 2018. ~ <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/america-has-high-expectations-for-india-can-new-delhi-deliver>.

⁵⁶ Defense spending figures are taken from Laxman Kumar Behera, “Defence Budget 2018–19: The Imperative of Controlling Manpower Cost,” IDSA, Issue Brief, February 5, 2018, 5. For the dominance of the continental mindset in the Indian armed forces, see John H. Gill, “Challenges for India’s Military Strategy: Matching Capabilities to Ambitions?” in *Strategic Asia 2017–18: Power, Ideas, and Military Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017).

budgetary allocation of the armed forces.⁵⁷ Although the Indian Navy has embraced a self-designated role as a “net security provider” in the Indian Ocean, its focus is more toward the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal—India’s immediate neighborhood—than toward Southeast Asia.⁵⁸ Moreover, at present, the navy lacks the capacity to operate effectively in Southeast and East Asia. According to Gurpreet Khurana, in the waters east of the Strait of Malacca “the extended logistic lines and choke-points together pose a substantial hindrance for the [navy] to undertake missions across the spectrum of conflict.”⁵⁹ As Chinese influence among the smaller nations of South Asia continues to grow, the time and attention of India’s foreign and security policy elites will be increasingly devoted to the immediate neighborhood. Southeast Asia will need to compete with the Persian Gulf for any diplomatic and military resources that remain after attending to issues closer to home.

A second factor constraining Indo-U.S. cooperation is a fear in New Delhi, and to a lesser extent in Washington, that cooperation might adversely affect bilateral relations with China. The economies of India, China, and the United States are interdependent. Despite some political tensions, all three countries seek expanded economic growth, and none explicitly seeks to create an enemy of the other. In the recent past, the United States has been more willing than India to balance economic cooperation with selected confrontation in its China policy. The Obama administration, for example, could negotiate a bilateral investment treaty with China while also increasing the pace of freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea in defiance of Beijing’s maritime claims around its artificially created land features. Unlike the United States, India shares a disputed land border with China. Thus, India has been more sensitive to Beijing’s diplomatic posturing and readiness to take offense at any action perceived to be aimed at containing its rise. Although some analysts have exaggerated the substantive effect that the so-called Wuhan summit had on Sino-Indian relations in the wake of the 2017 Doklam standoff, there

⁵⁷ For an overview of the Indian Navy and the challenges to its growth, see Walter C. Ladwig III, “Drivers of Indian Naval Expansion,” in *The Rise of the Indian Navy: Internal Vulnerabilities, External Challenges*, ed. Harsh Pant (Oxford: Ashgate, 2012), 19–40.

⁵⁸ Limaye, “Weighted West, Focused on the Indian Ocean and Cooperating across the Indo-Pacific”; and Prakash Panneerselvam, “Maritime Component of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): India-China Competition in the Arabian Sea,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 13, no. 2 (2017): 44–46. For more on the Indian Navy and its concept of a net security provider, see Anit Mukherjee, “India as a Net Security Provider: Concept and Impediments,” RSIS, Policy Brief, August 2014 ~ https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PB_140903_India-Net-Security.pdf.

⁵⁹ Gurpreet S. Khurana, “India’s Maritime Strategy: Context and Subtext,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 13, no. 1 (2017): 20.

has been a clear effort by the Modi administration to pause the growing antagonism in the bilateral relationship.⁶⁰ In the near future, India can be expected to continue to carefully adjust its policy in Southeast Asia to ensure that it does not negatively affect either its trade relationship with China or its own territorial dispute.⁶¹ For its part, the United States wants the countries of Southeast Asia to be able to defend themselves against intimidation and aggression. Despite what Aaron Friedberg terms the Trump administration's "unprecedentedly combative stance towards China," Washington does not want to be drawn into a conflict over a peripheral disputed territory where a minor disagreement could become a major war.⁶² To allay such fears and to safeguard their bilateral ties with Beijing, both Washington and New Delhi are careful in calibrating their relationship in Southeast Asia.

Third, there is an important institutional mismatch that prevents greater cooperation between the two democracies. The limited capacities of India's foreign and security bureaucracies constrain New Delhi's ability to play a larger global role. These capacity limits exist in two domains: the diplomatic corps and the institutional architecture of the defense ministry. Relative to its size, India has a very small foreign service that is quantitatively on par with that of New Zealand or Singapore.⁶³ This limits the number of diplomatic functions that can be undertaken at any one time and requires the Ministry of External Affairs to constantly prioritize competing demands. As India's prominence on the world stage has grown, these demands have only increased over time, as more countries seek to engage India on a broader range of issues. Individual diplomats must constantly pick and choose what tasks to focus on and their ability to take on additional responsibilities is limited. Consequently, foreign officials have been self-deterred from placing demands on their Indian counterparts out of a fear that it might be "overloading the Indian system."⁶⁴ This problem not only limits India's functions in existing multilateral meetings but also constrains the government's ability to embrace new diplomatic initiatives and groupings. A similar capacity problem also

⁶⁰ Dhruva Jaishankar, "The India-China Summit in Wuhan Was No Reset," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, May 10, 2018 ~ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-china-summit-wuhan-was-no-reset>.

⁶¹ Tarapore, "India's Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor," 170.

⁶² Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival* 60, no. 3 (2018): 7.

⁶³ Daniel Markey, "Developing India's Foreign Policy 'Software,'" *Asia Policy*, no. 8 (2009): 73–96; and Shashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 319, 336–37.

⁶⁴ Tanvi Madan, "What in the World Is India Able to Do? India's State Capacity for Multilateralism," in *Shaping the Emerging World: India and the Multilateral Order*, ed. Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, and Bruce Jones (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 97.

exists in the Ministry of Defence as there is only one joint secretary (U.S. assistant secretary equivalent) in charge of international cooperation for the entire world. Moreover, the Indian defense ministry does not have a counterpart to U.S. offices that are devoted to political-military affairs and regional developments. As a result, the strategic dimension of India's Act East policy, in terms of military-to-military contacts, exercises, and exchange of views, is limited.⁶⁵

Fourth, in the infrastructure space, India and the United States are not well placed to meet Asia's needs, meaning that Indo-U.S. cooperation on a connectivity strategy will neither be easy nor assured. Like then secretary Hillary Clinton's "new Silk Road" before it, former secretary of state John Kerry's vision of an Indo-Pacific economic corridor linking South and Southeast Asia in a network of trade and physical ties garnered much attention at the time of its announcement, but there has been little follow-through.⁶⁶ Unlike China, the U.S. government does not have the ability to direct U.S. firms to undertake infrastructure mega-projects or make investments in other parts of the world. To its credit, the Trump administration has set aside funds for an Indo-Pacific economic corridor, but the development and success of this initiative remains to be seen.⁶⁷ For its part, the Indian government lacks capital and the capacity to implement a large-scale infrastructure development program abroad.⁶⁸ Consequently, for both Washington and New Delhi, enhancing region connectivity will be a slow and challenging process.

Finally, the notion of a joint U.S.-India approach to Southeast Asia raises concerns among countries in the region. Unnerved by China's assertive behavior and island building activities, in recent years Southeast Asian countries have generally welcomed a larger role for the United States, India, and other extraregional powers, such as France, Japan, and the European Union.⁶⁹ Their diplomatic ambitions, however, have been mainly to embed

⁶⁵ For more on problems in the defense ministry, see Anit Mukherjee and Manohar Thyagaraj, "Competing Exceptionalisms: U.S.-India Defense Relationship," *Journal of Defense Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 18.

⁶⁶ John Kerry (remarks at the Center for American Progress's India: 2020 Program, Washington, D.C., July 28, 2014) ∼ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229870.htm>.

⁶⁷ Alyssa Ayres, "Pompeo's Indo-Pacific Strategy Is Just a Start," CNN, July 31, 2018 ∼ <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/30/opinions/pompeos-indo-pacific-strategy-opinion-ayres/index.html>.

⁶⁸ Prabir De, "India's Emerging Connectivity with Southeast Asia: Progress and Prospects," Asian Development Bank Institute, Working Paper, no. 507, December 2014 ∼ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/156362/adbi-wp507.pdf>. For more on connectivity between India and Myanmar, see V.S. Seshadri, *Transforming Connectivity Corridors between India and Myanmar into Development Corridors* (New Delhi: Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2014) ∼ http://ris.org.in/images/RIS_images/pdf/Trans%20Report.pdf.

⁶⁹ For more about hedging and alignment behavior in Southeast Asia, see Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," 93-103.

all these powers in various multilateral, ASEAN-centric forums. They have welcomed engagement with extraregional powers but, importantly, on a bilateral, one-to-one basis. If Washington and New Delhi were to jointly approach any of these countries, they would likely face opposition out of a fear that such actions were explicitly directed against China. It is not surprising, therefore, that the countries of Southeast Asia are not very keen on supporting the re-emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—the consultative grouping of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia—because they are concerned that such an assembly will undermine ASEAN centrality.⁷⁰

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

If India and the United States wish to enhance their cooperation in Southeast Asia, what are the most favorable areas to focus on? As a preliminary step toward any meaningful coordination, Washington and New Delhi should set up a dedicated forum to exchange views and actively encourage cooperation in Southeast Asia. The two states currently have a maritime security dialogue but its composition suggests Southeast Asia is not a major area of focus.⁷¹

One promising area to focus on is strengthening the existing regional security architecture. In analyzing the U.S. pivot and India's Act East policy, Sourabh Gupta has concluded that the best arena for partnership is in “multilateral security constructs that are UN-flagged or come under broad-based umbrellas such as the ASEAN Regional Forum or ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus,” the latter being a meeting of the ASEAN defense ministers and the organization's eight dialogue partners.⁷² India has traditionally felt comfortable working within regional security institutions and has embraced initiatives like the ADMM-Plus, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), and the Information Fusion Centre, which focuses on regional maritime information sharing. Fortunately, there are indications that the

⁷⁰ Joel Ng, “The Quadrilateral Conundrum: Can ASEAN Be Persuaded?” RSIS, RSIS Commentary, no. 120, July 17, 2018.

⁷¹ Ministry of External Affairs (India), “Third Round of the India-U.S. Maritime Security Dialogue,” Press Release, May 2, 2018.

⁷² Sourabh Gupta, “The U.S. Pivot and India's Look East,” East Asia Forum, June 20, 2012 ~ <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/06/20/the-us-pivot-and-india-s-look-east>.

United States is also increasingly invested in regional multilateral forums.⁷³ Therefore, despite the internal divisions plaguing ASEAN, it is important for Washington and New Delhi to give attention to ASEAN-led regional security initiatives, even if just for symbolic reasons.

Maritime domain awareness and maritime capacity building in partner countries are another area for potential cooperation. Both countries are currently working on enhancing their shared MDA in the Indian Ocean region, yet from the standpoint of real-time situational awareness, many key parts of maritime Southeast Asia remain *mare incognitum*.⁷⁴ India and the United States can help build connections among the various national maritime surveillance agencies in the region to create a network that would enhance MDA from the Andaman Islands to the east coast of the Philippines. The United States has already contributed some funds to build the MDA capacity of the Philippines and Indonesia and is exploring projects in Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand.⁷⁵ The ultimate aim would be to pool the surveillance capabilities of each state to develop a shared awareness of the real-time situation in the air and seas of Southeast Asia. There are certainly capacity shortfalls that inhibit MDA in the region, but lack of trust among neighbors is also an important obstacle. New Delhi and Washington can leverage their existing relationships to bridge some of these gaps. According to Admiral Sunil Lanba, India's chief of naval staff, this is an area of priority for the Indian Navy and India has already operationalized agreements with a dozen Indian Ocean littoral nations to share white shipping information.⁷⁶ The efficacy of U.S.-India cooperation on MDA would of course be enhanced if India signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence—the final outstanding “foundational agreement” that could underpin robust military-to-military cooperation between the United States and India.⁷⁷ If such an accord were reached, the two partners would be able to exchange geospatial information

⁷³ Mary Fides Quintos and Joyce Teodoro, “Moving ASEAN-U.S. Security Relations to a New Level?” East-West Center, Asia Pacific Bulletin, no. 256, April 15, 2014 ∞ <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/moving-asean-us-security-relations-new-level>.

⁷⁴ Abhijit Singh, “Searching for a High Note in U.S.-India Maritime Partnership,” War on the Rocks, May 4, 2018 ∞ <https://warontherocks.com/2018/05/searching-for-a-high-note-in-the-u-s-india-maritime-partnership>.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Building Maritime Capacity in Southeast Asia,” Fact Sheet ∞ <https://id.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/embassy-fact-sheets/fact-sheet-u-s-building-maritime-capacity-in-southeast-asia>.

⁷⁶ Dinakar Peri, “Full Text of Interview with Admiral Sunil Lanba, Chief of Naval Staff,” *Hindu*, November 4, 2017.

⁷⁷ Mark Rosen and Douglas Jackson, “The U.S.-India Defense Relationship: Putting the Foundational Agreements in Perspective,” CNA, February 2017 ∞ https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DRM-2016-U-013926-Final2.pdf.

for both civilian and military purposes, which would facilitate ocean mapping and other maritime monitoring activities.

A parallel initiative to augmenting MDA would be a coordinated effort to enhance the capabilities of regional states to police their own exclusive economic zones. Japan is already working to build the capacity of the Philippine and Vietnamese coast guards via the transfer of surface vessels and joint training exercises, while Australia has provided the Philippine Navy with similar assistance.⁷⁸ The United States and India can contribute to these efforts by supplying communications and sensor systems that are interoperable with the Indian and U.S. navies to enhance situational awareness. The Indian Navy can also be a source of expertise, particularly for countries in which joint training with the United States would be controversial. Although many of these efforts are already underway individually, a coordinated approach would help ensure maximum returns on each nation's endeavor. Prior consultations about security assistance priorities in Southeast Asia could help de-conflict, and perhaps even coordinate, their efforts.

Third, the United States and India should re-emphasize enhancing connectivity between South and Southeast Asia. The focus should be on implementing existing projects, however, rather than on proposing increasingly grandiose region-wide economic corridors that are never translated into reality. A good starting point is the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, which was first proposed in 2002. A lack of financial and institutional support in all three countries caused the project to languish for years; however, the Modi administration has recently declared that it will be operational by the end of 2019.⁷⁹ Ensuring that this project hits its target will be key to establishing India's reputation as a credible partner. On its side, the United States can work with countries such as Japan or institutions such as the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank to help provide the necessary financing for planned extensions of the highway to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.⁸⁰ The United States can also provide funding and expertise for "smart logistics"

⁷⁸ The United States has also transferred decommissioned Coast Guard cutters to the Philippines and Vietnam.

⁷⁹ "India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway by 2019," Press Trust of India, January 23, 2018.

⁸⁰ To overcome the problem of a lack of capital, there are some who envisage a growing role for Japan. The issue was discussed at the U.S.-India-Japan trilateral dialogue in 2018. See "Joint Statement on the U.S.-India-Japan Trilateral Meeting," U.S. State Department, April 5, 2018 ~ <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280254.htm>. Reports have also surfaced about nascent discussions between India, the United States, Japan, and Australia on a joint regional infrastructure project that would be an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. "Australia, U.S., India and Japan in Talks to Establish Belt and Road Alternative," Reuters, February 18, 2018.

along this trade corridor, whereby integrated systems track cargo vehicles and transmit customs manifestos, rendering border crossings a seamless exercise.

Counterterrorism intelligence is a final area for potential cooperation between the two countries in Southeast Asia. As with India and the United States, all the regional countries are concerned about ISIS gaining a foothold as well as about the spread of extremist Salafist ideology in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. In recent years, the two partners have intensified their bilateral counterterrorism cooperation via joint training and intelligence sharing. It could be productive to extend that conversation beyond South Asia to examine what both countries can do to prevent radicalization and entrenchment of militant groups in Southeast Asia.⁸¹ Such efforts could also be expanded to include active cooperation with various countries in the region.

CONCLUSION: WORKING TOGETHER, BUT IN PARALLEL

The transformation in U.S.-India relations that has occurred in the past fifteen years has resulted in an apparent congruence of interests between the two nations' policies toward the Asia-Pacific broadly and Southeast Asia in particular. Taking their cues from increasingly common diplomatic positions on developments in the region, a number of analysts have suggested that Indo-U.S. cooperation in Southeast Asia is a likely proposition.⁸² The underlying assumption is that a convergence of interests could lead the two countries into a gradual, if unspoken, "alliance."

Yet expectations of close Indo-U.S. cooperation in Southeast Asia overlook both the limits to this partnership and the constraints on India's ability to play a significant role east of the Strait of Malacca.⁸³ For these reasons, extensive diplomatic consultations and shared assessments of regional security issues have not yet led to active cooperation on a policy level. Despite these constraints, however, there are still some steps that India and the United States can take to better coordinate their policies toward Southeast Asia. Regular diplomatic consultations are crucial to this effort and should

⁸¹ For more on India's counterterrorism cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, see Julio S. Amador, "ASEAN-India Cooperation in Counterterrorism," in *Heading East: Security, Trade, and Environment between India and Southeast Asia*, ed. Karen Stoll Farrell and Sumit Ganguly (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸² Karl Inderfurth and Ted Osius, "India's 'Look East' and America's 'Asia Pivot': Converging Interests," CSIS, U.S.-India Insight, no. 3, March 2013 ~ <http://csis.org/publication/indias-look-east-and-americas-asia-pivot-converging-interests>.

⁸³ Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad," *Survival* 60, no. 3 (2018): 181-94.

be prioritized. In addition, both countries are working in parallel to build up the militaries of partner states in the region. To an extent, their efforts are complementary, as India is able to provide training and logistical and other value-added skills to countries that operate Russian military platforms and also can provide low-tech military systems and subsystems. Finally, the two countries should work with like-minded ASEAN countries to support regional security initiatives and strengthen the twin concepts of ASEAN unity and centrality.

Despite being economically interdependent with China, most Southeast Asian states want other major powers to remain engaged in the region to hedge against political domination by Beijing.⁸⁴ The presence of multiple rising powers, competing territorial claims, and nationalism mean that the region is likely to witness a protracted great-power competition for influence.⁸⁵ Undoubtedly this will exacerbate tensions in the U.S.-China and India-China relationships. How these three powers interact with each other will have major consequences for Southeast Asia. For the moment, it appears that U.S. and Indian policies toward the region will move in parallel, working independently in pursuit of a common goal. It remains to be seen whether in response to growing Chinese assertiveness their partnership can rise to another level. ◆

⁸⁴ Deepa M. Ollapally, "How Does India's Look East Policy Look after 25 Years?" *Asia Policy* 13, no. 2 (2018), 146.

⁸⁵ C. Raja Mohan, "China's Rise, America's Pivot, and India's Asian Ambiguity," *Seminar*, no. 641 (2013) ~ http://www.india-seminar.com/2013/641/641_c_raja_mohan.htm.

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Indo-Pacific and India-U.S. Strategic Convergence: An Assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article examines Indian and U.S. perceptions of the Indo-Pacific, the extent of their strategic convergence and cooperation in this region, and the manner in which key states in the region have responded to this seeming convergence.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The strategic basis of the Indo-Pacific is constructed, to a significant degree, on the apparent strategic convergence between India and the U.S. According to several accounts, this strategic convergence is driven to a large extent by the two countries' shared concerns about China's growing geostrategic ambitions across both the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The reactions of certain key states in the region, including China, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia, are often cited as evidence that the Indo-Pacific is a key site for India-U.S. strategic convergence. However, such assessments do not pay enough attention to several significant divergences between India and the U.S. in relation to the region. Most fundamentally, India and the U.S. have differing geographic conceptions of the Indo-Pacific with important implications for broader strategic convergence between the two states.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Differences over the geographic scope of the Indo-Pacific reveal differences in strategic priorities between India and the U.S., potentially undermining broader policy convergence.
- Managing China's rise within seemingly more inclusive institutions and processes appears vital for obtaining greater policy convergence from other key Indo-Pacific states.
- The U.S. and India do not demonstrate strong common positions on key issue areas vis-à-vis China in the Indo-Pacific, presenting obstacles for coordinating military and diplomatic strategies.

There is a sizeable literature on the genesis of the “Indo-Pacific” as a geostrategic moniker. Within this literature, growing strategic convergence between the United States and India is cited as a key driver for the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new geostrategic space. The term “Indo-Pacific” can be understood as representing two different geographies. Taking the “Indo” to signify India alone, the region stretches from India, or more specifically from the eastern Indian Ocean, to the Pacific Ocean.¹ However, if “Indo” is taken to represent the Indian Ocean instead of India alone, the region extends from the southern tip of Africa and the Gulf of Aden to the Pacific Ocean.²

There is some contestation between the United States and India about which of these two geographies reflects the ambit of the Indo-Pacific region.³ The U.S. view approximates the Indo-Pacific Command area of operations, extending from the west coast of India in the Indian Ocean to the west coast of the United States in the Pacific Ocean. India, by contrast, regards the “Indo” to denote the whole of the Indian Ocean, stretching from South Africa to Australia. This divergence in strategic mapping is significant because it signals certain differences in perceptions and strategies between the two countries.

There are three broad justifications for the strategic salience of the Indo-Pacific. The first is India’s emergence as a key strategic actor in global affairs in the last two decades. China’s rise as the main challenger to global U.S. economic and military power has rendered East Asia as one of the leading sites for great-power competition, and India’s involvement in East Asia is viewed as both inevitable and positive in the longer term according to one section of opinion.⁴ The Indo-Pacific, in this rendition, encapsulates much more clearly the central theater of contemporary geopolitics than the

¹ According to the U.S. National Security Strategy of 2017, the Indo-Pacific “stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States.” White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., December 2017), 45–46.

² For a discussion of the importance of the western Indian Ocean for India’s approach to the Indo-Pacific, see Samir Saran and Abhijit Singh, “India’s Struggle for the Soul of the Indo-Pacific,” Lowy Institute, Interpreter ∞ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-struggle-soul-indo-pacific>.

³ For specific discussions of the contested nature of the Indo-Pacific region, see Aparna Pande and Satoru Nagao, “Whose Indo-Pacific?” *American Interest*, August 3, 2018 ∞ <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/08/03/whose-indo-pacific/>; Allan Gyngell, “To Each Their Own Indo-Pacific,” *East Asia Forum*, May 23, 2018; and Mark Beeson and Jeffrey Wilson, “The Indo-Pacific: Reconceptualizing the Asian Regional Space,” *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2018): 79–84.

⁴ Manjeet S. Pardi, “Is India a Great Power? Understanding Great Power Status in Contemporary International Relations,” *Asian Security* 11, no. 1 (2015): 1–30; and Nyshka Chandran, “Southeast Asia Is Increasingly Turning to India Instead of the U.S. or China,” *CNBC*, March 15, 2018 ∞ <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/15/southeast-asia-increasingly-turns-to-india-instead-of-the-us-or-china.html>.

Asia-Pacific, which leaves out India.⁵ The second justification is the growing military ambition and strength of the Chinese military beyond East Asia into the Indian Ocean. China's logistics and evacuation base in Djibouti is viewed as evidence of its desire to play a larger role within the Indian Ocean region. In this context, China's challenge to U.S. military and economic supremacy stretches beyond the primary locus in East Asia and extends into the Indian Ocean.⁶ The Asia-Pacific, therefore, no longer depicts the epicenter of global strategic competition. Third, the Indo-Pacific encapsulates the vital geoeconomic link between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. As the energy demand from China and other East Asian economies grows in tandem with their economic development, there is greater appreciation of the importance of the Indian Ocean as a transit hub for energy supplies. The energy security needs of countries in East Asia are thus linked to the geostrategic complexion of the Indian Ocean region.⁷

In all three broad explanations of the Indo-Pacific as a distinct and key strategic space, the United States views its interests as converging with those of India. Specifically, as strategic competition between India and China increases, containing China's ambition within the Indian Ocean region has become a foreign policy objective for India.⁸ Moreover, as part of its Look East and Act East policies, India has attempted to expand its diplomatic and strategic influence into East Asia. In this enterprise, it has been encouraged by

⁵ Rory Medcalf, "Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific," *Asan Forum*, June 26, 2015 ~ <http://www.theasanforum.org/reimagining-asia-from-asia-pacific-to-indo-pacific>. There is also an important U.S. bureaucratic politics component to this exercise as well. During the Obama administration, there was a split between officials who were in charge of Asia policy on whether the U.S. "rebalance" included India. The Trump administration, however, has employed the "Indo-Pacific" in a manner that makes it clear that India is part of the United States' Asia policy. For further discussion, listen to Joshua White's views on this issue in "The U.S., China, and India Balancing Act in the Indo-Pacific," Brookings Institution, podcast, March 28, 2018 ~ <https://www.brookings.edu/podcast-episode/the-u-s-china-and-india-balancing-act-in-the-indo-pacific>.

⁶ While some analysts view the Indian Ocean as an area of low strategic priority for the United States, others see an increasing U.S. interest in the region as a result of the growing Chinese economic and military presence there. See Ashley J. Tellis, "U.S. and Indian Interests in India's Extended Neighbourhood," in *Power Realignment in Asia: China, India and the United States*, ed. Alyssa Ayres and C. Raja Mohan (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 221–48; and Jan Hornat, "The Power Triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2016): 425–43.

⁷ Euan Graham, "Maritime Security and Threats to Energy Transportation in Southeast Asia," *RUSI Journal* 160, no. 2 (2015): 20–31; Michael R. Porter, "The Indian Ocean Matters to East Asia: Emerging Indo-Pacific Interests in East Asian Affairs," in *Regional Institutions, Geopolitics and Economics in the Asia-Pacific: Evolving Interests and Strategies*, ed. Steven B. Rothman, Utpal Vyas, and Yoichiro Sato (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 174–92.

⁸ Deepa M. Ollapally, "Understanding Indian Policy Dilemmas in the Indo-Pacific through an India-U.S.-China Maritime Triangle Lens," *Maritime Affairs* 12, no.1 (2016): 1–12.

several regional states that perceive China's behavior as increasingly aggressive and desire a more varied balance of power.⁹

This article examines Indian and U.S. perceptions of the Indo-Pacific region and assesses the extent of their strategic convergence. It argues that overly optimistic assessments of an Indo-Pacific area of cooperation between the two countries do not pay sufficient attention to several significant divergences between them. Most fundamentally, as discussed above, India and the United States have differing geographic conceptions of the region with important implications for the possibility of broader strategic convergence between the two states. In examining these constraints, this article also discusses the reactions of other key regional powers (namely, China, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia) to the seeming strategic convergence between the United States and India.

The article is organized as follows:

- ∞ pp. 81–83 chart India's and the United States' divergent strategic outlooks toward this region during the Cold War era.
- ∞ pp. 84–88 analyze the specific strategies that the two states have attempted to develop in the Indo-Pacific and outline why and how certain strategies have been coordinated, as well as which strategies have stalled.
- ∞ pp. 88–91 scrutinize the reaction of four key regional states—China, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia—to both the notion of the Indo-Pacific as a possible site of India-U.S. strategic convergence and the specific strategies that the two states have employed in response to these reactions.
- ∞ pp. 92–94 discuss some of the key hurdles facing both India and the United States in their pursuit of strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific.

THE INDIAN OCEAN DURING THE COLD WAR: U.S. AND INDIAN PERCEPTIONS

A significant portion of the geopolitical history of the Indian Ocean relates to Britain's military dominance of the region at the height of its imperial power. At the end of World War II, Britain remained committed to maintaining its position as the leading power in the Indian Ocean region,

⁹ For a Japanese view on Japan diversifying away from the United States as its sole security partner in East Asia and building closer links with India as part of this strategy, see Paul Midford, "New Directions in Japan's Security: Non-U.S. Centric Evolution, Introduction to a Special Issue," *Pacific Review*, 31, no. 4 (2018): 407–23. The manner in which "many Southeast Asian states see India as a potential balancer to China" is outlined in Stephen Cohen, "India and the Region," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 341–55.

despite the onset of decolonization. With India gaining independence in 1947, Singapore became key to Britain's attempt to maintain its preeminent position within the Indian Ocean and East Asia. In addition, Britain maintained bases in Kenya, Bahrain, and Aden in the western Indian Ocean with an eye on the need to maintain its earlier influence in the Gulf States of the Middle East.¹⁰

By the 1950s, the security of Western Europe in the context of the Cold War had supplanted the Indian Ocean and East Asia as the key strategic threat for Britain. In addition, it had become clear to British leaders that U.S. military support was essential to meet any challenge to British interests and forces in these two regions. As a result, the United States' interests had to be increasingly accommodated within Britain's strategic plans.¹¹ In December 1966, Britain agreed to allow the use of the British Indian Ocean territory of Diego Garcia for U.S. defense purposes. The United States began construction of naval facilities in Diego Garcia in 1971. The fall of Saigon in 1975 and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 established Diego Garcia as a key base for the U.S. Navy amid apprehensions about the domino theory in Southeast Asia and the imperative of maintaining the unfettered flow of energy resources from the Persian Gulf.¹²

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United States' interests in the Indian Ocean region had become more apparent. Before this period, the Indian Ocean seemed peripheral to the global strategic interests of the United States, with the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans being much more important in its ideological and military confrontation with the Soviet Union. The growing importance of oil supplies from the Persian Gulf, the increasing Soviet attention to the Middle East, and the retreat of Britain's military presence rendered the Indian Ocean region an important theater in the global Cold War, and the U.S. naval facility in Diego Garcia was a symbol of this importance.

Following independence, there was keen debate within India about its role in the Indian Ocean. K.M. Panikkar was one of the earliest exponents of India's need to assume the mantle of supremacy in this region from the departing British power:

The freedom of India will hardly be worth a day's purchase, if Indian interests in the Indian Ocean are not to be defended from

¹⁰ Malcolm Murfett et al., *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore from 1275 to 1971* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 281–308.

¹¹ T.B. Millar, "The Indian and Pacific Oceans: Some Strategic Considerations," *Adelphi Papers* 9, no. 57 (1969): 1020.

¹² Changwei Chen, "A Diplomatic Tightrope: The Whitlam Government and the Diego Garcia Dilemma," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 3 (2014): 530–50.

India, especially as...the British fleet will be in no position to maintain that unchallenged supremacy which it possessed for 150 years. The defence of India's shores [can no longer] be left any longer to the British navy.¹³

Despite Panikkar and others making strong arguments for the need to enhance naval power and thereby establish Indian supremacy in the Indian Ocean region, the navy consistently has received the lowest share of the defense outlay among the three services since 1947. The conflicts with Pakistan and China between 1947 and 1965 meant that land-based threats received priority against any threat from the sea via the Indian Ocean. The retreat of Britain from East of Suez rekindled debates within India about the need to fill the power vacuum left in the Indian Ocean. The then chief of naval staff believed that the Indian Navy should take “total charge of the Indian Ocean” in the aftermath of the British announcement.¹⁴ However, it was the United States that increasingly came to replace Britain as the paramount power in the region.

After the India-Pakistan war of 1971, India's main strategic interest in the Indian Ocean involved encouraging a retrenchment, or at least a reduction of great-power naval presence. Yet the escalation of conflicts in Southeast Asia and the Middle East and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan resulted in heightened great-power competition in the Indian Ocean. This led to efforts by India to persuade the two superpowers to accept the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace via a UN General Assembly resolution. Although the resolution was affirmed, it faced opposition from the two superpowers as well as certain littoral states.¹⁵ The United States viewed its military presence in the Indian Ocean, via both bases in littoral states and increased naval deployments, as key to containing perceived Soviet influence in this region. Indian and U.S. interests in the region thus diverged considerably. In fact, India perceived the United States' drive to augment its military presence in the Indian Ocean, in association with the close U.S. security relationship with Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s, as a pressing security threat to India's strategic interests in its own neighborhood.¹⁶

¹³ K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1951), 90–91.

¹⁴ Quoted in David Brewster, *India's Ocean: The Story of India's Bid for Regional Leadership* (London: Routledge, 2014), 30.

¹⁵ Inder Khosla, “Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace,” *International Studies* 21, no. 4 (1982): 417–43.

¹⁶ S.P. Seth, “The Indian Ocean and Indo-American Relations,” *Asian Survey* 15, no. 8 (1975): 645–55.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE
INDIA-U.S. STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

The manner in which the end of the Cold War slowly led to closer strategic ties between India and the United States has been well documented.¹⁷ In India, the demise of the Soviet Union caused a considerable amount of introspection about the implications for Indian strategic interests. India increasingly viewed a less confrontational approach to the United States as in its interest, especially as two interrelated sources of threats from the Cold War had not dissipated—Pakistan and China. With the United States progressively de-hyphenating its approach to India and Pakistan, both the United States and India began to view China’s growing military and economic power as possibly one of the key threats to their security interests.¹⁸ This did not, however, translate into shared perceptions of the specific threat China posed, as well as the potential opportunities it offered.¹⁹

In the early 1990s, India’s Look East policy sought to expand the country’s economic and diplomatic presence beyond South Asia into East Asia. As part of this effort, India joined key East Asian multilateral institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting–Plus process.²⁰ The United States supported this Indian endeavor as part of a broader strategy of dealing with China’s expanding economic and military capacity.²¹ More recently, the 2015 “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” has been viewed as an attempt to broaden the regional canvas for the strategic partnership in order to address the potential

¹⁷ See, for example, C. Raja Mohan, “India and the Balance of Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2006, 17–32; and Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ For an argument for how the maintenance of U.S. primacy in global affairs has remained a consistent objective of U.S. grand strategy after the Cold War, see Patrick Porter, “Why America’s Grand Strategy Has Not Changed,” *International Security* 42, no. 4 (2018): 9–46.

¹⁹ The elements of both competition and cooperation in India-China relations in the early post–Cold War period are thoroughly discussed in John W. Garver, “China and South Asia,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 519, no. 1 (1992): 67–85. For an analysis of debates within the United States in the 1990s on aspects of both cooperating with and containing China, see David Shambaugh, “The United States and China: Cooperation or Confrontation?” *Current History* 96, no. 611 (1997): 241–45.

²⁰ G.V.C. Naidu, “Whither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia,” *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 2 (2004): 331–46.

²¹ See Evan S. Medeiros, “Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability,” *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2005): 145–67.

threat that China poses to both countries.²² China's "two ocean" strategy, encompassing Chinese interests in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, further cements the strategic salience of the Indo-Pacific framework, even as China continues to express considerable unease about its strategic function as employed by India and the United States.²³

Given the predominantly maritime orientation of the Indo-Pacific region, the United States and India have focused on China's actions in the maritime realm. They see China's behavior as a source of acute instability and have repeatedly stressed the need for China to adhere to a rules-based order, specifically by observing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Related to this issue, India's approach to freedom of navigation in the maritime domain has gradually evolved, inching closer to the United States' position, although certain earlier residual concerns still remain within Indian policy circles. Specifically, Indian domestic laws are perceived to be in contravention of the principles of UNCLOS, and misgivings also persist regarding the application of the United States' interpretation of "innocent passage" in the territorial waters and exclusive economic zones of littoral states.²⁴ Despite these lingering concerns, India has asserted the right of its navy to innocent passage in international waters in the South China Sea in response to Chinese warnings to stay clear of "Chinese waters."²⁵ However, India continues to refuse to participate in joint freedom of navigation patrols with the United States in the South China Sea.²⁶

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a source of significant concern for both India and the United States and is another domain of

²² "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region," White House, Office of the Press Secretary, January 25, 2015 ∞ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region>. For an analysis of the role of China in this "joint vision," see Nirmala Ganapathy, "India and the U.S. 'Vision' for Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Seen as 'Counter' to China," *Straits Times*, January 26, 2016.

²³ Robert D. Kaplan, "China's Two-Ocean Strategy," in *China's Arrival: A Strategic Framework for a Global Relationship*, ed. Abraham Denmark and Nirav Patel (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2009), 43–58.

²⁴ For an overview of the Indian position on freedom of navigation, see Iskander Rehman, "India, China and Differing Conceptions of the Maritime Order," Brookings Institution, June 2017.

²⁵ In 2011 the INS *Airavat*, in moving toward Nha Trang in southern Vietnam, was warned by Chinese radio message to stay away from "Chinese waters." In response, India's Ministry of External Affairs publicly declared that "India supports freedom of navigation in international waters, including in the South China Sea, and the right of passage in accordance with accepted principles of international law." See Indrani Bagchi, "China Harasses Indian Naval Ship on South China Sea," *Times of India*, September 2, 2011.

²⁶ No other country has joined the United States in these freedom of navigation operations to challenge China's territorial sea claims in the South China Sea. China has made clear that joining these patrols crosses a "red line" with respect to its core national interests. See Ankit Panda, "China's 'Red Line' Warning to Japan on South China Sea FONOPs Is Here to Stay," *Diplomat*, August 29, 2016.

potential converging strategies toward China. India has three main stated objections to BRI: that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor poses a threat to Indian sovereignty, that the initiative reduces the strategic options of countries involved with wider regional implications, and that it erodes good governance, rule of law, and financial transparency in these countries.²⁷

The United States under the Obama administration did not have a clear policy on BRI. Its New Silk Road initiative preceded BRI and was meant to stabilize Afghanistan by economically integrating the country into the immediate region via upgrading transportation and energy infrastructure links, in conjunction with India. The scheme did not have its intended effect on Afghanistan, and the Obama administration turned to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and later the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) initiative to offer alternatives to BRI.²⁸ The United States' participation in the TPP ended at the start of the Trump administration. The IPEC has its genesis in 2013 at the India-U.S. Strategic Dialogue when Secretary of State John Kerry outlined the potential of the initiative for development and investments as well as for trade and transit between the economies of South and Southeast Asia. The Trump administration resuscitated the New Silk Road and the IPEC in its maiden budget in May 2017. The U.S. State Department will look to bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, and the private sector to augment its budgetary requests for both of these projects.²⁹

Offering alternatives to BRI via initiatives like the New Silk Road and the IPEC for countries in the Indo-Pacific presents opportunities for developing greater convergence between the United States and India in the region. These alternatives have also shaped their broader approach to third countries. Japan shares the goal of managing the threat posed by China in the Indo-Pacific and, more specifically, is keen to augment efforts to advance alternatives to BRI. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) is a joint India-Japan project to build a sea corridor linking Africa with India and East Asia. Japan has committed \$20 billion to the project, which will prioritize development projects in health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agro-processing, disaster management, and skill enhancement. In a bid to demonstrate the inclusive nature of the corridor, in comparison to projects under the aegis

²⁷ Harsh V. Pant and Ritika Passi, "India's Response to China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Policy in Motion," *Asia Policy*, no. 24 (2017): 88.

²⁸ Daniel Klliman and Manpreet S. Anand, "Expanding U.S.-India Geoeconomic Cooperation amid China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Asian Forum*, December 23, 2017.

²⁹ "U.S. Revives Two Key Infrastructure Projects in Asia: Five Things to Know," *Indian Express*, May 24, 2017.

of BRI, the African Development Bank and several African countries are expected to be actively involved in the planning and implementation stages.³⁰ The AAGC, however, does not involve the United States specifically, just as the \$113 million U.S.-Japan-Australia Infrastructure Fund recently announced by the U.S. secretary of state in July 2018 does not include India (although more recent reports have suggested that India is in talks with the United States to join this initiative).³¹ These developments point to the present gap in crafting greater policy congruence between the United States and India in response to broader shared concerns about the BRI enterprise.

Beyond crafting alternatives to China's BRI, India and the United States have also pursued joint military activities in the Indo-Pacific in conjunction with Japan, specifically in the maritime domain. One high-profile example is the annual Malabar naval exercise, which began as a joint U.S.-India naval drill in 1992 and has evolved into an annual naval exercise involving aircraft carriers, search and rescue, and antisubmarine warfare and taking place across both the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Japan was invited to become a permanent member of the exercise in 2015, reflecting again the United States and India's strategy of involving Japan in their joint military exercises.³²

Besides Japan, Australia has also participated in the Malabar exercise (in 2007, together with Singapore). China's opposition to Australia's (and Singapore's) inclusion seems to have led to the absence of both countries since 2007. There has been a significant amount of debate concerning India's decision to not invite Australia for the latest round of the Malabar exercise. Some analysts have speculated that Indian opposition reflects a reluctance to offend China in the context of the Doklam standoff or Indian misgivings about Australia's seeming inability to demonstrate consistency in its policies toward China.³³ Despite Australia's current absence from the Malabar exercise, there are tentative signs of a developing security partnership built on the basis of broad U.S.-India shared interests and strategies, which stretch across the Indo-Pacific. One manifestation of this trend is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, comprising India, Japan, the United States,

³⁰ RIS, ERIA, and IDE-JETRO, "Asia Africa Growth Corridor: Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development," May 2017 ~ <http://www.eria.org/Asia-Africa-Growth-Corridor-Documents.pdf>.

³¹ Robert Delaney, "India in Talks to Join U.S. Global Development Partnership Countering China's Belt and Road Plan," *South China Morning Post*, September 25, 2018.

³² Gurpreet S. Khurana, "Malabar Naval Exercises: Trends and Tribulations," National Maritime Foundation, Issue Brief, August 5, 2014.

³³ See Abhijit Singh, "India-Australia Relations: Getting over the Quad Blues," Observer Research Foundation, Commentary, June 19, 2017; and Shashank Joshi, "Malabar 17 Exercise: The China Subtext," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, September 26, 2018.

and Australia. It was first conceived in 2007 as an extension to the already existing Trilateral Security Dialogue between the United States, Japan, and Australia. However, Australia unilaterally announced its departure from the grouping in 2009 after a change of government. In 2017 the Quad was resuscitated with a working-level meeting among senior officials on the sidelines of the annual ASEAN summit and the East Asia Summit, with a second meeting in June 2018 in Singapore on the sidelines of an ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting.³⁴

The Malabar naval exercises and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue are the military and diplomatic dimensions of the pursuit of congruent strategies in managing the threat posed by China. More specifically, they are products of the United States' and India's efforts to expand their converging approaches with other countries in the Indo-Pacific, namely Japan and Australia. Beyond these two countries, the United States and India have also attempted to pursue congruent policies toward other states in the Indo-Pacific. Indonesia, geographically located at the intersection of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the largest state in Southeast Asia, is one such state they have attempted to engage as part of their broader partnership to manage the threat posed by China. Indonesia's response will be scrutinized in the next section as well.

THE REACTION OF KEY INDO-PACIFIC STATES TO THE INDIA-U.S. PARTNERSHIP

The gradual transformation of the India-U.S. relationship and the emerging concept of the Indo-Pacific has prompted a variety of responses from states within this region. The responses range along a continuum from apprehension to support. The key states discussed here will be China, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia. These states have been chosen because they are the four most influential countries, besides the United States and India, in shaping the geostrategic discourse on the Indo-Pacific region.

China's response to the strategic convergence between India and the United States and the idea of the Indo-Pacific has been one of apprehension. This is unsurprising, given that one of the key drivers of India-U.S. strategic convergence has been their shared anxiety regarding current and future Chinese behavior and intentions across both the Indian and Pacific Oceans. China has adopted a mixed strategy in response to closer relations between

³⁴ Ankit Panda, "U.S., Japan, India, and Australia Hold Working-Level Quadrilateral Meeting on Regional Cooperation," *Diplomat*, November 13, 2017.

the two countries. First, it has stressed how their strategic convergence against a rising but “peaceful” China increases the risk of conflict rather than diminishes it, with India potentially being drawn into an armed conflict between the United States and China. Second, it has sought to delegitimize the utility of the Indo-Pacific concept by emphasizing the need for regional states in East Asia to negotiate differences among themselves without the interference of extraregional states like India and the United States, thus decoupling the Pacific and Indian Oceans.³⁵

Japan, on the other hand, has demonstrated strong support for attempts by the United States and India to forge a greater strategic partnership. This is similarly unsurprising, given the nature of Japan’s relationship with China. Despite its treaty alliance with the United States, Japan has had deep concerns about the durability of the U.S. commitment to East Asia.³⁶ India’s growing defense relationship with the United States has provided the impetus for burgeoning military and diplomatic ties between Japan and India. Mirroring U.S. support for India playing a larger role in East Asia, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was one of the earlier articulators of the Indo-Pacific concept. Japan’s interest in open and unobstructed sea lines of communication for its energy supplies against both traditional and nontraditional threats that traverse the Indian Ocean to East Asia informs its approach to the region. The establishment of Japan’s first and only overseas naval base in Djibouti and its active involvement in antipiracy operations in the Indian Ocean underline this imperative.³⁷ In the traditional security sphere, Japan views the Indo-Pacific concept as important for building a more positive balance of power in East Asia against growing Chinese threats. In conjunction with U.S. support, it aims to facilitate India’s gradual emergence as a significant strategic actor in regional geopolitics.³⁸

Australia, another U.S. treaty ally, has viewed the prospects of growing strategic convergence between the United States and India in broadly positive terms. Australian policymakers have long viewed China as a source of both

³⁵ Chengxin Pan, “The ‘Indo-Pacific’ and Geopolitical Anxieties about China’s Rise in the Asian Regional Order,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 4 (2014): 453–69.

³⁶ Under the Trump administration such Japanese fears have been heightened. See Jeffrey W. Knopf, “Security Assurances and Proliferation Risks in the Trump Administration,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017): 26–34; and Matteo Dian, “The Strategic Value of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Consequences of Abandoning It for the U.S. Role in Asia,” *International Politics* 54, no. 5 (2017): 583–97.

³⁷ Ra Mason, “Djibouti and Beyond: Japan’s First Post-War Overseas Base and the Recalibration of Risk in Securing Enhanced Military Capabilities,” *Asian Security* 14, no. 3 (2018): 339–57.

³⁸ Madhuchanda Ghosh, “India’s Strategic Convergence with Japan in the Changing Indo-Pacific Geopolitical Landscape,” *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 392, August 2017.

anxiety and opportunity.³⁹ They regard the prospect of an India increasingly aligned with the United States, desirous and capable of performing a major strategic role in the Pacific Ocean, as a positive development.⁴⁰ As in the case of Japan, closer India-U.S. strategic ties have resulted in deeper military and diplomatic interactions between India and Australia. Australian leaders were also early supporters of the Indo-Pacific regional concept because Australia straddles the Indian and Pacific Oceans and has significant interests in both regions. In the Indian Ocean, Australia has, like the United States, backed India to play the role of net security provider, especially as China's military footprint has steadily grown. In the Pacific Ocean, however, Australia's approach is less clear. There seem to be some concerns within sections of the Australian political class, as well as in policy circles, that a joint India-U.S. military strategy against China in the Pacific Ocean could prove counterproductive. While Chinese actions in the South China Sea have concerned Australia, it has also been mindful of Chinese perceptions of a nascent anti-China military coalition. Australia has therefore gone through periods, especially under the Rudd government, where it was wary of Chinese reactions to Australia being party to attempts by the United States, India, and Japan to present a joint military response to China's actions in the South China Sea and the wider Pacific Ocean.⁴¹ The current Australian government seems to have shed some of those apprehensions, as seen in its request to be part of the annual Malabar naval exercise as well as its gradually growing military ties with India since 2017.⁴²

Indonesia, like Australia, is both an Indian Ocean and a Pacific Ocean littoral state. Straddling both oceans, Indonesia has historically

³⁹ For an analysis of official Australian strategic perspectives of China over the last 50 years, see Ric Smith, "The Long Rise of China in Australian Defence Strategy," Lowy Institute, Perspectives, April 2009. For a pro-China view, see Robert John Carr, "Pragmatism Rules in China Relations," *Australian Financial Review*, March 23, 2015. Carr was Australia's foreign minister from 2012 to 2013 and heads the Australia-China Institute at the University of Sydney. He is known for his pro-China views within Australia.

⁴⁰ Australia's 2016 *Defence White Paper* states that "India is a rising major power and Australia welcomes its increasingly active role in Indo-Pacific security [and] India's 'Act East' policy provides opportunities for greater bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific particularly through our common membership of the East Asia Summit and ADMM-Plus." See Department of Defence (Australia), 2016 *Defence White Paper* (Canberra, 2016), 134–35 ~ <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>.

⁴¹ See Greg Sheridan, "Labor's Damaging Quad Qualms Are an Insult to India," *Australian*, November 18, 2017.

⁴² To a significant extent, this reassessment of the China threat has been driven by details of the apparent attempts by the Chinese government to influence the political class and academia within Australia. See Tom Westbrook, "Australia, Citing Concerns over China, Cracks Down on Foreign Political Influence," Reuters, December 5, 2017. For a detailed exposition of this point, see Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia* (Yarra: Hardie Grant, 2018).

been conscious of its archipelagic status and interests beyond Southeast Asia. The notion of a single strategic space, the Indo-Pacific, fits neatly into the country's recent policy vision.⁴³ The Indo-Pacific concept allows Indonesia to maintain its key role in East Asia and the Pacific Ocean while enhancing its visibility and role within the Indian Ocean as befits the world's fourth most populous country. More specifically, Indonesia views this idea as key in bridging together various multilateral frameworks across the two regions—namely ASEAN, the East Asia Summit, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Indonesia's perception of U.S.-India strategic convergence against a rising Chinese threat across the two oceans is largely positive. Reflecting the majority view of ASEAN member states, Indonesia perceives India's deeper involvement in the strategic affairs of East Asia as a positive measure toward developing a more stable balance of power in the region.⁴⁴ Yet, although Indonesia perceives the value of greater security cooperation between India and the United States, it is wary of arrangements such as the Quad and is reluctant to participate or publicly endorse regional or subregional arrangements that exclude China.⁴⁵ It is also suspicious of any Indo-Pacific grouping driven largely by the great powers, which could undermine the principle of "ASEAN centrality." Even as it recognizes the value of India-U.S. strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific to balance the threat posed by China, Indonesia is simultaneously wary of a great power-led regional order.⁴⁶ Instead, it believes that India-U.S. strategic convergence needs to be mediated by an inclusive regional order led by ASEAN.⁴⁷

⁴³ "Indonesia: Poros maritim dunia" [Indonesia: Global Maritime Fulcrum], Ministry of Maritime Coordination (Indonesia), October 18, 2017 ~ <http://presidenri.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/20171018-Kemenko-Maritim-3th-Jokowi-JK-cetak.pdf>.

⁴⁴ In May 2018 the two countries agreed on a shared vision that reaffirms the "convergences and complementarities in the region between India's Act East Policy and Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR), and Indonesian Ocean Policy and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision, while reaffirming the importance of the ASEAN centrality and unit." See "Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," Government of India, Prime Minister's Office, Press Information Bureau, May 30, 2018.

⁴⁵ Euan Graham, "The Quad Deserves its Second Chance," in "Debating the Quad," ed. Andrew Carr, *Centre of Gravity*, March 2018, 4–7.

⁴⁶ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "Indonesia's Vision of Regional Order in East Asia amid U.S.-China Rivalry: Continuity and Change," *Asia Policy* 13, no. 2 (2018), 57–63.

⁴⁷ Endy M. Bayuni, "Indonesia Takes Ownership of Indo-Pacific Geopolitics," *Jakarta Post*, January 17, 2018.

CONCLUSION:
CHALLENGES TO INDIA-U.S. STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE

Postulations about the strategic convergence between India and the United States to a significant degree drive assessments of the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region. In the Indian Ocean, India aims to establish and maintain its position of strategic primacy as an Indian Ocean state.⁴⁸ The United States supports the primacy of India in its role as the net security provider in this region. Simultaneously, India appreciates the dominant role of the United States as an extraregional power in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁹ In the Pacific Ocean, India similarly views the United States' dominant position as a positive, while the United States encourages India's growing role as a significant extraregional actor.⁵⁰ In this context, Indian defense cooperation with certain states in Southeast Asia, especially Singapore and Vietnam, has grown over the last two years, although the scale of India's Look East engagement is still viewed as underwhelming.⁵¹

The first challenge relates to building and maintaining a regional order in the Indo-Pacific by constructing sustainable institutions that include a broad coalition of states. The Quad is the only discernible Indo-Pacific multilateral security collective. While it might be too early to make concrete judgements on the durability and effectiveness of the recently revived dialogue, two problems are clear. The first is the disparity within the Quad with respect to the level of threat China poses and the strategies to be employed to deal with this threat. The collapse of the original Quad is proof of this inherent problem, which stems from the four participating countries' differing levels of economic engagement with China as well as changes in their domestic politics. The second problem with the Quad is its structural inability in its current form

⁴⁸ Manjeet Pardesi, "Order in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region: Indian Hegemony or Indian Primacy?" in *International Security in the Asia-Pacific: Transcending ASEAN towards Transitional Polycentrism*, ed. Alan Chong (Cham: Palgrave, 2018), 195–216.

⁴⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi, *The U.S. Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asia's Evolving Balance of Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 38–59.

⁵⁰ Stephen Burgess, "The U.S. Pivot to Asia and Renewal of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership," *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 4 (2015): 367–79.


⁵¹ In 2016, India announced that it will extend a \$500 million line of credit to Vietnam for it to purchase defense equipment, largely to be spent on coast guard patrol boats as part of the Comprehensive Strategic Agreement in 2007. Singapore and India have also upgraded their defense relations, specifically in the maritime realm as part of their Defence Cooperation Agreement, which allows the Indian Navy greater access to Singapore's naval facilities as well as provides for more joint exercises between the two navies. See "India and Vietnam: A 'Strategic Partnership' in the Making," S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Policy Brief, April 2018; and Nirmala Ganapathy, "India and Singapore Deepen Defence Ties with Naval Agreement," *Straits Times*, November 29, 2017.

to expand beyond these four states in the Indo-Pacific. Other key regional states, especially the ASEAN states, will not participate in the Quad as it is presently constituted due to China's likely exclusion from any expansion of members.⁵² The perception that the Quad's genesis was driven by the need to contain the threat from China renders its possible entry into the Quad unlikely at this point. The only means by which China, and correspondingly other key actors, could join the dialogue is by expanding its scope and aims, thereby making it a complex and multidimensional institution rather than the single issue grouping it is presently perceived to represent. This does not necessitate relinquishing the management of the threat posed by China as a goal of the grouping; rather, this goal needs to be pursued more subtly within a medley of several other goals among a broader coalition of states.⁵³

The second challenge is the apparent divergence in relative capability and strategies between the United States and India in the Pacific Ocean. The United States consistently has supported a bigger military role for India in the Pacific Ocean, and India increasingly has articulated a congruent vision while gradually augmenting its naval capability to match such ambitions. However, there is an important divergence in specific strategies between the two partners in the Pacific Ocean. India, mindful of its relative military capabilities, is cautious of challenging China's core interests, specifically in the South China Sea.⁵⁴ This partly explains its reluctance to engage in joint freedom of navigation patrols in those waters. Beyond an appreciation of its relative military capabilities in the Pacific Ocean, India deems the Indian Ocean as a clear priority over the Pacific. Challenging China in the South China Sea risks an escalation of hostilities and possible transfer of armed conflict to the land domain. The recent Doklam episode demonstrates China's ability to challenge India vigorously along their shared border, and inviting another standoff as a result of provoking China in the South China Sea would not seem prudent. Thus, even with India's growing military capability, the Pacific will remain a second-tier strategic priority.

The third challenge relates to the implications of the diverging strategic geographies of the Indo-Pacific discussed in the first section. The United States' view of the Indo-Pacific approximates the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of operations, spanning from the west coast of India in the Indian Ocean to the

⁵² Richard McGregor, "With China or Without? ASEAN Leaders Wary about Indo-Pacific Cooperation Plans," *Nikkei Asian Review*, April 11, 2018.

⁵³ Tanvi Madan, "The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the 'Quad,'" *War on the Rocks*, November 16, 2017  <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad>.

⁵⁴ Ian Hall, "India's Responses to U.S.-China Rivalry in the South China Sea," in *U.S.-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, ed. Huiyun Feng and Kai He (London: Routledge, 2018), 65–81.

west coast of the United States in the Pacific Ocean. India, by contrast, regards “Indo” to denote the whole of the Indian Ocean, stretching from South Africa to Australia. This divergence in strategic mapping is significant because it signals divergent perceptions and strategies between the two countries.⁵⁵ This is especially apparent in their strategies toward specific states in the Persian Gulf, especially Iran. India’s joint development of Iran’s Chabahar port is a key aspect of its broader strategy of establishing Indian primacy in the Indian Ocean in response to China’s development of ports at Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka as well as its logistics facility in Djibouti. The Trump administration’s withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the reinstatement of economic sanctions on Iran have negative implications for India’s bilateral relationship with Iran. More specifically, the Trump administration has announced a “zero exemption” policy toward countries and companies buying Iranian oil and has publicly stated its expectations that India will reduce its heavy dependence on oil imports from Iran.⁵⁶ These developments herald a possibly sharp divergence between the United States and India on the role of Iran in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁷ Although managing China’s growing strategic reach in the Indo-Pacific might be a broad, congruent aim for both countries, the Iran example demonstrates possible differences in pursuing this strategy.

In sum, there are three key challenges confronting the prospects of strategic convergence between the United States and India in the Indo-Pacific. One challenge relates to differences over the geographic scope of the Indo-Pacific and reveals divergences in strategic priorities between the two countries, potentially undermining broader policy convergence. A second issue concerns the difficulty for both countries in managing China’s rise within seemingly more inclusive institutions and processes. Doing so will be vital for obtaining greater support from other key Indo-Pacific states. Finally, the United States and India do not demonstrate strong common positions in key issue areas vis-à-vis China in the Indo-Pacific, presenting major obstacles for coordinating military and diplomatic strategies. ◆

⁵⁵ Alyssa Ayres, “The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy Needs More Indian Ocean,” Expert Brief, Council on Foreign Relations, May 25, 2018.

⁵⁶ Michelle Nichols, “U.S. Envoy Haley Tells Modi Important to Cut Imports of Iranian Oil,” Reuters, June 27, 2018.

⁵⁷ Rorry Daniels, “Strategic Competition in South Asia: Gwadar, Chabahar, and the Risks of Infrastructure Development,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 35, no. 2 (2013): 93–100. More recently, the United States has agreed to exempt Iran’s Chabahar port from sanctions imposed on Iran and to allow eight countries, including India, an exemption from the ban on buying Iranian oil. These waivers, however, are temporary, and India still must reduce the amount of oil procured from Iran under the agreement. For the longer-term negative repercussions for the India-U.S. relationship of the Trump administration’s approach toward Iran, see Raymond E. Vickery Jr., “Even with a Waiver, Will Iran Sanctions Chill U.S.-India Ties?” *Diplomat*, November 7, 2018.

SPECIAL ISSUE

Dealing with Differences: The Iran Factor in India-U.S. Relations

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KEYWORDS: INDIA; UNITED STATES; IRAN; MIDDLE EAST POLICY; SANCTIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article examines the India-U.S. strategic partnership and argues that the Iran factor is not as big an impediment to the bilateral relationship as is often assumed.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The India-U.S. relationship is not as sensitive to the Iran factor as is frequently depicted. Both sides are accommodative of each other's strategic interests and have so far taken the long view when dealing with their differences to avoid major disruptions in ties. India, being the regional power with global aspirations in this partnership, is additionally willing to adapt and absorb certain costs, as seen during the U.S. sanctions against Iranian oil imports in 2012, and more recently in 2018, in return for U.S. accommodation of its interests in the region, primarily the Chabahar port project that is closely tied to Afghanistan's economic security. To resolve differences, the two countries conduct bilateral negotiations in private at the highest levels of leadership and work to cultivate an understanding on how each side sells disagreements to their respective domestic audiences.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- A more transactional U.S. administration should not expect India to abandon its strategic autonomy in rhetoric. However, in practice, India has proved willing to meet the U.S. halfway, as demonstrated in the case of Iran.
- India's investment in the Chabahar port and trilateral connectivity initiative contributes to Afghanistan's economic security and should be viewed as complementing U.S. strategy in South Asia. India's presence in Iran also benefits their combined balancing strategy against China in the region.
- The India-U.S. strategic partnership would benefit greatly from regular, direct engagement over differences. As the two countries begin bilateral consultations on the Middle East, dealing with disagreements, rather than sidestepping them, would enable each side to more clearly understand how the other thinks and operates and to leverage their complementary strengths.

The India-U.S. bilateral relationship has fundamentally transformed in the span of two decades into a strategic partnership defined by closely aligned interests. Ever since former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee suggested the two countries were “natural allies,” a strong consensus has emerged across successive administrations in both Washington and New Delhi to build the relationship, in part as a counterweight to China’s rise.¹ This commitment was best captured by former U.S. president Barack Obama, who stressed that the India-U.S. relationship would become “one of the defining partnerships” of the 21st century in his address to a joint session of the Indian parliament in 2010.² The recent adoption of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” strategy by the Trump administration was a reaffirmation of this vision. India and the United States still have no formal alliance, however, though since 2005 their interests have been codified within a “strategic partnership.” As noted in the introduction to this special issue, strategic partnerships, not alliances, are a defining feature of the post-Cold War world.³ They are convenient tools that help states evade the challenges of managing an alliance and thus capture the “ambiguity of the strategic landscape” today quite well.⁴ Since 1998, India has signed over 30 strategic partnerships varying in content and relevance, with the one with the United States being the most comprehensive.

When it comes to evaluating the India-U.S. partnership, observers have focused a great deal on what brings the two states together and less so on their differences and how they manage them. Some of the most severe policy disagreements between the two emerge from well within India’s immediate neighborhood and include Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.⁵ This region,

¹ Malini Parthasarathy, “India, U.S. Natural Allies: Vajpayee,” *Hindu*, September 9, 2000 ~ <https://www.thehindu.com/2000/09/09/stories/01090005.htm>; and Condoleezza Rice, “Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000, 56.

² “Remarks by the President to the Joint Session of the Indian Parliament in New Delhi, India,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 8, 2010 ~ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/remarks-president-joint-session-indian-parliament-new-delhi-india>.

³ Walter Ladwig and Anit Mukherjee, “India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership,” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 1 (2019).

⁴ Rajesh Basrur and Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, “A Time of Strategic Partnerships,” *Hindu*, September 21, 2017 ~ <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-time-of-strategic-partnerships/article19722970.ece>; Rohan Mukherjee, “Japan’s Strategic Outreach to India and the Prospects of a Japan-India Alliance,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 835–59; and Rajesh Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged,” *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (2017): 15.

⁵ India’s immediate neighborhood as defined by the Modi government extends from Iran in the west to Myanmar in the east. S. Jaishankar (IISS Fullerton Lecture, Singapore, July 20, 2015) ~ http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25493/IISS_Fullerton_Lecture_by_Foreign_Secretary_in_Singapore.

interestingly, falls outside the U.S. conception of the Indo-Pacific but well within India's notion of it.⁶

This article focuses specifically on Iran and the oft-cited disagreement between India and the United States over the former's engagement with the Middle Eastern state. After the Trump administration withdrew from the Iranian nuclear deal and re-imposed sanctions, commentators and journalists, particularly on the Indian side, were quick to condemn "U.S. pressure" to reduce India's dependence on Iranian oil and predict a growing "disconnect" within the India-U.S. strategic partnership.⁷ This reaction was not entirely surprising. Bilateral engagement has previously faced at least two rounds of controversial disagreement over Iran since the strategic partnership was forged—first, when the George W. Bush administration was finalizing the nuclear cooperation agreement with India in 2005 and, second, when the Obama administration installed a robust sanctions regime to deter energy trade with Iran from 2012.

With the India-U.S. partnership yet again dogged by questions of reliability over differences on Iran, it is an opportune moment to assess the severity of this disagreement and how truly sensitive India-U.S. ties are to it. In short, is the Iran factor as big an impediment to the bilateral relationship as is often assumed? This article takes a deep dive into the Iran factor in this partnership from 2001 and finds that, in fits and starts, the two countries have navigated their differences over time to some degree and managed to accommodate the issue without much disruption to their broader strategic partnership. This management has involved a range of methods. First, accommodative bargaining between Washington and New Delhi in which India agreed to reduce oil imports from Iran resulted in the United States acknowledging its interest in the Chabahar port project. Second, India, as the regional power in the partnership, has demonstrated a willingness to incur costs, both reputational and financial, in order to accommodate U.S.

⁶ India's definition of the Indo-Pacific includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Indian Ocean islands to its west. The United States, by contrast, limits the region to the mandate of the Indo-Pacific Command. Narendra Modi (keynote address at Shangri La Dialogue, Singapore, June 1, 2018) ~ <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=179711>; and "USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command ~ <http://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility>.

⁷ "Iran Oil a Big Issue between India, U.S.," Press Trust of India, June 28, 2018 ~ <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/iran-oil-big-issue-between-677689.html>; Suhasini Haidar, "The Deepening Disconnect," *Hindu*, June 29, 2018 ~ <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-deepening-disconnect/article24281893.ece>; Girish Shahane, "India Could Show the U.S. Some Spine on Iran, but It Would Rather Flaunt Muscle at Home," *Scroll*, July 5, 2018 ~ <https://scroll.in/article/885282/india-could-show-the-us-some-spine-on-iran-but-it-would-rather-flaunt-muscle-at-home>; and Mohammed Ayoub, "Keeping Friends Close," *Hindu*, July 30, 2018 ~ <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/keeping-friends-close/article24547361.ece>.

interests vis-à-vis Iran. Third is a management style featuring high-level involvement from both sides, private disagreements, and the cultivation of an understanding by each side of how the other sells these disagreements to its domestic political audience. Going forward, the two countries will need to leverage their differences to develop complementary approaches, especially in the Middle East.

The article is divided into four main parts:

- ≈ pp. 99–108 detail Indian and U.S. interests vis-à-vis Iran and identify policies that converge or diverge between the two partners.
- ≈ pp. 108–14 analyze the management of their disagreement over Iran and highlight certain behaviors that enable both countries to accommodate each other's interests with some success.
- ≈ pp. 114–17 discuss contemporary developments and identify obstacles that lie ahead in the management of the Iran issue at a time when India and the United States have begun regular coordination on the Middle East.
- ≈ pp. 117–18 provide a short conclusion.

UNDERSTANDING INDIAN AND U.S. POLICIES TOWARD IRAN

India and the United States adopted diverging approaches toward Iran during the Cold War. The United States initially viewed Iran as a key regional proxy to stave off Soviet influence in the region, while Iran upset India by signing the Baghdad Pact (later renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO) and supporting Pakistan in its 1965 and 1971 wars against India.⁸ The Islamic Revolution of 1979 overturned U.S. plans and set the adversarial tone that defines the U.S.-Iran relationship today. The revolution, by contrast, was viewed positively in India as an attempt to break free from the influence of the great powers. Iran's subsequent withdrawal from CENTO and support for the Non-Aligned Movement were both welcomed by New Delhi.⁹ However, Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's focus on exporting the Islamic Revolution throughout the region and subsequent support of Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute deterred relations with India over the next decade.

⁸ Sujata Ashwarya Cheema, *India-Iran Relations: Progress, Problems and Prospects* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2016), 31.

⁹ Ministry of External Affairs (India), *Annual Report 1979–1980* (New Delhi, 1980), 22.

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, India was confronted with a severe balance-of-payments crisis. These events transformed New Delhi's worldview, refocusing its attention on the Middle East. Improved relations between New Delhi and Tehran set the stage for two key agreements that still define the India-Iran strategic partnership: the Tehran Declaration (2001) and the New Delhi Declaration (2003). Today, Iran is important to India's energy security, its plans for improving connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the security and stability of its neighborhood, particularly Afghanistan.¹⁰

U.S. policy on Iran in the post-Cold War period has been firmly focused on the latter's sponsorship of terrorism and its nuclear program. Successive administrations have targeted Iran's support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, its role in the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and human rights violations carried out by the regime.¹¹ One significant departure in this otherwise acrimonious relationship was Iran's assistance in 2001 to the U.S.-led coalition in overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks and its key role in brokering the new Afghan government through the Bonn process.

The following discussion will first describe contemporary Indian engagement with Iran and assess what is and is not working and why progress has been slow. It will then examine the U.S. approach during the same period.

Evaluating Indian Interests

India's ties to the Middle East have traditionally focused on energy trade and its sizeable diaspora. The region is a source of more than 60% of India's oil and gas imports and, therefore, critical to its energy security.¹² It is also home to 8.9 million Indians who contribute around \$40 billion in remittances every year and account for roughly 3% of India's GDP.¹³ India's relationship with Iran remains largely transactional—i.e., a buyer-seller relationship that

¹⁰ "India-Iran Joint Statement—'Civilisational Connect, Contemporary Context' during the Visit of Prime Minister to Iran," Ministry of External Affairs (India), May 23, 2016 ~ http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26843/India_Iran_Joint_Statement_quot_Civilisational_Connect_Contemporary_Contextquot_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Iran.

¹¹ White House, "Ceasing U.S. Participation in the JCPOA and Taking Additional Action to Counter Iran's Malign Influence and Deny Iran All Paths to a Nuclear Weapon," Presidential Memoranda, May 8, 2018 ~ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/ceasing-u-s-participation-jcpoa-taking-additional-action-counter-irans-malign-influence-deny-iran-paths-nuclear-weapon>.

¹² "India's Oil Import from Middle East Rises to 59%," Press Trust of India, April 25, 2016 ~ <https://www.livemint.com/Industry/9n0jzqdp24PmBB13sjRYQJ/Indias-oil-import-from-Middle-East-rises-to-59.html>.

¹³ "With 16 Million, India Tops World in Number of Migrants Abroad," Indo-Asian News Service, December 19, 2017.

is heavily reliant on energy trade. Officials on both sides frequently allude to “historical and civilizational links,” but such reiterations are misleading given the limited nature of their actual bilateral engagement. Such romanticization of the relationship detracts from its low levels of institutionalization. This is in sharp contrast to India’s other relationships in the Middle East with the Arab Gulf countries. Additionally, a mere four thousand Indians live in Iran, whereas Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates host close to three million Indians each.¹⁴

India’s interests in Iran today are primarily economic and center on two pillars: energy and connectivity. Bilateral trade stood at \$12.88 billion in 2016–17, with \$10.50 billion in imports, mainly crude oil.¹⁵ Iran is India’s third-largest oil supplier after Saudi Arabia and Iraq. When the Obama administration enforced unilateral sanctions, the country dropped to seventh place in 2013–14 (6% of Indian oil imports) from second place in 2008–9 (17%). India is also Iran’s second-largest oil customer after China.

The India-Iran relationship on energy, however, has been fraught with bitter negotiations and stalemate even after the Iranian nuclear deal.¹⁶ For instance, India drastically reduced imports from Iran in 2017 in an attempt to force it to give the development rights to the Iranian gas field Farzad B.¹⁷ Though India has not officially pulled out of the project, the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline that made news for two decades is no longer on its radar, owing to security and commercial concerns. Negotiations for a direct undersea liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline between Iran and India have not made significant progress either.¹⁸ With sanctions against Iran reapplied in November 2018, private and public Indian firms have had to take stock of the risks of doing business in Iran because their stakes in the United States are higher.

¹⁴ Ministry of External Affairs (India), “Population of Overseas Indians,” December 2016 ~ http://mea.gov.in/images/attach/NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf.

¹⁵ Exports stood at \$2.38 billion, reflecting a trade deficit. Ministry of Commerce and Industry (India), Department of Commerce, Export Import Data Bank ~ <http://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/iecnt.asp>.

¹⁶ Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, “Tehran Talks Tough with India,” *LobeLog*, June 24, 2015 ~ <https://lobelog.com/tehran-talks-tough-with-india>.

¹⁷ The field was exclusively assigned to an Indian firm, which discovered it in 2008. However, Iran opened it up to international bidding, claiming that the Indians failed to deliver on financial commitments. Nidhi Verma, “India Cuts Oil Import Plans from Iran by a Quarter over Gas Field Row,” *Reuters*, May 2, 2017 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-iran-oil/india-cuts-oil-import-plans-from-iran-by-a-quarter-over-gas-field-row-idUSKBN17Y1DR>.

¹⁸ “Undersea Iran-India Gas Pipeline Can Bring Cheaper LNG to India,” *Press Trust of India*, September 5, 2017 ~ <https://www.livemint.com/Industry/wj8PfrvGGyAfh1p8aoPX9K/Undersea-IranIndia-gas-pipeline-can-bring-cheaper-LNG-to-I.html>.

Second, connectivity is another area of economic interest that the Modi government has prioritized in its engagement with Iran. The India-Iran joint statement released during Modi's visit to Tehran in 2016 asserts that strategic connectivity projects will define the India-Iran strategic partnership and their renewed engagement after the Iranian nuclear deal.¹⁹ Indian investments totaling \$2 billion would be pumped into the Chabahar port located in southeast Iran and the proposed rail links connecting the port to Afghanistan. These infrastructure projects, first discussed in 2003, would "open a new chapter in bilateral cooperation and regional connectivity," given that the port would be further linked to Afghanistan via road through a trilateral transit agreement between India, Iran, and Afghanistan. This route has been operational using existing infrastructure since October 2017, but with the return of U.S. sanctions, proposed investments for newer projects face numerous delays. India's plans to upgrade the port, for example, require the participation of a private Indian firm, but companies remain risk averse and hesitant to invest in Iran.

Third, India-Iran military interactions are of a very limited nature. Bilateral defense cooperation between the two has not advanced beyond infrequent naval ship visits and irregular meetings between the national security councils. The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation in 2003 in order "to explore opportunities for cooperation in defense and agreed areas, including training and exchange of visits."²⁰ The first Indo-Iranian naval exercise was held in March 2003, but with India moving closer to the United States and the latter sanctioning Iran, defense interactions had become minimal by 2009. After the Iranian nuclear deal, India and Iran agreed to convene a joint working group on defense under their defense secretaries, but, at the time of writing, it has not met. Their national security councils have also not met since 2015. On the matter of defense exchanges, the two sides have not moved beyond occasional "port calls by naval ships, training, and exchanges of defense delegations."²¹ Toward broader security cooperation, however, Iran is an active member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium that focus

¹⁹ "India-Iran Joint Statement"

²⁰ "The Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Iran "The New Delhi Declaration," Ministry of External Affairs (India), January 25, 2003 ~ <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7544/The+Republic+of+India+and+the+Islamic+Republic+of+Iran+quotThe+New+Delhi+Declarationquot>

²¹ "India-Iran Joint Statement during Visit of the President of Iran to India," Ministry of External Affairs (India), February 17, 2018 ~ <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29495/IndiaIran+Joint+Statement+during+Visit+of+the+President+of+Iran+to+India+February+17+2018>.

on maritime security and safety, particularly humanitarian assistance and disaster relief within the Indian Ocean region.

Additionally, there has been growing dissonance in India-Iran collaboration in their shared neighborhood over the past decade owing to their changing strategic priorities. For instance, there is a clear disconnect today between Indian and Iranian interests in Afghanistan. Political and security coordination between the two countries is no longer as close as it was during 2001, when both states backed the Northern Alliance to overthrow the Taliban government. Iran's policy of sheltering and engaging with the Taliban since then has not been viewed favorably by India.²² On Afghan strategy, New Delhi has been extremely hesitant to endorse the peace talks with the Taliban, claiming that the process imparts equal standing to the elected government in Kabul and the terrorist organization.²³ India and Iran also do not see eye to eye on the continued U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Tehran, unlike New Delhi, sees Washington as the problem, not the solution. Despite the constant refrain of bilateral cooperation to secure Afghanistan's future by leaders on both sides, not much progress has been made on actionable strategies.²⁴

On the subject of Iran's proactive engagement with terrorist groups, an attack in 2012 that targeted Israeli diplomats in New Delhi was directly linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps by Indian investigative agencies.²⁵ Yet, in a display of diplomatic restraint (or hedging, according to some analysts), the Indian government refrained from publicly implicating the Iranian regime at the time. Iran's policy of allowing members of al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to transit its territory has added further cause for worry in New Delhi. Media reports suggest that Tehran has been "less than helpful" on investigations, particularly in the case of 22 Indians

²² On Iran's engagement of the Taliban, see Emma Graham-Harrison, "Afghan Taliban Send Delegation to Iran," *Guardian*, June 3, 2013 ~ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/03/Afghan-taliban-send-delegation-iran>; and "Taliban Hails Iran Visit as Major Political Achievement," Press TV, June 14, 2013 ~ <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/06/14/309028/taliban-hails-iran-visit-as-achievement>. For India's view, see Avinash Paliwal, "New Alignments, Old Battlefield: Revisiting India's Role in Afghanistan," *Carnegie India*, June 15, 2017 ~ <https://carnegieindia.org/2017/06/15/new-alignments-old-battlefield-revisiting-india-s-role-in-afghanistan-pub-71272>.

²³ Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the U.S. Withdrawal* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017), 266.

²⁴ Author's interviews with analysts at the Centre for Strategic Research, the research arm of the Expediency Council that advises Iran's supreme leader, Tehran, October 2015.

²⁵ Neeraj Chauhan, "Cops Name Iran Military Arm for Attack on Israeli Diplomat," *Times of India*, July 20, 2012 ~ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Cops-name-Iran-military-arm-for-attack-on-Israeli-diplomat/articleshow/15263013.cms>.

who crossed through Iran in 2016 to join the ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan.²⁶ Iran's dealings with numerous terrorist networks have thus brought about a significant shift in India's position on this matter since 2003, when New Delhi strongly defended Tehran against similar allegations.²⁷

A final and greatly controversial security consideration for India has been Iran's nuclear program. Since the early 2000s, New Delhi has supported Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and encouraged a diplomatic resolution to proliferation concerns associated with the program.²⁸ Nevertheless, India consistently voted against Iran in resolutions passed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2005, 2006, and 2009. The United States applied visible pressure on India to vote against Iran in 2005.²⁹ However, by the third vote in 2009, Iran's intentions had been flagged by the IAEA, and the UN Security Council finally reached agreement on the issue. Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh reiterated that "Iran should not go in for nuclear weapon or all that is inconsistent with obligations as member of NPT [Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty]."³⁰ Key members of the Singh government involved in the decision-making process at the time maintain that the U.S. intervention was only "one of the inputs" that influenced India's choice to vote against Iran in the IAEA.³¹ Shyam Saran, who was foreign secretary during the first two of the three votes, has suggested that other critical considerations included Pakistan's links to the Iranian nuclear program (in addition to those with North Korea) and a desire for "full accounting by Iran to the IAEA."

This rationale was carried forward even after the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal was completed. By 2010, when it was certain that Iran was not open to dialogue on its nuclear program, Indian national security adviser Shivshankar Menon agreed with the Obama administration's assessment of the situation. He stressed that "the last thing we want is another nuclear

²⁶ Praveen Swami, "Iranian Spies Held Top Indian Al Qaeda Man, Set Him Free," *Indian Express*, November 3, 2017 ~ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/iranian-spies-held-top-indian-al-qaeda-man-set-him-free-islamic-state-jihadi-4920187>.

²⁷ Amit Baruah, "Iran Not Harboursing Al-Qaeda, Says India," *Hindu*, May 31, 2003 ~ <http://www.thehindu.com/2003/05/31/stories/2003053104451100.htm>.

²⁸ "India Supports Iran's Peaceful Use of Nuclear Technology: Official," *Financial Times*, October 19, 2004.

²⁹ "U.S. Warns India over Iran Stance," BBC News, January 25, 2005 ~ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4647956.stm.

³⁰ "India Votes against Iran in IAEA Resolution," Press Trust of India, November 27, 2009 ~ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/India-votes-against-Iran-in-IAEA-resolution/article16894640.ece>.

³¹ "Mr. Mulford Had an Exaggerated Notion of the Kind of Influence the U.S. Exercises in India," Press Trust of India, March 21, 2011 ~ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/lsquoMr.-Mulford-had-an-exaggerated-notion-of-the-kind-of-influence-the-U.S.-exercises-in-Indiarsquo/article14956199.ece>.

power in our neighborhood.”³² Scholarly analysis also suggests that New Delhi was further incentivized by the recognition of its own efforts toward nonproliferation.³³ The United Progressive Alliance government valued the exceptional status granted to it as the only nonsignatory NPT state that possessed nuclear weapons and was able to enter into civilian nuclear trade. India welcomed the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, terming it the “triumph of diplomacy and sagacity.”³⁴ With the U.S. exit from the deal, New Delhi continues to advocate a diplomatic resolution to the crisis and maintains an official position of recognizing only UN-related sanctions on Iran.³⁵

The above analysis of India’s relations with Iran demonstrates the challenging nature of this bilateral relationship. Even when coordinating on seemingly common interests such as stability in Afghanistan, the two sides have encountered significant policy differences. A tough sanctions regime and its impact on India’s own ties to the United States (and Europe) have dampened the momentum of India-Iran engagement at regular intervals. Iran, for its part, has remained publicly cordial and appreciative of their buyer-seller energy relationship during the sanctions years but privately critical of India’s friendship with the United States and reluctance to invest a lot more in Iran after the nuclear deal.³⁶ A broader conversation between the two countries has also not been easy owing to their diverging interests with the Arab Gulf states. This latter component drives a significant portion of U.S. policy toward Iran, as will be discussed next.

Assessing the U.S. Approach

The 1979 revolution turned Iran from a cornerstone of U.S. policy to a key adversary in the Middle East. Washington’s policy toward Iran in the 21st century has been directed by the war on terrorism after the September 11 attacks and U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq to

³² “2010: India Did Not Want Nuclear Iran,” *Dawn*, May 23, 2011 ~ <https://www.dawn.com/news/631183>.

³³ Kate Sullivan, “Is India a Responsible Nuclear Power?” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Policy Report, March 2014, 8 ~ https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PR140301_Is_India_a_Responsible_Nuclear_Power.pdf.

³⁴ “India-Iran Joint Statement.”

³⁵ “Work Out Iran Nuclear Deal through ‘Dialogue and Diplomacy’: India,” *Times of India*, May 9, 2018 ~ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/irans-right-to-peaceful-use-of-nuclear-energy-should-be-respected-india/articleshow/64096060.cms>.

³⁶ “Can’t Forget Support India Gave Us during Difficult Times, Iran Says,” *Times of India*, August 15, 2015 ~ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Cant-forget-support-India-gave-us-during-difficult-times-Iran-says/articleshow/48489857.cms>; and Tanvi Madan, “India’s Relationship with Iran: It’s Complicated,” Brookings Institution, February 28, 2014 ~ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2014/02/28/indias-relationship-with-iran-its-complicated>.

combat terrorism in the region. The United States has employed coercive tactics such as economic sanctions and military pressure, including threats of war. For successive U.S. administrations, the primary areas of focus have included Iran's support for terrorism, its nuclear and ballistic weapons programs, and its vehement opposition to U.S. allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Addressing human rights violations by the Iranian regime is another priority. These issue areas are often interwoven in the U.S. approach to contain Iranian influence, and this section will, therefore, jointly examine policies as they have evolved since 2001.

U.S. policy toward Iran since 2001 has been a multifaceted campaign involving economic, military, and diplomatic pressure.³⁷ The short-lived bilateral discussions following the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and the nuclear deal in 2015 were significant departures from this norm. Punitive economic measures have consisted of powerful secondary sanctions and diplomatic campaigns to deter countries, primarily U.S. partners and allies, from doing business with Iran. The Bush and Obama administrations leveraged the U.S. financial system to extend the reach of these sanctions. At the same time, both governments pursued a carrot-and-stick approach by making attempts, somewhat erratically, to engage with Iran on its nuclear program. The Bush administration's approach over its eight years included efforts to draw Iran into negotiations in 2006. Obama's outreach to Iran at the very start of his presidency in 2009 was quickly overshadowed by the unrest in Tehran following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election. The resultant internal power tussle in Iran torpedoed a nuclear fuel-swap initiative later that year. Following this, the Obama administration in 2010 embarked on a hectic diplomatic spree and produced a far-reaching UN Security Council resolution and harsh multilateral sanctions to be imposed on Iran, with the backing of China and Russia. This round of sanctions was complemented by additional actions from the European Union, Japan, and South Korea, as well as the unilateral U.S. sanctions that went into effect in 2012. Such an unprecedented level of international compliance with regard to the sanctions brought Iran to the negotiating table, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was finalized in 2015. Complementing these economic measures, U.S. military strategy focused on keeping the chokepoint in the Persian Gulf region at the Strait of Hormuz open and safe for the transportation of

³⁷ Suzanne Maloney, "Under Trump, U.S. Policy on Iran Is Moving from Accommodation to Confrontation," Brookings Institution, May 11, 2017 ~ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/05/11/under-trump-u-s-policy-on-iran-is-moving-from-accommodation-to-confrontation>.

energy, pushing back Iran-supported militias in Syria and Iraq, preventing the Iranian proliferation of weapons to terrorist groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, and ensuring the security and interests of U.S. allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.

President Donald Trump has replaced his predecessor's strategy of accommodation with one of confrontation. For Trump, the Iran nuclear deal holds great personal significance because it was the most important foreign policy breakthrough achieved by Obama. Terming it a very bad deal, the current U.S. government believes that the agreement "facilitated Iranian misbehavior in non-nuclear arenas and impeded efforts to punish Iran for such malign acts."³⁸ This view mirrors the Republican line that the deal has many "fatal flaws"—the most significant of them being the weak sunset provisions that "merely delayed the inevitable nuclear weapons capability of the Iranian regime."³⁹

This thinking has found bipartisan support in Washington and has the backing of U.S. allies in the Middle East and Israel. There still remains quite a bit of uncertainty about the exact goals of this confrontational approach, but the general thrust has been to restore the multipronged strategy of economic, military, and diplomatic pressure on Iran. Keeping with this approach, Trump has restored sanctions under the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2012, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012, and the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012. Currently, Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy depends heavily on sanctions compliance by Iran's top energy customers, including China and India. The administration's initial demand that these countries reduce their imports to zero by November 2018 was later amended to include waivers for a few countries, including India, until March 2019.⁴⁰

In sum, since the early days of their strategic rapprochement, India and the United States have found themselves in agreement over the proliferation

³⁸ Christopher Ashley Ford, "Moving American Policy Forward in the Aftermath of the Iran Nuclear Deal" (remarks delivered at DACOR Bacon House, Washington, D.C., July 25, 2018) [~ https://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/2018/284528.htm](https://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/2018/284528.htm).

³⁹ Mike Pompeo, "After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy" (remarks at the Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2018) [~ https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/05/282301.htm](https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/05/282301.htm).

⁴⁰ Nick Wadhams, "U.S. to Give Eight Nations Oil Waivers under Iran Sanctions, Official Says," Bloomberg, November 2, 2018 [~ https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-11-02/u-s-said-to-give-eight-nations-oil-waivers-under-iran-sanctions](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-11-02/u-s-said-to-give-eight-nations-oil-waivers-under-iran-sanctions); and Sanjeev Choudhary, "U.S. Agrees to Grant India Waiver from Iran Sanctions," *Economic Times*, November 1, 2018 [~ https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/us-agrees-to-grant-india-waiver-from-iran-sanctions/articleshow/66454042.cms](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/us-agrees-to-grant-india-waiver-from-iran-sanctions/articleshow/66454042.cms).

dimensions of the Iranian nuclear program. New Delhi is also cognizant of Iranian sponsorship of terrorism in its region but disagrees on the perceived level of threat.⁴¹ These factors have not deterred its engagement with Tehran, which has been based on national interests such as energy security and connectivity. Since the Iranian nuclear deal, however, India has placed greater emphasis on the connectivity component. There appears to be some form of accommodation by the United States in this regard, as will be discussed in the next section exploring the management of their differences over Iran.

MANAGING INDIA-U.S. DIFFERENCES OVER IRAN

When New Delhi and Washington set out to coordinate their aforementioned interests, differences are bound to come up from time to time that require careful management. Both countries have, to a large extent, demonstrated an ability to deal with these differences to preserve long-term interests rather than ignoring them or driving moments of conflict underground. They may at times agree on the ends but disagree on the means, as seen in the case of the Iranian nuclear program and U.S. sanctions that affected India's oil imports.⁴² India and the United States have managed their disagreement about Iran over the years through a highly involved bilateral process that irons out differences privately rather than in public.

Accommodative Bargaining: Flexible India, Amenable United States

Strategic partnerships involve the interplay of common and conflicting interests followed by the delicate dance of accommodating those interests. Such "accommodative bargaining," as Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing suggest, is a process of give and take in which both states benefit from some agreement.⁴³ When carried out between allies, or aligned states (as in the case of India and the United States), the supporting state is willing to sacrifice interests in conflict in order to realize a common goal with the other.⁴⁴ India—the weaker state in this partnership—finds the situation more

⁴¹ Pakistan is a far greater threat to Indian interests.

⁴² Tanvi Madan, "Finding a New Normal in U.S.-India Relations," Brookings Institution, June 30, 2014 ~ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/finding-a-new-normal-in-u-s-india-relations>.

⁴³ Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 22.

⁴⁴ Glenn H. Snyder, "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut," *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1990): 115.

challenging given its strategic need to engage with Iran while navigating crises created by its own partner that undermine this goal. Subsequently, New Delhi and Washington have employed an accommodative bargaining strategy to deal with their differences to ensure minimum disruption of their pursuit of common interests.

The success of the Obama administration's sanctions strategy against Iran in 2012 has been largely attributed to securing the support of Iran's top oil customers, including India. This was done through an innovative tweak in the sanctions regime—offering waivers to countries that voluntarily demonstrated “significant reduction” in Iranian oil imports. Interestingly, the U.S. legislation stipulating these reductions (section 1245 of the 2012 NDAA) did not define what exactly qualified as significant, leaving it open to the administration's interpretation.⁴⁵ By mid-2013, New Delhi went so far as to hint that it could no longer reduce imports any further, but at no point was its waiver in jeopardy.⁴⁶ This subjective standard of reduction with no fixed value was a face-saving measure for New Delhi. The Indian government could claim to its domestic audience that its reductions of Iranian oil imports were voluntary cuts, given that no formal waiver was sought from Washington in the first place. Both the Singh and Modi governments maintain that they never conceded to any country-specific sanctions under U.S. pressure but rather reduced imports on their own accord. Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj has argued the same with regard to Trump's new round of sanctions.⁴⁷

Second, the United States has acknowledged certain facets of India's interests in Iran since 2012—i.e., enhancing strategic connectivity via the Chabahar port—while India has given due consideration to U.S. concerns over the Iranian threat, among other foreign policy priorities, in reciprocity. A few months after the sanctions went into effect in 2012, India, Iran, and Afghanistan initiated discussions over trilateral connectivity centering on the Chabahar port on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Tehran. When asked to respond to this development, the Obama

⁴⁵ Rishika Chauhan, “Adapting India, Accommodating United States: A Case of Iranian Sanctions,” *Foreign Policy*, October 24, 2015 ~ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/24/adapting-india-accommodating-united-states-a-case-of-iranian-sanctions>; and Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, “When Iran Sanctions Bite,” *Pragati*, September 29, 2014 ~ <http://pragati.nationalinterest.in/2014/09/when-iran-sanctions-bite>.

⁴⁶ Amitav Ranjan, “Can't Halt the Import of Iran Oil, India to Tell U.S.,” *Indian Express*, March 20, 2013 ~ <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/cant-halt-the-import-of-iran-oil-india-to-tell-us/1090655>.

⁴⁷ Archis Mohan, “Won't Follow U.S. Trade Curbs on Iran, Says Sushma Swaraj,” *Business Standard*, May 28, 2018 ~ https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/won-t-follow-us-trade-curbs-on-iran-says-sushma-swaraj-118052801397_1.html; and Nidhi Verma, “India Says It Only Follows UN Sanctions, Not U.S. Sanctions on Iran,” *Reuters*, May 28, 2018 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-iran/india-says-it-only-follows-u-n-sanctions-not-u-s-sanctions-on-iran-idUSKCN1IIT0WJ>.

administration noted that it was interested in increased trade and commerce in that region and therefore “anything that ameliorates that situation is something that we would support.”⁴⁸ This was a clear concession to New Delhi for rolling back its oil imports from Iran. The practice of striking a conciliatory note and recognizing India’s “legitimate business interests” in Chabahar has continued under the Trump administration. Then secretary of state Rex Tillerson emphasized this during his visit in 2017, and, in a seeming hint of reciprocity, the Indian side conveyed its willingness to work with Washington to reduce trade with North Korea, which was an equally important U.S. foreign policy priority.⁴⁹ Likewise, after the United States’ exit from the nuclear deal, the Trump administration, even as it urged the Modi government to “rethink its relations with Iran,” acknowledged that the United States “understands the logistics that come into play” in Chabahar.⁵⁰ Washington then exempted the port project from certain sanctions in November 2018, giving the clearest indication of its accommodation of India’s interests using the rationale that the initiative was vital to Afghanistan’s economic security.⁵¹

This is not to gloss over the fact that Trump’s election, his subsequent tough talk on Iran, and the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal have negatively affected India’s investment plans in Chabahar. Nonetheless, India remains willing to bear certain costs to manage this partnership, as illustrated next.

India’s Willingness to Incur Costs

India’s willingness to absorb costs is a second factor worth considering when examining how India and the United States accommodate differing interests vis-à-vis Iran. India, being the regional power with great-power ambitions in this partnership, has been willing to absorb

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, Daily Press Briefing, August 27, 2012 ~ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2012/08/196948.htm>.

⁴⁹ “Tillerson Says U.S. Sanctions Targeting Iran’s ‘Malign Behaviors’ Only,” RFE/RL, October 25, 2017 ~ <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-tillerson-sanctions-destabilizing-activities/28815296.html>; Jonathan Landay and Aditya Kalra, “India Defends Ties with North Korea in Talks with Tillerson,” Reuters, October 25, 2017 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tillerson-asia/india-defends-ties-with-north-korea-in-talks-with-tillerson-idUSKBN1CU0IE>; and “Will Reduce Trade, but No Cutting of Diplomatic Ties with North Korea: India to U.S.,” Wire, October 25, 2017 ~ <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/mea-india-us-ties-sushma-swaraj-res-tillerson-north-korea-china-iran-rohingya-pakistan>.

⁵⁰ Michelle Nichols, “U.S. Envoy Haley Tells Modi Important to Cut Imports of Iranian Oil,” Reuters, June 27, 2018 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-india/us-envoy-haley-tells-modi-important-to-cut-imports-of-iranian-oil-idUSKBN1JN24K>; and “India Considers Cuts to Oil Imports from Iran,” Wire, June 28, 2018 ~ <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-prepares-to-cut-oil-imports-from-iran>.

⁵¹ Jonathan Landay, “Pompeo Allows Sanctions Exception for Iran Port Development,” Reuters, November 7, 2018 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-sanctions/iran-says-it-is-selling-the-oil-it-needs-to-despite-u-s-pressure-idUSKCN1NB0YW>.

some costs—reputational and financial—to accommodate U.S. interests. First, its vote against Iran at the IAEA in 2005 and decreased political and military interactions demonstrated a willingness to bear reputational costs vis-à-vis both Iran and domestic audiences in order to gain the long-term security benefits of aligning with the United States. The Singh government faced immense pressure over its vote against Iran from fellow coalition members, who feared further policy concessions to the United States. A second domestic factor of consequence was the sensitivity of India's Shia population, which represents 10%–15% of the global Shia community. Over a decade later, the Singh government's risky gambit seems to have paid off. What further aided this process along this time was the growing divergence between India and Iran, particularly with regard to the Iranian nuclear program and their interests in Afghanistan.

Second, India has visibly incurred financial costs when accommodating U.S. interests regarding Iran. This was seen when it reduced oil imports from Iran in 2012. After unilateral U.S. sanctions in 2012 upended Indian energy security calculations, New Delhi faced the dual challenge of reducing Iranian imports and finding replacements for them while simultaneously reconfiguring its refineries to process crude oil from a different source. The latter process to retrofit refineries, the majority of which are owned by the government, incurred significant costs.⁵² India has, therefore, shown willingness to cross its own lines, so to speak, on this issue.

More recently, India's investment plans in Chabahar have been plagued by delays in part owing to Trump's rhetoric and the return of U.S. sanctions, which have spooked India's risk-averse private sector.⁵³ Reputational costs have also been incurred, given that this project is India's first overseas venture of its kind by two state-owned companies.

Management Style: High-Level Consultations, Private Disagreements

A third factor that has helped India and the United States navigate contentious issues since rapprochement is a distinct management style that prioritizes regular contact at the highest levels of leadership. Public

⁵² Iran offers sweet light crude and the readily available alternative from Saudi Arabia was too heavy and sour, making it unsuitable for India's older refineries at the time. "India Cooperated to Implement UN-Mandated Sanctions against Iran: U.S. Report," Press Trust of India, February 7, 2017 ~ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-cooperated-to-implement-un-mandated-sanctions-against-iran-us-report/story-oCAZLc2vWSU9ZYp835ttgO.html>.

⁵³ Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, "Rouhani's Visit a Reality Check for Iran-India Relations," *Al-Monitor*, March 6, 2018 ~ <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/03/iran-india-ties-rouhani-state-visit-chabahar-farzad-jcpoa.html>.

declarations on sticky issues have proved to be unhelpful. The two sides keep up appearances while privately airing grievances, preferring to practice delicate diplomacy for better payoffs.⁵⁴

With regard to high-level leadership involvement, much has been written about the personal energies of President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Singh that were crucial to navigating the early days of bilateral rapprochement in Washington and New Delhi. Their personal chemistry helped diplomats on both sides smooth out several wrinkles during negotiations.⁵⁵ Both leaders took the necessary difficult, and at times extremely risky, political steps to see the civilian nuclear agreement through. Bush focused on the larger significance of the relationship, resisting the pressures of transactional diplomacy on issues such as nuclear reactor sales or India's engagement with Iran.⁵⁶ The Singh government, for its part, put its own political future at stake and survived a confidence vote to clear the way for the landmark nuclear deal in 2008.⁵⁷

Obama found Singh to be “a great friend and partner to the United States (and to me personally),”⁵⁸ despite their fundamentally disagreeing on the effectiveness of sanctions to deter the Iranian nuclear program.⁵⁹ We know that in private deliberations with the U.S. government, however, Singh's closest advisers, such as then national security adviser Shivshankar Menon, were willing to go along with a more “carefully targeted” U.S. sanctions regime that would not hurt the people of Iran.⁶⁰ Given this understanding, the United States batted for the Chabahar port project after India reinitiated consultations with Iran and Afghanistan at the Non-Aligned Summit in 2012—the very same year unilateral U.S. sanctions went into effect.

⁵⁴ Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 261.

⁵⁵ Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017), 238.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁷ “Bush, Singh Agree to Press Ahead with Nuke Deal,” Reuters, July 25, 2008 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-34664820080724>.

⁵⁸ “I’m a Big Fan of Manmohan Singh, He Was Great Support: Barack Obama,” Indo-Asian News Service, December 1, 2017 ~ https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/i-m-a-big-fan-of-manmohan-singh-he-was-great-support-barack-obama-117120100550_1.html.

⁵⁹ “Sanctions Not Answer to Iran’s Nuclear Ambitions: Manmohan Singh to Obama,” Press Trust of India, April 14, 2010 ~ <https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-sanctions-not-answer-to-iran-s-nuclear-ambitions-manmohan-singh-to-obama-1371145>.

⁶⁰ Menon noted that the Iran situation was “very unsatisfactory” from India’s point of view as well and that the United States had “a choice among unsatisfactory strategies.” “250737: NSA Menon Discusses Regional Security and Trade Issues with Codel McCaskill,” *Hindu*, May 21, 2011 ~ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/the-cables/250737-nsa-menon-discusses-regional-security-and-trade-issues-with-codel-mccaskill/article2035456.ece>.

A second process involves the cultivation of an understanding with respect to how each side sells differences to its domestic political audience. This accommodation is critical given that the Indian side plays up its special relationship with Iran at home during critical moments in U.S. policymaking to demonstrate its strategic autonomy within the India-U.S. partnership. The Modi and Singh governments have regularly employed such language to placate political allies and opponents alike. In the midst of negotiating the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal in 2007, Indian defense minister A.K. Antony informed the parliament that the Indian Navy was training five Iranian soldiers in its facilities. When this generated unease in Washington, he buckled down further by reiterating that India has friendly relations with Iran and “will continue to do so.”⁶¹ When the unilateral U.S. sanctions went into effect in 2012, the Indian petroleum and natural gas minister rejected them, stating “we do not go by the sanctions imposed by regional blocs or individual nations.” In parliament, the government clarified that its official position was “bound by UN sanctions, and unilateral sanctions imposed by countries or group of countries should not impact legitimate trade relations with Iran.”⁶² When asked whether the government was rethinking investment plans in the Iranian oil and gas sector after the latest round of U.S. sanctions by the Trump administration, the junior minister for external affairs highlighted that India’s bilateral relations with Iran “stand on their own and are not influenced by India’s relations with any third country.”⁶³ All of the above statements were delivered even as India in practice proceeded to decrease its defense interactions with Iran and reduce oil imports.

In Washington, managing India’s engagement with Iran involved the opposite: downplaying the relevance of the Iran factor and shoring up domestic political support for New Delhi as a reliable partner to meet U.S. strategic goals. This was a particularly significant challenge for the Bush administration as it worked to roll back decades of mistrust within the political establishment, including over India’s engagement with Iran. The first such incident came about in March 2006 when two Iranian naval ships docked at an Indian port for a five-day training session as President Bush

⁶¹ Rama Lakshmi, “India’s Long-Established Ties with Iran Straining Alliance with U.S.,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2007.

⁶² Sujay Mehdudia, “Not Bound by U.S. and EU Sanctions against Iran: India,” *Hindu*, January 25, 2012 \approx <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Not-bound-by-U.S.-and-EU-sanctions-against-Iran-India/article13380756.ece>; and Ministry of External Affairs (India), Rajya Sabha, “Starred Question No. 308, Impact of Relations with Iran,” April 26, 2012.

⁶³ Ministry of External Affairs (India), Rajya Sabha, “Unstarred Question No. 975, Impact of USA’s Sanctions against Iran,” July 26, 2018 \approx <https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/30195/QUESTION+NO975+IMPACT+OF+USAS+SANCTIONS+AGAINST+IRAN>.

was wrapping up the visit to India during which he agreed to deliver the nuclear deal. At a hearing of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the proposed deal the following month, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dismissed the veracity of such media reports. The U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, Nicholas Burns, similarly denied that the event had any significance during a presentation at a think tank in Washington, D.C., stating that the exercise was little more than “a few hundred Iranian naval cadets playing volleyball with Indians.”⁶⁴

MANAGEMENT OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

For India and the United States, the ongoing process of accommodating the other’s position over Iran has not been without its share of fire-fighting at home and resulting disenchantment in the short term on both sides. The Trump administration has increased the unpredictability of U.S. strategic priorities and policy direction. Nevertheless, the fundamental “geopolitical logic” of the India-U.S. partnership has remained intact despite the U.S. president’s emphasis on transactional diplomacy.⁶⁵ To be sure, economic and trade hurdles are bigger challenges facing this partnership than the Iran issue, but the return of sanctions adds to existing friction. India is, of course, familiar with this exercise and began regulating its imports from Iran once the United States announced its withdrawal from the nuclear deal in May 2018. The U.S. government granted waivers in November 2018 to eight major customers, including India, exempting them from sanctions until March 2019.⁶⁶ India is expected to reduce its imports by a third during this time, and extensions will follow if the government demonstrates steps to end purchases eventually. Complying with the latter condition remains difficult for the Modi government, which is facing pressure over rising oil prices and falling local currency during an election year. Making purchases of dollar-denominated

⁶⁴ C. Christine Fair, “Indo-Iranian Ties: Thicker Than Oil,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2007): 56.

⁶⁵ Jeff Smith, “Another First: U.S. and India to Hold 2+2 Dialogue in Delhi,” Heritage Foundation, Issue Brief, August 24, 2018 ~ <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/another-first-us-and-india-hold-22-dialogue-delhi>.

⁶⁶ Asa Fitch, Ian Talley, and Courtney McBride, “Iran Vows to ‘Break’ Sanctions as U.S. Reimposes Ban on Oil,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 2018 ~ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-re-imposes-sanctions-against-iran-oil-banking-and-shipping-sectors-1541425059>.

oil is increasingly expensive for New Delhi, despite growing imports from Saudi Arabia to replace Iranian crude.⁶⁷

India, Iran, and Afghanistan have continued trilateral transit consultations to iron out operational and logistical issues on the route connecting the Chabahar port to Afghanistan.⁶⁸ The three countries remain determined to work on the trilateral connectivity initiative that in fact complements Trump's South Asia strategy on the ground by connecting Afghan markets to India, the regional economic powerhouse. The Trump administration has yet to publicly support these consultations, but an exception on certain U.S. sanctions was granted to the project in November 2018. Policy uncertainty on this project remains a challenge to the future management of the Iran factor in India-U.S. ties.

For Washington, India's presence in Iran through the Chabahar port project and related connectivity initiatives could prove useful to their combined balancing strategy against China in this region. It could be leveraged as an opportunity for better management of the Iran issue as New Delhi and Washington work together to balance China's growing economic hold, particularly in India's immediate neighborhood, including Pakistan and Iran, through the Belt and Road Initiative. The Trump administration, for its part, has clearly aligned itself with India on the initiative. Iran is vital for the the China–Central Asia–West Asia economic corridor, and projects worth \$22 billion have been initiated in the first phase of China's infrastructure and connectivity drive in the country.⁶⁹ New Delhi certainly cannot and does not intend to directly compete with Beijing in this sphere but presents itself as a viable alternative partner on multilateral strategic connectivity projects.⁷⁰ India's own investments at the Chabahar port and adjoining economic zone are miniscule (\$2 billion) compared to the visible Chinese economic presence in the port town.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Jessica Jaganathan and Nidhi Verma, "Saudi Arabia to Supply Extra Oil Cargoes to India in November as Iran Sanctions Loom," Reuters, October 10, 2018 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-saudi-oil/saudi-arabia-to-supply-extra-oil-cargoes-to-india-in-november-as-iran-sanctions-loom-idUSKCN1MK0QN?rpc=401&>.

⁶⁸ "India, Iran, Afghanistan Hold First Trilateral on Chabahar Port Project," Press Trust of India, October 23, 2018 ~ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-iran-afghanistan-hold-first-trilateral-on-chabahar-port-project/articleshow/66337029.cms>.

⁶⁹ Figure provided by a former cabinet minister who was part of a diplomatic delegation visiting Singapore in February 2018. Also see the op-ed by the Chinese ambassador to Iran, Pang Sen, "Belt, Road Initiative and China-Iran Cooperation," Mehr News Agency, March 19, 2018 ~ <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/132929/Belt-Road-Initiative-and-China-Iran-cooperation>.

⁷⁰ Iran encourages Indian investment with the same rationale. Author's field visit and interviews in Tehran and Chabahar, November 2015.

⁷¹ Author's field visit to Chabahar's free trade zone and areas adjoining the Shahid Beheshti port complex in Chabahar, November 2015.

Another factor that could complicate the management of the issue for India would be the absence of familiar faces handling the Iran file within the Trump administration. The previous two senior diplomats to manage relations on the U.S. side in the Bush and Obama administrations were intimately involved in the India-U.S. partnership and familiar with its negotiation dynamics. Nicholas Burns and William J. Burns were undoubtedly tough on the issue but sensitive to the Indian position. Both attached particular importance to the partnership that would “help build a new international order” and counseled Washington to remain “patient” with New Delhi.⁷² The absence of an assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia two years into the Trump presidency compounds this complications, making routine contact over bilateral policies difficult within the partnership. In the meantime, the hotline connections established between the Indian and U.S. foreign and defense ministers after the inaugural 2+2 dialogue in September 2018 could prove useful.

From India’s short-to-medium-term approach on Iran, it is also clear that the United States will need to manage its expectations with regard to its strategic partner. India chooses to remain outside alliance structures and prefers to align its interests with the United States through a strategic partnership to preserve ownership over its strategic interests. A strategic partnership provides the necessary flexibility for India to maximize benefits from the multipolar international system as it exists today. New Delhi will continue to exercise the strategic autonomy card whenever it differs with Washington, such as over its engagement with Iran. As the previous section demonstrates, this does not mean that India is not amenable to meeting U.S. interests halfway with regard to Iran. However, otherwise manageable differences would sharpen swiftly if Washington were to opt for military confrontation or regime change.

As India and the United States now expand their consultations on the Middle East, it would prove helpful to both parties to leverage these differences and identify complementary strengths in the region.⁷³ Indian officials have not been comfortable raising the issue of Iran in bilateral forums with their

⁷² Nicholas Burns, “India’s Strategic Importance to the U.S.,” *Boston Globe*, February 3, 2012 ≈ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/02/03/india-strategic-importance/Gel26HCIZGLUuWCw1lXHaN/story.html>; and William J. Burns, “The United States and India: A Vital Partnership in a Changing World” (remarks at the Center for American Progress, Washington, D.C., October 26, 2012) ≈ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/d/former/burns/remarks/2012/199801.htm>.

⁷³ Apart from bilateral consultations announced during the Trump-Modi meeting in 2017, India has planned to station a liaison officer in Bahrain to enhance dialogue with U.S. Central Command and improve coordination in the western Indian Ocean region. Shishir Gupta, “Soon, India Defence Attaché at U.S. Navy Bahrain Command,” *Hindustan Times*, March 21, 2018 ≈ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/soon-india-defence-attache-at-us-navy-bahrain-command/story-iTGPB5sLbOlod11MlprWjI.html>.

U.S. counterparts, except in times of crisis such as sanctions.⁷⁴ For a more mature partnership to take form, both sides must begin talking about their differences more regularly. There may exist a need to de-romanticize the Iran issue in New Delhi, but it is a tall order to expect the political elite to lead that charge. The silver lining is that the Indian diplomatic community holds no such notion vis-à-vis Tehran, and their U.S. partners are today increasingly aware of this reality during consultations over the Middle East,⁷⁵ although in no way will this translate into India taking sides or aligning too closely with the United States and its allies in the Middle East on regional issues. India may no longer view the Arab Gulf states solely through the prism of their close relationship with Pakistan, but it remains wary and unable to completely discount this influence.⁷⁶ More importantly, New Delhi's approach has thus far worked to its benefit, with all sides—the Arab Gulf states and Iran—being accommodative of its diverging policies. However, with rivalries sharpening between the two blocs (and between the United States and Iran), India aims to spend its political capital wisely as it becomes harder to walk this fine line.⁷⁷

India's gravest concern in the Middle East is that it has “few levers available to influence events.”⁷⁸ The country is painfully aware of this limitation, given that 8.5 million Indians would be directly affected if a crisis were to occur.⁷⁹ It sees the United States as its most well-placed partner to formulate contingencies for future crises. Given that the two strategic partners are in the very early stages of coordinating on security issues in the region, there will undoubtedly be a learning curve as they gauge each other's positions, weigh concerns, and find areas for collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Since their strategic rapprochement in 2005, India has learned to say “no” and the United States balks less at India's reluctance to align with its choices.

⁷⁴ Author's interview with former senior official in the Obama administration, Washington, D.C., January 2018.

⁷⁵ Author's conversation with senior diplomats in the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, March 2018.

⁷⁶ Author's interview with senior Indian diplomat in Abu Dhabi, March 2018.

⁷⁷ Author's conversations with senior officials in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in March 2017, June 2017, and September 2018, and with diplomats and scholars in Abu Dhabi in September 2016 and March 2018 and in Tehran in November 2015.

⁷⁸ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 58.

⁷⁹ For instance, during Operation Raahat in 2015, the Indian Armed Forces evacuated close to five thousand Indian citizens and foreign nationals from Yemen after the military intervention by Saudi Arabia and its allies.

Questions of intent, reliability, and commitment to the partnership often emerge in these moments of disagreement, as in the case with Iran. These concerns run especially high given the Trump administration's transactional approach with its friends, which challenges how the United States has conducted business with India since the Bush administration—"sans symmetric reciprocity," largely due to New Delhi's preference to work within an informal, flexible strategic partnership.⁸⁰

The Iran factor has not disrupted or paralyzed broader consultations within the India-U.S. partnership. As demonstrated in the above analysis, both India and the United States have managed to navigate their differences with some degree of success through accommodative bargaining. The weaker power, India, is flexible and willing to accommodate U.S. interests while Washington works out a face-saving measure for New Delhi, such as the waivers for sanctions. In reciprocity, the United States has acknowledged some facets of Indian engagement with Iran, such as the Chabahar port project. India has also been willing to incur reputational and financial costs, keeping the bigger strategic picture in mind. The personal energy of Indian and U.S. leaders across the Bush and Obama administrations further helped the two sides overcome friction. Airing their differences in private, whether over the Iranian nuclear program or the efficacy of sanctions, has enabled each side to better understand how the other thinks on matters of disagreement.

If India and the United States need to develop better "habits of cooperation," as Cara Abercrombie suggests in this same issue of *Asia Policy*, they also need to get creative with their differences to realize the potential of the strategic partnership.⁸¹ As the two sides begin coordinating closely in the Middle East, this process will not be without its challenges. It would be prudent for Indian and U.S. leaders not to discount but rather to leverage their differences and identify the complementary strengths that each party brings to the table. The more experience they gain in negotiating disagreements, the stronger the India-U.S. strategic partnership will become. ♦

⁸⁰ Ashley J. Tellis, "Avoiding the Labors of Sisyphus: Strengthening U.S.-India Relations in a Trump Administration," *Asia Policy*, no. 23 (2017): 44–45.

⁸¹ Cara Abercrombie, "Realizing the Potential: Mature Defense Cooperation and the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership," *Asia Policy* 14, no. 1 (2019).

SPECIAL ISSUE

Realizing the Potential: Mature Defense Cooperation and the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership

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KEYWORDS: INDIA; UNITED STATES; STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP; COOPERATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article argues that the defense and security dimension of the U.S.-India strategic partnership, despite demonstrating significant growth and progress in recent years, still lacks the maturity critical to enabling the cooperation envisioned.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The U.S.-India global strategic partnership, now well into its second decade, has continued to be a priority for successive governments in both countries because of its tremendous economic and security potential. Washington and New Delhi have demonstrated the political will to propel robust cooperation and have begun to put into place the architecture of a mature relationship. Yet the overall output resulting from numerous dialogues, military exercises, and engagements and the tangible impact on Indian and U.S. security objectives are less than one would expect given the level of input and the number of years spent working toward these goals. Additional effort is required to habituate the type of cooperation the U.S. typically enjoys with its closest allies and partners and realize the relationship's full potential.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Until and unless the U.S. and India routinely engage one another at all levels within government—from the strategic to the tactical—and build habits of cooperation, the relationship will not mature.
- Dissimilar perceptions of how to implement the strategic partnership can cause the U.S. and India to have unrealistic expectations of one another, which in turn can frustrate practical cooperation.
- Different foreign policy approaches to relations with Russia, Iran, and Pakistan could complicate future cooperation if not managed carefully.
- Bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of resources dedicated to the bilateral relationship can inhibit the development of informal relationships and habits of cooperation.

The U.S.-India global strategic partnership, now well into its second decade, has continued to be a priority for successive governments in both countries because of its tremendous economic and security potential. Since President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee outlined a vision for a new bilateral relationship in 2000, U.S. Democratic and Republican administrations and Indian governments led by the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alike have committed significant time, energy, and resources to building the foundation for close cooperation. Both sides are motivated by the shared belief that a strong India is in the United States' interest and that continued U.S. global leadership, as well as a sustained forward U.S. military presence in the Indo-Pacific, benefits India.¹ At its core, the relationship is rooted in the two countries' shared democratic values and increasingly convergent interests. Prominent among them is the desire to ensure that no single power dominates Asia, to counter international terrorism, and to uphold the liberal international rules-based order.² As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said before a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 2016, "A strong India-U.S. partnership can anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific."³

Today, motivated in part by China's assertive actions in the region, Washington and New Delhi have amplified the importance of the relationship and have accelerated efforts to improve cooperation. The Trump administration has placed India firmly at the center of its Indo-Pacific strategy, which gives more prominence to India than did the Obama administration's rebalance policy, in which its role was ambiguous. In the 2017 National Security Strategy, the United States prominently welcomed "India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense power," in marked contrast with China, which the document refers to as a strategic competitor—a first in a public U.S. strategy document.⁴ Former secretary of state Rex Tillerson further underscored the importance of India, making it the focus of his first major foreign policy speech. He said, "We need to collaborate with India to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is increasingly a place of peace, stability, and

¹ "Joint Statement on United States–India Relations: A Vision for the 21st Century," March 21, 2000, available at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-2000-03-27/pdf/WCPD-2000-03-27-Pg594.pdf>.

² Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: From Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017), 201–2.

³ Narendra Modi (remarks before a joint session of the U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., June 8, 2016).

⁴ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., December 2017), 46.

growing prosperity so that it does not become a region of disorder, conflict, and predatory economics.”⁵

Under Prime Minister Modi, India has overcome its traditional reluctance to tilt toward the United States, signaling through its actions and public statements a greater comfort in deepening bilateral cooperation.⁶ In issuing the “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” in 2015, India aligned itself with the key principles and norms most closely associated with U.S. leadership in the region.⁷ Hosting the 2+2 dialogue with the United States in 2018—India’s first such ministerial-level dialogue with any country—was a further demonstration of India’s commitment to deepening its strategic partnership. These efforts underscore a fundamental calculation that the United States will remain a critical partner for advancing India’s core interests.

This article assesses the maturity of the defense and security dimension of the U.S.-India strategic partnership by gauging its success at meeting the expectations set by both sides. Analysis is limited to defense and security cooperation, as these have been the primary drivers of the relationship to date, though other factors, notably trade, economic cooperation, and diplomacy, are also vital to its success. Overall, this article finds that, while defense and security cooperation have demonstrated significant progress in recent years, the strategic partnership nevertheless lacks elements of a mature relationship that are critical to enabling the cooperation envisioned. This is not entirely surprising, given that the types of cooperation India is pursuing with the United States present a departure from its traditional security relationships, most notably with Russia. The United States, which has considerable experience working closely with international partners, is for its part still learning how to adapt its established patterns of cooperation to an Indian model, one in which India is neither a formal ally nor a junior partner. Despite these constraints, the United States and India have both demonstrated the political will to propel robust cooperation and have begun to put into place the architecture of a mature partnership. With additional effort, they can habituate regular cooperation and realize the full potential of this endeavor.

⁵ Rex Tillerson, “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century” (speech presented at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., October 18, 2017).

⁶ Ashley J. Tellis, “The Whirlwind in Washington,” *India Today*, June 16, 2016 ~ <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/19/whirlwind-in-washington-pub-63842>.

⁷ “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, January 25 2015 ~ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region>.

The discussion that follows is divided into four parts:

- ≈ pp. 123–25 offer a definition of a mature strategic partnership.
- ≈ pp. 125–35 assess the overall maturity of the defense and security dimension of the U.S.-India relationship.
- ≈ pp. 136–41 explore factors that have constrained cooperation.
- ≈ pp. 141–44 offer policy recommendations to help the strategic partnership achieve its full potential.

DEFINING A MATURE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Whereas obligations incurred by states in a formal alliance are well defined in signed treaties, responsibilities in a strategic partnership are inherently less clear. There is no universally accepted definition of a strategic partnership between two countries.⁸ Some, such as the U.S.-Israel strategic partnership, function one step below a formal treaty alliance. For others, such as India’s recently upgraded relationship with Rwanda, the establishment of a strategic partnership indicates a desire to increase bilateral cooperation in discrete areas. Because there is no common definition of a strategic partner, each relationship is likely to be unique. Drawing from the business world, one definition that seems applicable to the spectrum of strategic partnerships describes them as arrangements “to help each other or work together, to make it easier for each of them to achieve the things they want to achieve.”⁹ A mature strategic relationship, therefore, is one where the two parties have succeeded in making it easier to achieve their respective and shared goals. This is not to say that the two have necessarily achieved their goals, but that they have taken the necessary steps to ease the process.

For India, a country that has deliberately eschewed formal alliances, strategic partnerships are a politically acceptable framework to advance targeted areas of cooperation with multiple countries.¹⁰ In the post-Cold War era, India has formed numerous strategic partnerships—by

⁸ Thomas Wilkins provides a useful summary of the international relations theory discourse on strategic partnerships, noting the lack of an agreed definition. See Thomas S. Wilkins, “Alignment, Not ‘Alliance’—The Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 53–76.

⁹ This definition of strategic partnership is taken from the online edition of the *Cambridge Business English Dictionary* ≈ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/strategic-partnership>.

¹⁰ Ankit Panda, “Why Does India Have So Many ‘Strategic Partners’ and No Allies?” *Diplomat*, November 23, 2013 ≈ <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/why-does-india-have-so-many-strategic-partners-and-no-allies>.

some counts more than 30 since 1998.¹¹ Yet they are by no means equal but vary in significance depending on the relative impact of the partnership on India's strategic objectives. For the United States, which has also forged multiple strategic partnerships in the post-Cold War era, the arrangement offers an appealing means to enhance cooperation without the burden of alliance entanglements.

By almost any measure, the United States is India's most important strategic partner. The only country stronger than China—in terms of military might, economic influence, and ability to spur multilateral cooperation on a global scale—the United States alone has the capacity and heft to bolster India's standing in global economic and political institutions and enhance its defense and security capabilities.¹² Certainly India has other relationships it considers significant for achieving national security objectives. Some in India would argue that Russia, with which India has a “special and privileged strategic partnership,” is the most important.¹³ Russia does indeed continue to play a key strategic role insofar as it is a source of military hardware and energy resources, but it increasingly has less to offer India in terms of bilateral trade. India also no longer needs Russia's support in the UN Security Council, and its growing alignment with China and recent uptick in military engagement with Pakistan have unnerved New Delhi.¹⁴ Japan is another important partner for India. Their close and deepening ties reflect a growing convergence of the two countries' geostrategic interests, and Japanese financing and investment underwrite several Indian development and regional connectivity projects in Asia. Yet Japan alone does not have the convening power to promote or enable Indian security leadership in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵

¹¹ Suhasini Haidar, “Strategic Partners’ Are Now a Dime a Dozen,” *Hindu*, January 11, 2017 ~ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/%E2%80%98Strategic-partners%E2%80%99-are-now-dime-a-dozen/article17024245.ece>.

¹² Rajesh Rajagopalan, “India's Strategic Choices: China and the Balance of Power in Asia,” Carnegie India, September 2017, 27–31 ~ <http://carnegieindia.org/2017/09/14/india-s-strategic-choices-china-and-balance-of-power-in-asia-pub-73108>.

¹³ Satish Kumar et al., “India's Strategic Partners: A Comparative Assessment,” Foundation for National Security Research, New Delhi, November 2011 ~ http://fnsr.org/files/Indias_Strategic.pdf.

¹⁴ India's concerns regarding Russian-Pakistan military cooperation are described in P.S. Raghavan, “India-Russia Strategic Partnership—A Mutual Commitment,” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 11, no. 4 (2016): 302–7; and Vinay Kaura, “Russia Signs Naval Cooperation Deal with Pakistan: Recent Warmth in Moscow-Islamabad Ties May Worry New Delhi,” *Firstpost*, August 3, 2018 ~ <https://www.firstpost.com/world/russia-warming-up-to-pakistan-is-the-elephant-in-the-room-in-moscow-new-delhi-ties-india-must-safeguard-long-standing-relations-4888711.html>.

¹⁵ Rajesh Basrur and Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, “A Time of Strategic Partnerships,” *Hindu*, September 21, 2017 ~ <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-time-of-strategic-partnerships/article19722970.ece>.

Only the United States could lead the international nonproliferation community in accepting India as a de facto nuclear weapons state, as it did with the 2008 civil nuclear initiative. No other country, certainly not Russia, had the global standing to persuade the dozens of nuclear supplier countries to rewrite rules to advance India's interest. The United States could and did in the most visible demonstration of Washington's commitment "to help India become a major world power in the twenty-first century."¹⁶ The United States further stands out among India's strategic partners in that it brings to bear not just its own power and resources but its close defense and strategic ties with a majority of India's other regional strategic partners, including Afghanistan, Australia, France, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam, to name just a few. To be sure, the potential presented by this network of allies and partners has not been a driver of the U.S.-India strategic partnership to date. Indeed, its value likely is still underappreciated in Indian policy circles. But as opportunities for new areas of collaboration among these partners present themselves, they will reinforce to India the importance of its strategic partnership with the United States.

ASSESSING THE MATURITY OF DEFENSE AND SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

If the goal of a strategic partnership is to make it easier for countries to achieve their respective goals, the overall maturity of the U.S.-India strategic partnership can be assessed by gauging how well the United States and India have progressed in achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Defense and security objectives have remained largely consistent since President George W. Bush's first meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2001. With little variation, joint statements from 2001 to the present have pledged that the United States and India will work together to deepen defense cooperation, advance defense technology cooperation, enhance maritime security, combat terrorism, and promote stability in Afghanistan.¹⁷ This section will examine the progress made in achieving these objectives, and in instances where little progress has been made, identify potential reasons why.

¹⁶ "Background Briefing by Administration Officials on U.S.-South Asia Relations," U.S. Department of State, March 25, 2005 ~ <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/43853.htm>.

¹⁷ Each of these areas of cooperation has been referenced in nearly every presidential and prime ministerial joint statement since November 2001. Joint statements were issued on November 9, 2001; July 18, 2005; March 2, 2006; November 24, 2009; November 8, 2010; September 27, 2013; September 30, 2014; January 25, 2015; June 7, 2016; and June 26, 2017.

The Framework of the Strategic Partnership

Defense and security cooperation function within the architecture of the broader strategic partnership. Over the past decade and a half, the United States and India have put in place a framework to steer the relationship. They have institutionalized more than 40 dialogues, based in large part on comparable dialogue structures that the United States has with its closest partners and allies.¹⁸ This architecture is larger and substantively more comprehensive than that of any of India's other partnerships. Only the partnership with Russia comes close, with an annual summit and annual meetings between the external and defense ministers and their respective counterparts. But India's bilateral cooperation with Russia is far more limited in scope.¹⁹ Through these dialogues, the U.S. and Indian governments underscore their political support for the relationship, set objectives, identify and overcome obstacles to cooperation, and monitor progress and sustain momentum.

At the highest level, the U.S. president and Indian prime minister, with rare exception, meet at least once annually, if not as part of a counterpart visit, then on the margins of a multilateral meeting such as the G-20 summit, East Asia Summit, or UN General Assembly.²⁰ The two countries also have multiple cabinet-level dialogues. The most important of these is a new 2+2 meeting between the U.S. secretaries of state and defense and Indian ministers for external affairs and defence, which was held for the first time on September 6, 2018, and supplants the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue that was inaugurated in 2015. Additionally, key U.S. and Indian cabinet officials frequently engage one another through reciprocal visits. Below the cabinet level, dozens of dialogues covering a broad range of issues—including strategic cooperation, energy, climate change, education, development, economics, trade and agriculture, science and technology, health, and innovation—drive day-to-day cooperation.²¹

The defense relationship has its own subset of structured working groups, spanning from high-level policy dialogues to talks on trade,

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India," Joint Report to Congress, July 2017, 2.

¹⁹ Ministry of External Affairs (India), "India-Russia Relations," Brief, May 2017 ~ http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_Russia_May.pdf.

²⁰ With the exception of 2007, the president and prime minister have met at least once annually since 2000. In 2007, the two had planned to meet on the margins of the September UN General Assembly, but Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was forced to cancel travel for health reasons. Since 2013 the president and prime minister have held annual counterpart visits in Washington, D.C., or New Delhi in addition to meeting on the sidelines of multilateral summits.

²¹ Ministry of External Affairs (India), "Brief on India-U.S. Relations," Brief, June 2017 ~ https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_US_brief.pdf.

technology cooperation, armaments cooperation, technology security, and military cooperation (to include service-specific working groups), as well as a new maritime security dialogue (see **Table 1**). Additionally, the United States and India have an annual trilateral dialogue with Japan that includes defense officials.

TABLE 1
U.S.-India Defense Dialogues

Title	Focus	Level (United States / India)
Defense Policy Group	Policy	Undersecretary of defense for policy / Defence secretary
Defense Procurement and Production Group	Trade	Director, Defense Security Cooperation Agency / Director general (acquisition)
Joint Technical Group	Armaments cooperation	Principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for research / Director general (production coordination and services integration), Defence Research and Development Organization
Senior Technology Security Group	Technology security	Director, Defense Technology Security Agency / Additional secretary (defense production)
Military Cooperation Group	Military cooperation	Deputy commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command / Chief of integrated defence staff
U.S.-India Maritime Security Dialogue	Maritime security	Assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs / Joint secretary, disarmament and international security affairs; joint secretary, Americas
Defense Technology and Trade Initiative	Technology codevelopment and coproduction	Undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment / Secretary (defense production)

The Deepening of Defense Cooperation

The United States and India identified specific focus areas for defense cooperation in bilateral framework agreements signed in 2005 and 2015.²² The agreements list more than a dozen potential areas where the two militaries would work together. Though they stop short of identifying interoperability as a goal, the documents direct the respective military establishments to engage in activities that would support that larger objective, such as conducting regular military exercises, enhancing military education and training, increasing intelligence exchange, and collaborating in multinational operations when doing so is in their interest.

The U.S. and Indian defense establishments have unquestionably achieved progress over the past decade and a half, resulting in greater comfort and familiarity between the two armed forces, improved information sharing, increased frequency of dialogues, and tangible cooperation. Bilateral military ties are further enhanced through educational exchanges. Indian officers regularly attend U.S. military schools, while officers from both sides engage in reciprocal training and exchanges and participate in combined efforts to share lessons learned with third countries. In 2016 and 2017, for example, U.S. and Indian instructors conducted a combined training for African peacekeepers.²³ The Indian military exercises with the United States more than with any other country, and the two have regular exercises with their armies, air forces, and navies as well as with special operations forces. These exercises have grown in size and sophistication over the years, providing quality training and preparing the militaries to work together in potential combined operations. The annual Malabar naval exercise, which started as a mere passing exercise in 1992, has included Japan as an annual partner since 2015.²⁴ The 2017 exercise boasted aircraft carriers from the United States and India and a Japanese helicopter destroyer. India also now regularly participates in the biennial U.S.-led multilateral Rim of the Pacific exercise. The Indian and U.S. armies

²² U.S. Department of Defense and Indian Ministry of Defence, "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," June 28, 2005 ~ <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/3211/2005-06-28%20New%20Framework%20for%20the%20US-India%20Defense%20Relationship.pdf>; and U.S. Department of Defense and Indian Ministry of Defence, "Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," June 3, 2015 ~ <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2015-Defense-Framework.pdf>.

²³ U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India," 4.

²⁴ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "Japan to Join Malabar as Permanent Participant," *Defense News*, October 13, 2015 ~ <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2015/10/13/japan-to-join-malabar-as-permanent-participant>; and Gurpreet S. Khurana, "MALABAR Naval Exercises: Trends and Tribulations," National Maritime Foundation, August 5, 2014, 1 ~ http://www.academia.edu/7879273/India-US_MALABAR_Naval_Exercises_Trends_and_Tribulations.

engage annually in the brigade-level field exercise Yudh Abhyas, and U.S. special operations forces train with their Indian counterparts twice annually in the Vajra Prahar and Tarkash exercises.²⁵ Bilateral air force exercises occur less frequently—a reflection of the fact that the Indian Air Force has far fewer international engagements due to limitations posed by distance, fuel costs, and aircraft compatibility.²⁶ Nevertheless, though the bilateral air exercise Cope India occurs infrequently (it was held in December 2018 for the first time since 2009), India did participate in the multilateral Red Flag–Alaska as recently as 2016. At the September 2+2 dialogue, the two countries agreed to introduce a tri-service exercise in 2019.

Despite their deepening defense cooperation, it is notable that in the intervening fourteen years since the United States and India coordinated efforts to respond to the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami they have not conducted a combined military-relief operation. Although both the Indian and U.S. armed forces deployed in large numbers to Nepal in 2015 to assist with relief efforts after the massive earthquake, they did so unilaterally, with no prior coordination. The two militaries did engage in some coordination on the ground in Nepal but not to a degree that would be expected considering that they had inked a disaster-relief initiative a decade earlier vowing to train together to enable an integrated response in precisely this type of situation.²⁷

Even if the two countries were to choose to engage in some form of combined operation, as envisioned in the 2005 and 2015 defense framework documents, they would find it challenging. The U.S. and Indian armed forces are still far from being interoperable. The concept of interoperability is much more than simply having common platforms and equipment. Militaries are interoperable when they can “act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve...objectives.”²⁸ Shared hardware enhances operational effectiveness for a number of reasons, but true interoperability relies on much more than hardware. More than anything, it requires habits of cooperation that develop through training, exercises, and joint planning to establish shared doctrines and procedures.²⁹

²⁵ U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, “Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India,” 5.

²⁶ Kishore Kumar Khera, “International Military Exercises: An Indian Perspective,” *Journal of Defence Studies* 11, no. 3 (2017): 27–28.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-India Disaster Relief Initiative,” Fact Sheet, July 18, 2005 ~ <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/fs/2005/49730.htm>.

²⁸ NATO, “Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces,” June 6, 2017 ~ https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_84112.htm.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Thus, although India exercises more with the United States than with any other country, the frequency of the exercise program is insufficient to achieve interoperability. As a point of comparison, whereas the U.S. Navy conducted only one exercise with India in 2017, it engaged in 28 major exercises with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force that same year.³⁰ Even a non-ally like Singapore, whose active duty forces are around 5% the size of India's, conducts more bilateral military exercises with the United States than does India.³¹ The Indian Defence Ministry's stated objective for international defense cooperation and exercises is to enhance "mutual trust and understanding with counterparts in foreign countries."³² Exercises are planned in support of political and foreign policy goals; the operational benefits are secondary. For this reason, when allocating resources for foreign military exercises, India has sought to increase the number of partners with which it engages (23 total partners since 2012), as opposed to increasing the frequency of exercises with key, capable partners like the United States.³³ This has the effect of increasing familiarity with numerous militaries, but it does not improve interoperability. Similarly, India's failure to regularly fill all the slots offered in U.S. professional military education programs is a missed opportunity for the rising stars in the Indian armed forces to build relationships with future U.S. military leaders.

Interoperability has been further hampered by India's reluctance, until very recently, to sign enabling agreements. These include the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), signed in 2016, which streamlines accounting practices to permit unanticipated reciprocal military logistics support, and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), signed in September 2018, which allows release of sophisticated communications systems for sale to India and will enable the two militaries to communicate securely. India has yet to agree to initiate negotiations on the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for Geospatial Intelligence, which would provide India with access to sophisticated mapping data.³⁴ These agreements, heatedly debated among Indian strategists

³⁰ Author's interview with the Japanese naval attaché to the United States, Washington, D.C., July 3, 2018.

³¹ Singapore conducted eight bilateral military exercises with the United States in 2017 and averages around seven bilateral exercises annually. In 2018, Singapore also participated in an additional eight multilateral exercises with the United States. Author's email communication with the Singapore defense attaché to the United States, August 14, 2018, and January 4, 2019.

³² Ministry of Defence (India), *Annual Report 2016–2017* (New Delhi, 2017), 168.

³³ Khera, "International Military Exercises," 17–40.

³⁴ For additional information on these agreements, see Mark Rosen and Douglas Jackson, "The U.S.-India Defense Relationship: Putting the Foundational Agreements in Perspective," CNA, February 2017 ~ https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2016-U-013926-Final2.pdf.

as potential threats to India’s sovereignty, are considered in the United States to be banal, box-checking exercises that facilitate basic cooperation. For example, the United States has signed a LEMOA or similar agreement with 88 countries, NATO, and the United Nations and a BECA-like agreement with more than 57 countries. The number of COMCASA-like agreements that the United States has signed is not publicly available, but it is most certainly greater than one dozen.³⁵ Forward progress on these agreements will provide a basis for improved operational cooperation.

Defense Technology Cooperation

India seeks access to quality U.S. technology to improve its military capability, bolster its domestic defense industry, and diversify its sources of defense equipment. The United States is interested in expanding defense trade with India to improve interoperability with the Indian armed forces, in addition to making sales. Importantly for India, the two countries have agreed to move beyond a buyer-seller arrangement to pursue coproduction and codevelopment and facilitate the transfer of defense technologies to India. The United States and India have made great strides thus far as a result of efforts by both sides to educate one another on their respective acquisition processes—in Washington’s case, to relax export controls for India, and for New Delhi, to be willing to adopt new end-use monitoring and security procedures. U.S. defense sales to India have reached approximately \$18 billion since 2001, with the promise of billions of dollars in additional U.S. sales on the horizon. Although the two countries continue to encounter bureaucratic challenges to foreign military sales, they have demonstrated an ability to innovate and adapt in order to facilitate sales and greater technology collaboration.³⁶

In 2012 the United States and India established the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with the goal of accelerating coproduction and codevelopment efforts. The DTTI was designed to identify specific technology projects for collaboration and, in the process, streamline bureaucratic obstacles, enabling more routine collaboration in the future. In creating the initiative, the United States and India sought to bypass ossified bureaucratic structures in both countries. The DTTI has expanded from

³⁵ Rosen and Jackson, “The U.S.-India Defense Relationship.”

³⁶ Cara Abercrombie, “Removing Barriers to U.S.-India Defense Trade,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 10, 2018 ~ <http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/10/removing-barriers-to-u.s.-india-defense-trade-pub-75206>.

four simple coproduction pathfinder projects to include seven working groups on sophisticated programs such as aircraft carrier, jet engine, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance technologies. At the same time, the United States has dramatically increased the level of technology it is willing to transfer to India. The decision to designate India a “major defense partner” in 2016—a status unique to India—reflects policy and regulatory changes to treat the country on par with the United States’ closest allies and “facilitate the export of goods and technologies for projects, programs, and joint ventures in support of official U.S.-India defense cooperation.”³⁷ This was followed by the announcement in July 2018 that the U.S. Department of Commerce granted India Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status, which further reduces the number of controlled items requiring export licenses for India.³⁸

Although these measures have benefited the relationship tremendously in many ways, the DTTI has nevertheless not yet accomplished its primary objective of jointly producing or developing defense articles. This is due in part to the challenge of identifying projects that are required by both defense establishments and make good business sense for potential private-sector partners. The initiative’s halting progress also reflects a disjuncture of goals, with the United States aiming to build institutional partnerships across the bureaucracies, while India continues to subject DTTI projects to its competitive procurement process.³⁹

Maritime Security

Goals for bilateral maritime security cooperation have evolved over the past decade. Following their shared experiences as partners in the 2004 Tsunami Core Group, which also included Australia and Japan, and facing the threat of Somali pirates, the United States and India announced a maritime cooperation framework in 2006 to address nontraditional security threats such

³⁷ U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, “Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India,” 5.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Public Affairs, “U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross Announces Programs to Increase U.S. Commercial Engagement in the Indo-Pacific Region,” July 30, 2018 ~ <https://www.commerce.gov/news/press-releases/2018/07/us-secretary-commerce-wilbur-ross-announces-programs-increase-us>.

³⁹ Ashley J. Tellis, “Beyond Buyer-Seller,” *Force*, August 2015 ~ http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Tellis_Beyond_Buyer-Seller.pdf.

as disaster response, counterpiracy, and transnational crime.⁴⁰ The initiative never picked up steam, however, because there was no political imperative for cooperation in the intervening years, and operational cooperation was inhibited by the interoperability limitations discussed previously. To date, operational U.S.-India maritime security cooperation has consisted primarily of Indian Navy vessels coordinating with the multinational counterpiracy task force operations off the coast of Somalia.

Over the past four years, however, maritime security cooperation has been energized against the backdrop of rising tensions over territorial disputes and Chinese land-reclamation activities in the South China Sea. With the release of the “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” in 2015, President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Modi provided a framework and impetus for maritime security cooperation.⁴¹ A new maritime security dialogue, launched in 2016, with participation by diplomats, naval officers, and civilian defense officials has deepened the discussion on the types of cooperation the two countries can address together in the maritime domain. India and the United States signed a white shipping agreement in 2016 to improve maritime domain awareness by sharing open-source information on the movement of commercial vessels. The two countries signed the LEMOA that same year, more than ten years after it was first discussed, which will enhance the ability of the militaries to support one another’s logistics requirements in the course of operations, including at sea. Indeed, the first use of the agreement was replenishment to an Indian Navy vessel in the Sea of Japan in 2017.⁴² Starting in 2018, India agreed to send a military liaison to the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain to coordinate maritime activities in the Indian Ocean. The arrangement for the first time bridges the division of U.S. geographic combatant command lines and opens up opportunities for future bilateral cooperation throughout the Indian Ocean region.⁴³

⁴⁰ “Indo-U.S. Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation,” Ministry of External Affairs (India), March 2, 2006 ~ <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6030/IndoUS+Framework+for+Maritime+Security+Cooperation>.

⁴¹ “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region.”

⁴² Sushant Singh, “LEMOA in Place, U.S. Tanker Refuels Indian Navy Ship in Sea of Japan,” *Indian Express*, November 11, 2017 ~ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/lemoa-in-place-us-tanker-refuels-indian-navy-ship-in-sea-of-japan-4932082>.

⁴³ Shishir Gupta, “Soon, India Defense Attaché at U.S. Navy Bahrain Command,” *Hindustan Times*, March 21, 2018 ~ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/soon-india-defence-attache-at-us-navy-bahrain-command/story-iTGpB5sLbOlod11MlprWj1.html>.

Counterterrorism

The United States and India have a shared imperative to defeat terrorist groups that would threaten their citizens and interests in South Asia. Interest in counterterrorism cooperation preceded the September 11 attacks, but that event put counterterrorism at the forefront of the bilateral agenda. The two countries established a joint counterterrorism working group in 2000, which has met fifteen times. Additionally, they have conducted numerous professional and educational exchanges among law enforcement, military, and civilian experts, sharing best practices and lessons learned, and have pursued cybersecurity cooperation against terrorist threats.⁴⁴ Yet, while the two have worked together to address a number of counterterrorism objectives, practical cooperation to address specific threats lagged initially, due in large part to what Lisa Curtis has referred to as “a lingering trust deficit” owing to the United States’ ongoing operational cooperation with Pakistan.⁴⁵ The 2008 Mumbai attacks helped break down some of the barriers to cooperation, with reported improvements in intelligence sharing and law-enforcement cooperation after the attack.⁴⁶ A homeland security dialogue, established in 2011, brought together experts from key bureaucratic stakeholders on both sides to address multiple aspects of counterterrorism cooperation, including law enforcement, critical infrastructure protection, and cybersecurity.⁴⁷ After Mumbai, a changed U.S. approach to Pakistani-based groups that target India and the region has helped overcome some of India’s distrust.⁴⁸ Today, counterterrorism cooperation has improved dramatically, moving beyond regular dialogues to improved coordination, intelligence and information sharing, technology and equipment sharing, and efforts to counter improvised explosive devices.⁴⁹ In 2017, the two countries launched a dialogue to increase bilateral cooperation on pursuing designations against individuals and terrorist groups, moving closer to the tangible counterterrorism cooperation

⁴⁴ K. Alan Kronstadt and Sonia Pinto, “India-U.S. Security Relations: Current Engagement,” Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, R42823, November 13, 2012, 14 ~ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42823.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Lisa Curtis, “U.S.-India Counterterrorism Cooperation: Deepening the Partnership,” testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Washington, D.C., September 14, 2011 ~ <https://www.heritage.org/testimony/us-india-counterterrorism-cooperation-deepening-the-partnership>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Kronstadt and Pinto, “India-U.S. Security Relations,” 12.

⁴⁹ “Brief on India-United States Relations,” Ministry of External Affairs (India), 2017.

envisioned by U.S. and Indian leaders in 2001.⁵⁰ These recent gains were highlighted in the September 2018 2+2 dialogue joint statement, with the two countries pledging to further increase cooperation.⁵¹

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been a recurring focus of the strategic partnership since 2001, but U.S. and Indian leaders have been clear-eyed about the limits of practical bilateral cooperation, given regional political sensitivities. Rather than identify specific areas for direct cooperation, the United States and India have supported their respective efforts to achieve stability in Afghanistan. India has endorsed the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan, and the United States has welcomed India's development assistance. The two countries communicate regularly about Afghanistan, a practice that has improved in recent years after India expressed frustration in 2011 about the U.S. government's lack of transparency about a major policy announcement that year.⁵² Since 2014, they have worked to coordinate military assistance to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, made a point of visiting India early in his command in 2016 to share perspectives—the first time a U.S. commanding general had done so. The United States coordinated with India as New Delhi provided lethal military equipment to Afghanistan for the first time by transferring seven attack helicopters to the Afghan Air Force in 2015–16.⁵³ The United States' 2017 South Asia Strategy, the first such document to explicitly recognize an Indian role in shaping Afghanistan's future, presents an opportunity for greater coordination and cooperation going forward.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ "India-U.S. Counter-Terrorism Designations Dialogue," Ministry of External Affairs (India), December 19, 2017 ~ <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29183/IndiaUS+CounterTerrorism+Designations+Dialogue>.

⁵¹ "Joint Statement on the Inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Press Spokesperson, September 6, 2018 ~ <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/09/285729.htm>.

⁵² K. Alan Kronstadt and Sonia Pinto, "India-U.S. Security Relations: Strategic Issues," Congressional Research Service, CRS Reports for Congress, January 24, 2013, 41 ~ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42948.pdf>.

⁵³ Franz-Stefan Gady, "India's Plans to Buy Helicopter Gunships for Afghanistan," *Diplomat*, January 2, 2018 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/indias-plans-to-buy-helicopter-gunships-for-afghanistan>.

⁵⁴ "Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia," White House, August 21, 2017 ~ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia>.

BARRIERS TO MATURITY

As the preceding section demonstrates, the frequency and number of engagements and breadth of overall activity between the two governments, in particular between the Indian and U.S. militaries, have grown dramatically over the past decade and a half, demonstrating a considerable level of effort by both sides to strengthen the strategic partnership. The two have successfully taken unilateral actions, making changes to legislation, policies, and procedures to facilitate strategic partnership objectives. Yet the overall output resulting from these dialogues, exercises, and engagements and the tangible impact on Indian and U.S. security objectives are less than one would expect given the level of input and the number of years the two countries have worked toward these goals.

Although the U.S.-India strategic partnership has a strong institutional architecture in place, it lacks the practical cooperation needed to achieve its objectives. There simply is not the natural, connective tissue between officials—informal as well as formal—that one would expect of a relationship this broad and ambitious. The United States knows from experience that maturity in a relationship results when two partners engage routinely at all levels—from the strategic to the tactical. Critically, through formal and informal connections, partners build the habits of cooperation that help government officials identify opportunities and clear obstacles. Alyssa Ayres underscores this point in her assessment of bilateral diplomatic ties, noting “the habits of cooperation between both countries do not resemble those the United States has with other major powers.”⁵⁵ U.S. and Indian officials—diplomats as well as military officers—do not naturally engage outside of formal structures or dialogues. They do not routinely coordinate with one another in advance of major policy announcements or multilateral events on issues that do not directly affect the bilateral relationship, as the United States does with many of its allies and other key partners. For example, U.S. officials typically will coordinate with close partners in advance of making major foreign and security policy decisions to avoid surprise, promote cooperation where possible, and minimize friction where differences exist. The United States and India do this more today than they have in the past, but not routinely—as the United States does, for example, with Japan or Australia.

⁵⁵ Alyssa Ayres, *Our Time Has Come: How India Is Making Its Place in the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 231–32.

This lack of connectivity, or shared habits of cooperation, represents a breakdown in the United States and India's ability to translate vision into action. There are several possible reasons that the two countries have found it so difficult to build these connections. It likely is not deliberate but the result of a combination of factors, key among them being different expectations of the partnership and foreign policy differences. These in turn are compounded by bureaucratic obstacles in both countries.

Differing Expectations for the Strategic Partnership

At a fundamental level, it seems that, despite sharing a common vision for the strategic partnership, the two countries have different ideas of what the partnership means in practice and how to implement that vision. These differences in perception can lead to divergent, and possibly unrealistic, expectations for one another, which in turn can frustrate practical cooperation. The United States typically works in concert with its partners to achieve shared security objectives. It has modeled its approach to India on other mature security relationships. While it recognizes that India is unlikely to enter into a formal alliance, Washington nevertheless expects that over time India will grow more comfortable working alongside the United States militarily and diplomatically. In terms of military cooperation, the United States envisions cooperation on noncombat operations, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief missions, or combined maritime security patrols. The United States also expects that positive momentum in the defense and security dimension of the relationship will spur greater cooperation in areas that have traditionally faced more obstacles, like trade and investment.

India, unaccustomed to working in an alliance-type relationship, tends to view the strategic partnership very differently. It expects to coordinate defense and security perspectives, approaches, and efforts but fundamentally to go it alone, functioning in parallel with the United States as opposed to working together. India's policy of strategic autonomy, a deliberate decision not to align with any one country, places limits on how closely it will work with the United States. In this context, India seeks U.S. assistance with building up its military capabilities—by transferring technology and know-how and building skills through exercises—as well as in promoting its standing in global multilateral organizations so that India can grow into a leadership role. This approach allows the country to benefit from cooperation with the United States without compromising its strategic autonomy. Though the United States may be its most important security

partner, India will deliberately circumscribe certain types of cooperation to ensure that it keeps the door open to other partners in the future. However, in doing so, it may inadvertently be closing off opportunities to work with the United States in the future by not engaging in the type of ground work—those habits of cooperation and enabling efforts—that would be required, for example, to launch close military cooperation quickly.

Some of the differences in expectations likely stem from the simple fact that India has never before had a multidimensional security partner. Its decades-long defense relationship with the Soviet Union and subsequently Russia never involved operational cooperation but was focused on defense sales and technology transfer. Indeed, the first military exercise between the two countries did not occur until 2003.⁵⁶ With the exception of India's procurement and production cadre, who have decades of experience working closely with the Russian defense establishment, Indian defense officials and military officers have no real experience building habits of cooperation with another country. There is a risk that requirements for meaningful cooperation will be obscured by the sheer number of dialogues, which generate a sense of momentum in the relationship but do not guarantee outputs. Staff may perceive that there is progress based on the number of meetings and prioritize process over outcomes, even when greater effort might be required to achieve a tangible impact.

Foreign Policy Differences

While a growing convergence of interests and strategic outlooks has propelled the U.S.-India strategic partnership forward, the two countries continue to maintain very different stances on a number of key foreign policy issues. Their different approaches to relations with Pakistan, Russia, and Iran have stymied aspects of defense cooperation in the past, and any one of these could complicate cooperation in the future. U.S. military cooperation with Pakistan is a perennial irritant to India that has directly impeded cooperation in some areas. As noted earlier, Indian concerns about U.S.-Pakistan ties, most notably the United States' history of arms transfers to that country, have inhibited some bilateral counterterrorism cooperation. The United States has deliberately concentrated its military engagement with India in its Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility, avoiding military engagement

⁵⁶ "Joint Indo-Russia Tri-Services Exercise Indra-2017 Successfully Conducted," Ministry of Defence (India), Press Information Bureau, November 1, 2017. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=173145>.

with U.S. forces operating to India's west—the country's priority maritime theater—where the U.S. Central Command engages Pakistan.⁵⁷ The United States' deliberate attempt to firewall its military engagements with India and Pakistan from their bilateral disputes has, as a result, inhibited some cooperation with India. Concerns over Pakistani sensitivities also limited the scope and extent of U.S. and Indian cooperation regarding Afghanistan in the first decade of the conflict, particularly in terms of coordinating security assistance. It remains to be seen whether recent changes in U.S. policy toward Pakistan will remove some of these barriers to cooperation.

India's close military ties to Russia have likewise complicated some aspects of cooperation with the United States, particularly in the area of defense technology transfer and coproduction. The United States seeks to ensure that its technology will not be shared with other countries. India's scorecard in this regard has been excellent, but it resents U.S. end-use monitoring and export-control policies, which are designed to ensure that sensitive technology does not fall into the hands of competitors or adversaries like Russia. Although the United States has successfully worked with India to overcome its sensitivities to export-control requirements and mitigate against potential risks related to defense sales to Russia, India's continued defense relationship with Russia presents an ongoing challenge to defense cooperation with the United States. Indian incorporation of sophisticated Russian technologies into its command-and-control networks will at best cause the United States to consider withholding sensitive technologies it otherwise would have been willing to share with India.⁵⁸ At worst, new defense acquisitions, such as the S-400 air defense system that India recently agreed to purchase from Russia, could trigger U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, with significant repercussions for future U.S.-India defense cooperation.⁵⁹

To date, the United States and India have successfully navigated differences on Iran policy, but U.S. threats of secondary sanctions on India

⁵⁷ Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (India), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (New Delhi, October 2015), 32.

⁵⁸ Vishnu Som, "U.S. May Block Sale of Armed Drones as India Is Buying Arms from Russia," NDTV, May 29, 2018 ~ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/s-400-missile-deal-us-may-block-sale-of-predator-drones-as-india-is-buying-arms-from-russia-1858958>.

⁵⁹ Ashley J. Tellis, "How Can U.S.-India Relations Survive the S-400 Deal?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 29, 2018 ~ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/08/29/how-can-u.s.-india-relations-survive-s-400-deal-pub-77131>.

because of trade with Iran present a potential new irritant in bilateral ties.⁶⁰ Collectively, these differences have the effect of casting doubt among senior foreign policy elite in New Delhi and Washington on the reliability of the other as a partner. This in turn may affect individual government officials' willingness to build habits of cooperation with their counterparts.

Bureaucratic Obstacles

The challenges to the strategic partnership posed by differences in expectations and foreign policy are exacerbated by bureaucratic obstacles in both capitals. Frequent turnover in both countries' bureaucracies makes it difficult to build personal relationships with counterparts. In India, an inexperienced civil service that rotates frequently through positions is often reluctant to make the decisions required to facilitate cooperation. In the United States, approval for new initiatives with India, particularly for some export-control decisions, can languish because of lengthy review processes, which can delay bilateral cooperation and reinforce Indian impressions that Americans can be difficult partners.

Some of India's standard bureaucratic practices prevent, complicate, and undermine cooperative behavior. For example, the process for approving military officer engagements with foreign counterparts severely limits opportunities to build relationships and habits of cooperation among military personnel. All foreign engagements by the Indian military, from exercises, to meetings, to travel by individual officers—including the service chiefs of staff—must be approved by senior civilian officials in the Ministry of Defence. This applies as well to ministry meetings with foreign defense attachés in New Delhi, severely limiting the ability for officers posted to India to build relationships with their counterparts in the country. This practice is in place for multiple reasons, notably to preserve civilian oversight of the military and of foreign affairs. Yet the process is slow and inevitably fails to approve some engagements in time.⁶¹ Other actions considered mundane in the U.S. system can require prime minister-level approval in India, greatly delaying efforts to advance bilateral cooperation. For example, logistics agreements like the LEMOA are typically approved at the one-star level in the U.S. system,

⁶⁰ Suhasini Haidar, "India Braces for More U.S. Pressure on Iran Sanctions," *Hindu*, July 4, 2018 ~ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iran-sanctions-india-braces-for-more-us-pressure/article24331678.ece>.

⁶¹ Author's interview with U.S. Department of Defense officials, January 3, 2018.

whereas this agreement required national-level approval in India and was signed by the defense minister.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defence are not staffed to take on the full spectrum of cooperation required in a robust security relationship with the United States, let alone invest in relationships and habits of cooperation with U.S. counterparts. This challenge is not specific to relations with the United States. Dan Markey has discussed the need for India to invest in its foreign policy “software,” meaning its diplomatic corps as well as its nongovernmental institutions—academia, the media, think tanks, and businesses—that play an important role in policymaking to support the country’s global ambitions.⁶² Despite modest increases in the number of diplomats in recent years, India still does not have enough qualified and trained personnel in government to manage its engagements, build habits of cooperation, and support its global ambitions. The Ministry of Defence Office of Planning and International Cooperation is headed by a single joint secretary—a diplomat seconded from the Ministry of External Affairs. According to an organizational chart, this position is authorized to have a staff of fifteen and is responsible for managing India’s defense cooperation and engagements with the entire world. U.S. defense officials only ever interact with the joint secretary.⁶³ By comparison, the Australian Department of Defence International Policy Division has a staff of approximately 150 personnel to manage global defense policy and engagements, and staff assigned to work on the U.S. alliance relationship routinely meet with their U.S. counterparts at all levels.⁶⁴

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

Recommendations

Any of the challenges described above could slow progress in the U.S.-India strategic partnership, and some combination of them likely explains the missing habits of cooperation. Taken together, they reveal a general lack of maturity in the relationship. None, however, negates the logic underpinning the strategic partnership or its potential to advance U.S. and Indian interests. The challenges faced in defense and security are replicated

⁶² Daniel Markey, “Developing India’s Foreign Policy ‘Software,’” *Asia Policy*, no. 8 (2009): 73–96.

⁶³ Author’s email exchange with a U.S. Department of Defense official, August 8–9, 2018.

⁶⁴ Author’s email exchange with an Australian Department of Defence official, August 10, 2018.

across other dimensions of the relationship as well. It is in the interest of both countries to make even more of an effort to increase their practical cooperation. To fully achieve the potential of this partnership, the two should make several adjustments to how they engage one another and endeavor to normalize cooperation through more frequent and targeted engagements.

First, it is important that the United States and India strive toward developing a common understanding of what the strategic partnership means in practice and clarify their respective roles. They would be well advised to establish a joint set of priorities for achieving the desired end state, and a roadmap of near-, mid-, and long-term goals. The roadmap should specify what they intend to work on separately, and what they will work on together, being clear-eyed about what will be required of each. There is no need to create a new mechanism to achieve this understanding; the two can rely on the existing dialogue structure, provided discussion is focused and on target.

Second, India and the United States would benefit from regular, candid exchanges with one another regarding potential areas of foreign policy disagreements and their impact on trust in the bilateral relationship. Relationship managers—the mid-level and junior staff in Washington and New Delhi—do engage in these types of discussions; yet the issues are sufficiently significant as to require senior officials on both sides to address them properly. These conversations could occur on an ad hoc basis but should also be included on the agenda for high-level dialogues, such as the 2+2 and summit meetings. Senior leaders should find ways to narrow differences where possible, minimize potential stumbling blocks to existing cooperation, and avoid at all costs working at cross purposes from one another.

Third, and most importantly, both countries should prioritize this relationship and resource it appropriately. Top-down attention in India and the United States has been key to spurring successful cooperation to date. Until and unless some of these other differences are overcome and habits of cooperation are developed at the working level, senior leadership cannot be complacent. India will not be able to build a surfeit of personnel “software” overnight, but it can prioritize resources to the U.S. relationship and increase opportunities for ad hoc engagement, in addition to ensuring that the institutional framework is meeting relationship priorities. India should consider adding personnel to the Ministry of External Affairs Joint Secretary (Americas) desk, ensuring that an adequate number of staff are working the account to drive the agenda of the numerous dialogues and maintain informal contact with U.S. counterparts between formal meetings. It should also consider increasing staffing within the Ministry of Defence Office of the Joint Secretary for Planning and

International Cooperation to work specifically on cooperation with the United States. India might also increase the size of its defense attaché office at its embassy in Washington, D.C., to facilitate engagement. In this regard, it could draw from its Russia model. India has ten uniformed officers in its Moscow embassy's defense representative office (compared with only three in Washington), as well as civilian representatives from several of its public-sector defense undertakings who help manage joint production efforts with Russia. Finally, India would be well served by sending a liaison officer to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii, as it is doing with the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, and initiating periodic visits to the headquarters of U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command to share perspectives. It also should consider easing restrictions on military personnel interactions with foreign counterparts, in particular with New Delhi-based defense attaché offices.

For the United States, a few modest bureaucratic adjustments to prioritize India would have considerable impact. It should designate senior officials at the undersecretary level or higher in both the Departments of State and Defense as the India leads for their departments. Officials at the assistant secretary level would retain day-to-day oversight of the relationship, while these higher-level designees would be responsible for ensuring that India is prioritized within the bureaucracy. They would also maintain routine contact with senior Indian counterparts to sustain momentum in the bilateral relationship as well as build the habit of routinely consulting senior Indian officials on matters of global policy import. The United States could also increase the number of slots available to Indian officers in its military schools, provided India fills them.

New Delhi and Washington should direct resources to ensure that the two sides can accomplish what they have said they will do. For example, both countries should invest more in bilateral and multilateral military exercises and exchanges to improve interoperability. The United States and India should both dedicate personnel to ensuring the DTTI's success. In this way, they can build relationships and habits of cooperation between their governments beyond just those individuals responsible for managing the bilateral relationship so as to improve mutual understanding of policies and perspectives and coordinate positions.

Conclusion

The considerable potential of a mature U.S.-India strategic partnership to advance the countries' respective interests and contribute to regional and

global security is worthy of the expectations placed on it by Washington and New Delhi. The United States and India have already made significant investments of time, attention, and resources to propel the relationship forward with notable progress. They have demonstrated through the conclusion of their civil nuclear initiative their ability to affect change on a global scale. And they have built the foundation for a successful partnership through a robust dialogue framework.

Yet, as the preceding analysis of the defense and security dimension of the relationship has shown, the architecture that the countries have put in place is by itself insufficient to help them achieve their goals. The U.S.-India strategic partnership is still immature, not because the two countries have not accomplished all they set out to do together, but because it is not clear they will be able to do so without first addressing key challenges. These include their differing expectations, potentially problematic foreign policy differences, and bureaucratic obstacles. Defense ties have been the foundation of a strong strategic partnership. As U.S.-India trade relations enter choppy waters, it is all the more imperative that the two countries fortify defense ties by building habits of cooperation to provide ballast to the overall relationship.

Continued progress in the strategic partnership is not assured. To realize its full potential, the United States and India must acknowledge the challenges that have prevented greater progress to date and take action to address them. This will require significant and continued effort at the highest levels of government to address existing obstacles and develop the habits of cooperation that are the mark of a mature relationship. This “defining partnership for the 21st century” holds too much promise for the two countries to allow inertia or complacency to undermine its success.⁶⁵ ◆

⁶⁵ Narendra Modi and Barack Obama, “A Renewed U.S.-India Partnership for the 21st Century,” *Washington Post*, September 30, 2014.

ROUNDTABLE

Seeking Stability:
Japan's Relations in Northeast Asia under Shinzo Abe



James D.J. Brown

Shin Kawashima

June Teufel Dreyer

Yoshihide Soeya

Tomohiko Taniguchi


Introduction

Northeast Asia is one of the world's most complex security environments—a region home to three nuclear weapons states, great-power rivalry, multiple territorial conflicts, and long historical memories. In this environment, Japan must deftly navigate its relations with its neighbors against a backdrop of growing uncertainties about the international order. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's leadership, the country has taken unprecedented steps toward “normalizing” its international posture, introduced a new “free and open Indo-Pacific” strategy, bolstered its defenses, and strengthened relations with its ally and security guarantor, the United States. At the same time, Japan has assumed a new leadership role in regional economic and diplomatic initiatives, such as bringing the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership to fruition following U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement.

This *Asia Policy* roundtable takes stock of Japan's current political and economic relations with its Northeast Asian neighbors and the United States. Focusing on Japan's relations with Russia, China, Taiwan, the two Koreas, and the United States, the essays assess Tokyo's priorities and policies and note salient issues to watch in each bilateral relationship over the next two to three years.

Since returning to power in December 2012, Abe has sparked new momentum in Japan's relations with Russia and has committed to resolving the territorial dispute over the Northern Territories/Kuril Islands. James D.J. Brown examines Abe's efforts to cultivate ties with Russia and create the conditions for a resolution while arguing that a favorable deal is still likely to prove elusive. Shin Kawashima traces the trajectory of Japan-China relations to contend that the recent so-called improvement in their relationship is in reality a return to a more neutral state. He then looks at how Japan is striking a balance between Chinese and U.S. initiatives for Asia. June Teufel Dreyer addresses another delicate balance in Japanese foreign relations—that of Taiwan. Japan-Taiwan relations are developing in a generally positive direction, given shared democratic values, history, and strategic calculations, but remain constrained by the prospect of angering China. On the Korean Peninsula, North Korea continues to be a major source of regional instability. Yoshihide Soeya analyzes Japan's interpretation of developments in the North Korean crisis and related interactions with South Korea and the United States in response, and he

suggests strategic and political options for the coalition of involved states in the future. Last, and perhaps key to achieving a sense of stability in this insecure environment, Japan under Abe has concentrated on reinvesting in its relationship, and in particular the bilateral security alliance, with the United States. Tomohiko Taniguchi shows how Abe has done this by both making it easier for the United States to maintain a presence in Japan and demonstrating that a continued presence in the Indo-Pacific is in the best interest of the United States.

Taken together, these essays depict a more assertive and internationally minded Japan than in recent years. Under Abe, the country has sought to promote its political, security, and economic goals in a challenging regional environment beset by a changing balance of power, nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula, provocative behavior by China in the East China Sea, competing economic arrangements, and concerns about the possible withdrawal of the United States from its traditional role. As Taniguchi puts it, Japan is choosing to play the role of a “system stabilizer.” Its efforts to do so remain important to watch. 

Abe's Russia Policy: All Cultivation and No Fruit

James D.J. Brown

Since returning to power in December 2012, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made Japan's relations with Russia one of his foreign policy priorities. Above all, he has committed himself to resolving the decades-old territorial dispute over what Russia terms the Southern Kuril Islands (known as the Northern Territories in Japan) and to signing a peace treaty "with his own hand."¹ Pursuing this aim, Abe has met President Vladimir Putin as frequently as possible, achieving a total of 25 meetings by the start of 2019. These efforts culminated in an agreement in November 2018 to accelerate territorial talks based on the 1956 Joint Declaration, which states that Russia is willing to transfer two of the four disputed islands to Japan after signing a peace treaty.

With a resolution to this World War II-era dispute apparently in sight, territorial negotiations will dominate the bilateral agenda during the remainder of Abe's premiership, which must end by September 2021. Any analysis of contemporary Japan-Russia relations therefore requires an assessment of the prospects of a territorial agreement finally being reached. Before this, however, it is useful to reflect on how Abe's single-minded pursuit of a legacy-defining deal with Russia has more broadly shaped Japan's political, economic, and security relations with its northern neighbor.

Abe's policy for securing a territorial breakthrough has been officially characterized as his "new approach" to Japan's relations with Russia.² This was announced during his visit to Sochi in May 2016, and it is understood to consist of two components. The first is Abe's willingness to moderate Japan's territorial demands, effectively abandoning the previous insistence that Russia acknowledge Japanese sovereignty over all four of the disputed islands. Second, the Japanese leader has actively promoted expanding cooperation with Russia across a broad range of sectors, using the slogan that Russia is Japan's bilateral relationship with "the greatest

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¹ "Nichiro heiwa joyaku no kosho shinten ni iyoku—Shusho, Suzuki Muneo-shi to kaidan" [Desire for Progress in Japan-Russia Peace Treaty Negotiations—PM Talks with Muneo Suzuki], *Hokkaido Shimbun*, November 9, 2018 ~ <https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/246454>.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Nichiro shuno kaidan" [Japan-Russia Summit Meeting], May 7, 2018 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/rss/page3_001680.html.

underlying potential.”³ This also represents a change from previous administrations, which had sought to partially hold back engagement as a means of incentivizing Russian concessions. By contrast, Abe’s calculation is that, by frontloading cooperation, he can add dynamism to the relationship and create momentum toward achieving the desired territorial breakthrough.

This essay makes the case that despite Abe’s careful cultivation of closer ties with Russia in the areas of politics, economics, and security, a favorable territorial deal is still likely to elude him. Above all, this is because the conditions that Russia will apply to even a two-island deal will be too demanding for any Japanese leader to accept.

Expanding Political Ties

In terms of political relations, Abe has led by example and worked hard to cultivate personal trust with Putin. As well as holding frequent summits, he has publicly praised the Russian leader, describing him as “a man who keeps promises” and someone who “is dear to me as a partner.”⁴ It is possible that Abe genuinely does admire the Russian strongman, yet the main reason for his emphasis on this personal relationship is the belief that Putin has the power and political will to make a territorial deal. This is based on the understanding that only a popular Russian leader with clear nationalist credentials could force through territorial concessions against domestic opposition. Added to this is the fact that Putin has already approved border agreements with China in 2004 and Norway in 2010. He is also the first Soviet or Russian leader since 1960 to acknowledge the validity of the 1956 Joint Declaration and its offer to transfer the islands of Shikotan and Habomai to Japan after the signing of a peace treaty.

The interactions between Abe and Putin inevitably attract most attention, but it is important to note that the recent improvement in political relations has spread beyond the two leaders. As would be expected, there are also regular meetings at the level of foreign ministers and deputy foreign ministers. Furthermore, interparliamentary ties have

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), *Gaiko seisho, dai 61 go* [Diplomatic Bluebook, 61st Edition] (Tokyo, 2018), 98 \approx https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/2018/pdf/pdfs/2_5.pdf.

⁴ Kirill Agafonov, “Abe schitaet Putina derzhashchim obeshchanie chelovekom” [Abe Considers Putin a Man Who Keeps Promises], TASS, February 14, 2017 \approx <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4019491>; and “Sindzo Abe: Prezident Putin mne dorog kak partner, s nim mozno pogovorit’ po dusham” [Shinzo Abe: President Putin Is Dear to Me as a Partner, with Him One Can Speak Heart to Heart], TASS, November 25, 2018 \approx <https://tass.ru/interviews/5826060>.

expanded considerably. For instance, in a little-noted development, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) signed a cooperation agreement with United Russia during a visit by Secretary General Toshihiro Nikai to Russia in April 2018.⁵ There has also been an increase in exchanges between the countries' upper houses, with Russian Federation Council speaker Valentina Matvienko visiting Japan in November 2016 and her Japanese counterpart, Chuichi Date, becoming in July 2018 the first president of Japan's House of Councillors to deliver a speech in Russia's upper house.

Some aspects of this growing political relationship are certain to rouse suspicion in the West. In particular, although Japan did join the rest of the G-7 in introducing sanctions against Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it kept these measures deliberately weak, and the Abe administration has been happy to host several Russian officials who are under Western sanctions. Japan also avoided taking a public stance against Russia over the Skripal poisoning in March 2018 in the United Kingdom and the Kerch Strait incident in November 2018. Most notably, while 28 countries and NATO expelled a total of 342 Russian diplomats in response to the Skripal case, Japan declined to do so. Unquestionably, these decisions were shaped by the Abe administration's desire not to disrupt the ongoing territorial negotiations.

Abe's Eight-Point Economic Cooperation Plan

As well as laying the groundwork for a resolution to the territorial dispute through strengthened political relations, the Abe government has sought to facilitate a breakthrough by promoting economic cooperation. This is the area in which Japan most obviously has something to offer Russia by means of investment and technology transfers. Mindful of this, Abe in May 2016 announced an eight-point economic cooperation plan that is designed to boost bilateral exchange and give Russia a taste of what more could be achieved if a peace treaty were concluded. The eight points are:

- (1) Extending healthy life expectancies, (2) developing comfortable and clean cities that are easy to live and work in, (3) expanding fundamentally exchange and cooperation between medium-sized and small companies, (4) cooperating on energy, (5) promoting industrial diversification and enhancing productivity in Russia, (6) developing industries and export bases in the Russian

⁵ "Pravyashchaya v Yaponii LDP i 'Edinaya Rossiya' podpishut dogovor o sotrudnichestve" [Japan's Ruling LDP and "United Russia" Sign a Cooperation Agreement], RIA Novosti, April 26, 2018 ~ <https://ria.ru/20180426/1519435307.html>.

Far East, (7) cooperating on cutting-edge technologies, and (8) expanding people-to-people interactions.⁶

Abe has actively promoted the implementation of this plan by attending Russia's Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok for three successive years, as well as by taking part in St. Petersburg's International Economic Forum in May 2018. He also appointed his minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Hiroshige Seko, to the new post of minister for economic cooperation with Russia.

Abe claims that the eight-point plan has been a success, with more than 150 projects agreed to and more than half of those already underway.⁷ It is noticeable, however, that many of these projects are small-scale, with the prime minister himself giving the examples of a rehabilitation center in Vladivostok, smart traffic lights in Voronezh, and the provision of high-speed internet to schools in Yakutia.⁸ These projects are no doubt valuable to those involved, but they lack symbolic significance and are too small to exert influence on Russian thinking about the territorial dispute. Indeed, Minister Counselor Dmitri Birichevski from the Russian embassy in Tokyo has expressed disappointment at the level of economic engagement offered so far, stating that Russia wants more than “the imitation of cooperation.”⁹ It is also notable that, despite the introduction of the eight-point plan in May 2016, bilateral trade is only anticipated to reach \$22 billion in 2018, well below the nearly \$35 billion recorded in 2013.¹⁰

In 2019 it will therefore be interesting to see if Japanese companies are willing to take a bolder step and commit to the larger-scale investments that Russia is waiting for. One possible area for cooperation is liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the Arctic. In September 2018, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation and Novatek, which is the operator of the Yamal and

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), “Nichiro shuno kaidan.”

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), “Toho keizai foramu zentai kaigo ni okeru Abe sori daijin supichi” [Address by Prime Minister Abe at the Eastern Economic Forum Plenary Session], September 12, 2018 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/jrep/page4_004330.html.

⁸ “Abe schitayet, chto sotrudnichestvo Yaponii i Rossii polozhitel'no vliyayet na zhizn' Rossiyan” [Abe Believes That Japan-Russia Cooperation Has a Positive Influence on the Lives of Russians], TASS, November 25, 2018 ~ <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5831981>.

⁹ Dmitry Birichevsky, “Contemporary Russia-Japan relations” (lecture at Temple University, Japan Campus, September 18, 2018) ~ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unaJlt3BzLA&t=0s&list=PLAA67B040B82B8AEF&index=6>.

¹⁰ “Oreshkin: Tovaroorobot mezhdu Rossiei i Yaponiei v 2019 godu obgonit pokazatel' s SSHA” [Oreshkin: Trade Turnover between Russia and Japan in 2019 Will Overtake That with the U.S.], TASS, September 12, 2018 ~ <https://tass.ru/vef-2018/articles/5553573>.

Arctic LNG-2 projects. Furthermore, Seko visited the Yamal LNG project in April 2018, and Foreign Minister Taro Kono told an audience in October that “we are promoting comprehensive energy development cooperation with Russia in its Arctic region.”¹¹

Deepening Security Ties

In addition to overseeing these political and economic ties, Abe has overseen a deepening of security cooperation with Russia. This goal is explicitly set out in Japan’s 2013 National Security Strategy, which states that “under the increasingly severe security environment in East Asia, it is critical for Japan to advance cooperation with Russia in all areas, including security and energy.”¹²

In accordance with this ambition, Japan has begun 2+2 meetings between the countries’ foreign and defense ministers. The first of these was held in November 2013, followed by further 2+2s in March 2017 and July 2018. Regular meetings between the secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev and his Japanese counterpart Shotaro Yachi have also been held. These have been combined with increased exchanges between senior military officers. Most prominently, Oleg Salyukov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Army, and Valerii Gerasimov, chief of the general staff, visited Japan in November and December 2017.¹³ In return, Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) chief of staff Katsutoshi Kawano traveled to Russia in October 2018. The next high-profile exchange is anticipated to be the visit to Japan by the head of the Russian Navy, Vladimir Korolev, in 2019.

Japan and Russia have long conducted regular search-and-rescue exercises between the Russian Pacific Fleet and Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF). These were held for the eighteenth time in July 2018. Moreover, in November 2018, maritime cooperation moved into a new area when the JMSDF and Russia’s Northern Fleet conducted their first antipiracy drill in the Gulf of Aden. This exercise included flying helicopters off each other’s decks, which demonstrated a new level of practical cooperation.

¹¹ Arctic Circle Secretariat, “H.E. Taro Kono, Foreign Minister of Japan,” Vimeo, October 19, 2018 ~ <https://vimeo.com/295994012>.

¹² Cabinet Secretariat (Japan), *National Security Strategy* (Tokyo, December 2013) ~ <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/131217anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

¹³ James D.J. Brown, “Japan’s Security Cooperation with Russia: Neutralizing the Threat of a China-Russia United Front,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 861–82.

Delivering on a Territorial Deal?

Abe has therefore worked hard to achieve widespread improvement in Japan–Russia relations over the last few years. Many of these developments have value in their own right, but, from Abe’s point of view, they have a clear instrumental purpose: to lay the foundation for a territorial deal. Now that he is in the last phase of his premiership, Abe needs to deliver. Following his meeting with Putin in Singapore in November 2018, it is now apparent how he proposes to do this.

The main outcome in Singapore was the agreement to accelerate territorial talks based on the 1956 Joint Declaration. This is significant because, while this document offers the possibility of two islands being transferred to Japan, it makes no mention of the other two islands, Iturup and Kunashir (Etorofu and Kunashiri in Japanese). This suggests that Abe is ready to give up on Japan’s claim to these larger islands. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the prime minister has stopped talking entirely about “the return of four islands.”¹⁴

Instead, Abe’s goal appears to be the “two plus alpha” solution. As described by Muneo Suzuki, an informal adviser to the prime minister on this issue, this entails Japan regaining the islands of Shikotan and Habomai and securing rights to visa-free access and joint economic activities on Iturup and Kunashir.¹⁵ This would deliver only 7% of the disputed landmass to Japan but provide it with 38% of the contested sea area and at least some form of access to all four islands.

Abe also appears to have a clear schedule in mind for negotiating this settlement. Meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 in December, the Japanese and Russian leaders agreed that Foreign Ministers Kono and Sergei Lavrov will oversee the talks, which will be conducted by Deputy Foreign Ministers Takeo Mori and Igor Morgulov. During his visit to Russia on January 22, 2019, Abe sought to give further impetus to the process, and the leaders agreed for their foreign ministers to meet again in mid-February. In this way, Abe hopes to set the stage for the two sides to sign a framework agreement when Putin visits Osaka for the G-20 Summit in June 2019. Even if this timeline were to slip, in theory there would still be time for the

¹⁴ “Ryodo kosho no ronsen—Yonto henkan naze kataranai” [The Debate about Territorial Negotiations—Why He Won’t Say Return of the Four Islands], *Hokkaido Shimbun*, November 27, 2018 ~ <https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/251944>.

¹⁵ Suzuki Muneo, “Abe shusho wa ‘2 shima + arufa’ de ketsudan suru” [PM Abe Will Decide on “2 Islands Plus Alpha”], *Mainichi Shimbun*, November 14, 2018 ~ <https://mainichi.jp/premier/politics/articles/20181113/pol/00m/010/001000d>.

Japanese parliament to ratify an agreement before the end of the Abe era in September 2021.

Having thus upgraded Japan-Russia relations across the board and likely willing to settle for a two-plus-alpha compromise, is Abe on the verge of securing a territorial deal? The answer is probably not. Most importantly, the Kremlin has made it very clear that there is nothing automatic about the two islands being transferred to Japan after the signing of a peace agreement.¹⁶ What this indicates is that, even to gain just the two smaller islands, Japan would be required to fulfill certain conditions.¹⁷

First, Japan would be expected to acknowledge Russian sovereignty over all four of the disputed islands, thereby fulfilling Moscow's requirement that Japan recognize the results of World War II. After this acknowledgment is made and the peace treaty signed, Russia would move toward transferring the two smaller islands, not as a matter of legal necessity but as a gesture of goodwill. Second, to guarantee that no U.S. military facilities would appear on the transferred territory, Russia would insist that Shikotan and Habomai be excluded from the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Third, Japan would be required to guarantee the economic rights of the approximately three thousand Russian residents of Shikotan and to provide them with compensation if they were to decide to leave the island. Fourth, Japan would need to drop its current sanctions on Russia. The Russian leadership has also used the negotiations to place pressure on Japan to abandon its plans to install the Aegis Ashore missile defense system.¹⁸

It would be exceptionally difficult for any Japanese government to accept these conditions. To begin with, the Japanese public has been told for decades that all four of the islands are Japan's "inherent" territory.¹⁹ Therefore, significant public opposition should be expected to any attempt to abandon Japan's claim to the larger two islands. Indeed, a recent opinion poll found that only 5% of Japanese respondents were willing to settle for just

¹⁶ "Peskov isključil avtomatičeskuyu peredachu Kuril'skikh ostrovov Yaponii" [Peskov Excludes the Automatic Transfer of the Kuril Islands to Japan], Interfax, November 18, 2018 ~ <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/638361>.


¹⁷ James D.J. Brown, "The High Price of a Two-Island Deal," *Japan Times*, November 16, 2018 ~ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/11/16/commentary/japan-commentary/high-price-two-island-deal>.

¹⁸ "Lavrov zayavil o riskakh bezopasnosti Rossii iz-za deyatelnosti SSHA v Yaponii" [Lavrov Talks about the Risks to Russian Security of the U.S.'s Activities in Japan], RT, January 14, 2018 ~ <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/592365-lavrov-yaponiya-ssha>.

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Northern Territories Issue," March 1, 2011 ~ <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/overview.html>.

two islands.²⁰ Additionally, it can be anticipated that the U.S. government would not look favorably on an attempt by Japan to pick and choose where the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty applies. Likewise, Japan could expect serious criticism from Western partners if it were to drop the sanctions on Russia, especially given the re-escalation of tensions between Russia and Ukraine in November 2018.

To make matters worse, even if Japan showed a willingness to accept these conditions, there is no guarantee that Russia would follow through with the deal. In a Levada Center survey, only 17% of Russians were willing to accept the transfer of any of the Kuril Islands to Japan.²¹ Opposition is even stronger in the Russian Far East.²² With Putin's popularity less than what it was, he is likely to think twice before risking public anger over this issue. Even more crucially, the Russian leadership can hardly have failed to notice that the Abe administration's enthusiasm for closer political, economic, and security ties has been driven by its desire for a territorial deal. This incentive would disappear if an agreement were actually reached. As such, it is logical for Russia to play for time, to seek to extract as many inducements as possible, and to avoid ever actually resolving the dispute.

Overall, while Russia and the territorial negotiations will continue to feature prominently in Abe's foreign policy between 2019 and 2021, it is unlikely that the prime minister's determined efforts to cultivate close relations with Russia will ultimately bear the long-awaited fruit. 

²⁰ "Hopporyodo 2-to senko 46%, 2-to dake henkan wa 5-pasento seronchosa" [Northern Territories 2-Islands First 46%, Return of Only 2 Islands 5%, Public Opinion Survey], *Nikkei*, November 25, 2018 \approx <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO38162370V21C18A1PE8000>.

²¹ "Kuril'skaya duga: Pochemu Rossiyane stali chashche podderzivat' ustupku ostrovov" [The Kuril Arc: Why Russians Have Started to More Often Support Conceding the Islands], RBC, November 30, 2018 \approx <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/30/11/2018/5bffd8159a7947275a098fc7>.

²² "Na Sakhaline poprosili ne obsuzhdat' temu Kuril na peregovorakh s Yaponiei" [On Sakhalin They Request That the Topic of the Kurils Is Not Discussed in Negotiations with Japan], RIA Novosti, November 29, 2018 \approx <https://ria.ru/20181129/1533748782.html>.

Japanese Diplomacy and the “Improvement” in Sino-Japanese Relations

Shin Kawashima

Sino-Japanese relations showed continual signs of “improvement” in 2018. In May, Premier Li Keqiang visited Japan to attend a trilateral summit between Japan, China, and South Korea. In October, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid an official visit to China, and President Xi Jinping is expected to make an official visit to Japan in 2019. Such events signify a revival of relations between Chinese and Japanese heads of state.

Given the worsening of relations between China and the United States, Abe’s visit (and the potential strengthening of ties between Japan and China that it has been seen to embody) has received a great deal of attention. Until recently, bilateral relations had been at a standstill, with the most recent state visit being that of Yoshihiko Noda in December 2011 during the Democratic Party of Japan’s brief stint in power.¹ This essay argues that, rather than marking a new, warm era in Sino-Japanese relations, Japan’s objective has been to return the relationship to the neutral footing it was on prior to its trajectory of decline beginning just over ten years ago.

The essay first examines where the relationship went off track, starting in 2008, with Chinese incursions into the disputed waters of the East China Sea. It then addresses more recent issues in the bilateral relationship, including how the deteriorating Sino-U.S. relationship has affected both Sino-Japanese and U.S.-Japanese ties and how Japan is striking a balance between Chinese and U.S. initiatives for Asia. The essay concludes by examining where China and Japan see the Sino-Japanese relationship heading in the near term and what is needed to establish a stable, constructive bilateral relationship.

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NOTE ~ The author thanks Thomas P. Barrett for the translation of this essay into English.

¹ That is not to say that Abe has not met with Chinese heads of state since his inauguration in December 2012. Since fall 2014, meetings between the two sides have taken place at the G-20, APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), and other multilateral gatherings. Included among these were visits by Abe to China that were conducted as part of multilateral conferences. However, when multilateral gatherings have taken place in Japan, the Chinese side has shunned participation. Furthermore, Japanese prime ministers have not visited China outside the context of multilateral conferences.

The Senkaku Islands: A Catalyst Worsening Sino-Japanese Relations

Perceptions regarding the “neutral” state of relations, and the Sino-Japanese relationship itself, differ between the two countries. Japan, for example, sees China as culpable for the initial breakdown of relations.

The contemporary breakdown originated with two Chinese government vessels that entered Japanese waters around the Senkaku Islands (known as the Diaoyu Islands in China) in December 2008. At the time, some of the islands were owned by the Japanese state and some were privately owned. While the Chinese government has maintained since the early 1970s that the islands constitute Chinese territory, no public Chinese vessels had ventured into the area up until this point. In 2010, a Chinese fishing boat operating in close vicinity to the islands crashed into a Japan Coast Guard (the Maritime Safety Agency) vessel, resulting in the arrest of the Chinese captain. This event was reported extensively around the globe, and it led to the outbreak of an anti-Japan movement in China. In Japan, public outcry catalyzed conservative government voices to propose not only an augmentation of island defenses but also further measures in the unequivocal expression of Japanese sovereignty. In 2012, conservative activists sought to purchase and thus privatize the islands to build facilities, such as a lighthouse, as a display of sovereignty. Seeking to circumvent such an outcome, the Noda administration made the decision to place all five islands completely under state ownership and bought back the three islands that hitherto had been privately owned. During this process, Japan conducted talks with China, but perhaps due to the fact that the process coincided with the beginning of Xi’s premiership, the Chinese side was fiercely critical of the Noda administration’s attempt to “nationalize” the islands. After the buy-back process was set in motion, relations between the two countries’ heads of state came to a standstill.

Prior to the December 2008 incident, meetings between the Japanese and Chinese heads of state had been frequent that year. President Hu Jintao visited Japan, and the two countries had signed a joint declaration for a mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests that had been initiated during Abe’s first term. Notably, the two countries had agreed to begin joint development of resources in the East China Sea. Japan has hopes that the relationship will return to the state it was in during the first half of 2008. It was for this reason that, during his 2018 visit to China, Abe made a point of broaching with the Chinese side the June 2008 agreement on developing resources in the East China Sea.

The Effect of Worsening Sino-U.S. Relations on Sino-Japanese Relations

While Abe's China visit constituted one aspect of the supposed improvement in bilateral relations, tensions in the Sino-U.S. relationship also introduced new factors into the Sino-Japanese relationship. Given the progressively worsening ties between China and the United States, China undoubtedly wishes to improve terms with Japan. Yet Tokyo believes that an improvement in Sino-Japanese relations could be perceived by the United States as a sign that Japan is attempting to strengthen ties with China. These interactions, however, do not indicate a switch to a pro-China policy and instead were merely a reset of the bilateral relationship back to neutral.

In 2017, Abe summarized his conditions for economic cooperation with China into four points focused on "the international standards of openness, transparency, economic efficiency and financial soundness."² These were passed on to the Chinese side during Premier Li's Japan visit in May 2018 and once again during Abe's own visit to China in October 2018.³ These conditions coincide with key suspicions that the United States harbors *apropos* China.

At first, the Chinese government likely perceived these actions as an indication that Japan was gauging how the United States would react to Sino-Japanese cooperation. However, when a temporary deferment in a tariff increase for Japanese-produced vehicles was negotiated in mid-October, tensions in Japan-U.S. economic relations were to some extent alleviated. For this reason, any possibility that Japan would stand beside China in opposing the United States is now off the table. And the United States is continuing to take a tough stance on China in terms of intellectual property, trade, and technological innovation.

While Japan's official development assistance program for China ended in 2008, Tokyo still continued to provide a small amount of aid to China for technological cooperation. Prior to Abe's 2018 visit, however, it was decided that this program, too, would now be brought to an end. On the one hand, this signified that the Sino-Japanese relationship had been reconfigured to level footing. On the other, it could be interpreted as a message to the United States that Japan had now suspended technological cooperation with China.

² Shinzo Abe, "Asia's Dream: Linking the Pacific and Eurasia" (speech given at the banquet of the 23rd International Conference on the Future of Asia, Tokyo, June 5, 2017) ~ https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201706/1222768_11579.html.

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Premier of State Council Li Keqiang Visits Japan: Japan-China Summit Meeting and Banquet," May 9, 2018 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000857.html; and Shin Kawashima, "A New Norm in China-Japan Relations?" East Asia Forum, November 1, 2018 ~ <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/11/01/a-new-norm-in-china-japan-relations>.

In this way, the worsening of U.S.-China relations has had the tangible effect of moving Japan closer to its U.S. ally.⁴

Japan's Balancing of Competing Initiatives and the Four Conditions

During Abe's visit to China, the first Japan-China Third Country Market Cooperation Forum convened in Beijing. Representatives from both sides agreed to engage in joint cooperation in over 50 projects based in third countries, spanning the realms of infrastructure, logistics, IT, healthcare, finance, and beyond. The Japanese side was vocal from the start that the four international standards of openness, transparency, economic efficiency, and financial soundness must be met in these endeavors.⁵ Whether these conditions are met by China once the projects are in motion, and furthermore whether a system of checks can be implemented to ensure that they are, will become key issues for the international community.

First, if these conditions are met, it will help ease U.S. concerns about Japan's seemingly pro-China turn. Second, in a period when the United States is seen to be reducing engagement with China, Japan's continued commitment to these four conditions in its own engagement will give concrete form to a liberal-minded China policy. Third, if Japan can ensure that these four conditions are being and continue to be met, it will create an overlap between the United States' and Japan's "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy and China's Belt and Road Initiative, thus creating common ground to some extent between China and U.S. allies.

Yet, how the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry will enact a system that enables them to verify that China is meeting these conditions is still unclear. Moving forward, it will be important that Japan continues to demonstrate a "trust, but verify" stance vis-à-vis China for cooperation to succeed.

China's Hopes for the Future Sino-Japanese Relationship

While friction continues to increase between China and the United States, China's view of Japan has changed significantly. In 2010, China's GDP overtook that of Japan and is now nearly three times its size, and China's international influence has grown greatly as well. The country

⁴ Kawashima, "A New Norm in China-Japan Relations?"

⁵ Japan External Trade Organization, "1st Japan-China Third Country Market Cooperation Forum," October 18, 2018 ~ https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/jetro/topics/2018/1810_topics11.

has also ramped up its military activities in close proximity to Japanese territory and has behaved much more aggressively in the East and South China Seas.

These factors have likely driven China's recent attempts to reconstruct its bilateral relationship with Japan. But its goals in this regard diverge greatly from those of Japan, which has sought to return the relationship to the neutral position it was in back in 2008. China's plans for its future relationship with Japan were reflected in the 2018 rollout of its Maritime and Aerial Accident Communication Mechanism, its current means for handling disputes in the East China Sea, and the development of its disaster-prevention system.⁶ The Chinese government, moreover, feels compelled to create the impression domestically that it is prioritizing the development of its relationship with Japan. Given the far from sanguine situation of U.S.-China relations, the Chinese government has much to gain from presenting at home the image that it is favoring relations with Japan. It is for this reason that the Chinese leadership is emphasizing the Abe administration's growing pro-Belt and Road stance domestically, albeit while skirting the issue of the four conditions for economic cooperation that Japan has so heavily emphasized.

However, the biggest concerns in China-Japan relations—issues pertaining to territory, historical perceptions, and Taiwan—went largely unaddressed during meetings between the two countries' leaders in 2018. While one can understand the reasons that such issues have been pigeonholed in favor of pursuing an improvement in bilateral relations, this improvement only concerns the strategic relationship, and a breakdown in relations could happen again in the future. In terms of the average citizen, feelings between the two countries continue to be exceedingly negative. While there is often news about how considerable improvements have occurred in popular Chinese views regarding Japan, this trend is confined to a limited portion of the population. For such reasons, then, while Sino-Japanese relations may well continue to improve in 2019, the two countries have yet to achieve true stability in the bilateral relationship. ◆

⁶ See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Prime Minister Abe Visits China," October 26, 2018 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000958.html.

The Japan-Taiwan Relationship: An Unstable Stability

June Teufel Dreyer

Japan's relations with Taiwan (Republic of China, or ROC) have been shaped by both countries' relationships with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States. Despite President Chiang Kai-shek's adversarial relationship with Japan during World War II, relations between Japan and his ROC (first on the mainland and then on the island of Taiwan) were cordial during the postwar period. Shared opposition to Communism provided a common bond. An estimated twenty thousand Japanese troops under Japanese command wore Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang, or KMT) uniforms and fought against the Chinese Communist troops until 1948.¹ Strategic reasons also reinforced ties: the city of Hualien on Taiwan is but 69 miles from Japan's Yonaguni Island. Were Taiwan to be absorbed into the PRC, the territorial waters of Japan and China would be uncomfortably close.

This essay argues that strategic calculations, shared democratic values, and generally pleasant memories of colonial history will foster the continued development of Taiwan-Japan relations, although these will remain constrained by each side's fear of unduly angering China. The first section situates the relationship in a historical context, while the second section examines the development of relations under Shinzo Abe and Tsai Ing-wen. The essay concludes by considering the outlook for the Taiwan-Japan relationship.

The Past Is Prologue

As the PRC began its ambitious industrialization program, Japanese businesses saw lucrative opportunities and pressed for the normalization of diplomatic relations that would facilitate these. Tokyo's 1972 derecognition of the ROC in favor of the PRC dealt a sharp blow to the Taipei government, but economic and other ties continued informally. When Chiang Kai-shek's son and heir Chiang Ching-kuo died in office in 1988, he was succeeded

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¹ Donald G. Gillin, *Warlord Yen-Hsi-shan in Shansi Province, 1911-1949* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 285.

by his Taiwanese vice president. Born in Taiwan when the island was a Japanese colony, Lee Teng-hui infuriated Beijing by saying, correctly, that he had been a Japanese citizen for most of his life. In deference to Japan's acceptance of Beijing's one-China policy, Lee agreed not to visit Japan officially so long as he was in office, though he was able to use his language fluency to arrange informal meetings with Japanese officials. Under his administration, the ban on Japanese-language media programming was lifted, with the Taiwanese quickly becoming enthusiastic consumers of the latest Japanese television programs as well as Japanese fads and fashions. A new Taiwanese word, *harizu* (Japan mania), came into being. After a Chinese show of force in the Taiwan Strait ahead of Taiwan's 1996 election, Japanese officials, aware of the implications for their own security, committed to the United States to help defend the *shuhen jitai* (the waters around Japan), refusing Beijing's demand that Taiwan be explicitly excluded from the definition thereof. By 1999, retired members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces had become frequent visitors to Taiwan.

As China became less Communist and more prosperous, formerly anti-PRC elements in Taiwan became attracted by the mainland's nationalistic message. Overwhelmingly composed of those who had come to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek and their descendants, this group tended to identify as Chinese and favored unification with China, albeit under a variety of improbable scenarios (such as the PRC accepting ROC rule or the complete democratization of the PRC). Native-born Taiwanese, by contrast, were more resistant to incorporation into a country they had never been part of. The former became known as the "blues" and the latter as the "greens," with Lee, the first popularly elected president, as the standard bearer of the greens. In 2000, the term-limited Lee was succeeded by another Taiwanese, Chen Shui-bian, who continued his de-Sinification policy and moved still closer to Japan. These developments not only angered China, which from time to time accused Japan of wanting to bring Taiwan back under its control, but also upset the George H.W. Bush administration, which feared that Chen might provoke a war that could involve the United States.

Chen's successor, Ma Ying-jeou, born to a family from the mainland, reversed this process, declaring unification as his end goal. Though denying that he was anti-Japanese, Ma's conduct in office tended to confirm this reputation. Among other acts, in 2010 Ma snubbed then former prime minister Abe during his visit to Taipei by failing to provide official transportation, as would normally have been the case—Abe took a cab—and urged Japan to "learn from history," a phrase frequently used

by Chinese authorities to refer to insufficient apologies for the behavior of Japanese troops during World War II. Even Ma's signature piece, a 2013 fisheries agreement, had been in the discussion phase for many years, with the Japanese government agreeing to it only after a period of intense friction with the PRC over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Despite growing resistance to China within Taiwan, Ma also championed a number of controversial agreements that bound his country's economy more tightly to China's. When he attempted an extra-parliamentary agreement to ensure the passage of one such deal, a spontaneous demonstration erupted island-wide. Taiwan's unicameral legislature was occupied for three weeks, and the greens, led by Tsai Ing-wen and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), swept to victory in the national election in 2016.

Japan and Taiwan under Abe and Tsai

Taiwan-Japan relations in the Tsai era began with congratulatory messages from Abe and then foreign minister Fumio Kishida to the new president on her election. This gesture was not as innocuous as it might seem, being the first time since Japan normalized relations with the PRC in 1972 that senior officials had formally acknowledged Taiwan's election results. While calling Taiwan "Japan's great friend" and emphasizing the shared values of the two countries, the foreign minister was careful to add that relations would be maintained on a nongovernmental basis.²

Within a year, however, there was a change in the names of the organizations that allegedly handled nongovernmental relations: the Japanese government announced that its representative office in Taipei, the ambiguously titled Interchange Organization, would be renamed the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Organization. In addition to more accurately describing the organization's functions, the new name elevated the two sides to equal status, thus implicitly contradicting the PRC's contention that the island is a province of China. The Taiwan government reciprocated a few months later by renaming its de facto embassy in Tokyo as the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association (from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Japan). The announcement was low-key and is thought to have been delayed to avoid causing problems for President Donald Trump's meeting in April 2017 with President Xi Jinping. On a less formal level, a bilateral defense

² "Press Conference by the Chief Cabinet Secretary," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, May 20, 2016 ~ http://japan.kantei.go.jp/tyoukanpress/201605/20_p.html.

dialogue that began under Chen Shui-bian and was suspended under Ma Ying-jeou's administration was resumed.

Also testing the limits of Beijing's tolerance was the 2017 annual report of Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS).³ Particularly irritating, in addition to the report's subtitle "The Dynamics of the China-Taiwan Relationship," with its implicit hint of parity, were two mentions of "the Republic of China." Both uses were in fact historically accurate because they concerned the period prior to 1972, when Japan had recognized Taiwan as the legitimate government of China. The Japanese government responded to Beijing's complaints by stating that NIDS is an independent entity. This is technically correct, although the institute's website describes it as the main policy research arm of the Ministry of Defense. After Taiwan suffered a devastating earthquake in February 2018, Abe sent condolences to Tsai, addressing her as "your excellency." Following a protest from Beijing, the letter was removed from the Japanese government's website.⁴ The PRC Foreign Ministry also lodged a "serious protest" when a Japanese vice-minister attended a cultural exchange meeting in Taiwan, and another a year later when the head of Taiwan's Veteran's Affairs Council visited his counterpart organization, the Taiyukai, in Tokyo. Although the Taiyukai is not formally part of the government, its headquarters are located in the defense ministry and its directors are recently retired flag-rank officers.

The Future

Since then, apart from ongoing vibrant cultural exchanges and several center-right newspapers from Japan interviewing high-ranking Taiwan government officials, which Beijing regularly protests, quasi-unofficial relations seem to have plateaued. One factor may have been Abe's desire to be granted a state visit to Beijing, which occurred in October 2018, and to receive a reciprocal visit from Xi Jinping, which has yet to be scheduled. Major Japanese business interests do not want to be left out of Xi's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, though the government, wary of the strategic implications, has specifically excluded their taking part in port construction projects. For its part, Beijing is eager to include Japan, not only for its

³ National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), *NIDS China Security Report 2017—Change in Continuity: The Dynamics of the China-Taiwan Relationship*, trans. by Japan Times (Tokyo: NIDS, 2017).

⁴ Charles Hong, "Japan the Most Helpful?" *Taipei Times*, February 15, 2018 ~ <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2018/02/15/2003687671>.

financial and technological contributions but also to drive a wedge between Tokyo and Washington, which has steadfastly opposed participation.

Whether the aforementioned improvements in Japan-Taiwan relations represent a new normal, a return to the *status quo ante* of the Ma era, or a precursor to the gradual development of more formal state-to-state relations depends on many contingencies. Taiwan does not want to be a pawn in Sino-Japanese relations, worrying that Tokyo may treat it as an expendable entity to be sacrificed on the altar of *raison d'état*. Conversely, Japan wants to avoid being drawn into a Taiwan-China conflict. Both countries are acutely aware that China can be expected to vigilantly watch, object to, and respond with one or more of the retaliatory techniques available to it. These range from pressure on disputed islands, overflight of Japanese and Taiwan territories, restrictions on trade, and cyberattack intrusions to even kinetic attacks. Neither country wants to provoke the PRC leadership into using any of these options. In the case of Taiwan, this prudence was shown in the November 2018 local elections, when a referendum item calling for a change in the name Chinese Taipei, under which the island's athletes are permitted to compete in the Olympics, failed to pass.⁵ Under pressure from China, the International Olympic Committee had just before the election warned that the athletes would not be allowed to participate at all under the name Taiwan.⁶

Outward appearances of a steady state notwithstanding, destabilizing factors lurk in PRC-Japan-Taiwan relations. Although Tsai has been careful to avoid arousing Beijing's ire—overly so, according to her core constituency—she has been unwilling to accept the so-called 1992 Consensus that would ratify the PRC's view of “one China.” Also to Beijing's displeasure, Abe continues to push forward with his plans to revise the Japanese constitution in what Beijing claims is a further step toward the remilitarization of the country. And the Japanese government was sufficiently nettled by Taiwan voters' refusal to lift the country's ban on food imports from five Japanese prefectures near the 2011 nuclear meltdown that Foreign Minister Taro Kono suggested that Japan might no longer be willing to support Taiwan's bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.⁷

⁵ Central Election Commission (Taiwan), “2018 Taiwanese Referendums” \approx <http://referendum.2018.nat.gov.tw/mobile/en>.

⁶ “IOC Rejects Taiwan Name Change,” NHK World, November 19, 2018.

⁷ “Government Moves to Placate Japan over Food Import Ban,” *Tokyo Daily News*, December 13, 2018 \approx <http://tokyodailynews.com/taiwan-news-govt-moves-to-placate-japan-over-food-import-ban>.

The Japanese government has become increasingly uncomfortable with the PRC's expansionist activities in the South China Sea, through which a large proportion of Japanese oil and gas imports pass, while Beijing counters that Japan has no right to operate outside its own geographic area. The issue of the disputed islands in the East China Sea also remains unresolved. At the same time, Beijing's "united front" tactics are actively attempting to shift Taiwan politics back toward a pro-unification posture, even working on countries such as Australia and New Zealand to support its position.⁸ Should a KMT government replace the Tsai administration in the 2020 election, Japan would again have to address the uncomfortable possibility that its territorial waters would abut China's. An editorial in the *Japan Times* following the 2018 local elections, in which the KMT performed well, argued that the results indicated that there was no appetite in Taiwan for a real challenge to China and "Japan must adjust its strategic calculations accordingly."⁹ Others countered that the Japanese, and even more so Japanese decision-makers, do not take newspaper editorials seriously and that larger geopolitical factors will continue to shape the country's strategy.

Even if Abe, having won a third term as head of the ruling party and therefore prime minister, is not inclined to do so, he could be replaced by someone whose views of cross-strait relations are quite different. Xi, despite having succeeded in abolishing term limits for the PRC presidency, is not unassailable either. Domestic dissatisfaction with his heavy-handed rule, combined with declining economic indicators, could tempt Xi toward a diversionary foreign adventure. Should that include an ultimatum to Taiwan, a U.S.-Japanese response could trigger a dangerous escalation.

Assuming that none of these scenarios occur, the outlook for Taiwan-Japan relations is a continuation of warm relations just below the level that Beijing would deem to have crossed the line from unofficial to official relations. Occasional probing on exactly where that line is can be expected. At the same time, Beijing continues to quietly pursue measures to change the status quo in its relations with Taiwan, a status quo that the United States has pledged to defend. The danger of miscalculation is ever present. ◆

⁸ See June Teufel Dreyer, "The Big Squeeze: Beijing's Anaconda Strategy to Force Taiwan to Surrender," Foreign Policy Research Institute, August 13, 2018 ~ <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/08/the-big-squeeze-beijings-anaconda-strategy-to-force-taiwan-to-surrender>. Described by Xi as "a magic weapon for the victory of the party's cause," united front tactics comprise a coordinated series of efforts, both legal and illegal, to influence other countries' views in support of China's policies.

⁹ "Tsai and the DPP Get Shellacked," *Japan Times*, November 26, 2018 ~ https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/11/26/editorials/tsai-dpp-get-shellacked/#.W_7xAuJOlc8.

Japan and Peace on the Korean Peninsula: The Need for a Flexible Approach

Yoshihide Soeya

This essay presents a perspective on Japan's relations with the two Koreas in relation to resolving the thorny issues posed by North Korea. It will first briefly recap recent developments in North Korea's posture under Kim Jong-un before examining Japan's interpretation of those changes and related interactions with South Korea and the United States in response. It will then analyze the evolution of Japan's approach to relations with the Korean Peninsula and suggest strategic and political options for the future.

Developments on the Korean Peninsula

Upon swiftly consolidating power following the death of his father Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un adopted in March 2013 the "dual track" (*byungjin*) policy of pursuing the goals of nuclear and economic development. Although this approach is called a dual track, there is an obvious timing difference in his approaches to the two ambitions. Kim has given clear priority to missiles and nuclear weapon development over economic development as is evidenced by the quickening tempo of missile and nuclear tests: North Korea conducted three nuclear tests in 2016 and 2017, and in the same two years it launched seventeen medium- and long-range missiles. However, both areas of testing stopped completely after fall 2017. Notably, a Japanese specialist who has conducted a detailed content analysis of North Korea's state newspaper, the *Rodong Shinmun*, has found that the destinations of Kim's inspection visits have clearly shifted from military facilities to civil and economic ones since fall 2017.¹

Kim took advantage of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in February 2018 to begin a "charm offensive." Encouraged by its success, he declared a "great victory" for the *byungjin* policy at a Workers' Party Central Committee meeting in April 2018 and indicated a strategic shift toward

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¹ Author's conversation with Professor Atsuhito Isozaki, Faculty of Law, Keio University.

economic development.² Kim has thus seemingly embarked on a long journey toward creating an international environment on and around the Korean Peninsula favorable for both regime security and economic prosperity. The summit with Moon Jae-in on April 27, 2018, at Panmunjom and the summit with Donald Trump on June 12, 2018, in Singapore were crucial catalysts for this shift. Shaped by these two events, the basic framework for dealing with North Korea in the years ahead will consist of three pillars: (1) establishing new relations between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), (2) building a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and (3) working toward complete denuclearization of the peninsula.

Reading from Different Playbooks

A critical issue for the international community—but especially in Northeast Asia—is how to most effectively cope with Kim's strategic and seemingly long-range ambitions. Doing this will require close coordination among all the countries concerned. While North Korea, China, and Russia appear to form a loose coalition, the U.S., South Korean, and Japanese governments maintain little consensus on how to assess or approach the situation.

In this context, the current relationship between South Korea and Japan—one essentially of mutual neglect—warrants particular attention. The verdict by the South Korean Supreme Court in late November 2018 allowing South Koreans to seek compensation from Japanese firms for wartime forced labor was a severe blow to bilateral relations. Even more grievous, however, is the fact that the court case originated from a Supreme Court judgment to remand a lower court decision in 2012, and that both sides had let six years pass idly by without taking steps to resolve the issue.

As a result of this and other long-standing historical tensions, the Japanese government is suspicious of South Korea's reconciliatory moves toward North Korea. The Abe administration still appears to believe pressure will be most effective in achieving simultaneous solutions to the abduction, missile, and nuclear issues. Supporters of the prime minister's hard-line policy toward North Korea thus tend to see dialogue as a way for North Korea to deceive Japan, South Korea, and the United States. Indeed, the Abe and Trump administrations, in contrast to the Moon

² Jesse Johnson, "Abe Cautious as North Korea Pledges to Halt Nuclear and Longer-Range Missile Tests Just Days Before Key Summit," *Japan Times*, April 21, 2018.

administration, have been the key drivers of the maximum pressure strategy, and Abe has consistently sought Trump's support on the Japanese abductee issue.³ In general, he is also engaged in a not-so-subtle effort to ensure that Trump does not make concessions easily on security-related issues, particularly regarding Japanese concerns about North Korean short- and medium-range missiles. It is not surprising that in searching for a foothold to resolve these issues, Japan sees the United States as the best partner, no matter how mercurial relations are with Trump.

Changes and Challenges to Japan's Approach?

There are, however, some indications that Abe may be changing his approach to North Korea. While his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2017 almost entirely emphasized the importance of pressuring North Korea, the tone of his UN address in September 2018 was quite different:

Japan's policy of seeking to settle the unfortunate past and normalize its relations with North Korea once the abductions, nuclear, and missile issues are resolved will not change.... In order to resolve the abductions issue, I am also ready to break the shell of mutual distrust with North Korea, get off to a new start, and meet face to face with Chairman Kim Jong-un.⁴

The abduction issue was arguably critical in raising Abe to his current top position in leadership. He has repeatedly expressed his determination to resolve this issue during his tenure as prime minister, and he links it to solving the missile and nuclear issues. Realistically speaking, however, a preoccupation with the abduction issue is an obstacle to Japan's engagement in Korean affairs. While Kim may be ready to take up this issue, as was indicated by the Stockholm Agreement in May 2014 in which North Korea agreed to conduct a comprehensive and full-scale investigation on the abductions, he may also be thinking of using the abduction card as leverage in some way in the future. For now, Japan is a comparatively low priority in North Korea.

For Japan to become relevant sooner rather than later regarding the missile and nuclear issues, it is important for Abe to decouple those

³ See, for example, Narumi Ota, "Abe to Make Last-Minute Plea to Trump on Abduction Issue," *Asahi Shimbun*, June 6, 2018 ~ <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201806060062.html>. The abduction issue refers to seventeen Japanese nationals recognized by Tokyo as abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s and their return to Japan. Five abductees were returned in 2002.

⁴ Shinzo Abe (address at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 25, 2018) ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/unp_a/page3e_000926.html.

concerns from the abduction issue. In doing so, Japanese public opinion may not necessarily be the obstacle many outside Japan believe it to be. A *Nikkei* opinion poll in July 2018 indicated, for instance, that only 21% of those surveyed expect Abe to make progress on the abduction issue, while 71% expressed doubts.⁵ Although the abduction issue may be critical for Abe's legacy, the general public is rather sober about the prospect of its resolution.

If Japan gets involved in the current efforts for change on the Korean Peninsula, an advantage for Japan is the Pyongyang Declaration signed by Junichiro Koizumi and Kim Jong-il on September 17, 2002. The declaration laid out a comprehensive framework for diplomatic normalization, and the document is still treated as valid by both Tokyo and Pyongyang. Most importantly, the declaration sets up a framework for the normalization of relations and the potential for Japanese assistance to North Korea, keeping in mind Japan's diplomatic normalization with South Korea in 1965 as a precedent:

The Japanese side regards, in a spirit of humility, the facts of history that Japan caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of Korea through its colonial rule in the past, and expressed deep remorse and heartfelt apology. Both sides shared the recognition that, providing economic co-operation after the normalization by the Japanese side to the DPRK side, including grant aids, long-term loans with low interest rates and such assistances as humanitarian assistance through international organizations, over a period of time deemed appropriate by both sides, and providing other loans and credits by such financial institutions as the Japan Bank for International Co-operation with a view to supporting private economic activities, would be consistent with the spirit of this Declaration, and decided that they would sincerely discuss the specific scales and contents of the economic co-operation in the normalization talks.⁶

In return, North Korea agreed to take measures regarding the abducted Japanese, maintain a moratorium on launching missiles, and resolve nuclear issues: "Both sides confirmed that, for an overall resolution of the nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula, they would comply with all related international agreements. Both sides also confirmed the necessity of resolving security problems including nuclear and missile issues by promoting dialogues among countries concerned."⁷

⁵ *Nikkei Shinbun*, November 9, 2018.

⁶ "Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration," September 17, 2002 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html.

⁷ *Ibid.*

International circumstances at the time of the Pyongyang Declaration were different from today. The six-party talks had yet to be institutionalized, and U.S. policy was premised on distrust and pushing North Korea into a corner. Only then did Kim Jong-il make a strategic decision to cultivate relations with Japan, which led to a summit and the signing of the Pyongyang Declaration. The way Japan was approached by the North Korean leader back then reveals the ultimate criticality of Japan's role in dealing with North Korea. After all, the northern part of the peninsula is the only area that still remains unresolved in the process of reconciliation and compensation by Japan after the war. This alone is good enough reason for Japan to be imaginative in engaging in Korean affairs.

Conclusion: Searching for Peace on the Peninsula

In Japan, there is still a strong underlying distrust of Pyongyang among many politicians, professionals, and the general public. Despite this, the international approach to North Korea may be shifting, as evidenced by the recent summits. For Japan, let alone the Abe administration, to change its approach to Pyongyang, the bottom-line requirement is for it to take seriously that Kim Jong-un is committed to the long-term strategic goal of establishing "peace" on the peninsula precisely as a means to guarantee regime survival and achieve economic prosperity.

Even if Kim is sincere about his long-term aspirations, whether denuclearization will be achieved in the process is still uncertain. What Japan and the other states involved in resolving the crisis need now and in the months and years ahead is a strategy of flexible response that entails both a measure of trust in Kim's proclaimed end goals and a firm resolve to eventually denuclearize North Korea.

One thing that is obvious is that complete denuclearization as a precondition for negotiations will not work. Unless the countries concerned—Japan and the United States, among others—change this approach to negotiations, there is a strong possibility that the process will stall indefinitely. This does not mean that they should necessarily trust North Korea, but it is important to create an opening for success and not to make stalling a self-fulfilling prophecy. The involved countries must coordinate policy and craft a truly strategic approach toward a peaceful and prosperous future for Northeast Asia. ◆

Japan: A Stabilizer for the U.S.-Led System in a New Era

Tomohiko Taniguchi

Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan has concentrated on reinvesting in the bilateral military alliance with the United States. Abe has done this both by making it easier for the United States to maintain a presence in Japan and by attempting to demonstrate that such a continued presence in the Indo-Pacific is in the best interest of U.S. national security. In general, he feels responsible for cementing the United States' defense commitment to the region.

Geopolitical as well as geoeconomic elements have driven Tokyo's actions and decisions on this issue. Support for the bilateral military alliance remains consistent in Japan, and the partisan divide on many domestic issues is less prominent when it comes to the need to keep the alliance in good order. Few advocate the abandonment of the alliance, and Abe's recent decision to strengthen national defense capabilities was more or less unopposed.

This essay argues that Japan needs the United States to stay involved in the Indo-Pacific and examines how, in a time of great regional uncertainty, Japan under Abe has attempted to engage the United States and keep it close while simultaneously bolstering Japan's own capabilities. The first section looks at Abe's cultivation of relations with U.S. administrations in the face of changing regional dynamics. The second section then details Abe's efforts and contributions to stabilizing a strong bilateral relationship and U.S. presence in the region. The essay concludes with a call to maintain this stability in the years ahead.

Engaging the United States in a Changing Regional Environment

Prime Minister Abe is among the few leaders of the world to build a strong personal rapport with both President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump. Regardless of the striking differences between the two presidents, Abe has sought to strengthen U.S.-Japan relations under both administrations.

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With Obama, Abe had several notable firsts. In 2015, he became the first Japanese prime minister to address a joint U.S. Congress, and a year later, for the first time since the end of World War II, he escorted a sitting U.S. president around Hiroshima's ground zero and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Both leaders made another historic first by visiting Pearl Harbor together in December 2016. Following Trump's election in November 2016, Abe was the first foreign leader to meet the president-elect in New York. Since then, Trump has spent more time with Abe than with any other foreign leader.

No matter who sits in the Oval Office, maintaining the best possible relationship at the head-of-state level is a major priority for Japan. The United States is Japan's only treaty-bound ally and has been vital for Japanese national security since the Cold War era. The nuclear umbrella the United States provides to Japan has not lost relevance. Nearly twenty years into the 21st century, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security that the two nations forged in 1960 has gained even more salience and remains a high priority in Japan's foreign policy agenda.

Changes in regional dynamics have made Japan's neighborhood more volatile. North Korea has become a declared nuclear power, and China continues to develop its own military and nuclear arsenal. The year 2018 saw the unprecedented development of the U.S. president granting the North Korean leader a one-on-one meeting, but whether Pyongyang will implement complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement remains unclear. Any changes to the U.S. military posture in South Korea could alter the security dynamic within the region and beyond, much to the detriment of Japan's long-term security. In addition, China challenges Japan's territorial integrity in the East China Sea almost daily, as well as the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

Given this fraught security environment, Japan seems increasingly backed into a geopolitical corner. Put simply, Japan needs the United States at this time of great geopolitical and socioeconomic uncertainty. Yet little can be taken for granted regarding the long-term sustainability of the U.S. engagement in the region. U.S.-Japan relations are filled increasingly with "what ifs." These concerns explain the zeal with which Abe has cultivated—and continues to cultivate—close ties with his U.S. counterparts.

Supporting and Stabilizing the U.S. Presence in the Indo-Pacific

From the firsthand knowledge I have obtained by working with Prime Minister Abe for over six years, I have learned that the questions he asks about U.S.-Japan relations are not “what ifs” (such as what if the United States withdraws from the Korean Peninsula, or what if the United States under Trump sees less value in getting engaged in East Asian affairs militarily). Rather, the questions he poses to himself and his cabinet pertain more often than not to what Japan should do to keep those “what if” situations from occurring at all. To that end, what has Japan done of late?

Defense policy. For a start, Japan under Abe has made shifts in the direction of a stronger national defense. The Defense Agency, which for many decades was a subministerial agency, was granted a higher legal status as a full-fledged ministry during the first Abe administration. Since returning to office at the end of 2012, Abe has furthered this organizational development. The National Security Council and the supporting office of the National Security Secretariat were also established in December 2013. In the same month, the nation’s first National Security Strategy was published, and the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets went into law one year later in December 2014. As a result, Japan was for the first time equipped with an intelligence community that could connect more seamlessly with its U.S. counterpart. This has long been an essential step for the strategic efficiency in the security alliance.

Despite opposition, the biggest security change Abe has enacted is the Legislation for Peace and Security. Put into effect at the end of March 2016, this new legal framework enables Japan finally to give protection to the military assets, such as naval boats or military aircraft, of the United States and other close partner nations. The new law also enables the government, “when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs,” to take actions to defend the foreign country in question. “Collective defense,” long an object of heated constitutional debate, has become an executable reality, albeit in a much less ambitious way.¹

¹ According to the newly enacted law, Japan can use force under the following three conditions: “(1) When an armed attack against Japan occurs or when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, (2) when there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan’s survival and protect its people, and (3) limited to the minimum extent necessary.” Thus, the new law still forbids Japan from working with the United States in places that do not immediately threaten Japan’s survival. Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2016* (Tokyo, 2016), 166 ~ http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016_2-1-2_web.pdf.

Defense spending. In the realm of geoeconomics, one sees a similar picture emerging: Japan is doing as much as it can to help reduce the cost of U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, while shoring up its own defense. Japanese taxpayers cover an annual \$5.4 to \$5.6 billion of the Japan-based U.S. forces' expenses, countering any claims that Japan is a free rider, as Trump labeled it while on the campaign trail.² Considering that the president has used harsh language to criticize other long-standing U.S. allies of doing too little for their own defense, Japan is in a relatively safe position—but only barely.

In December 2018 the Japanese government published the “Mid-Term Defense Program,” which revised plans announced in 2011 to acquire 42 Lockheed Martin's F-35As upward to 147. Further, Japan plans to deploy two U.S. Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense batteries, the cost of which will reach approximately \$5.4 billion.³

This dramatic increase in the number of cutting-edge fighter aircraft, as well as the installment of an expensive anti-missile system, kills two birds with one stone: enhancing Japanese airborne and anti-missile capabilities while reducing bilateral trade tensions. It is hoped that these combined measures will keep the United States close and further incentivize it to stay involved in the region.

Trade. Even the trade-liberalization arrangement that Japan worked to bring into effect in the absence of the United States, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, is designed, according to the Japanese officials who negotiated the deal, to easily accommodate the United States sometime in the future. Japan and Australia, among others, collaborated to finalize the agreement with an eye toward eventually bringing in the United States by taking elaborate steps to keep hurdles to U.S. entry as low as possible. The agreement entered into force at the end of 2018. This is yet another way in which the Abe administration has attempted to keep the perilous “what if” scenarios at bay.

² Ministry of Defense (Japan), “Zainichibeigun kanren hiyo (2003-nendo yosan)” [U.S. Military-Related Expenses in Japan (FY2003 Budget)] ~ http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/zaibeigun/us_keihi/keihi.html; and Linda Sieg, “Trump Candidacy Stirs Alliance Angst in Japan,” Reuters, March 20, 2016 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-japan/trump-candidacy-stirs-alliance-angst-in-japan-idUSKCN0WWM017>.

³ Franz-Stefan Gady, “Japan's New Ballistic Missile Defense System Acquisition Cost Doubles,” *Diplomat*, July 25, 2018 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/japans-new-ballistic-missile-defense-system-acquisition-cost-doubles>.

Conclusion: Looking to the Future

One important question remains unanswerable. In the future, perhaps in the People's Republic of China's centennial year of 2049, will the U.S. public still find it easy to justify U.S. military involvement in the region? The long-standing U.S. doctrine of preventing either end of the Eurasian continent from being dominated by a hostile seeker of hegemony has so far held, but the question increasingly is, how long will it hold? Will it still hold, say, 30 years from now?

Precisely because these future questions are unanswerable, Abe is striving to make the Japanese armed forces more synergistic with their U.S. counterparts and to reduce the cost of U.S. forward deployment. The geopolitical and economic easing of U.S.-Japan relations is all done in the hope that the United States will continue to help stabilize the Indo-Pacific. It is Abe's belief that continued U.S. engagement would benefit Australia, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, India, and many other countries in addition to Japan. Under his administration, Japan has chosen to play the role of a system stabilizer in this era of uncertainty. ◆

BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides's

Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict

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Priscilla Clapp

David I. Steinberg

Bruce Matthews

Katherine G. Southwick

Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides

Tackling Myanmar's Elusive National Identity

Priscilla Clapp

*M*yanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict by Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides is a *tour de force*: a comprehensive, balanced, meticulously researched, and trenchant analysis of a modern human tragedy. It should be required reading for everyone engaged in efforts to save the Rohingya and to address conflict in Rakhine or elsewhere in Myanmar, whether they are working on the ground or participating in media reporting and public advocacy. The excellent foreword by former U.S. ambassador to Myanmar Derek Mitchell also adds valuable context to the book.

The authors begin by addressing three major misconceptions in the international community concerning the Rakhine conflict. First, they challenge the notion that the conflict is merely a recent phenomenon arising from communal tensions between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in 2012 by amplifying the historical origins of the conflict to explain its many earlier manifestations. Second, they debunk the common misconception that the conflict in its current form is driven by oppression of a minority, demonstrating instead that it actually comprises three distinct sets of ethnic rivalries: between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims, between the Rakhine ethnic minority and the Bama majority, and between the Rohingya and the military (the Tatmadaw). Third, the authors clarify the misconception that the Rohingya struggle is about citizenship, contending on the contrary that it is actually a question of whether the Rohingya constitute an indigenous "national race," which is a status above citizenship that determines full political rights in Myanmar.

Ware and Laoutides focus next on three distinct waves of violence that have erupted in Rakhine State in the last five years. The first was a wave of communal violence triggered by local events that were portrayed arbitrarily in terms of religious differences. The second was armed violence set off by the emergence of a militant Muslim armed group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), that staged a series of attacks on security posts in October 2016 and August 2017, triggering an inordinately strong response by the Tatmadaw that sent hundreds of thousands of Rohingya into refuge in Bangladesh and elsewhere. The third wave of violence has been brought

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on by the movement of the Arakan Army (AA), representing the Rakhine ethnic minority, into Rakhine State in opposition to the Tatmadaw. In the last two years, the AA has staged a number of surprisingly deadly armed attacks against the Tatmadaw, effectively extending the armed ethnic conflict in the northeast of the country to the western border. Ware and Laoutides identify five key actors driving the violence in Rakhine State today: the Rohingya with their militant wing ARSA, the Rakhine Buddhists with their armed group the AA, the ethnic Bama-dominated Tatmadaw, the National League for Democracy (NLD) government locked in a power struggle with the military, and the international voices who have “weaponized public shaming” (p. 21).

The book warns that the violence in Rakhine State poses a serious threat to Myanmar’s reform process in several important respects. The conflict has confronted the NLD—the main advocate for reform—with two powerful groups attempting to undermine its legitimacy: one “anchored in domestic conservative circles” supported by the Tatmadaw, demanding a hard-line approach to the Muslim population, and a second “spearheaded by international actors,” charging the government with collusion with the military in the abuse of human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide (p. 59). In the authors’ estimation, Rakhine has become a major battleground in the NLD’s power struggle with the military and seriously threatens national cohesion, particularly when combined with the rapid spread of anti-Muslim sentiment across the country, led by ultra-nationalist monks and other groups and propelled by misuse of social media. Anti-Muslim sentiment has become a pawn for political parties in the electoral process, threatening NLD prospects in 2020 and thus hopes for further reform. And finally, the violence against the Rohingya has seriously eroded international support for Myanmar and the reform process.

The book skillfully digests an enormous body of historical research on centuries of Rakhine history to take the reader through the evolving historical narratives that have become so essential for each of the three ethnic parties to the conflict in Rakhine. Among other things, this exercise in historical analysis helps the reader understand the critical role that so-called indigenous status plays in all the conflicts—not only those in Rakhine but also elsewhere in the country. In brief, the authors contend that the mythology surrounding indigeneity in Myanmar grew from the practices of British colonial rule that created a reification of society based on indigenous ethnic identity, which was compounded by the deliberate introduction of Indians to replace the Bama ethnic majority in the economy

and government. It was the British colonial masters who came up with the famous list of 135 ethnic identities (*taing yin tha*) that determine official indigenous status today.

After independence, the Bama majority regained its dominant role and gradually marginalized the country's ethnic minorities. This process accelerated rapidly with the ascendancy of General Ne Win in the 1960s, when he deliberately excluded ethnic minorities and Muslims from the military and prominent positions in government. Consequently, the military created the national myth of *taing yin tha* solidarity under the Bama majority to preserve the union from disintegration, enshrining *taing yin tha* status in the 1982 citizenship law. Although all immigrants can eventually gain citizenship, *taing yin tha* status is above citizenship, and this principle is now embedded in the 2008 military constitution under which the NLD governs. Thus, in the authors' view, it is precisely this lack of access to *taing yin tha* citizenship that assigns the Rohingya permanently to second-class status, even though many can trace their ancestry in the country back to before the British arrival in 1823, which would qualify them as *taing yin tha*, no matter what they called themselves at the time. The *taing yin tha* mythology, they conclude, is the most essential roadblock to peace in Myanmar, not only in Rakhine but with all the other minorities as well.

These historical narratives also reveal two other critical factors in this conflict. First, the ethnic Rakhine resentment of mistreatment at the hands of the Bama majority is even more deeply rooted in history than the persecution of Rohingya, and it remains salient today. Second, the current Rohingya identity has evolved over centuries from a mixed migration of Muslims into the Arakan/Rakhine region who gradually developed a common ethnic identity as the military vise closed around them after independence. The authors conclude that the Rohingya can rightfully claim indigenous status on the basis of the historical record, and that—particularly in light of the mixed-race composition of Myanmar society today—the Rakhine and Bama communities should accept a Rohingya “cultural” identity instead of pretending that members of this group are all recent immigrants from Bangladesh.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the historical narratives demonstrate clearly that the key driver of conflict in Rakhine State for many decades has been the Tatmadaw's predatory practices, including its increasing restrictions on the Muslim population and its consignment of the Rakhine ethnic minority to economic and political marginalization. This helps explain why Rakhine political parties have become among the most

successful of the ethnic minorities in gaining parliamentary representation, adopting a strongly nationalist agenda aimed primarily at the Bama majority. In the authors' words, "while there are some in their midst who could be considered extremist, there are deep sensitivities about Muslim issues, and...their primary struggle has long been to wrest political and economic control over their state from Nay Pyi Taw rather than directed towards the Muslims" (p. 47).

The final chapter offers a long list of sensible and thoughtful recommendations for arriving at a long-term solution to the conflict, expanding on the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by Kofi Annan, which was originally inspired by Aung San Suu Kyi. In my view, however, the authors' most significant contribution consists of three major pieces of advice that I have not seen previously vetted so clearly in this debate.

First is their stark conclusion that a peaceful solution to conflict in Rakhine State, and indeed Myanmar as a whole, will not be possible until the country is able to develop a national identity, rather than continuing to define citizenship in terms of ethnicity. In their words, the *taing yin tha* policy is a weapon

of exclusionary politics, largely perpetrated by Ne Win and the military regime after the 1962 coup, and it should be consigned to history along with the xenophobic and autarkic authoritarianism of that period...Without leaving this poisonous politics of ethnicity behind and reframing the debate entirely away from race and ethnicity, it is hard to see how a sustainable long-term peaceful solution could ever be achieved—in Rakhine State or nationally (p. 200).

Second is the centrality of the military to the continuing conflict in Rakhine and elsewhere, which Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD government are powerless to control. The analysis throughout the book makes clear that until an enlightened military leadership emerges and it becomes possible to negotiate new arrangements that provide equal security to all citizens, peace will remain elusive, if not impossible.

Finally, the book ends with a warning to the international community that its response to local conflict over the past twenty years has inadvertently become an incentive for violence on the part of aggrieved minorities. In the case of Rakhine, the authors identify four particular forms of international involvement as (1) a vocal Rohingya diaspora, (2) the humanitarian response to communal conflict in 2012 that was perceived to favor Muslims, (3) Western human rights advocacy groups, and (4) Islamic countries and

networks showing solidarity with the Rohingya cause. They postulate that the intense international concern for the Rohingya may have led ARSA to attack security posts in Rakhine to trigger a more punishing international response that would force the Myanmar government into a political solution. Ware and Laotides urge the international community to move away from high-profile confrontation and public shaming, which sidelines moderate voices, and to concentrate instead on “principled engagement that works hard to bring the parties together, around a negotiated solution” (pp. 216–17). In my estimation, this is sound advice. ◆

Myanmar: The Multiple Conundrums of Rohingya Policy

David I. Steinberg

In their new book *Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict*, Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides have deftly traversed the disputatious minefields that surround the current Rohingya problem. They have done so with balanced, sensitive, and measured steps and analysis, providing insights into the complex, conflicting historical and present narratives that make up real and mythical history. This book provides the necessary background for judicious appraisal of the problems, if not simple means for their solution. We are in their debt.

Yet the minefields remain and are likely to expand over time. Multiple historical narratives regarding this group of people are in dispute, encumbered by various myths and half-truths that solidify into supposedly revealed wisdom. The present is emotionally and legally entrapped in the past. Responsibilities are ignored. Access is restricted or denied. Prejudices mount. And international outrage and internal suspicions of such outrage are increasing. The United Nations, world and regional powers, and the Myanmar government differ in their responses. But the longer solutions are ignored or denied, the more intractable the issues become.

Myanmar's political liberalization and technological changes have heightened confrontations. Better access to diverse information—informed or derogatory—and the relative freedom to express such views, together with the power of technology, have quickly spread vituperative prejudices and misinformation. Cumulative issues and group identity, but ones sparked by individual incidents, cause “ethnic entrepreneurs seeking to anchor their narratives in particular events” (p. 187). Flashpoints cannot easily be controlled and are likely to persist.

With careful, deliberative attention, the authors have sought what Confucius called “the rectification of names.” The term “Rohingya” in political parlance exacerbates tensions and is restricted in Myanmar circles, as it implies a distinct indigenous group to Myanmar officialdom and contrasts with the officially preferred term “Bengali,” indicating foreign origins. So too does Burmese terminology excite passions: *lu myo* (literally, “people type”—race, nationalism, ethnicity) and *taing yin tha* (literally,

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“sons of the country”—indigenous ethnic groups) have been “weaponized” to further particularistic goals and exclude others, although the terms can overlap. “The *taing-yin-tha* definition of indigeneity, and the politics that drive it, are not inherent in history or the context. Rather, they are weapons of exclusionary politics, largely perpetrated by General Ne Win and the military regime after the 1962 coup” (p. 200). The authors thus carefully delineate the various historical narratives of each group that are used to justify or vilify present policies and actions.

Perceived vulnerabilities, no matter how seemingly illogical or farfetched to the outside observer, provide avenues into explaining, but not justifying, various fears and are essential to comprehending the dynamics of antagonisms—past and future. Without considering their importance to a diverse set of actors, no solutions to the plight of the Rohingya are possible. These long-standing emotions have become more acute in the present period of rising ethnic, religious, and group nationalism, thus complicating solutions.

The Rohingya feel vulnerable to three sets of antagonists: most immediately to the essentially Burman Tatmadaw (the military), their oppressors; then to the Buddhist Rakhine (an ethnic group primarily on the Bay of Bengal coast); and finally to the Burman population at large. The Buddhist Rakhine people feel vulnerable to the expanding Rohingya population within their state, a demographic accentuated by a lack of education and healthcare. But having been treated as second-class citizens, the Buddhist Rakhine are also vulnerable to the dominant Burman majority and the Tatmadaw. This has been evident over history with the rise of ethnic and particularistic nationalism, the destruction of their kingdom by the Burmans in 1784, and the looting of their most revered religious image, the Mahamuni Buddha, which is now resident in Mandalay. The suppression in 2017 of a Rakhine celebration of their kingdom by the central government, resulting in several deaths, is simply a recent reminder of such deeply held emotions and residual but strong antipathies.

The Burman majority is evidently disturbed by the expanding Muslim population and has passed legislation to reverse this trend and restrict conversions to Islam. Even the supposed 4% Muslim population of Myanmar, excluding the Rohingya, may fear that Burman antipathy toward the Rohingya will reverberate negatively toward them. Finally, the dominant Tatmadaw regards the new, even if pathetically meager and ill-armed, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) as a national security threat that

could expand with Middle Eastern backing. Former senior general Than Shwe regarded the Bangladesh border as the most vulnerable.

ARSA's attack in August 2017 came one day after the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, in collaboration with the Kofi Annan commission, which had investigated the previous Rohingya riots, released its report with 88 constructive recommendations. These are discussed in some detail in this volume. State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi accepted the report and its recommendations, and she promised to implement them. The recommendations are sound and equitable but virtually impossible to implement in the current atmosphere. It is quite natural for the authors of the volume to accept and advocate their pursuit, but progress is unlikely, and an air of unrealistic possibilities, if not optimism, is apparent in the volume.

Although the sometimes-articulated charge of genocide against the Rohingya is questionable to this observer, that of ethnic cleansing seems, alas, apt. After some reluctance, perhaps because the U.S. government did not want to appear to be too critical of the Aung San Suu Kyi administration, the Department of State admitted the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. Some Western observers are reluctant to criticize Aung San Suu Kyi, as they regard her as the best hope for a future "democratic" Myanmar. However, the Burmese do not want the Rohingya back (which is what ethnic cleansing is) and will not give up any of their former land to Bangladesh. Bangladesh does not want them either, even suggesting that refugees be confined to a remote island in the Bay of Bengal that is subject to fierce annual monsoon rains and typhoons that flood the area. Any agreement between the two countries at this stage seems more like theater than reality.

International discussion of the Rohingya's return to Rakhine thus seems unrealistic to a significant degree. Western international organizations advocate citizenship for the Rohingya, who are now stateless, but this is highly unlikely under Myanmar's restrictive 1982 citizenship law. The government's denial of the use of the term "Rohingya" is in large part motivated by the consideration that this designation would imply an indigenous ethnic group (*taing yin tha*) to which citizenship should be granted. If significant numbers were somehow to return under UN auspices, then new, liberal conditions for their livelihood, education, healthcare, and mobility would be required. The Tatmadaw has already occupied some burned out Rohingya villages.

The Tatmadaw may well be blamed for the atrocities and excesses connected to the Rohingya's migration, but the regime of Aung San Suu Kyi

and the National League for Democracy are also complicit. Her defense of the Tatmadaw to the assembled diplomats on September 19, 2017, was egregiously simplistic and even ingenuous, misstating conditions of which the diplomatic community is well aware.¹ Surely, she and her party must also navigate the minefields of administration in which the Tatmadaw controls all coercive power, minority relations, and both state and local government. Her statement on a visit to Hanoi in October 2018 that the Rohingya problem “could have been handled better”² must rank among the gross understatements of the year and, in effect, insults all involved and cognizant observers of Myanmar.

International effects from the Rohingya problems have begun to occur. ARSA is said to have received some Middle Eastern backing, and the status of Muslims in Myanmar came to the attention of Osama bin Laden a generation ago. The continued mistreatment of both the Rohingya and the broader Muslim minority throughout the country will continue to excite potential concerns within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and beyond. The Rakhine dilemmas have had an effect on Myanmar’s broader international relations as well. China has supported the government in its handling of the crisis, while the West, especially the United States, has vehemently criticized the regime and imposed selective sanctions again some members of the Tatmadaw. Diminished U.S. influence is evident, and closer relations with China are likely. Myanmar has turned from the West, and Aung San Suu Kyi has lost the veneer as the icon of democracy. While she has decried this designation, claiming to be a politician, she has yet to exhibit such talents. Western influence, investment, and tourism have already suffered.


Myanmar’s ‘Rohingya’ Conflict claims that this study is not about statelessness, denial of citizenship identity, and so forth but “primarily about the possibility and the extent of inclusion, on equal terms, of the Rohingya and (to a lesser extent) the Rakhine in the political community that constitutes the Union of Myanmar” (p. 198). Unfortunately, insofar as it deals with reality, the book is about the former, with hopes for the latter, though these goals seem distant in terms of reaching fruition.

¹ Oliver Holmes, “Fact Check: Aung San Suu Kyi’s Speech on the Rohingya Crisis,” *Guardian*, September 20, 2017 ~ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/20/fact-check-aung-san-suu-kyi-rohingya-crisis-speech-myanmar>.

² Hannah Beech, “Rohingya Crisis ‘Could Have Been Handled Better,’ Aung San Suu Kyi Says,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2018 ~ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/world/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-rohingya.html>.

This volume discusses in detail current conflict studies literature and draws lessons from the Rohingya case for states, the media, scholars, and donor organizations. Although the crisis in Myanmar may adhere to some of the general theoretical concepts of internal and ethnic conflict, this situation is unique. There are important lessons for potential donors to Myanmar and for the alleviation of the suffering of the Rohingya that are spelled out in this volume.

A rational solution to the Rohingya dilemmas is devoutly to be wished, as Shakespeare wrote, but none appears plausible at this time and for some years ahead at a minimum. The preparations for the 2020 Myanmar elections will mean that no significant political group, given the unpopularity of the Rohingya, will be prepared to make the electoral sacrifices necessary to alleviate the crisis. Political will and courage are lacking under the fears and vulnerabilities so evident among all actors. And international intervention is not a feasible alternative. So the tragedy unfolds, and suffering and debasement continue.

Although the minefields remain, few available works have dealt as equitably and carefully as Ware and Laoutides's book in both explaining the past and charting a desirable future path once these hazards have been traversed. But who is or will be our Virgilian guide through this dangerous maze? 

Identity Politics, Myanmar's *Bête Noire*, Continues to Constrain the Nation's Future

Bruce Matthews

With Myanmar's *'Rohingya' Conflict*, Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides have crafted a valuable study of the long-standing Rohingya emergency in Myanmar. The book provides both a helpful historical review and a fresh perspective on this conflict, including the recent events that have seriously compromised the international reputation of the country.

Scarcely two years ago, then U.S. president Barack Obama lifted the economic sanctions imposed on the long-time military state after it finally ceded some control (but not all) to the government of Aung San Suu Kyi elected in 2015. Just as Myanmar seemed to have turned a corner on decades of suffocating military rule, however, renewed attempts by indigenous Muslims (the Rohingya, derived from "Rohang" or "Arakan") to gain some political autonomy in the west of Myanmar's Rakhine State have led to disaster. A recent manifestation was the Rohingya military-style assault on border security forces on August 25, 2017, aided by possibly minor but worrisome connections to international jihadists. It was particularly unfortunate that these attacks came only hours after the submission of the final report by the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which the authors aver was the best set of recommendations to date even despite certain gaps (p. 208). The violence led to the subsequent excessive response by the army (the Tatmadaw) involving horrific, documented human rights abuses and the forced expulsion of 700,000 Rohingya (two-thirds of the community) from Myanmar into neighboring Bangladesh.

The authors come to grips with the general theme of the Rohingya crisis and its historical grievances in three parts. One way of reviewing their approach to this complex topic is to provide a brief outline of the book's structure, and then to isolate several crucial issues identified for further discussion. The book does not claim to have all the answers, nor to apportion blame, but aims to explain the conflict, correct misconceptions, examine the historical narrative, and help conceptualize a way forward. The first part, entitled "Context," is initially designated as "Personal Journeys into this Conflict." Its two chapters reflect the comprehensive fieldwork

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undertaken by the two authors, who visited Myanmar and the state of Rakhine several times over five years, and explore the complexities and misconceptions encountered in analyzing the 2017 Rohingya uprising. These chapters provide a geographic, demographic, and historical basis on which an analysis should be formed. They argue that Myanmar's 2017 experience of sectarian violence and what amounts to subsequent "ethnic cleansing" needs to be seen as an extension of other Rohingya attacks on security forces dating back to 2012. These have involved the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and show evidence of likely foreign Islamist jihadist involvement. But, importantly, the authors stress that the Rakhine State is also the homeland of a historic and substantial Arakan (Rakhine) Burmese Buddhist society that is ethnically and culturally separate from the Rohingya. This society has roots in western Myanmar associated with the once-famous Mrauk-U kingdom (1430–1784 CE) and its own significant chronicles (the *Razawin*), which lend support for an independent identity. The Rakhine Buddhists affirm that their political independence was harshly terminated by invading Burmese forces in 1784. Importantly, therefore, this community, with its independent Arakan Army (AA), is still involved in its own insurrection campaign against rule from Naypyidaw, Myanmar's capital. It is significant that the Rakhine State (its name changed from Arakan in 1990) has a solid overall Buddhist majority, who in turn are not at war with the Rohingya.

The book's second part, entitled "Historical Narratives, Representation and Collective Memory," continues an examination of the "competing nationalist narratives," and how they are used to exacerbate the conflict from the three entirely separate perspectives of the Rohingya, the Rakhine Buddhists, and the Burmese. The third part, comprising two final chapters, focuses on conflict analysis theory. Most important is the key demographic issue of a Muslim community with high birthrates, stemming from, among other things, a lack of education, healthcare, and economic security. These factors are seen as a long-term major driver of the current crisis. The final chapter discusses the role that the international community could play in bringing the Rohingya crisis to satisfactory resolution and offers recommendations.

Of the many factors contributing to the Rohingya crisis addressed in this book, four deserve particular emphasis. First, an acknowledgment of the deeply historical nature of Burma's identity politics is crucial. The struggle for Burmese and Buddhist dominance in a country composed of many tribal groups arguably fostered a fear of outsiders, one that accelerated


during the British colonial era (1824–1948). In Rakhine (one of seven states or primarily ethnic regions in the modern nation, distinct from the seven divisions, which are largely Burmese), this fear continues to focus largely on the presence of the Muslim Rohingya. The Burmese consider the Rohingya as later arrivals from the subcontinent and not as belonging to one of the so-called traditional 135 *taing yin tha* or indigenous national “races” settled in Myanmar before the British arrived. The authors confirm this “poisonous policy of ethnicity” as “a key driver of multiple conflicts across the country” (p. 201). The Rohingya Muslim community in Rakhine (they self-identified with the name Rohingya only in the 1950s) was not on the list. Although the first post-independence officials accepted the presence of the Muslim community in townships on the border with East Bengal (Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung) and provided them with national registration cards, this initiative was immediately voided by the dictatorship and extreme nationalism of Ne Win (1962–88). Historical records show, however, that a Rakhine Muslim presence in western Myanmar is very old, with several sources of origin (prisoners of war, slaves, and traders), waves of migration, and involvement as a recognized, contributing community in the pre-Burman Rakhine Buddhist kingdom of Mrauk-U. More recently during World War II, the Muslim community in the west of Burma sided with the British against the Japanese and Burmese nationalist forces. Subsequently, when the Muslims did not receive hoped-for autonomy, their actions in the ensuing *mujahid* rebellion caused further disconnect from the state.

Second, the book provides details of ARSA, the militant resistance force that has been involved in several attacks on border facilities since 2012. Initially more of a peasants’ militia armed with slingshots and knives, ARSA recently has been internationalized to some degree under the leadership of Ataullah abu Ammar Jununi, a Pakistani jihadist. It brought its secessionist agenda to full view in the attacks against the Myanmar state in late August 2017, now widely considered “a grave miscalculation.” The possibility that the ARSA strategy of coordinated attacks on the border forces was not a miscalculation but a tactical response to increase public outcry following an anticipated disproportionate military response—and even a way to attract potential recruits for future operations—makes it an even more “serious moral hazard situation” (p. 216).

Third, Myanmar has a substantial Muslim population that is not identified with the Rohingya and whose members have full citizenship rights (such as the Kaman and Muslims of mixed marriages). But spillover anti-Muslim pogroms are nonetheless not uncommon (for example, in

Meiktila in 2013). Events in Rakhine State negatively reverberate deep into Myanmar society.

Fourth, a key feature is how the international community should continue to respond to the expulsion of the Rohingya in what is now acknowledged as an act of genocide by the International Criminal Court. The near-silence of Aung San Suu Kyi on the issue is disheartening. She has no authority over Myanmar's armed forces, which is a serious impediment to any resolution of this crisis. But she at least invited former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan to preside over the important Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, though a later "advisory board" to help implement the proposals was a dismal failure. Other international initiatives, such as the April 2018 report of Bob Rae, special Canadian envoy to Myanmar, and the March 2018 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, led by Marzuki Darusman, at the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council, provide similar efforts to bring resolution to the tragic situation, the consequences of which are still unfolding.

In the conclusion to their well-researched and comprehensive book, Ware and Laoutides bring forward several suggestions for the Myanmar state, including moving quickly and openly on citizenship with a social policy to support reform, removing the link between citizenship and ethnicity, enforcing measures to protect the land and assets of the displaced Rohingya refugees, and, importantly, acknowledging the state's negative role in this conflict. The authors understandably appear to be actually quite skeptical about whether these expectations are realistic given the unwholesome historical record of military rule, by whatever name, that Myanmar is still governed under. 

Elucidating Intractability

Katherine G. Southwick

Violence dramatically escalated in western Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017 and 2018, forcing well over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. At the height of violence, the weekly exodus was said to be swifter than the flow of refugees from Rwanda in 1994. Reports of indiscriminate killings, systematic rape, a long history of discrimination, and hateful official language directed against the population have led several organizations and experts, including the UN-sponsored Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, to conclude that the crimes committed against the Rohingya likely meet the definition of genocide. The need to respond to the humanitarian crisis and the responsibility to protect vulnerable groups seem clear. Many have made calls to hold perpetrators accountable and enable Rohingya refugees to return safely and with dignity.

If only it were that simple. Situations of apparent moral clarity tempt us to minimize their political and practical complexity. Yet we know that sustainable solutions cannot gloss over the Gordian knot of history, structural factors, and opportunism that bring about intractable conflict and mass atrocities. In *Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict*, Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides provide a great service in elucidating this conflict's intractability and the factors that lead to violence. The book largely succeeds in its aim "to illuminate the multiple dimensions and perspectives, explain the extensive role that historical narratives play, interrogate positions, and provide in-depth analysis that might help conceptualize a pathway forward" (p. 12). While some aspects of the analysis remain open for further inquiry, the value of this work in broadening and deepening understanding of conflict in Rakhine State and how it threatens to undermine the country's reform process is indisputable.

The first part presents a well-rounded portrait of the conflict, illustrating that the internationally dominant narrative of a persecuted Rohingya minority is incomplete. It painstakingly describes the three main tensions in the region: the violence between Rohingya and Rakhine communities, fanned by nationalist sentiment among members of both groups, and two sets of long-standing hostilities between the central Burman state and

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the peripheral Rakhines and Rohingya groups, respectively. While the Rohingya “have never previously been a particularly violent or religiously radicalized population,” despite decades of marginalization, small groups have engaged in armed insurgency since independence in 1948 (p. 47). The focus of the two armed, secessionist groups today—the Rakhine-led Arakan Army (AA) and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)—on the central government conveys that both groups perceive the state as the real adversary, rather than their Rakhine or Rohingya neighbors. In providing this fuller picture, Ware and Laoutides make the essential point that resolving the plight of the Rohingya requires recognizing how these three conflicts are interconnected and thus must be addressed together.

The book’s second part is particularly valuable in offering a discussion of the competing historical narratives that help justify each party’s claims and uphold this conflict’s intractability. The authors recount the Rohingya “origin” narrative, which serves to portray the Rohingya as an indigenous group with historical roots in the region that reach back to the ninth century. The Rakhine narrative on the region’s historical “independence” serves to bolster Rakhine demands for autonomy from Burman rule. The Burman “unity” narrative counters this conceptualization with a historical interpretation that emphasizes shared ancestry and unity among Myanmar’s national races. Finally, the shared Rakhine and Burman “infiltration” narrative portrays the Rohingya as “Bengali Muslims” that pose an existential threat to Rakhine identity, Buddhism, and nationhood.

The authors then carry out the dicey task of evaluating these narratives based on historical records and dispassionate critique. Drawing from Jacques Leider, they conclude that the Rohingya identity, popularized in the 1960s, appears to draw from a “hybridized history” that finds roots in precolonial times as well as extensive Muslim migration in the nineteenth century (pp. 134–35).¹ Thus, the authors convey that while the Rohingya’s origin narrative may not be watertight, the group’s claims for political rights, even under existing law, are legitimate (p. 135). Ware and Laoutides also highlight how the Rakhine claim for independence is based on a principle of racial equality, partly rooted in an experience of relatively peaceful coexistence with Muslims up until the late colonial period. The authors state that their primary purpose is to adequately depict each perspective, not to provide a detailed history or validation of one side’s perspective over another (p. 32).

¹ Jacques P. Leider, “Competing Identities and the Hybridized History of the Rohingyas,” in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, ed. Renaud Egreteau and Francois Robinne (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2015), 151–78.

By highlighting some of the inconclusive aspects of each narrative, however, the authors demonstrate that appeals to history are insufficient in charting a path forward. They also convey that while accurate history matters, peace and reconciliation cannot be won through a “stalemate of stories” (p. 69).²

Deconstructing the narratives in turn presages the path forward, proffered in the third part, which emphasizes the need to shed the importance of these narratives and the toxic parameters under which they are constructed, including the notion of *taing yin tha*, the ideology of indigenous identity that gave rise to the exclusionary politics propounded by General Ne Win and the military regime after the 1962 coup (p. 200). Ideas of racial hierarchy, of tying political inclusion and exclusion to ethnicity, have sharpened demographic and ethnic security dilemmas and the salience of political economy and territory as conflict factors, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6. A long-term solution thus requires “leaving this poisonous politics of ethnicity behind, and reframing the debate entirely away from race and ethnicity” (p. 200). The book avers that the solution goes to the heart of democratic reform, which requires, as others have suggested,³ recognizing the political community as a “community of citizens...in which cultural diversity between equals is celebrated in non-hierarchical and non-exclusionary terms” (p. 210). In line with that core message, and drawing in part from the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (also known as the Annan Commission), the authors call for a range of responses related to holding perpetrators of alleged crimes accountable, revising laws to afford broader access to citizenship and equal rights, and facilitating peaceful dialogue and cooperation among “elite social entrepreneurs,” among other recommendations (p. 211).

While *Myanmar’s ‘Rohingya’ Conflict* is rich in knowledge and analysis, the authors admit that “this book does not purport to have all the answers” (p. 12). Moreover, while seeking to “provide as reasoned and evidence-based an analysis as possible, while causing minimal offence,” the authors recognize that goal is “nigh impossible” (p. xv). The fact that the conflict is

² P.L. Hammack, “Identity as Burden or Benefit? Youth, Historical Narrative, and the Legacy of Political Conflict,” *Human Development* 53 (2010): 173–201.

³ International Crisis Group, “Rohingya Crisis: A Major Threat to Myanmar Transition and Regional Stability,” October 27, 2017 ≈ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/rohingya-crisis-major-threat-myanmar-transition-and-regional-stability>; Nick Cheesman, “How in Myanmar ‘National Races’ Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, no. 3 (2017): 477; Katherine Southwick, “Preventing Mass Atrocities against the Stateless Rohingya in Myanmar: A Call for Solutions,” *Columbia Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 2 (2015): 149; and Thein Sein, “Myanmar’s Complex Transformation: Prospects and Challenges” (remarks given at Chatham House, London, July 15, 2013) ≈ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Meetings/Meeting%20Transcripts/150713Sein.pdf>.

ongoing further denies analysts the full benefit of hindsight in providing a sense of objectivity or scholarly consensus. These caveats recognize that differences of opinion and the need for more knowledge and guidance in finding a path to peaceful resolution will persist.

For instance, an issue arises from the difficult task of distinguishing a scholarly approach from a potentially unsettling sense of moral equivalence in terms of characterizing different actors' grievances. The authors clearly recognize that the Rohingya have suffered disproportionately and that the violence between the Rohingya, Rakhines, and the Myanmar government is asymmetric. In that light, the decision to place the word Rohingya in quotation marks in the title and to refer to the group in the text as "Muslims in northern Rakhine State" is fraught. To be sure, the authors are aware that using or not using the word Rohingya is polarizing, as "avoiding the name is seen by others as representing complicity in human rights violations" (p. xv), while using the term implies support for a political cause that many in Myanmar strongly oppose (p. xvi). Thus, the authors are understandably concerned that using the name would appear "naïve" or "partial" (p. xvii), alienating non-Rohingya readers in Myanmar (though Laoutides observed that Rakhine villagers he had met seemed uninterested in a "war of names") (p. 4). The labeling decision in a sense functions as a kind of concession to lead resistant minds to the authors' final recommendation to depoliticize ethnicity and accept a people's "moral right to name themselves" (p. 212). Placing Rohingya in quotation marks also resonates with the book's theme concerning contested narratives. All that said, the balance of considerations seems to favor embracing the term Rohingya, given the importance of equality and inclusion to the authors' prescription for sustainable peace, the call for "highly principled but committed engagement" (p. 217), and the moral consideration in modeling a stance that cannot be seen to enable the erasure of a vulnerable group or to challenge the very few tools available to that group to advance its members' sense of dignity and rights.

This sense of moral equivalence among grievances occasionally reappears, such as when the authors write, "This is thus a multi-polar conflict, in which at least three groups react defensively, out of deeply compelling existential fears" (p. 18). That the central government has a deeply compelling fear of ARSA or the Rohingya seems implausible, particularly in light of the authors' observation that the government's response to ARSA's attacks in 2017 constituted a "dramatic overreaction" (p. 19). In characterizing the Rohingya as actors in the conflict, the authors write that "while most are peace-loving and have shown great forbearance

under prolonged discrimination, some have turned to violence” (p. 19). The statement is true, but it can be read to imply that the turn to violence is disappointing rather than a possibly understandable result of desperation. Given the prolonged persecution and risk of death to which Rohingya have been subjected, reproach of ARSA attacks raises the question of how the insurgency is morally or qualitatively distinct from other acts of armed resistance to ethnic cleansing and genocide, such as the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943.

The authors speculate that ARSA deliberately undermined the Annan Commission report when the group launched its attacks against the military hours after the report’s release. The authors observe that the commission’s recommendations fell short of ARSA’s goals for autonomy. Alternatively, perhaps having seen how little meaningful action followed previous commissions, and with Rohingya continuing to die from the various constraints imposed on their lives, ARSA determined, rightly or wrongly, that there was nothing left to lose. According to the authors, the prospect of international outcry and calls for intervention based on human rights discourse and a “process of global victimhood developed after the Second World War” create a moral hazard for armed groups to provoke brutal, large-scale responses from the military (p. 214). In this characterization, ARSA and international human rights advocates arguably share some responsibility for the depth of the humanitarian crisis, a weighty charge worthy of introspection. It is a claim, however, that unfairly portrays the role of international law and advocacy, on which many of the Annan Commission’s and the book’s recommendations are actually based. Arguably, pressure on international entities not to speak out earlier enabled violence on all sides to reach this point. The risk of being labeled a terrorist organization and thus unworthy of international support also perhaps constrains the moral hazard perceived here. To the extent that moral hazard exists, then responsibility lies with the international community to mitigate it by working more proactively to support conflict prevention and resolution in a form of “principled engagement” that the authors ultimately advocate. How exactly that alternative should manifest and how the considerable barriers to implementing the necessary recommendations can be overcome remain to be seen. ♦

Authors' Response:
Is There No Resolution in Myanmar's Rohingya Conflict?

Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides

We are deeply grateful to the reviewers of our book *Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict* for their kind words as well as their in-depth engagement with the material. We are gratified that the reviewers all endorse our central argument, namely that identity politics—in particular, the *taing yin tha* mythology—is the primary roadblock to peace. Myanmar must move beyond these toxic conceptions of ethnicity and indigeneity and develop a truly Myanmar identity before any lasting and equitable resolution is possible, not only of this conflict but of the many conflicts across the country. That is, however, a very unlikely outcome in the foreseeable future.

We appreciate that the reviewers all concur about the complexity and deeply historical nature of this conflict. Gaining an understanding of this complexity and the causes of intractability is an essential first step in any pathway toward effective international engagement. As Katherine Southwick reminds us, in situations like this the “apparent moral clarity tempt[s] us to minimize their political and practical complexity. Yet we know that sustainable solutions cannot gloss over the Gordian knot of history, structural factors, and opportunism that bring about intractable conflict and mass atrocities.” These complexities, of course, are the central messages throughout the book.

David Steinberg is concerned that in our pursuit of recommendations from our analysis, we err toward offering “unrealistic possibilities, if not optimism.” We accept this critique in part as we agree about the improbability of solutions—or even any real progress—being found quickly. We, nonetheless, do find a need to stand with the practitioners, advocates, and engaged locals who work tirelessly for some way forward. The nature of intractability means virtually everything appears irresolvable and any recommendations implausible. As Bruce Matthews noted, “the authors understandably appear to be actually quite skeptical” about whether these recommendations are in any way realistic. Yet, continue to try we must.

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We are pleased to see Steinberg expand on the international relations turmoil this conflict is causing for Myanmar and the extent to which Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy are complicit—castigating her for an “egregiously simplistic and even ingenious” defense of the Tatmadaw, “misstating conditions” and making statements that “must rank among the gross understatements of the year.” This posture continues, unfortunately, with her and her party’s maneuvering regarding repatriation of the Rohingya from Bangladesh, for example, and ingenious misstatements about the degree of implementation of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State recommendations.

Steinberg articulates the view that the charge of genocide against the Rohingya is questionable, while the charge of ethnic cleansing seems apt. Although we took this line of argument in our book, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) report released in August 2018 significantly changes our minds. The report found evidence that the crimes in Rakhine State, and the manner in which they were perpetrated, “were similar in nature, gravity and scope to those that have allowed genocidal intent to be established in other contexts.”¹ It thus recommended investigations and prosecutions for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Despite Myanmar not being a signatory to the Rome Statute, in September 2018 the International Criminal Court claimed jurisdiction at least over the deportation of the Rohingya,² and it has commenced a full-fledged preliminary examination against the Myanmar commander-in-chief and other senior officials. These are very significant findings, which, as Southwick notes, suggest that it is now time to accept “genocidal intent.” Indeed, since the release of this report, we have accepted this terminology in several subsequent publications. The evidence is now compelling.

Southwick comments that some of our writing seems to imply moral equivalence of the different actors’ grievances. This is perhaps unsurprising given our extensive efforts to convey the perspectives of Rakhine and (as much as possible) Tatmadaw/Burman leaders, particularly about some of the deeper fears motivating them. Although Southwick acknowledges that we have clearly and repeatedly stated that the Rohingya have suffered

¹ C. Sidoti, M. Darusman, and R. Coomaraswamy, “Report of the International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/39/64, August 24, 2018, 16.

² “Statement of ICC Prosecutor, Mrs. Fatou Bensouda, on Opening a Preliminary Examination Concerning the Alleged Deportation of the Rohingya People from Myanmar to Bangladesh,” International Criminal Court, September 18, 2018 ~ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=180918-otp-stat-Rohingya>.

disproportionately and that the conflict is deeply asymmetric, she highlights a few ways in which our writing still leaves her uncomfortable in this regard.

We respect and appreciate this discomfort. Indeed, we suggest that grappling meaningfully with the perspectives, fears, and motivations of the perpetrators of any crime is always uncomfortable—and crimes have been committed. However, one of our premises in writing this book was that people do not listen until they feel their fears and concerns have been heard and taken seriously. Thus, from the outset, a key aim was not only to lay out and analyze the issues with as much academic objectivity as possible, but to do so in a way that facilitates a real understanding of the various actors' deeply held perspectives. Regardless of how much we agree or disagree with any party, our contention remains that understanding their fears and motivations is essential before any meaningful engagement is possible. We have endeavored to provide this perspective, something we consider to be widely missing in other analysis of this conflict.

Nothing in this, however, implies moral equivalence among grievances. Rather, our claim is that the intractability of this conflict stems from an equivalence in the depth of belief and fear held by key actors. Thus, there is no moral equivalence in rightness or injustice. But there is, we maintain, an equivalence in the existential fear perceived by all sides and their commitment to a set of perceived "facts," informed by historical narratives, about this conflict. As Steinberg observes, "no matter how seemingly illogical or farfetched to the outside observer" the various fears and vulnerabilities are, these, as explained in our book, are "essential to comprehending the dynamics of antagonisms—past and future. Without considering their importance to a diverse set of actors, no solutions to the plight of the Rohingya are possible."

The Rohingya are genuinely existentially threatened, as demonstrated by the violence perpetrated against them. The ethnic Rakhine, we argue, feel just as existentially threatened by things like the demographic threat of Rohingya population growth and the assimilation pressure of "Burmanization." We make this argument in detail in the book and will not rehash it here. The third strand of this argument, and what Southwick in particular doubts, is that the Tatmadaw and central government have a deeply compelling fear of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya. We would suggest, however, that the military's "dramatic overreaction" (p. 19) to the 2016 and 2017 ARSA attacks is not evidence of the lack of fear, as Southwick implies, but of the depth of their fear—a fear capable of blinding battle-seasoned officers to the consequences of

their actions beyond immediate objectives. These consequences include the breakdown of the very law and order they claimed to be protecting as well as ramifications for the long-term conflict dynamics in Rakhine, for national peace efforts, and for national development and international relations. We turn to Steinberg for support on this point: “the dominant Tatmadaw regards the new, even if pathetically meager and ill-armed, [ARSA] as a national security threat that could expand with Middle Eastern backing. Former senior general Than Shwe regarded the Bangladesh border as the most vulnerable.” We maintain that, in the mind of Burman army generals and civilian leaders, the greatest perceived threat to the security of the Myanmar people and state has long been massive irregular migration of Muslims from Bangladesh and the importation of jihadism and an Islamization agenda. The rise of ARSA piqued those fears in ways that prompted irrational reactions.

Southwick is not convinced by our caution at the end of the book about moral hazard. Although the situation for the Rohingya was dire before 2017, we argue it cannot be compared with the Jewish ghetto in 1943 Poland, as she suggests. Unlike the Polish Jews, there is no evidence that the Rohingya were facing an imminent extermination. In addition, there is little evidence that ARSA enjoyed wide support among the Rohingya at the time, an issue that raises questions of legitimacy regarding its justification for violent action. Nevertheless, ARSA’s attack triggered a response by the military that put Rohingya into harm’s way, with their final position more endangered than it was prior to 2017. In the least, ARSA’s action amounted to poor leadership that certainly does not advance the Rohingya cause or interests in any meaningful sense.

It is always difficult writing about contemporary events as they unfold, without the benefit of hindsight. A lot has happened since we completed the manuscript, yet in many regards little has changed. As Steinberg notes, many minefields still remain, and all of our analysis has barely helped plot a course forward. Indeed, the number of minefields seems to have multiplied over the past year, not just the scale of each issue.

The number of Rohingya refugees has been revised upward since our manuscript was completed. It is now recognized that over 700,000 refugees were driven across the border into Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, in the span of a few months after the attacks and military operations commenced on August 25, 2017. As of December 2018, the UNHCR lists 900,998 Rohingya

refugees in camps, with more in host communities.³ Some 933,387 are currently receiving regular food assistance in Bangladesh.⁴ The best estimates we have heard are that no more than 500,000–550,000 Rohingya now remain in Myanmar, meaning that close to two-thirds of the Rohingya population living in Myanmar just two years ago has now been driven out. Given the sentiment across much of the country against their return and the continued issues with the process, the charge of ethnic cleansing seems well justified.

It is notable, and of deep concern, that adding the total now in Bangladesh with the number remaining in Myanmar leads to a population estimate in the order of 1.4–1.5 million Rohingya. The 2014 census, while not enumerating the Rohingya for political reasons, did provide an estimate of the number of people not enumerated in Rakhine State, namely 1.1–1.3 million.⁵ Given the sensitivities at the time, most latched onto the lower figure, and the Rohingya population in Rakhine has been widely quoted as 1.1 million in 2014. It now appears this was a serious underestimate based on lack of real enumeration. This difference becomes highly significant in the context of any return.

What this means is that, even if a repatriation of a large number were to occur in 2019—something we agree with the reviewers is highly unlikely—it is inconceivable that more than half the current refugee population in Bangladesh could be brought back. Already many voices in Myanmar claim the camps have been infiltrated by large numbers of poor Bangladeshis hoping to emigrate to Myanmar to obtain land alongside the returning Rohingya. While this is ludicrous, it is just one more powerful obstacle to the return of large numbers of refugees. With most Rohingya land now cleared, with in some cases military installations even having been constructed where Rohingya houses once stood, and with the impossible claim of full citizenship before repatriation being maintained, large-scale return seems like a pipe dream.

One final key update since publication, and very pertinent for any international actors seeking a way to inch toward resolution, is the startling

³ “ISCG Situation Report Data Summary: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Cox’s Bazar,” UNOCHA Inter Sector Coordination Group, December 13, 2018 [~ https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/iscg-situation-report-data-summary-rohingya-refugee-crisis-cox-s-bazar-13-december](https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/iscg-situation-report-data-summary-rohingya-refugee-crisis-cox-s-bazar-13-december).

⁴ “ISCG Situation Report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Cox’s Bazar,” UNOCHA Inter Sector Coordination Group, December 13, 2018 [~ https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/iscg-situation-report-rohingya-refugee-crisis-cox-s-bazar-13-december-2018-0](https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/iscg-situation-report-rohingya-refugee-crisis-cox-s-bazar-13-december-2018-0).

⁵ Department of Population, Ministry of Immigration and Population (Myanmar), “The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Rakhine State,” Census Report, vol. 3, May 2015.

revelation unearthed by Paul Mozur in October 2018 about a major Tatmadaw psychological warfare campaign against the Rohingya.⁶ Mozur claims the Tatmadaw has run a major operation on Facebook for years, employing up to seven hundred personnel just outside Naypyidaw who created innocuous-looking pages and identities and then over time ramped up the distribution of anti-Rohingya sentiment. This is a startling revelation, suggesting major manipulation of public opinion by the Tatmadaw. The question it raises is, how much is Myanmar public opinion about the Rohingya a result of this manipulation, and how easily could this change? If the widespread anti-Rohingya sentiment across most of Myanmar has, in part, been whipped into a frenzy by a psychological warfare campaign, then perhaps this points to an opportunity. Perhaps by increasing dissemination about this underhanded action by the Tatmadaw, and strengthening the profile of local support being given to the Rohingya, public opinion may be able to be turned around rapidly. Is that possible? It seems farfetched, but we do note that over the last year or more a number of prominent Burmese civil rights campaigners have begun speaking out publicly on Facebook in support of the Rohingya, including regarding their rights to citizenship and to call themselves Rohingya.

Finally, we thank Priscilla Clapp for highlighting three of our most central conclusions, which we wish to restate here. First, even though we argue the Rohingya should be seen as eligible for citizenship, and even indigenous status, on the basis of the historical record, this is not enough. Peaceful resolution will not be possible until the country leaves behind the toxic, destructive identity politics that elevate *taing yin tha* status above citizenship and develops a national identity with rights that apply to all peoples. Second, given the lack of civilian control of the Tatmadaw, resolution of this conflict is not possible until a more enlightened military leadership emerges. And finally, many of the responses to the conflict by the international community have inadvertently become incentives for further violence, meaning we need to rethink and improve the ways in which we engage with all parties. We hope our book helps readers do this. ♦

⁶ Paul Mozur, "A Genocide Incited on Facebook, with Posts from Myanmar's Military," *New York Times*, October 15, 2018.

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