

STATECRAFT AND FOREIGN POLICY INDIA, 1947-2023

SUBRATA K. MITRA, JIVANTA SCHOTTLI
AND MARKUS PAULI



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Statecraft and Foreign Policy

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Jivanta Schottli
Markus Pauli

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For Suvarna

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List of abbreviations and terms with glossary

TRIMs	Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures	All WTO members signed the TRIMs Agreement during the Uruguay Round negotiations. It applies to countries' regulation of foreign investors and their industrial policy, and restricts preferential treatment of domestic firms.
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act	An Act of the Indian Parliament from 1958 granting special powers to the Indian Armed Forces to maintain public order in 'disturbed areas'. An Act passed in 1990 was applied to Jammu and Kashmir and has been in force since then.
Article 370	Article 370 of the Indian Constitution	Gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), a northern region of the subcontinent which was administered by India as a state from 1954 until 31 October 2019 (with a separate constitution, a state flag and autonomy over the internal administration). In 2019, it was revoked by a two-thirds majority in both houses of India's Parliament. J&K split into the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir; and Union Territory of Ladakh.
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	Regional intergovernmental organization comprising 10 countries in Southeast Asia.
AUKUS		Security alliance for the Indo-Pacific region between the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, dating back to September 2021. It entails sharing defence technologies with the aim to prepare for a potential threat to regional security by China.

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party	Current ruling political party of India. One of the two major Indian political parties. Parliamentary Chairperson: Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa	Acronym for these five major emerging economies. There have been annual summits of this association since 2009.
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty	A multilateral treaty that aims to ban all nuclear tests, for military and civilian purposes. The United Nations General Assembly adopted it in September 1996. However, it has not yet entered into force, as all 44 individually named states known or believed to have nuclear reactors capable of making material required for a nuclear bomb have ratified it in their own legislatures. To date, eight of these 44 states still have not ratified the treaty – including India and Pakistan. The CTBT was initially proposed during the 1950s by the ‘big five’ nuclear powers – the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France.
CWC	Congress Working Committee	The executive committee of the Indian National Congress consists of 15 elected members and is headed by the Working President, Sonia Gandhi. Given the often-criticized nature of centralized decision making in the Indian National Congress, the CWC is unofficially referred to as the ‘High Command’.
EU	European Union	A political and economic union in Europe with 27 member states. The EU has an internal single market, with free movement of people, goods, services and capital. Nineteen EU member states form a monetary union (currency: euro).
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade	An international agreement, signed in 1947, to promote international trade by eliminating or reducing trade barriers such as quotas or tariffs. Successor: WTO.

G20	Group of Twenty	An intergovernmental forum comprised of the world's largest economies. It deals with major global issues such as international financial stability, the global economy, sustainable development and climate change. Members are the European Union (EU) – represented by the European Commission and the European Central Bank – as well as Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, United States (group 1), India, Russia, South Africa, Turkey (group 2), Argentina, Brazil, Mexico (group 3), France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom (group 4), and China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea (group 5). The chair of the G20 leaders' meeting rotates between the aforementioned groups, which internally negotiate whose turn it is to be the chair. Other international organizations, countries and NGOs are invited to be present at the summits, some on a permanent basis.
	<i>Hindi-Chini bhai bhai</i>	Literally means: 'Indians and Chinese are brothers'. The term was coined by the Nehru administration during the initial euphoria following India's independence. It expressed the hope invested in a new post-colonial Asia as an independent force in world politics. However, after the 1950s border conflicts, the 1962 war between India and China, and unresolved border issues such as Aksai Chin and the McMahon Line, the slogan began to lose its lustre.
INC	Indian National Congress	One of the two major political parties in India. Often called the Congress party or simply Congress. Parliamentary Chairperson: Sonia Gandhi.

IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force	The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was part of a peacekeeping operation in Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990. The mandate of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was to end the Sri Lankan Civil War between Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan military. The main mission of the IPKF was to disarm the various militant groups, not just the LTTE.
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency	An international organization that aims to foster the peaceful use of nuclear energy and to prevent its military use, including in the form of nuclear weapons. The IAEA was established in 1957 and is an autonomous organization that reports to the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. Its headquarters are in Vienna, Austria. The IAEA and its former Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.
IMF	International Monetary Fund	The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an international financial institution consisting of 190 countries. Its mission is to foster global monetary cooperation, financial stability, international trade, high employment and sustainable economic growth, and to reduce poverty. It was created in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference based on the ideas of Harry Dexter White and John Maynard Keynes. It started its operations in 1945 with 29 member countries and the mission of reconstructing the international monetary system. At the core of the IMF's mission is the management of balance of payments difficulties and international financial crises. Its members contribute financial resources to a pool through a quota system from which countries with balance of payments problems can borrow funds. Its headquarters are in Washington, DC, United States.

INSTC	International North–South Transport Corridor	The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a network of ship, rail and road routes for freight transportation between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.
IR	International Relations	The study of politics, economics and law on a global level. Also referred to as International Affairs (IA), International Studies (IS), Global Studies (GS) or Global Affairs (GA).
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	The LTTE was a Tamil militant organization. The LTTE aimed to secure an independent state of Tamil Eelam in northeastern Sri Lanka, where it was based. The LTTE was formed as a response to Sri Lankan government policies that were widely considered to be discriminatory against the minority of Sri Lankan Tamils. Oppressive actions carried out by (majority) Sinhalese mobs included anti-Tamil pogroms in 1956, 1958 and 1977, and the 1981 burning of the Jaffna Public Library. The LTTE was founded in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. After the week-long ‘Black July’ anti-Tamil pogrom in 1983, the LTTE escalated the sporadic conflict into a full-scale insurgency, which became the Sri Lankan Civil War. More than 30 countries, including the European Union, Canada, the United States and India, labelled the LTTE a terrorist organization.

LAC	Line of Actual Control	Refers to the contested border between India and the People’s Republic of China. The LAC runs in the west through sections India claims in Aksai Chin, a less controversial ‘middle sector’ along India’s states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and, in the east, through a disputed section in Arunachal Pradesh. On the night of 15 June 2020, Indian and Chinese soldiers fought each other at the LAC. The clash resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and an unconfirmed number of Chinese casualties. It was the first time since 1975 that there had been combat fatalities at the LAC (Schottli 2020)
LoC	Line of Control	A military control line between the Pakistani- and Indian-controlled territory of the previous princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. It serves as the de facto border but does not constitute a legal international border.
	Lok Sabha	The Lok Sabha (‘House of the People’) is the lower house of India’s bicameral Parliament, with the upper house being the Rajya Sabha. Although both houses are formally equal in power, the Lok Sabha has the decisive voice in budgetary policy. A maximum of 545 members are directly elected by the general electorate through majority vote in single-member constituencies. In Sanskrit ‘Lok’ means ‘people’ and ‘Sabha’ means ‘assembly’.
NDA	National Democratic Alliance	Political alliance of centre-right and right-wing parties in India, led by the BJP.
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement	A forum of 120 ‘developing world’ states that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. Founded in 1961; initiated by the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesian President Sukarno, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah.

NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty	International treaty to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and to achieve nuclear as well as full disarmament. Opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty came into force in 1970. So far, 190 countries have joined the Treaty but both India and Pakistan (together with Israel and South Sudan; North Korea announced its withdrawal), for reasons contained in their nuclear policy, continue to withhold signatures to the Treaty.
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group	A multilateral export control regime, a group of nuclear supplier countries that seek to prevent nuclear proliferation by controlling the export of materials, equipment and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons. India has sought membership since 2016 and has received backing from a majority of the 48 members.
	Panchasheela	The five principles of peaceful coexistence which were agreed to by Nehru, Nasser of Egypt, Tito of Yugoslavia and Sukarno of Indonesia, in the Bandung Conference of 1954.
	Panchasheela Agreement	1954 agreement between India and China on trade and relations between 'Tibet Region of China' and India. Its preamble entails the first formal codification of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence': 1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, 2) mutual non-aggression, 3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, 4) equality and mutual benefit, 5) peaceful coexistence. In Sanskrit, 'panch' means 'five' and 'sheela' are virtues.

	Rajya Sabha	The Rajya Sabha ('House of States') is the upper house in the Indian Parliament. Together with the Lok Sabha, it forms the legislative body of the Indian state. It has 245 members. The legislatures of the states and union territories elect 233 of them. The Indian President nominates the remaining 12 members. The Rajya Sabha has a term of six years, with one-third of its members retiring every two years.
	Satyagraha	Satyagraha is a philosophy of non-violent resistance and means 'holding on to truth'. Mahatma Gandhi employed it against British colonial rule in India and apartheid in South Africa. Gandhi used the term to refer to 'civil disobedience'. Satyagraha includes three core principles. Firstly, <i>sat</i> – truth, honesty and fairness. Secondly, <i>ahimsa</i> – non-violence and refusal to inflict injury upon others. Thirdly, <i>tapasya</i> – willingness and effort for self-sacrifice. Thousands of followers joined Mahatma Gandhi in April 1930 on his Salt Satyagraha. This was a 390 km march to the coastal town of Dandi in Gujarat, where, on 6 April, Gandhi broke the British salt tax, a tax that declared the private production or collection of salt illegal.
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation	The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also called Shanghai Pact, is a political, economic and security alliance, comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (the founding members of the 1996 mutual security agreement 'Shanghai Five', SCO's predecessor), Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan (the latter two joined in 2017). Some other countries are associated as observers or partners. The SCO meets once a year and conducts regular military exercises to promote cooperation, for example, against terrorism and to foster regional peace and stability.

SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	Regional intergovernmental organization of South Asian states. Members: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute	Research institute based in Stockholm, focused on armed conflict, military expenditure, arms trade, disarmament and arms control.
	Swadeshi	Swadeshi means 'of one's own country/made from its own resources'. It was used to refer to the consumption of only homemade goods. Swadeshi was used as a call to boycott British goods in favour of Indian products, in order to encourage self-sufficiency, particularly in cottage-industry items such as hand-loomed cloth. Mahatma Gandhi popularized Swadeshi during the freedom struggle.
	Swaraj	Swaraj means self-rule or self-determination. It often refers to the concept developed by Mahatma Gandhi during the independence struggle. Gandhi expressed this in his well-known pamphlet <i>Hind Swaraj</i> . The term is derived from Hindi. It is used in the political rhetoric of subnational movements in South Asia to demand a homeland or more autonomy for a particular region or ethnic minority. It also has been used to support the economic policy of protectionism aimed at creating a self-sufficient Indian market.
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights	All WTO members signed the TRIPS Agreement during the Uruguay Round negotiations. It established a regulatory standard for intellectual property and applies to citizens of other WTO members.

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	The Soviet Union – officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – was a socialist state that existed from 1922 to 1991. While <i>de jure</i> , a federal union of multiple national republics, it was <i>de facto</i> highly centralized and governed as a one-party state (prior to 1990) by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was the largest country in the world, covering 11 time zones, and for four decades after World War II it was a global superpower alongside the United States. The USSR was dissolved by President Yeltsin in 1991.
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council	A United Nations body with the mission to promote and protect human rights globally. The UNHRC has 47 members, who are elected for rotated three-year terms on a regional group basis. It investigates accusations of human rights breaches and focuses on human rights matters such as freedom of expression, association and assembly, belief and religion, women’s rights, LGBT rights, and rights of racial and ethnic minorities. The UNHRC was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 to replace the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), which had been strongly criticized for permitting countries with bad human rights records to be members. The UNHRC works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
UPA	United Progressive Alliance	Coalition of centre-left and left-wing parties in India formed after the 2004 general election and led by the INC.

WTO	World Trade Organization	<p>An intergovernmental organization which regulates and facilitates international trade. It started its operations in 1995 and replaced the GATT, which was established in 1948. The WTO has 164 member states that together represent over 96% of global trade and global GDP. The WTO facilitates trade in goods, services and intellectual property by providing a trade agreement negotiating framework. The reduction or elimination of tariffs, quotas and other restrictions is at the heart of its mission. The WTO provides an independent dispute resolution mechanism and forbids discrimination between trading partners, with notable exceptions, for example, for national security and environmental protection. The WTO is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.</p>
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Foreword

If you want a book that is almost encyclopaedic in its coverage of India's foreign policy, covering the period from its independence to the second decade of the new millennium, this is it. Subrata Mitra, Jivanta Schottli and Markus Pauli have done the almost impossible – they have provided a synopsis of the most important phases, relationships and issues that define the country's policies beyond its borders. And they have done so in an engaging and sophisticated manner. Readers as diverse as undergraduate students, students in advanced programmes of study and established scholars of India will find this an accessible book, free of jargon and abstruse theorizing, and yet with a penetrating point of view.

Studies of India's foreign policy have taken diverse approaches to laying bare its contours. International relations theory and foreign policy analysis offer a range of possibilities for analysing a country's foreign policy. This foreword is not the place to rehearse the gamut of either Indian foreign policy studies or international relations theory and foreign policy frameworks – with a light touch, the book does that very ably. Mitra, Schottli and Pauli present us with a distinct way of thinking about India's foreign policy – through the prism of statecraft. Statecraft has layers of meaning, one of which is invidious, namely, about how rulers (and perhaps elites) stay in power. This is one interpretation of Kautilya's and Machiavelli's classic works. Another meaning of statecraft is that it is what rulers and elites do to protect and advance the interests of their societies. According to this view, the ruling class may reap the fruits of sitting at the top of the political and economic hierarchy but in return they have a responsibility to deliver security and prosperity to those over whom they rule. Clearly, at any given moment, statecraft is probably a mix of both elements of statecraft – of the selfish and the more social acts of rulers and elites.

From this statecraft perspective, Mitra, Schottli and Pauli bring a flesh-and-blood perspective to India's foreign policy. Foreign policy is one element of statecraft. In an interconnected world, it is vital: people from other countries will have a profound impact on one's life chances,

and every society must have a way of dealing with other countries and peoples. The question at the heart of the book is how India's rulers and its foreign policy apparatus have dealt with others – those in the neighbourhood, in the near-neighbourhood, farther afield and with distant but powerful countries whose influence is continental if not global. How too has India managed global issues such as international trade, development, climate change, international maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and terrorism? Our authors also ask a difficult question, one that many scholars choose to avoid: how *well* has India dealt with other countries and with more cosmopolitan issues that impinge on its security and wellbeing? It is to Mitra, Schottli and Pauli's great credit that they sensitively address this fundamental and challenging question.

The book is divided into three main parts: the evolution of India's foreign policy during the Cold War; the changes, almost transformational, of foreign policy after the Cold War as the country's economy gathered steam and national power grew apace; and India's multilateral engagement in a complex world where power is becoming increasingly diffuse. There are many ways of approaching a social phenomenon for description and analysis. Mitra, Schottli and Pauli have organized the book largely chronologically – within [Part 1](#), focusing on the Cold War era, the reader will discover how India's prime ministers dealt with foreign policy in their time. In [Part 2](#), focusing on the post-Cold War era, this temporal treatment gives way to an analysis of the core 'strategic theatres', as it were, of India's foreign policy: nuclearization; great power relations (the US, China and Russia); bilateral relations in South Asia; and the next *mandala* of relationships, in West Asia, Europe and BRICS. Finally, in [Part 3](#), the book delves into India's multilateral engagements, where it is simultaneously seated at various regional and global negotiation tables to protect its interests while also contributing to cosmopolitan interests.

There are gaps, not surprisingly – no book can deal with everything without becoming impossibly big and unwieldy. Perhaps the most obvious gap is the absence of India's relations with Africa, Central Asia and Latin America. The authors insist that there are turning points and key moments in foreign policy: not surprisingly the book does not discuss every single one of the critical junctures and episodes of India's foreign policy. And yet, even a quick glance at the table of contents reveals that this is an ambitious book in its scope.

What will you learn here about the drivers of India's foreign policy and the efficacy or achievements of its efforts to deal with the world beyond

its borders? The authors begin by rehearsing the conventional view that India's foreign policy has no core, that it is mostly reactive and ad hoc, and that as a result it is marked by 'a sense of ambiguity', a 'puzzling Janus-like posturing' between selfishness and cosmopolitanism. Mitra, Schottli and Pauli do not altogether disagree with this characterization, but they give us a rather satisfying answer to why India is ambiguous and Janus-like: from a statecraft perspective, India's foreign policy must constantly deal with forces operating on it both internationally and domestically. Its rulers and diplomats must negotiate in two directions: with external interlocutors and forums and with domestic groups and interests. These impose limitations on what is feasible within India's foreign policy, influencing it in various ways and perhaps finally in a corrective shift. Successive chapters will depict India's 'double-edged diplomacy', to use Robert Putnam's terminology, and the resulting twists and turns in policy.

Finally, how has India done? How well has its foreign policy served the country? Throughout the book, the authors allude to and indicate their broad judgement: India has done pretty well. From Nehru to Narendra Modi, from non-alignment to strategic autonomy, from a time when India was economically and militarily weak to a time when it is arguably 'a leading power' (to quote Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's foreign minister) on a variety of issues, India has managed a complicated and often dangerous world with relative success. Readers may agree or disagree, but Mitra, Schottli and Pauli leave us with the strong impression that contrary to the cavilling critics of India, both at home and abroad, the country's leaders and diplomats have steered a mostly rational, pragmatic course, mindful of the limits and opportunities that face them.

I should end by saying that as I read the book, I found myself drifting away from foreign policy to think about larger issues related to Indian nationhood – to the 'idea of India' (in Sunil Khilnani's phrase). Mitra, Schottli and Pauli make no secret that this is part of their endeavour – to read foreign policy as a mirror to a society. In the culture wars of contemporary India, between the right and left and centre of Indian politics, there is acrimony and a sense of irreconcilability. This cool-headed volume, as it charts India's external relations, is suggestive of an alternative reading of India's future.

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Preface

The foreign policy of a state is a prerequisite of its sovereignty. Having an independent foreign policy and the capacity to project the national interest in the international area are indicators of the level of 'stateness' of a country. From a dominant theme of non-alignment, over the past seven decades since its independence, India has shifted to a foreign policy marked by the pursuit of national power. As a country of growing international economic and political importance, and the world's most populous state, it is essential to understand the motivations behind decisions that have shaped and constrained India's external engagement. Drawing on Robert D. Putnam's two-level game theory, the 'toolbox' we have developed in this book highlights the role of, and interplay between, domestic and international determinants of policymaking. It does so by implementing the concept of statecraft, which incorporates elite strategies, institutions and societal variables as the main determinants of the contents of foreign policy.

The book, which examines Indian foreign policy from independence in 1947 to the present day, will be useful for students of politics and foreign policy, both those specializing in India as well as those seeking a comparative perspective. Our toolbox could serve as a heuristic device for practitioners of the craft of diplomacy, helping them identify the nodal points through which the policy process evolves. The state makes foreign policy, but foreign policy also makes the state. How a state engages with other states can also serve as a template for understanding how the state evolves over time, including how it navigates a challenging environment through its own unique combination of strategy, force and ambiguity. *Statecraft and Foreign Policy*, which traces the evolution of this very special dynamic interaction, is the outcome of many years of teaching and research at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University in Germany, the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and most recently at the Ireland India Institute of Dublin City University (DCU), Ireland. A grant from DCU's

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences helped with the preparation of the material for publication. We are very grateful to all these institutions for their support.

We would also like to take this opportunity to record our gratitude to colleagues who have stood by us as we have gone through successive drafts of the text. We are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who provided invaluable feedback and comments. We express our sincere thanks to the wide network of our families, friends, colleagues and mentors, spread over North America, Europe and India, who have supported us over many years. Finally, we dedicate this book to Suvarna, with the hope that this book will help guide her generation to navigate their way through the increasingly complex world of diplomacy and national power politics.

For additional supporting material that can be used alongside the book, please refer to the following homepages: <https://www.dcupress.dcu.ie> and <https://www.dcu.ie/lawandgovernment/foreignpolicy>.

Subrata K. Mitra, Jivanta Schottli and Markus Pauli
Heidelberg and Dublin, July 2023

1

Introduction

India: nuclear, engaged and non-aligned

In terms of the foreign policy that the country has assiduously followed from independence in 1947 all the way to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, India continues to send mixed signals to the world. Having long since overcome the stock image of a 'third world' country steeped in mass poverty with a stagnant economy, 'emerging India', the fifth largest economy in the world, is a force to reckon with in international diplomacy, trade and security. However, a residual sense of ambiguity about the country and its use of power to promote national interests, as evident in its neutrality in the Ukraine war, casts a long shadow on its global profile. This makes the significance of India's huge presence on the world stage difficult to interpret. With its fractious but resilient democracy; multiple alliances but with no specific military focus; nuclear weapons and delivery capacity but no clear nuclear doctrine to help adversaries calculate the probability of the use of those weapons of mass destruction, India continues to be an enigmatic presence.

The perplexing question of what the enormous resources amassed by India amount to in international politics in terms of power and influence was raised two decades ago by Stephen Cohen, an acute observer of South Asia and its politics. In his words, 'One is therefore tempted to ask whether India is destined always to be "emerging" but never actually arriving' (Cohen 2001: 2). Cohen was not the only observer to nail the Indian paradox to this trenchant question; a whole gamut of specialists – Indian as well as foreign – have raised similar queries. In one of the first studies of India's attempt to project national power under Indira Gandhi, Surjit Mansingh, in *India's Search for Power* (1984) showed how the

forceful personality of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi enhanced India's stature, at least for a time. Barely a decade later, debates had emerged about the position of India in world politics, as shown in Ross Babbage and Sandy Gordon's *India's Strategic Future: Regional State or Global Power?* (2016). Šumit Ganguly (2003: 4) leaves the issue of India's exact status in global politics an open proposition, conditional on the capacity of India's leadership 'to grasp the nettlesome issues' of domestic politics, and 'to complete the process [of reform] started more than a decade ago'.

In *Statecraft and Foreign Policy*, we analyse the process underlying the making of foreign policy to dissect this sense of ambiguity. All countries to a certain extent adopt a Janus-like posture, keenly pursuing national interests while at the same time looking beyond what nation-states normally do and committing the country to the general good of humankind. In the case of India, the bifurcation of values/principles and interests was evident at the time of gaining independence. The country's first generation of leadership emerged from a freedom struggle fought using constitutionalism and legalistic arguments, non-violence as a form of power and a set of socialist ideals and principles. However, the shock of a brutal and bloody partition, war with Pakistan and the cut and thrust of international politics in the emerging Cold War context of the 1950s meant that the initial idealism quickly gave way to a dose of strategic realism. We argue that India's particular blend of foreign policy took on an institutional form over time, to the point that it is possible to speak of continuity in India's foreign policy. This continuity manifests itself as a thread linking Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, to Narendra Modi, the country's current leader, despite major differences of party and ideology.¹ There is an inherent logic linking the leaders, based on geography, history and domestic political dynamics.

To explore and understand when and why India's foreign policy sometimes falls short in terms of delivering concrete outcomes, we employ a toolbox that serves as a heuristic device to analyse India's ambiguous profile in the global arena. This explanatory device considers the fractures in India's political community – a peculiarity of Indian democracy where frenzied elections are the rule rather than the exception – to identify the gaps between the formulation of the national interest and its actual implementation.² Our analysis follows a historical trajectory and explains why some pressing issues with neighbouring countries have long languished in a sense of helpless inaction, but how a resolute leadership backed by professional staff can make a difference, though this is not always the case.³

India's emergence as a post-colonial state

Following close to two centuries of British colonial rule, India gained independence in 1947 with a stagnant economy, mass illiteracy and desperate poverty, but with its political leadership securely in place. Thanks to the 'orderly' transfer of power,⁴ the departing colonial rulers handed over the reins of power into the willing and eager hands of the Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Much has happened since, with varying opinion on the significance of these changes. The twenty-first century has seen many authors pronouncing the 'arrival' and the 'emergence' of India on the world stage. They portrayed India as a 'major economic actor' and 'an aspiring great power' (Jalan 2013; Panagariya 2010; Tharoor 2007). Another cluster of publications announced the 'shift of power eastwards' (Khanna 2019; Mahbubani 2010; Rachman 2016), seeing India's rise as part and parcel of this global reorientation. They pointed to the expansion of manufacturing hubs, markets, consumer demand and wealth, which has moved the global economy's centre of gravity to Asia. Several authors have highlighted investments in the military, space programmes, innovation and education as indicators of this shift. Some predicted the accompanying and inevitable decline of the West, while others questioned this conclusion (Auslin 2017; Rachman 2016). Others saw the 2008 financial crisis as confirmation and acceleration of the decline of the West. A few proclaimed 'Western-style' capitalism to be discredited, while others contested such predictions of the end of capitalism (Boldizzoni 2020; Collier 2019; Streeck 2017). However, what all these assets of the so-called 'West' or 'the Rest' add up to in terms of international politics remains open for discussion,⁵ as does the question of whether the international order today rests on a more multipolar arrangement and balance of power.

Critics and champions of globalization and globalized politics have addressed the importance of statecraft and foreign policy. A common refrain among the authors cited above (and there are many more who write in this vein) is that domestic factors play an important role in the determination of foreign policy. What one rarely comes across is how this general relationship acquires a particularly sensitive form and intensity in the Indian case. The very strength of India's boisterous democracy, which establishes a cordon sanitaire around the articulation of facts that are politically sensitive, often goes unacknowledged.

With these conflicting scenarios in the background, it is important to remember that new 'members of the club' of global economic integration, such as India, face challenges and dangers. These include capital flow fluctuations and the herd mentality of speculators. The liberalization

of markets brings with it the challenge to protect domestic interests and sovereignty. Nonetheless, as opinion polls show,⁶ expectations remain high and optimistic in India. Compared to the recent past, each of South Asia's economies was – before the Covid-19 pandemic – growing at a faster rate than previously. In the one and a half decades before the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, more people than ever before managed to get out of the poverty trap.⁷ Adding further complexity is the phenomenon of resilience in democratic institutions on the one hand, and the tendencies towards and evidence for what has been described as democratic backsliding.⁸ Between 2017 and 2020, each of the countries in South Asia (officially the eight members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) held elections. In many ways, this is an unprecedented moment in the history of India and its South Asian neighbours.

India's foreign policy and its interaction with domestic politics is the focus of this book, but our analysis does not remain confined to a single case study. The country's foreign policy is entwined with the region's history. This includes a deep and embedded British imperial legacy with multiple, overlapping ethnic, linguistic and religious identities. Policymakers and analysts increasingly recognize and concur with some core determinants of India's future. These include political stability and improved diplomatic relations with each of its neighbours. Enhanced interconnectivity within South Asia is another such decisive priority. India seems committed to stimulating trade and political ties with adjacent regions, which include Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Persian Gulf, and has moved towards closer ties with each of these regions. There is today a greater availability of resources and instruments for contemporary diplomacy, while at the same time there is an ancient past to draw upon,⁹ a period when India was deeply integrated into the regional as well as global economy, through trade, merchant networks and cultural exchange. (For a country bio of India, see [Table 1.1.](#))

Table 1.1 Country bio of India

	2022 Data [World rank]
Population	1.390 billion [2]
Territory	3,287,263 square km [8]
Real GDP (gross domestic product) per capita, purchasing power parity (in 2017 dollars; 2021 est.)	\$6,600 [159]
Year of independence	1947
Year of current Constitution	1950

Table 1.1 (Cont.)

Head of state	President Ms Droupadi Murmu (since 25 July 2022)
Head of government	Prime Minister Narendra Modi (since 5 June 2014)
Languages	English (11% of Indians), Hindi (primary language of 44% of Indians; total speakers: 57% of Indians), Bengali (9%), Marathi (8%), Telugu (8%), Tamil (6%), Gujarati (5%), Urdu (5%), Kannada (5%), Odia (4%), Malayalam (3%), Punjabi (3%)*
Religion	Hinduism (79.8%), Islam (14.2%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%), Jainism (0.4%), others (0.7%)
Scheduled castes	16.6% of the population
Scheduled tribes	8.6% of the population
Capital	New Delhi (an administrative district of Delhi, which is officially called the National Capital Territory of Delhi)
Six largest cities (in millions)	New Delhi 32.1; Mumbai 20.9; Kolkata 15.1; Bangalore 13.2; Chennai 11.5; Hyderabad 10.5
Memberships	BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation); BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa); Commonwealth of Nations; G4 nations (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan; supporting each other to become permanent members on the United Nations Security Council); Group of Five (five largest emerging economies: Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa); G20 (Group of Twenty); SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation); SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation); UN (United Nations); WTO (World Trade Organization)

* Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% as they refer to all people who reported this language as their first, second or third language; latest data: Census 2011. Sanskrit is reported (mainly as second or third language) by 2.4 million people.

Source: Central Intelligence Agency (2023)

Interests, perceptions and values in the making of foreign policy: a toolbox

The book brings together several distinct and yet connected lines of enquiry. Firstly, it identifies empirical puzzles that have defined Indian foreign policy since independence in 1947, an example of which is non-alignment. Soon after independence, it became an instrument and a moral standard for Indian foreign policy. Non-alignment was developed as a policy objective, drawing upon interests and identity and as a response to evolving Cold War global politics; it has been a crucial and dynamic feature of India's foreign policy. The book analyses its origins, the challenges it faces, the inconsistencies in implementation and its long-term impact and influence on India's foreign policy. At the centre of these concerns are questions such as: What have been the advantages and disadvantages of non-alignment for contemporary India? How did it evolve in terms of underlying logic and through its interpretation by decision-makers in the post-Cold War era and into the twenty-first century?

Such questions are linked to a broader discussion about grand strategy and strategic culture in India, and a debate initiated in 1992 with the publication of a provocative piece by George K. Tanham titled 'Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay' (Tanham 1992). Prepared as a report to the US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Tanham argued that India, because of the geography and historical and political dynamics in the region, had developed a predominantly 'defensive strategic orientation' (Tanham 1992: 7). Controversially, he proposed that the 'lacunae in strategy and planning derive largely from India's historical and cultural development' (1992: 50), the fact that India was not a united political entity for most of its history and that a 'Hindu' approach to time and life discouraged the ability to think and plan long term. These weakly or even largely unsubstantiated claims in Tanham's essay provoked a response from Indian and external analysts and policymakers, and triggered a discussion that continues to reverberate today.

A 2006 study by Rodney W. Jones, also for the US government, put forward a counter-argument: that India's strategic culture 'is not monolithic, [but] rather is mosaic-like, but as a composite is more distinct and coherent than that of most contemporary nation-states' (Jones 2006: 3). He went on to argue that this 'is due to its substantial continuity with the symbolism of pre-modern Indian state systems and threads of Hindu or Vedic civilization dating back several millennia' (2006: 3). The search for and debate regarding the cultural foundations of India's

strategic orientation and its inherent limitations have produced a veritable body of literature. Scholars have explored classic Hindu epics such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* (Datta-Ray 2016; Narlikar & Narlikar 2014), ancient texts and thinkers including the *Arthashastra* and its author, Kautilya (Mitra & Liebig 2017), and Mughal and Persian texts on statecraft (Liebig & Mishra 2017), in order to explore and tap the wealth of endogenous politico-cultural resources. Makers of foreign policy and its administrators have done this too, most notably the current External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, who has argued in a recent book titled *The India Way* that Indian decision-makers face not so much ‘the end of history’ but rather an unmistakable ‘return to history’ (Jaishankar 2020: 111). This raises important questions about the use and reuse of history and the invention of strategic tradition.

Both Tanham and Jones acknowledged the existence of an Indian policy of ambiguity, specifically with regard to nuclear weapons. While the former attributed this to a lack of strategic clarity, the latter explained choices and decisions in terms of a strategic culture that prioritises ‘knowledge as power and long haul endurance’ (Jones 2006: 17). This divergent interpretation continues to stimulate research on the question of how to assess and understand grand strategy in the context of India’s foreign policy. Kanti Bajpai, one of India’s foremost international relations scholars, has discussed this in terms of the different worldviews of strategic elites and the persistence of various subcultures (Bajpai et al. 2014). Many others have contributed to a rich literature on how to delineate and reconcile the plurality of ideological traditions found within the Indian strategic community and discourse (Beitelmaier-Berini 2021; Mohan 2003; Ollapally & Rajagopalan 2012; Sagar 2009). We engage with this theoretical debate, using a toolbox (see Figure 1.1) to explore a range of empirical puzzles in Indian foreign policy addressed in each of the chapters.

Secondly, the book engages with an ongoing discussion within the field of international relations about the need to foster a *global international relations* (Acharya 2014). In writing a textbook on India’s foreign policy, we also aim to contribute to this ongoing endeavour in terms of providing reference material and a counter-position to mainstream international relations literature. For example, alongside the study of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis ought to be a study of the 1962 India–China border war to explore the linkages as well as the parallels. This responds to the call for grounding international relations more consciously in world history and ‘in the ideas, institutions, intellectual perspectives and practices of both Western and non-Western societies’ (Acharya 2017).

The end of the Cold War revealed and unleashed intra-state dynamics, integrating them within global trends. This further highlighted the global nature of security, economic prosperity and sustainability. Examples have included the global war on terrorism, the rise of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and the 2016 Paris Agreement on the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change adaptation and finance. The Cold War, to a large extent, functioned upon a logic based on three ideas, namely, the 'zero-sum' nature of global competition for power between the 'capitalist West' and the 'socialist East', the relative power of nation-states within each camp, and the ideological compartmentalization of competing blocs and powers. None of these prisms or policy positions is particularly useful in our contemporary world, a context in which the movement of information, capital, goods and people have significantly spread and accelerated with time. Some scholars have thus proposed a reorientation, in order to rethink and decentre the academic field of international relations.¹⁰ This requires challenging Western-centric traditions of international relations as a field of enquiry (Acharya & Buzan 2019).

Thirdly, we draw on our perspectives as political scientists with an area studies focus. We give both regional expertise and knowledge of the discipline equal importance. This is in order to explore the interaction between global and national politics and to understand the national context in depth. Our understanding of foreign policy is not defined only in terms of key events, single decisions and overarching strategies, but instead foreign policy is examined as a non-linear process that generates meaning and symbolic capital along the way. This approach resonates with the definitions of foreign policy used, for instance, by the renowned academic Christopher Hill, for whom 'Foreign policy is always the product of a society, a polity, interpreting its situation and choosing – who chooses is another matter – to act or react in a particular, un-predetermined way. The interaction of these multiple endogenous choices is what creates the unpredictable flow of international relations, with its dangers but also its achievements' (Hill 2003: 254).

Finally, this book does not rely on primary research but instead offers an analytical toolbox. We do this in a bid to reduce the barriers between area studies and theory-driven disciplines and as a way to draw on multiple perspectives. The analytical toolbox entails a set of instruments drawn from general international relations and foreign policy theories, which help to explore and understand the processes of change and continuity in Indian foreign policy within the context of an evolving international environment. As a result, we draw on a wide range of

insights, noted by a variety of scholars in the field of India’s foreign policy. This includes a focus on agency and ideas;¹¹ grand strategy, strategic culture and institutions (Bajpai 2014; Cohen 2001);¹² and the international balance of power and post-structural discourse analysis.¹³ Using a dynamic model comprising ‘domestic’-level variables of *interests, values, perceptions* and *personalities* set against contextual and structural determinants that are *historical, institutional* and *systemic*, we seek to highlight the role of process and politics. How a state’s leadership navigates domestic and international politics, the interplay between them and the feedback loop linking outcomes to inputs is the essence of our book and provides the basis for our understanding of statecraft.¹⁴

We embed our toolbox in the core determinants of India’s foreign policy – namely, political culture, security interests, history and the structure of its political system. European nation-states emerged from the long historical processes of nation-building, industrialization and state formation. Yet, we argue that one should examine the state as a conceptual variable in its own right, and analyse the role that India, as ‘state-nation’,¹⁵ has played in weaving the political units of vastly different levels of development and acquaintance with modern politics into a single political unit – the Indian nation.¹⁶ The state as an actor thus engages in the process of nation creation.¹⁷ India, after independence, has repeatedly made use of foreign policy in order to strengthen the contours and contents of this nation (Mitra 1990). Hence, we regard international politics

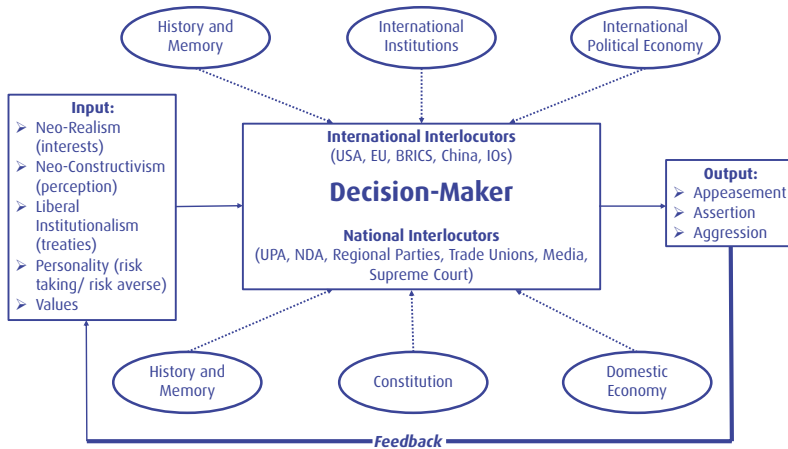


Figure 1.1 Toolbox: domestic and international constraints on foreign policy

Source: author.

not merely as an arena of anarchy, but instead, as an arena with deeply entrenched hierarchies. Newly independent states might perceive this more than established actors in the international realm. Thus, foreign policymaking and implementation must consider non-material factors such as ideas, norms, values and symbolism.

Neo-realism, neo-liberalism and constructivism – the three central international relations theories – contribute to our understanding of Indian foreign policy.¹⁸ However, our toolbox challenges the structuralism inherent in each of them. We focus on the decision-maker and the contextual demands of having to play a two-level game. Putnam (1988) argued that national decision-makers are often the critical nodes – where the domestic and the international merge. These decision-makers aim to make choices that enhance global influence and gains, but at the same time they also maintain or extend their clout at home. While information becomes key in determining the options on offer, several factors mediate the information at hand. These include the available knowledge and preferences about the national interest; the perceptions and values embedded within the decision-making elite's ideational framework; and the personality of the decision-maker, especially their attitude towards risk. Other studies of Indian foreign policy have focused on institutions (Ganguly & Pardesi 2009) or decision-making processes (Bandyopadhyaya 1980), or else have taken a historical perspective.¹⁹ Some authors have analysed strategic thought and strategic culture (Beitelmair-Berini 2021; Tanham et al. 1996) and the dynamics of intractable conflict and prolonged rivalries (Paul 2006). This book will shift the focus onto the decision-maker as an agent both embedded in and capable of shaping the decision-maker's environment.²⁰

We do not attempt to revisit foreign policy classics in cognitive theory such as Sprout and Sprout (1957), who highlighted the role of the operational environment and psychology. Nor does this book unearth new primary sources or make use of archival material. As a result, we are unable to provide new insights into the research that foregrounds (strategic) culture and which has of late experienced a renaissance.²¹ Instead, we aim to provide an analytic narrative of India's foreign policy since independence in 1947. We highlight 'critical junctures' – phases in the life of a nation during which decisions with very long-standing implications were taken; we identify key actors and discuss their options and room to manoeuvre. As mentioned earlier, we position ourselves within the vibrant discussion on the need for a global international relations. In our view, a global international relations aims to go beyond understanding equilibria, engaging more with questions about change in international politics – the nature of change, its possibilities and its consequences.

Rather than examining and assuming the state as given, the aim is to understand the processes, dynamics and politics of state making and in turn how these translate into and intersect with foreign policy goals and instruments.

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) have pointed to the absence of tools to explain change – for example, the rise of emerging powers and the rise of new actors. Norms, ideas and human consciousness play a central role in politics in general but particularly in mediating the political interaction of the state and the global arena. Hence, we argue the need for a focus on agency. There have been various versions and forms of rationalist and constructivist theory debating the rationality of individual action and the sources of ‘rationality’. Constructivist interpretations would claim that norms constitute actors’ identities, agents and structures are mutually constitutive, and that changes in ideational and normative structures do occur, leading to changes in practice. To understand agency in this way leads to the argument that there exists a ‘logic of appropriateness’, action that is both rule and identity based. However, a criticism emerges in response that this is in fact a strongly structural account of identity – of action being defined almost in the form of preordained scripts (Sending 2002). This approach does not allow for, nor does it provide, the tools with which to explore the possibilities of there being a ‘logic of inappropriateness’ or in fact multiple logics, newly created and negotiated over time. We argue that to develop an action-oriented account of foreign policy, it is necessary to focus on aspects of reflection, choice and agency; to identify and understand unintended outcomes and the meanings that are attributed to action.

What follows is a review of core dilemmas and dynamics that have characterized India’s foreign policy over the decades. They will be examined separately, and in depth, in the respective chapters. The purpose here is to draw attention to indicators of change and continuity in Indian foreign policy and to the challenges of statecraft, defined as ‘the construction of strategies for securing the national interest in the international arena, as well as the execution of these strategies by diplomats’ (Kaplan 1952: 548).

Reorientation in India’s foreign and economic policy: liberalization and the end of the Cold War

An analysis of India’s foreign policy over seven decades will inevitably reveal evidence of both change and continuity in terms of preferences and positions taken on key international issues. However, apart from

identifying features that have been the bedrock for India's foreign policy, the chapters of this book will seek to highlight the ways in which change has been mediated and continuity enabled. Directly after India gained independence in 1947, foreign policy was not a core issue in domestic politics, yet the country had pursued a strong globalist orientation. Thanks to Mahatma Gandhi's methods of non-violence and civil disobedience and the country's freedom struggle, India was regarded widely as a 'symbol and catalyst of self-determination for several nationalist movements' (Power 1964: 257).²² The country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, enjoyed being in the international limelight, travelling widely and projecting a proactive role for India in key global institutions. India was the first non-Western nation to become a member of the British Commonwealth; it was also one of the founding members of the United Nations, joining in October 1945, two years before acquiring independence from British rule. Concerted efforts were also made to raise India's international profile through activities such as the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, the Bandung Conference of Asian-African states in 1955 and the Belgrade conference of non-aligned states in 1961.²³

India's foreign policy from 1947–64 was widely associated with one man, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the country's prime minister from 1947 until his death in 1964, and his close allies (Brecher 1961: 567). As the chapter on Jawaharlal Nehru (Chapter 3) will demonstrate, foreign policy, while not a part of electoral politics at home, was nevertheless an integral part of nation-building. In terms of personal reputation and political capital, Jawaharlal Nehru invested heavily in non-alignment. It is interesting to note the debates and alternatives that were voiced at the time (Erdman 1966) and to consider continuities, divergences and parallels with more recent discussions about alignment as strategy and India's foreign policy in the twenty-first century (Khilnani et al. 2012; Pant & Super 2015). Labelled by some as a doctrine that derived from India's experience of colonialism and as a legacy of the freedom struggle, others have examined the strengths and weaknesses of non-alignment as a strategy. Closely associated with it, in terms of ideas, preferences and policies, was Jawaharlal Nehru. Table 1.2 lists the events and leaders who have impacted statecraft and foreign policy.

At the time of the first government, foreign policy was a preserve of the policymaking elites. This was in part because Parliament itself was dominated by the Indian National Congress (INC) party, a phenomenon that came to be known as a 'one-dominant-party system', a period (1947–67) during which the INC ruled both at the centre and in the states. Even the national debacle of 1962,²⁴ when India suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of Chinese forces,²⁵ did not substantially change this.

Table 1.2 India: major events and prime ministers since independence

Event	Year	Prime Minister
Independence Day on 15 August, Partition and the transfer of power. Accession of Kashmir to India. First Indo-Pakistan War in Kashmir.	1947	Jawaharlal Nehru (INC) (16+ years)
Republic of India inaugurated on 26 January.	1950	
First general election of federal and provincial assemblies.	1951–2	
Sino-Indian border conflict.	1962	
Jawaharlal Nehru dies from a stroke on 26 May.	1964	Gulzarilal Nanda (INC) (acting; 13 days) Lal Bahadur Shastri (INC) (1+ year)
Second Indo-Pakistan War.	1965	
Death of Lal Bahadur Shastri.	1966	Gulzarilal Nanda (INC) (acting; 13 days) Indira Gandhi (INC) (11+ years)
Third Indo-Pakistan War. Pakistan splits, establishment of Bangladesh.	1971	
First Indian nuclear test.	1974	
National Emergency.	1975–7	
	1977	Morarji Desai (Janata Party) (2+ years)
	1979	Charan Singh (Janata Party – Secular) (170 days)
		Indira Gandhi (INC) (4+ years)
Operation Blue Star. Indian Army attacks the Golden Temple of Amritsar to dislodge Sikh terrorists (June). Assassination of Indira Gandhi (31 October).	1984	Rajiv Gandhi (INC) (5+ years)
	1989	Vishwanath Pratap Singh (Janata Dal) (National Front) (343 d.)

(continued)

Table 1.2 (Cont.)

Event	Year	Prime Minister
	1990	Chandra Shekhar (Samajwadi Janata Party – Rashtriya) (223 d.)
Liberalization of the Indian economy begins.	1991	P. V. Narasimha Rao (INC) (4+ years)
Babri mosque of Ayodhya destroyed.	1992	
Seventy-Third Amendment of the Constitution makes village council autonomous units and introduces a mandatory quota of at least 33% of seats for women.	1993	
	1996	Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP) (16 d.) H. D. Deve Gowda (Janata Dal) (United Front) (324 d.)
	1997	Inder Kumar Gujral (Janata Dal) (United Front) (332 d.)
Nuclear tests by India and Pakistan.	1998	Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP) (NDA) (6+ years)
Hindu-Muslim riots in Godhra, Gujarat.	2002	
	2004	Manmohan Singh (INC) (UPA) (10+ years)
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act passed by Parliament.	2005	
Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Agreement signed into law. Mumbai terrorist attacks by Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba.	2008	
Women's Reservation Bill (33% quota of all Lok Sabha and state assembly seats for women) fails to become law after passing in the Rajya Sabha.	2010	
	2014	Narendra Modi (BJP) (NDA) (9+ years and counting)

Table 1.2 (Cont.)

Event	Year	Prime Minister
Indian banknote demonetization.	2016	
Supreme Court rules that the practice of triple talaq, as a form of divorce in Muslim personal law, is unconstitutional.	2017	
Supreme Court rules that gay sex is no longer a criminal offence, overturning a 2013 judgement that upheld a colonial-era law (section 377).	2018	
National election: BJP increases the size of its majority in the Lok Sabha. Indian government revokes Jammu and Kashmir's special status (limited autonomy) given under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Pulwama attack: A convoy with Indian security personnel was attacked by a suicide bomber on the Jammu–Srinagar National Highway. Balakot airstrike: Indian warplanes conduct a bombing raid against an alleged terrorist training camp in Balakot, Pakistan.	2019	
Chinese incursions along the Line of Actual Control (June). Protests against the Citizen (Amendment) Act and farmers' protests against market-oriented agricultural reforms. Coronavirus: strict lockdown and 149,000 deaths by year end.	2020	
Start of India's two-year tenure as a non-permanent UN Security Council member. Mass vaccination campaign for Covid-19 and devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections.	2021	

(continued)

Table 1.2 (Cont.)

Event	Year	Prime Minister
Accidental firing of Indian BrahMos missile into Pakistan. India's first indigenous aircraft carrier INS <i>Vikrant</i> commissioned. Rahul Gandhi commences 3,751 km-long 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'/'Unity March' from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. India takes over G20 Presidency from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2023.	2022	

The debate that followed the 1962 war in Parliament and the press was tepid and refrained from launching a critique of the government's handling of the crisis. Contemporary India could not be a more significant contrast. Today, foreign policy issues regularly erupt in a media frenzy and heated political debates. Recently it was over incursions and military build-up on the Sino-Indian border. In the mid-2000s, it was the discussions about the civil nuclear bill with the United States. With the deepening of Indian democracy, foreign policy has grown increasingly entangled with conflicts of region, religion and the faultlines that underpin Indian politics.

India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies and a major player in key global issues such as climate change, international terrorism, security in the Indian Ocean and increasingly within the context of the Indo-Pacific. As a major power in the South Asian region, it is also embroiled in protracted border conflicts with China and Pakistan and foreign policy issues have a greater resonance within the country's domestic politics. This trend has accelerated due to India's growing integration into the global economy and the nuclearization of India's security apparatus.

After three decades of a closed economy, by 1992–3 various sectors of the economy gradually began to open to foreign investment. In fact, this process has continued into the twenty-first century with sectors such as defence manufacturing allowing a gradually greater percentage of foreign direct investment. The opening up of the economy meant greater competition among domestic companies and opportunities to expand abroad. Not only did India attract the interest of international investors, but Indian companies also started to develop a global presence

(Schottli & Pohlmann 2019). With this, the Indian state began to pursue active economic diplomacy, a significant transformation from the past. Post-independence, the economy of India was predicated upon three core principles: self-sufficiency, autarchy and a closed, planned economy. A decade of high economic growth in the 2000s pushed India into a new league of global economic players. This prompted greater involvement via the World Trade Organization. It also increased India's representation at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and India became a member of the G20.

When and why the reorientation in India's economic policy occurred is a topic that has been much debated (Ahluwalia 2002; Basu 1993; Bhagwati 1993; Kohli 2006a, 2006b). The dramatic events of the early 1990s, however, cannot be seen in isolation. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union put into question the meaning of non-alignment. This deprived India of one of its main foreign policy instruments. In a world no longer polarized between ideological extremes, India's room to manoeuvre shrank drastically. Since the 1970s, India's dependence on the Soviet Union had grown in terms of relying on the superpower for diplomatic, economic and military assistance. The end of the Cold War also revealed differences within the developing world, exposing further the limitations of Nehru's vision of post-colonial state-building and leading to a further weakening of India's position within the international community. The policy of non-alignment was questioned like never before given the fact that one of the poles, the Soviet Union, had collapsed. India could no longer rely on Soviet backing in the United Nations Security Council. Moreover, in 1991 a deep financial crisis forced India to seek help from the IMF. This crisis accelerated the liberalization of the Indian economy. Major economic reforms were put in place in 1991. All of these events highlighted the urgency for new global alliances.

The emergence of Hindu nationalism and India's nuclearization

Another significant change that occurred during the 1990s was the emergence of Hindu nationalism as a major political force in India's domestic politics. Following a year of governmental instability, in 1999 the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) managed for the first time to form a stable coalition government, serving a full term of five years until 2004. Initially a party of the 'Hindu-Hindi belt' or the North Indian

Gangetic plains, the rise of the BJP is an important political and social phenomenon. In [Chapter 5](#), the rise of the BJP, which coincided with a gradual decline in the dominance of the Indian National Congress party, is examined closely, as is the proposition that a new, one-dominant-party system is taking shape. The BJP-led coalitions have also been in power at crucial turning points in Indian foreign policy. The nuclear tests of 1998 gave a final push to a long-running nuclear programme (see [Box 1.1](#)). Furthermore, in a surprising turn in India's Pakistan policy, in February 1999 Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Pakistan to launch a bus route between the two countries. However, the nuclear tests triggered widespread international sanctions against India and Prime Minister Vajpayee's overtures towards Pakistan ended with the Kargil War in 1999. On both counts, the immediate outcome of bold decisions appeared to be a deterioration in India's security and standing in the world. However, in the mid and long term, assessing their impact and implications is less clear-cut ([Chakma 2005](#)).

Box 1.1 Nuclearization²⁶

On 11 and 13 May 1998, India set off five nuclear devices at its test site in Pokhran, in the northwestern state of Rajasthan. Pakistan followed suit with six tests of its own on 28 and 30 May at sites in the province of Balochistan. The tests marked the culmination point of a long-running nuclear weapons programme in both countries. For India, the programme dated back to 1945 when the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research was created. In Pakistan, the Atomic Energy Commission was set up in 1955. In both countries the objectives were to develop peaceful use of atomic energy. India's first test took place in 1974 under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, resulting in Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's initiation of a nuclear weapons programme, with Kahuta Research Laboratories emerging as its main centre.

The decision to test, and to become overt nuclear states, in 1998 was the result of a combination of domestic and international reasons. To date, Pakistan and India remain non-signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In 1999, the Kargil War erupted between India and Pakistan, marking the first instance of direct conventional warfare between nuclear states.

In 2020, according to international estimates, India had a stockpile of 150 nuclear warhead inventories. Numbers are more uncertain in the case of Pakistan, but *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* projected in 2021 that Pakistan has a stockpile of approximately 165 warheads.

India has several types of aircraft as potential delivery platforms and has a range of medium- to intercontinental-range ballistic missiles titled *Agni* (Sanskrit for 'fire'). Pakistan has a series of *Shaheen* (Urdu for 'Falcon') missiles that are land-based surface-to-surface medium-range ballistic missiles. Pakistan seeks to attain what it calls a 'full-spectrum deterrence posture'. It does not abide by a no-first-use doctrine, which means that in the event of an attack by India, which has superior conventional forces, Pakistan might use its nuclear weapons.

India maintains a credible minimum nuclear deterrence and has committed that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail.

India's nuclear doctrine was made public in January 2003, along with the establishment of a Nuclear Command Authority to manage its nuclear arsenal. However, a civil body, the Cabinet Committee on Security, is the final decision-making authority. Pakistan has yet to publicize an official nuclear doctrine. A centralized command-and-control structure was established in 2000, comprising President Musharraf, cabinet ministers and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Under an accord in place since 1988, India and Pakistan exchange a list of nuclear installations and facilities. Both countries have since continued with the practice, even during times of bilateral tensions, most recently in January 2021.

The nuclear tests of India were followed the next day by Pakistan's nuclear tests. On the one hand, nuclearization injected further instability into the region. At the same time, it can be analysed in terms of a logical calculation given China's modernization of its nuclear arsenal and Pakistan's clandestine nuclear programme. By turning Pakistan into an overt nuclear power, India's actions laid bare the challenges of managing a tripartite nuclear security dilemma involving two of its neighbours.

To date India has demonstrated a long and clean record on non-proliferation and is considered a de facto member of the 'nuclear club' or 'nuclear weapons states', a designation long restricted to the United States, Russia, the UK, France and China. In 2008, an India-specific exemption was negotiated and granted by members of the Nuclear Suppliers Club, a multilateral export control regime within nuclear supplier countries. The exemption allowed for trade in civilian nuclear fuel and technology with India, a country that had not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It was based on a formal pledge by India not to share sensitive nuclear technology or material with others and to uphold its voluntary moratorium on testing nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Supply Group (NSG) waiver lifted a three-decade-long embargo on civilian nuclear trade with India (imposed after the country's first nuclear tests in 1974). In the same year, the US Senate approved the civilian nuclear agreement allowing India to purchase nuclear fuel and technology from, and sell to, the United States. This came to be known as the civil nuclear deal with the United States and had been in the making for many years. It also symbolized a major breakthrough in relations with the United States. For much of the Cold War, mutual suspicion and disdain had characterized India-US relations.

From being treated as a pariah in 1998, India is courted today by all the major powers as a customer for nuclear technology and highly sophisticated weapons. India continues to invest in its nuclear missiles and a nuclear-powered submarine programme. Some observers have posited that India's decision in 1998 to go nuclear projected the country into a new league of power relations and capabilities. The decision to test is attributed to the desire to signal and demonstrate military capacity and political resolve. The outcome may not have been tangible power per se, but the longer-term effects have been substantive and substantial, opening new avenues for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Box 1.2 Kargil conflict

The Kargil conflict/war occurred in 1999, resulting in high-altitude warfare in mountainous terrain between India and Pakistan. Erupting shortly after a summit between the two prime ministers, it resulted in more than 1,000 casualties. In an effort to cut off links between Kashmir and Ladakh, Pakistan sought to force India to negotiate a settlement of the Kashmir dispute. The brainchild of

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, it has been speculated whether or not the prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was informed and to what extent. The conflict triggered US President Bill Clinton to intervene, pressuring Pakistan to withdraw its troops. In India, the Kargil Review Committee was set up to launch an inquiry into the causes and to analyse perceived Indian intelligence failures.

'Peaceful coexistence': India's strategic ambiguity

Over the decades, India's policymakers and diplomats have been adept in achieving three policy objectives. Firstly, they steered the economy towards market liberalization. Secondly, they re-engaged with the international community through organizations such as the World Trade Organization (India was a founding member of its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)). Thirdly, they reoriented allegiances following the end of the Cold War.

Despite these successes, India's foreign policy is often depicted in negative terms, criticized for being ad hoc and reactive and for its lack of long-term planning and weak strategic thinking.²⁷ Scholars cite as evidence the fact that the government does not issue white papers. They point to the lack of a strategic doctrine outlining the country's central foreign policy objectives and instruments and refer to a tendency to equivocate on major policy issues. Indian policymakers and commentators have also been criticized for being very vocal on normative issues in international affairs, adopting a moralistic position on international matters, combined with defensiveness about India's own domestic politics.

In part, the nature of non-alignment itself encouraged strategic ambiguity. The policy was designed to provide India with cover during the Cold War, avoiding Cold War entanglements in some situations, while benefitting from economic aid from both the United States and USSR on other occasions. In addition, it allowed the country 'to play a global role disproportionate to its military might and economic prowess. India's ostensible strength lay in the power of moral persuasion' (Ganguly 2003: 41). India could position itself as a voice for the newly independent, post-colonial countries in Asia and Africa, promoting global disarmament and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Some have argued that

as non-alignment has faded as a guiding principle and *raison d'être* for India's foreign policy, so has the degree of strategic ambiguity or ambivalence. Instead, it is posited there has been a gradual move towards a more explicit focus on the principle of 'strategic autonomy'. This trend is seen as having strengthened especially after India's nuclear tests in 1998, when the term 'strategic autonomy' was used with growing frequency by officials to convey that India would not accept international restrictions on its nuclear weapons programme (Smith 2020).

Panchasheela is another core Indian foreign policy concept and stands for the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'. It represented the ideal international system for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. During the Cold War, Nehru envisioned a world of primarily status quo powers – a world in which international law and arbitration would rule. They would ensure a fair distribution of natural resources and the resolution of conflicts. India, with its legacy as an Asian power, would offer the middle path between East and West, between communism and capitalism (a planned economy and secular democracy), harvesting the teachings of Asoka, Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi. Major powers would act responsibly, refraining from balance-of-power politics. They would never intervene in the domestic affairs of others (Cohen 2001: 55). At the time, India could afford to sit on the fence. Rather than choose sides, as mentioned above, India could rationalize its 'non-engagement' in moral terms. However, there was also a deeply pragmatic calculation that played a core role in India's non-engagement. Furthermore, according to some scholars India, as an important and democratic power, simply did not need to join an alliance.

Box 1.3 Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as the Mahatma (Great Soul), was an iconic figure and leader in India's struggle for independence. Born on 2 October 1869 in Gujarat, Gandhi trained as a barrister in England. Witnessing and experiencing the racial injustice in South Africa, where he had been sent on work, he developed a technique of resistance called *satyagraha* (Sanskrit and Hindi: 'holding onto truth') or 'non-violence'. Gandhi went on to spend 21 years in South Africa developing his political ideas and modes of activism. Seeing the need for cross-community coalitions, he later translated this into the need

for Hindu–Muslim unity. Returning to India in 1915, he joined the Indian National Congress and worked towards transforming the predominantly urban middle-class Congress into a mass movement.

Gandhi addressed the needs of the Indian peasantry, taking his ideas and philosophy of satyagraha across the country. In addition to non-violence, Gandhi was a strong advocate of self-reliance and the regeneration of rural life and industry. As an act of political engagement and empowerment, he advocated the spinning of one's own cotton, thus encouraging the involvement of women. Leading the famous 1930 Dandi March, Gandhi walked about 400 km, along with a number of his volunteers, from his ashram in Gujarat to the coastline. At the end, making his own salt through evaporation, Gandhi broke the British Raj salt laws, challenging the British monopoly and the authority of the British Empire.

As the British tried to crack down on the movement, this led to an intensification of the struggle. Gandhi was imprisoned on several occasions but released due to fear of the repercussions were he to die under British imprisonment.

Gandhi was vehemently opposed to Partition, an outcome which other senior Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel came to see as inevitable to attain independence. After 1947, in the wake of mass Hindu–Muslim atrocities on either side of the newly created border, Gandhi launched a fast-unto-death to end the violence and to compel the government to transfer money promised to Pakistan. On 30 January 1948, while in Delhi trying to stem communal violence, Gandhi was shot and killed by Nathuram Vinayak Godse, a Hindu extremist who considered him to be too conciliatory towards the Muslim community.

Gandhi's techniques of non-violent resistance and leadership during the freedom struggle are deeply revered and had a long-lasting impact on the country's first generation of leaders.

China and the geopolitical structure of South Asia

Developments over the past decades have brought new external challenges to the states of South Asia. The structural dynamics of the region and its immediate neighbourhood play an important role in prompting

unexpected outcomes. On the one hand, there was Panchasheela and Nehru's rhetoric of peaceful coexistence. However, the sloganeering of *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai* during the 1950s, which translates as 'India and China are brothers' did not last long. The 1962 border war – China's invasion of India – led to military disaster and memories of humiliation. Relations with other South Asian neighbours have also been complicated. While India claims to shun regional hegemony, relations with almost all the South Asian countries have been difficult. Disputes, resentments and hostilities have dominated relations rather than peaceful coexistence. The structural features of the Indian subcontinent are in part responsible. India is by far the largest South Asian country, and it has borders with each of the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the exception being the more recent SAARC member, Afghanistan. As a result, India has often found it hard to manage relations with its 'small' neighbours – countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which in terms of population are comparable to large European states. Soft borders, illegal immigration, terrorism, smuggling, drugs, sharing of water resources and the treatment of minorities are some of the issues which have held back relations in the neighbourhood.

A further structural problem complicates Sino-Indian relations as China remains locked in to the subcontinent's security dilemma. Why? Because of its close political, economic and strategic relationship with Pakistan – India's main regional rival. China poses a particularly complicated foreign policy challenge for Indian decision-makers and strategists. China and India share one of the longest un-demarcated borders in the world. Hence, territorial issues remain a potential flashpoint in the relationship. China continues to claim Arunachal Pradesh, today a state in the Indian Union. At the same time, India argues that China occupies Aksai Chin, 38,850 km² of land, claimed by India as the easternmost end of its union territory of Ladakh and administered by China as part of its Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous regions. Against this backdrop, trade has nevertheless burgeoned between the two giant neighbours – but the balance remains skewed in favour of China. Growing competition, as well as cooperation, have characterized Sino-Indian relations. The relationship looks likely to remain one that is defined by caution on both sides. Neither India nor China can afford a conflict, and both need to be careful and vigilant, especially given the role that different media forms can play in using border issues to agitate nationalism (Zhang 2019b).

Box 1.4 Aksai Chin

Located in the northeastern section of Ladakh district in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is about 38,000 sq km of the area known as Aksai Chin. Having been part of different kingdoms in the past and subjected to British colonial map-making in the nineteenth century, the territory emerged as a flashpoint between India and China. In the 1950s, India discovered and complained about Chinese National Highway 219, a major connection linking Tibet and China's Xinjiang province that ran through Aksai Chin. This became one of the reasons leading up the 1962 border war between the two neighbours. Aksai Chin remains under Chinese control, while India continues to assert its claim over Aksai Chin. In August 2019 when Ladakh was created as a federally administered union territory, as part of the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir, all of Aksai Chin was included. Some observers have speculated that this was one of the reasons why China moved a large number of forces to the contested areas, creating the conditions for the violent clash that occurred in the summer of 2020.

The acceleration of India's engagement with the world

Several developments pressured India to amend its earlier approach of non-alignment. These include global factors such as economic globalization and the end of the Cold War, domestic issues like the nibbling away of Congress dominance in Indian politics, and the regional geopolitics of an evolving order and balance of power in greater Asia. The second part of this book turns to the implications and impact of this shift in power on India's foreign policy choices and challenges. It will trace the construction of a new consensus on foreign policy principles and preferences. We argue that India's repositioning in international affairs rests on two internal paradigm shifts. The first is the move away from non-alignment to engaging with countries, including the West, based on a convergence of interests and in recognition of the need for aligning policy responses to key global issues. While this has generated 'alliances' such as the International Solar Alliance, which under Indian leadership has brought together 89 countries, the traditional type of military alliance has remained elusive. At the same time, a number of security-focused

arrangements have been negotiated bilaterally. The second is the transition away from a state-centric model of thinking and towards a world where non-state actors may have to be appeased, wooed and/or deterred.

India's diplomacy has significantly changed in tone, content and action since independence. In the past, a tone of moral outrage was used whenever India reacted to world events. The pitch today is generally more nuanced.²⁸ While India often chose to stand firmly on issues which it claimed to be integral to its principles and material interests, it often stood alone. Today there are various examples where India acts in concert with other countries, also most notably within the region. An example was the failed attempt by the Nepalese King Gyanendra in 2005 to undermine a democratic process in his country. India chose to work in concert with the UK, the United States and Japan to support the transition.

Policy analysts, ministers and diplomats continue to refer to the need to maintain and augment strategic autonomy, but India no longer has the choice of remaining aloof from the world. There are several external and internal reasons for this. At home, citizens expect the Indian state to deliver security and jobs – the middle classes, the poor and youth exert enormous aspirational pressure on the government. Engagement with the world is central to delivering sustainable growth and human development. At the same time, policies need to be calibrated to enable economic activity and to protect the vulnerable. Externally, New Delhi is committed to consolidating influence within the region; India's interests in Afghanistan and growing investment in naval capabilities are demonstrative of this.

India's leaders have left their imprint on the country's foreign policy. Significant changes in India's diplomacy, as shown above, are the outcome. Perceptions, values, interests and personality have shaped the process of change. Given the long shelf life of non-alignment as a concept and guiding principle, it is useful to consider how it has been at times used as a strategy, a rhetorical device and a normative benchmark.

The emergence of a complex multi-polarity in the age of interdependence has changed diplomacy. Actors seek to foster and control interlinkages; they identify interstices for new diplomatic initiatives. India draws on soft, hard and smart power resources. Compared with other major powers, India did not experience World War II in terms of fighting on Indian soil.²⁹ However, hundreds of thousands of Indian soldiers did fight for the Allied forces between 1939 and 1945 in battles across the world, including in the Middle East, North and East Africa, Europe and Asia.³⁰ During the Cold War, India also avoided becoming a site for proxy

wars between the superpowers. As a result, Indians and Indian policy-makers have not been traumatized by the tumultuous global politics of the twentieth century in the same way as other countries in Asia and around the world. Thus, they do not run the risk of opening historical wounds such as the Sino-Japanese faultline. However, with the departure of the British in 1947, Partition left a deep psychological scar on the region's collective historical memory. This had policy implications that still reverberate today. A 'cold peace' of sorts has held between India and Pakistan, punctuated by four wars and numerous terrorist attacks, driving home the necessity of finding ways to coexist.

Structure of the book

This book has three parts. **Part 1** analyses 'The evolution of India's foreign policy: domestic determinants, regional dynamics and global politics'. **Chapter 2** identifies the importance of foreign policy for a newly independent country like India. As the first major country to gain freedom from colonial rule, India was also among the few post-colonial states to opt for and put in place the institutions and practices of parliamentary democracy. Just five years after independence and two years following the promulgation of a constitution, the Indian state introduced universal suffrage in the country's first general elections of 1952. These facts were vital in forming and framing the newly independent state. Foreign policy, as the articulation of a country's identity and interests, was as a result heavily influenced by the colonial experience, the national freedom struggle and the first generation of statesmen and women leading the country at home and as its representatives abroad.

Three subsequent chapters in this first part cover the definitive 'phases' of India's foreign policy. In **Chapter 3**, we examine Jawaharlal Nehru, both the country's first prime minister and Minister for External Affairs. Nehru epitomizes the aspirations, tensions and shortcomings of the foundational years and his leadership spanned the formative years of 1947 to 1964. The chapter examines in detail the ideas and logic behind 'non-alignment' which came to define India's 'strategy' and position during the Cold War. The faultlines and ideological battleground of the Cold War were taking shape, reaching South Asia by the late 1950s. Together, **Chapters 2** and **3** draw attention to the role played by borders and territorial disputes in India's relations with its neighbours and rivals, namely Pakistan and China. We address the origins and reasons for a protracted conflict over Kashmir and the emergence of the disputed line of

actual control between India and China. Once again, the narratives and challenges of nation- and state-building spill over into the machinations behind India's early foreign policy challenges and the making of crises.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the dynamics of change and continuity in India's foreign policy over the next six decades, focusing on the impact of strong prime ministers and weak governments; the emergence of and limits to India's role within the region; and efforts to redesign the mould of post-colonialism, non-alignment and limited economic growth.

Part 2 of the book focuses on 'India's search for power in a post-Cold War, multipolar world'. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and as political unrest spread across Eastern Europe, leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, India was going through its own phase of volatility. Between December 1989 and June 1991 two governments, lasting about a year each, were formed by the two main national parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress party, respectively. In 1991, the country experienced its most severe economic crisis since independence, putting the economy on the brink of default and collapse. Instead, economic reforms and economic growth are widely regarded in the literature as a watershed, facilitating and marking the rise of India as a participant in the international economic system.

This was a time of significant social churn with caste and religion emerging as potent mobilization devices, challenging the established contours of India's identity, such as secularism and democracy. On the economic front, the achievements of a planned socialist economy were severely tested and led to a programme of difficult economic reforms. The 1990s, bookended by major events – the economic reforms of 1991 and the nuclear tests in 1998 – showcased the political acumen of leaders who skilfully navigated a period of domestic instability and, in many ways, international opportunity.

Box 1.5 Caste system

In the past, the caste system had acted as a filter to separate foreign policy, confined to the top elites of India, from the lower levels of Indian society. However, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, hailing from what the Indian government categorizes as *Other Backward Class* (OBC), foreign policy has penetrated much deeper into the lower strata of Indian society.

India's local castes, or *jatis*, are the basic social units that still govern marriages, social networks, food taboos and rituals in the country. It is estimated that there are more than 2,000 *jatis*, traditionally divided into four hierarchically ranked broad categories called *varnas*. These are the *Brahmins*, who performed the traditional function of priests; the *Kshatriyas*, who were the rulers and the warriors; the *Vaiśyas*, who were the mercantile classes; and the *Sudras*, who were the service groups, agriculturalists and artisans.

Traditionally, the caste system rested upon an interdependent relationship of occupational groups, referred to as the *jajmani system*, within which *jatis* were linked to one another through ties of reciprocal economic, social and political obligations. A relationship between lower castes and high-caste landowners, for example, was deeply exploitative, resting upon a hereditary system as well as the relationship of dependence created through certain rights, such as the guaranteeing of a share of the harvest.

Oppressive aspects of the caste system have been contested through social movements, including electoral mobilization, particularly among the *Dalits* (those excluded from the four-fold *varna* system) and other lower castes, referred to in the Indian Constitution as the Scheduled Castes and Backward Castes.

Many see the caste system as retrograde and a cause for social fragmentation and backwardness. At the same time, for a vast number of people, caste is the basis of identity, social interaction and political involvement. Through democracy and economic growth, caste has become an instrument of mobilization, collective action and organization, raising awareness about, and undermining, the caste system's ideological rigidity and structure of exploitation.

Focusing on the timeframe of 1991 to the present day, we explore the evidence and sources of continuity and change for five of India's central bilateral relations: the India–Pakistan relationship (covered in [Chapter 6](#)), India–US relations ([Chapter 7](#)) and India–China, India–Russia relations (examined together in [Chapter 8](#)). The chapters focus on how individuals shape relations between countries but are framed by dynamics that have become or need to become more institutionalized. Hence, India–China economic relations evolved rapidly during

the 2000s, but the border has remained a flashpoint. India–US relations experienced a breakthrough agreement with the civil nuclear deal in 2005, but it took another 10 to 15 years to reap the benefits through institutional changes. With Russia, the bonds forged during the Cold War have persisted in the form of defence relations and at the level of international diplomacy. However, the power of ideas, idealism and the ideology that framed India’s foreign policy during much of the Cold War has significantly reduced in importance as India has many more options and opportunities in terms of trade partners and global alliances.

Two more chapters in this part of the book map the transition in India’s foreign policy towards more significant and effective multilateral engagement. Surveying India’s efforts and obstacles within the region of South Asia (Chapter 9), we turn to other regions such as the European Union, the Middle East and the trans-regional BRICS format (Chapter 10) to discuss the range and reach of India’s global interests.

Part 3 of the book focuses on ‘India’s multilateral engagements’, highlighting four areas of cooperation and competition. Chapter 11 examines the contentious areas of trade and aid, Chapter 12 focuses on climate change and energy, Chapter 13 explores maritime dynamics in the context of ASEAN, the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific, and Chapter 14 discusses global security challenges. This part of the book aims to highlight the emergence of new challenges, as well as identifying and understanding where Indian negotiators and policymakers have leverage. It additionally explores the advantages and limits to the country’s bargaining and coalition-building strategies.

In Chapter 15, our concluding chapter, we consider a few open-ended questions on India’s foreign policy in the new millennium. Are there distinguishing features of an ‘Indian’ tradition of statecraft? Have certain values and ideas endured, underpinning the strategic choices and decisions of Indian policymakers over time? How do the aspirations and anxieties of a large and diverse population feed into the global discourse on the challenges of our times?

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Notes

1. Others have made this observation. See for example Basrur (2017); Narang and Staniland (2012).
2. The sense of uncertainty about India's exact status and the perplexity about the capacity of the country to transform its assets into power continues. See for example the *Economist* magazine's title page in May 2022 focusing on India's positioning during the multiple global crises emanating from the war in Ukraine, with the headline 'India's moment: Will Modi blow it?' (*The Economist* 2022).
3. The Teesta River water-sharing dispute with Bangladesh remains on the agenda but has faced political resistance from within the country, specifically from regional leaders; long inaction in Kashmir or the use of strategies like 'hot pursuit' and 'surgical strikes' in borderland areas have come in for regular criticism from various political perspectives. Steps recently taken, through constitutional action and quick implementation, have been controversial but appear to have been taken regardless of short-term political costs by the Bharatiya Janata Party regime.
4. For an exhaustive description of this process, see the account by V. P. Menon (1957), a civil servant at the time and regarded as one of the architects of the newly created state, in *The Transfer of Power*.
5. See for example the use of these terms in Zakaria (2011).
6. An opinion poll by the weekly news magazine *India Today* (2020) showed the following, surprisingly positive outlook, given the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the Indian economy, incomes and employment: respondents were asked: 'What's your outlook for the future six months from now?' 46% stated that they were optimistic, whereas 39% stated that they 'don't

see things improving' and 15% said that they are uncertain. However, a notable change in public perception between January and August 2020 – hence before and after the Covid-19 pandemic hit India – can be seen. When asked to compare the current Narendra Modi (BJP) government with the Manmohan Singh (Congress) government, the percentage of people saying Modi's government is better decreased from 50% to 43% and most notably the answer 'they are the same' increased from 11% to 45% – with a corresponding decrease of 'worse than Congress' from 30% to 10%.

7. The United Nations Development Programme (2019) reported that over 640 million people across India were in multidimensional poverty in 2005–6, falling steeply to slightly more than 365.55 million by 2016–17 – an impressive reduction of 271 million.
8. Indian democracy continues its remarkable resilience despite the global phenomenon of democratic backsliding; see Mitra (2020) and Mitra et al. (2022b). For an alternative view, see 'How India's Ruling Party Erodes Democracy' by Ashutosh Varshney, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 33(4), October 2022.
9. See Hegewald and Mitra (2012) for an analysis of the relationship between the past and the present in India. In their book, Hegewald and Mitra (2012) used the unique concept of reuse, which involves strategically adapting elements from the past into the present, thus integrating them into of a new modernity. See Schottli (2012) for a study of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's reuse of India's past.
10. For a discussion of the 'decentring' agenda in international relations scholarship, see for example Onar and Nicolaidis (2013).
11. See Hall (2019) for an analysis of ideology and domestic politics. For a discussion of the impact that past leaders and ideas have played, see Ganguly and Pardesi (2009).
12. For a discussion of strategic culture, grand strategy and Indian foreign policy, see Beitelmaier-Berini (2021); for an analysis of the intersection between domestic institutions and strategic worldviews, see Narang and Staniland (2012).
13. For an examination of India in the role of a balancer, see Pant and Joshi (2016); Wojczewski (2020) applies a poststructuralist perspective using discourse analysis.
14. For an overarching definition of statecraft, see Baldwin (2020: 8–9).
15. For a discussion of this concept, see Stepan et al. (2010).
16. For a discussion on reconciling the quest for universal theory with 'situated knowledge', see Rudolph (2005).
17. On 'stateness', see Nettl (1968); see Mitra (1990) for how foreign policy has become an instrument of state formation, adding a further layer to the role of agency in the making of foreign policy.
18. Numerous books provide an overview of the three main theories in international relations. For a very recent example, see Burchill et al. (2022).
19. Also see S. Raghavan (2016a) and P. Raghavan (2019).
20. Others have had similar objectives. Hall (2019), for example, explores Hindu nationalist political thought, Narendra Modi's own thinking, to examine change and continuity in India's foreign policy strategies.
21. See for instance Bajpai (2014); Beitelmaier-Berini (2021); Paranjpe (2020).
22. Written just before the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, the article conveys some of the views at the time about India's role in international affairs.
23. For material published at the time on these significant events, see Price (1950) and McTurnan Kahin (1956). Nehru's address to the Belgrade conference of 1961 is published in Vujović (1961: 10).
24. Thousands of Indian troops were killed or wounded and some 4,000 captured. The Henderson Brooks Report, an independent report, was commissioned by the Indian Army in the months following the end of the war. The report has not been officially declassified but portions have been leaked, confirming there was a lack of war preparedness on the part of India.
25. See Mitra (2017: 155) for a discussion on state–society relations that affect India's foreign policy and international profile.
26. For further definitions of political and economic terms in the context of South Asia, see Mitra et al. (2006).
27. See the discussion earlier in the chapter about the controversy unleashed by Tanham (1992).
28. An interesting case is India's decision to abstain from voting on the US-sponsored resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on alleged war crimes by Sri Lanka. In the words of India's Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh, the resolution was 'extremely intrusive'

as it proposed an open-ended international mechanism – unlike the two earlier UNHRC resolutions, which called upon Sri Lanka to work toward reconciliation (*The Hindu*, 4 April 2014). Pattanaik (2014) points out that ‘popular opinion within Tamil Nadu and electoral calculations may not be playing as big a role as it is made out to be. This is evident from the fact that even when electoral campaign is in full swing at the moment; New Delhi chose to abstain instead of voting in favour of the US sponsored resolution.’

29. The Battle of Imphal took place in 1944 when Japanese forces attempted to attack and destroy Allied forces in the region of what is today the State of Manipur in northeast India, but they were driven back into what was then called Burma.
30. For an examination of India and World War II, see Raghavan (2016a).

Part 1: The evolution of India's foreign policy: domestic determinants, regional dynamics and global politics

Overview of Part 1

The four chapters in this part of the book will draw on the heuristic insights of the toolbox to analyse the unfolding of India's foreign policy under successive prime ministers from Nehru to Modi. Furthermore, we will use the toolbox to examine how internal and external factors, often pulling in different, even contradictory directions, have fundamentally shaped India's foreign policy. [Part 1](#) will also seek to answer the inter-linked questions of 'What are India's positions on specific issues in international politics?' and 'What is the general character of Indian foreign policy, taken as a whole?' Recent examples illustrate this well. The election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, his re-election in 2019 and the big majorities held by the ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led to much discussion about whether a fundamental shift has taken place in Indian foreign policy. Many people predicted, and have since reasserted, that the BJP's underlying values and worldview have generated a distinctive style and a new set of priorities in Indian foreign policy (Hall 2019). Others have argued that there remains a strong force of continuity rather than change.

Did the pomp and circumstance surrounding the array of South Asian leaders invited to the 2014 inauguration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi signify a regional turn in India's foreign policy? Do the many trips made by Modi, sometimes to countries where the last Indian prime ministerial visit was more than 30 years ago, represent highly symbolic acts but with limited outcomes? At the same time, these and other examples can be explored in terms of a tricky balancing act that signals

different priorities to different constituencies. The aims could be: (1) to position India as a place that is open to global business while having to allay concerns from domestic business interests. (2) To pursue closer relations with the United States while not jettisoning India's friendly relations with Russia, or in other words maintaining a balanced relationship with both as a preference that is reflected in domestic public opinion.¹ (3) To join a grouping of nations that appear to counterbalance China while maintaining India's claim of 'strategic autonomy' as its priority.

Published in 2020, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* was written by India's sitting External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and is the latest in a string of books on foreign policy written by foreign policy practitioners.² These offer invaluable insights into the making of policy and the question of how India's external strategy emerges from and interacts with domestic preferences. Recent books written by scholars based outside India have added to what has been an ongoing debate and discussion about India's rise, dating back in many ways to Stephen Cohen's 2001 book, *India: Emerging Power*.³ In 2018, Alyssa Ayres, a senior US foreign policy expert and former State Department official, published a book titled *Our Time Has Come: How India Is Making Its Place in the World*. As the title suggests, the book focuses on the aspirations and goals expressed by Indians (in policy statements and interviews with political and economic elites). The author implies that there is an inherent force propelling India forward and that despite economic challenges and difficulties in the relationship with the United States, India's rise on the world stage is inevitable. On the other hand, a book published in 2021, *Why Nations Rise: Narratives and the Path to Great Power* by Manjari Miller Chatterjee, argues that states need a powerful narrative and must construct their own rise. The ideational sources motivating elites and the ability to transform and reframe a country's image become as crucial as material factors of economic and military power. We hope the following chapters provide the reader with a set of key variables and a chronological narrative to analyse the claims and arguments made by policymakers and administrators, and by fellow political scientists.

Notes

1. In 2017, a Pew Research Centre poll on Indian public opinion found that roughly half (49%) have a favourable view of the United States. Russia fared almost as well as the United States, with 47% of Indians regarding Russia in a positive light (Stokes et al. 2017).
2. Others include Shyam Saran, a former Foreign Secretary and his book, *How India Sees the World* (2017) and Shivshankar Menon, a former National Security Adviser, and his book, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (2016).
3. For further discussion of India as a rising, emerging power, see Pardesi (2015).

2

Engaging the world: foreign policy and nation-building in India

Our agenda today – covering areas like vaccines, climate change and emerging technologies – makes the Quad a force for global good. I see this positive vision as an extension of India’s ancient philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which regards the world as one family. We will work together, closer than ever before, for advancing our shared values and promoting a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Narendra Modi, opening remarks at the first Quadrilateral Leaders’ Virtual Summit, 12 March 2021 (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India [2021](#))

In this chapter, we analyse the evolution of India’s foreign policy over the seven decades since independence. The chapter highlights some of the underlying themes that have shaped India’s foreign policy over time and emphasizes foreign policy as one of statecraft’s central aspects. Statecraft is defined as the art of making strategic choices to overcome the challenges of governing a nation of continental dimensions, characterized by great complexity and diversity, as well as conducting diplomatic affairs. We aim to show why India’s foreign policy has acquired a profile that is often characterized by a position of ambivalence (Ollapally [2011](#)). Many authors have identified organizational weaknesses, institutional limitations and a tendency towards strategic ambiguity in India’s foreign policy (Mitra & Schottli [2007](#)). While some authors have linked this to a weak tradition of strategic culture (Miller [2013](#)), others point to a lively democracy where experts offer opposing views on the direction of the country’s foreign policy, its momentum and impact. Some even refer to this as a ‘democracy tax’, as revealed by slower decision-making and the constant need to focus on campaigns and winning elections somewhere in the country.

The chapter also highlights changes that are taking place under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We assess the robust, personal networking with foreign leaders through state visits, which have become much more frequent under his leadership compared to that of his predecessors. In the conclusion of the book, we assess the impact that Covid-19 has had on this particular style of foreign policy given the severe travel disruption and the curtailment of in-person diplomacy. Under Narendra Modi's government, there have been significant departures from the more conventional approach to foreign policy. Firstly, there has been a concerted effort on the government's part to engage with the Indian diaspora. Secondly, there have been attempts to attract investment into the home market. Thirdly, there has been a bid to gain influence in foreign societies. We explore the factors that have led to this shift in the foreign policy stance of India and conclude the chapter with the consequences for India's relationship with its neighbours and its capacity to navigate global politics.

The jury remains out on whether, and to what extent, the Modi government has changed India's foreign policy. The coming to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 and Narendra Modi as prime minister drew significant attention to India's foreign policy among experts and the public. In part, this was due to the BJP's ideology of Hindu nationalism and the questions this raised about its impact on policies, as well as the BJP's vision for the Indian nation and state. It was also fostered by the incoming government itself. For instance, less than a year after taking office in May 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi challenged his senior diplomats 'to help India position itself in a leading role, rather than [as] just a balancing force, globally' (Press Information Bureau, Government of India 2015). Bold decisions were made, such as inviting leaders from all the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to the government's swearing-in ceremony on 26 May 2014. This government was also the first to host a US president for the country's annual Republic Day celebrations at which a foreign dignitary is the guest of honour: in 2015, President Barack Obama attended the event.

Although India continues to be reticent about signing multilateral trade deals (see [Chapter 11](#)), it has been willing to take on a more visible share of the burden of global leadership (see [Chapter 14](#)).¹ India is also working towards becoming an environmentally friendly, global 'citizen' (see [Chapter 12](#)). The willingness to take the initiative at the global level is reminiscent of the early years of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. While some policy initiatives of each new government are indeed novel, others build on the past. Like governments before him, the Modi

administration has also promised dramatic transformations of society, the economy and the state itself (NITI Aayog 2018).

Many scholars and observers have proposed, projected and explored whether the BJP has instilled a Hindu element into the country's foreign policy. There were expectations that the government would adopt a more muscular foreign policy, in alignment with a 'Hindu nationalist' agenda (Basrur 2017). The consensus, however, seems to be that while there may have been a change in style, in substance Indian foreign policy continues to move in the direction of multi-alignment as a strategy of deterrence and engagement (Basrur 2017).² However, the extent to which Indian ambivalence has been reduced, both in terms of actions and objectives, remains an open question. For instance, it can be argued that there has been a definitive shift in the language used by politicians. The following statement by the previous prime minister, Manmohan Singh, delivered in 2005 at an event commemorating 50 years since the Bandung Conference, shows how a combination of 'third world-ism' and the moral high ground contributed to the diffuse and uncertain nature of Indian foreign policy in the past.

At the global level, we must devise instrumentalities to deal with imbalances built into the functioning of the international political and economic order. We should aim to expand the constituency that supports [the] process of globalization. ... to meet these challenges and constraints, we must respond in a manner worthy of the Bandung spirit. Just as that historic meeting redefined the agenda for its times, we must do so once again here today. (Singh 2005)

The style is significantly different from the following extract taken from a keynote speech by Narendra Modi delivered at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, widely regarded as laying out India's vision for the Indo-Pacific.

All of this is possible, if we do not return to the age of great power rivalries. I have said this before: Asia of rivalry will hold us all back. Asia of cooperation will shape this century. So, each nation must ask itself: Are its choices building a more united world, or forcing new divisions? It is a responsibility that both existing and rising powers have. Competition is normal. But contests must not turn into conflict; differences must not be allowed to become disputes. Distinguished members of the audience, it is normal to have partnerships on the basis of shared values and interests. India, too, has many in the region and beyond.

We will work with them, individually or in formats of three or more, for a stable and peaceful region. But, our friendships are not alliances of containment. We choose the side of principles and values, of peace and progress, not one side of a divide or the other. Our relationships across the world speak for our position. (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018a)

Box 2.1 Jawaharlal Nehru

First prime minister of independent India (1947–64)

Jawaharlal Nehru is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the nation. The fact that India opted for and maintained a system of parliamentary democracy is often attributed to Nehru's leadership. As prime minister for almost 17 years, his tenure provided the political stability needed for a transition from colonial rule to independent nation-state. Key policies and institutions relating to the economy (self-reliance and the mixed economy), social reforms (the Hindu Code Bill) and foreign policy (Panchasheela) are associated with Nehru.

Born in 1889 into a political and wealthy family from the Kashmiri pandit community, Nehru was sent to England for his studies. Qualifying as a lawyer, he returned to India in 1912 and became involved in the freedom struggle. Gandhi became a mentor and over the next 30 years, Nehru rose within the Congress-led movement to become a highly prominent and influential leader. Jailed on several occasions, Nehru used his time in prison to write books and his autobiography, which became important sources to understand his thoughts and ideas about the world and India.

Nehru played a crucial role during negotiations with the British after World War II. A personal rivalry is reported to have developed between him and the Muslim League's Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who became Pakistan's first leader after independence. In addition to being India's first prime minister, Nehru was also the country's foreign minister and is regarded as the architect of Indian foreign policy. His ideas about peace, imperialism, great power politics and international cooperation shaped his approach to the dynamics of Cold War competition that were emerging in the 1950s. Under his watch and with his active involvement, the Non-Aligned Movement

took shape. Indian troops were committed to UN peace operations and Nehru sought to personally mediate during crises such as the Korean War and in Indo-China in the early 1950s.

Debates about the merits and weaknesses of the logic and practice of non-alignment persist today. Non-alignment was meant to provide India with a wider range of choices and flexibility in foreign policy as well as economic development. However, the border war in 1962 with China challenged both the premises and promises of non-alignment. Two early foreign policy choices made by Nehru have had particular long-lasting relevance. In 1947–8, the first war with Pakistan over Kashmir took place. It led to Nehru's appeal to the United Nations, resulting in the internationalization of the Kashmir question. The second was the decision to keep India in the Commonwealth, resulting in an India-specific arrangement whereby the Republic of India would hold only symbolic allegiance to the British crown. This ultimately enabled others to join.

In 1964, Nehru died and was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri, a long-time member of the Congress party and freedom fighter. He in turn was succeeded, after his own sudden death in 1966, by Nehru's daughter, Indira, who having married Feroze Gandhi in 1942, was Indira *Gandhi*. This created the Nehru–Gandhi family line that has produced three prime ministers to date.

The 'Janus face' of India's foreign policy

India's foreign policy, until recently, used to come across as enigmatic. Few scholars have systematically unpacked and discussed the conflicting pressures that frame foreign policymaking. India's nuclear policy is a prime example of this equivocation. The country of apostles of peace like Buddha and Gandhi, India became a de facto member of the nuclear club in 1998. An impressive arsenal of conventional weapons complements India's bombs and missiles (see [Table 2.1](#)), many of which are indigenous in origin. Given the possession of this deadly stockpile, something is notably missing. India does not have a doctrine which states against whom it aims these weapons.³ A BJP-led ruling coalition undertook nuclear tests in 1998, which were strongly condemned by China and were quickly followed by Pakistan's own tests. Yet, they were not, as later events have shown, a flash in the pan.

The tests brought to public attention a long-standing policy and institutional infrastructure for developing nuclear weapons that India has followed covertly over time. In fact, as a result there is a bipartisan consensus on the need for India to have nuclear weapons and for India to build up delivery capacity, notwithstanding the usual political bickering over details.⁴ However, despite bipartisan nuclear ambitions, there is no coherent policy underpinning the status of a de facto nuclear power. Similar incoherence has marked India's use of 'coercive diplomacy' against Pakistan. This involved a considerable mobilization of troops after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament. However, the mobilized troops were later recalled without the achievement of any demonstrable goals. This lack of clarity over broader goals has affected perceptions of India's foreign policy (Mitra 2009).

Experts have noticed the uncertainty behind India's diplomatic and strategic objectives. Stephen Cohen (2001: 2), for example, described India's foreign policy as Janus faced. He saw it as straddling two goals: the single-minded pursuit of self-interest like any other nation-state and, at the same time, a 'civilizational' outlook with a commitment to an ideal world community governed by democratic values and institutions. The spirit of Afro-Asian solidarity reflects this duality in India's foreign policy. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh voiced this notion at the 50th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, quoted above, and in his 2012 speech at the 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran (M. Singh 2012). As a result, nuclearization has been a source of intense speculation about India's real intentions – from the 'peaceful nuclear explosion' of 1974 to the nuclear tests of 1998 (Chakma 2005).

The most recent reports from August 2020 indicate that with an arsenal of around 160 nuclear weapons, Pakistan might have overtaken India, which is reputed to possess about 150 of these weapons of mass destruction. India, however, continues to have the edge over Pakistan regarding active troops. China, on the other hand, has maintained the country's superiority over India in almost all conventional as well as nuclear arms. The United States, of course, has more firepower than all of them taken together. The same holds for US military spending (see Table 2.1).

The ambiguity of India's foreign policy leads to questions about specific and more general issues and calls for a deeper probe into several key puzzles. What has been the long-term legacy and impact of non-alignment on India's foreign policy? Carrying this forward to contemporary times, does India still represent the voice of the post-colonial

Table 2.1 Tools of ‘persuasion’: who had what in 2020? (global rank in brackets)

	United States	Russia	China	India	Pakistan
Global Firepower rank 2020	1	2	3	4	15
Nuclear weapons ⁵	5,800 [2]	6,375 [1]	320 [3]	150 [7]	160 [6]
Airpower					
Fighters	2,085 [1]	873 [3]	1,232 [2]	538 [4]	356 [7]
Helicopters	5,768 [1]	1,522 [2]	911 [3]	722 [5]	346 [11]
Transports	945 [1]	424 [2]	224 [4]	250 [3]	49 [15]
Naval forces					
Aircraft carriers	20 [1]	1 [4]	2 [3]	1 [4]	0 [138]
Destroyers	91 [1]	16 [4]	36 [3]	10 [7]	0 [138]
Submarines	66 [3]	62 [4]	74 [2]	16 [8]	8 [13]
Land forces					
Tanks	6,289 [2]	12,950 [1]	3,500 [7]	4,292 [5]	2,200 [12]
Armoured vehicles	39,253 [1]	27,038 [3]	33,000 [2]	8,686 [12]	7,330 [14]
Self-propelled artillery	1,465 [4]	6,083 [1]	3,800 [2]	235 [21]	429 [18]
Rocket projectors	1,366 [5]	3,860 [1]	2,650 [2]	266 [13]	100 [31]
Manpower					
Active personnel	1,400,000 [3]	1,013,628 [5]	2,183,000 [1]	1,444,000 [2]	654,000 [6]
Available manpower	144,872,845 [3]	69,640,160 [9]	752,855,402 [1]	622,480,340 [2]	96,344,277 [6]

(continued)

Table 2.1 (Cont.)

	United States	Russia	China	India	Pakistan
Resources					
Defence budget (US\$, current million)	731,751 [1]	65,103 [4]	261,082 [2]	71,125 [3]	10,256 [24]
Oil production (barrels per day)	9,352,000 [3]	10,580,000 [1]	3,838,000 [7]	733,900 [25]	89,720 [42]

Sources: Global Firepower (2020); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2020); Arms Control Association (2020)

world or has its growing economic presence in the international arena created a new set of interests and global coalitions? Finally, how and to what extent has India's diplomacy kept in step with its growing arsenal of conventional and nuclear weapons? Has having the bomb produced a marked change in terms of strategic calculations and policy choices? A critical question that must rest at the heart of India's statecraft is the question of how to deal with Pakistan. Relations with its neighbour have been fraught for over 70 years, and despite short phases of engagement or detente, the relationship has remained mostly hostile.⁶

This book responds to these questions, and many more, through the lens of India's evolving foreign and security policy. Jawaharlal Nehru as the country's first prime minister put an indelible stamp on the country's foreign policy through his persona and personality, navigating a world that was on the cusp of the Cold War. In 2023, at the time of completing this book, India is led by a prime minister who also opted to play a visible and dynamic role in the foreign policy domain and who faces the challenges of an uncertain world order in the twenty-first century.

The following sections outline the building blocks for what we depict as a 'toolbox' approach to foreign policy analysis. We argue that visualizing the various input, output, environmental and processual factors is a useful way of identifying the shifting dynamics as well as sources of continuity that frame the foreign policy choices facing the country's decision-makers.

Strategy and context in the making of India's foreign policy

India's international relations hinge upon some core issues, each of which stems from its geographical location and the exigencies of political history. Situated at the geographic centre of South Asia, India shares land borders with six countries – Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan – and maritime borders with Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia. As a result, India has conflicts and disputes over boundaries, territory, movement of people and the sharing of natural resources with several other countries. While many remain unresolved, there have also been examples of successful dispute resolution (see [Table 2.2](#)).

Table 2.2 India's disputes (selected): resolved and ongoing

Dispute with	Disputed over	Status
Bangladesh	South Talpatti – was a small uninhabited sandbar in the Bay of Bengal, which emerged after the 1970 Bhola cyclone and disappeared around the time of the 2009 Cyclone Aila.	Resolved – agreements on the exchange of enclaves.
Pakistan	Kashmir – both countries claim the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir after India's Partition in 1947.	More than two-thirds of the population and more than half of the territory is controlled by India.
	Sir Creek – a nearly 100 km-long uninhabited marshland between the Indian state of Gujarat and the Pakistani province of Sindh.	June 2019: build-up of forces by Pakistan and, in response, by India.
People's Republic of China (PRC)	Zone of Aksai Chin (Depsang Plains).	Controlled by China (since the 1962 Sino-Indian War), claimed by India.
	Arunachal Pradesh – Indian state, created on 20 January 1972; northern border reflects the McMahon Line (from the 1914 Simla Convention between the United Kingdom and Tibet).	China claims most of the territory as South Tibet.

(continued)

Table 2.2 (Cont.)

Dispute with	Disputed over	Status
Nepal	Kalapani territory	Administered by the Indian Army since the 1962 Sino-Indian War. India issued a new political map in 2019 claiming the territory, followed by Nepal in 2020 doing the same.
	Susta territory	India controls it as part of the state of Bihar.
Sri Lanka	Katchatheevu island	Resolved – 1974 agreement.

Border and territorial disputes are the most significant conflicts India faces – not least the Kashmir conflict with Pakistan (see [Table 2.3](#)) and the confrontation with China over the status of Arunachal Pradesh and the entire Line of Actual Control.⁷ India has other disputes over water sharing and international rivers with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and China. Energy needs are further reasons for conflicts. An example is the long-awaited plans for oil pipelines to run from Iran via Pakistan to India, as well as from Myanmar via Bangladesh to India. Finally, India faces security concerns in the form of cross-border terrorism and drug smuggling. While these have been fixtures over time, there are a host of evolving threats and interests, commensurate with India’s growing international role and investments abroad. For instance, protecting Indian workers abroad has become a significant task for the government. Globally, India has the largest numbers of emigrants – 17.5 million Indians were working and living outside India in 2019 – followed by Mexico (11.8 million), China (10.7 million) and Russia (10.5 million) (Migration Data Portal 2020). In 2019, India was the biggest receiver of remittances (83.1 billion US\$), followed by China (68.4 billion US\$), Mexico (38.5 billion US\$) and the Philippines (35.2 billion US\$) (Migration Data Portal 2019). However, the global Covid-19 pandemic caused the ‘sharpest decline of remittances in recent history’, as reported by the World Bank (2020).

Several of the dilemmas and contradictions in India’s foreign policy, which will be considered in the chapters that follow, should therefore be considered in terms of critical contextual factors: geographical location, the disputed status of Kashmir and the tradition of non-alignment.

Table 2.3 Kashmir conflict timeline

1947–4	<p>First Indo-Pakistan War</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start: Pakistani forces tried to gain control over Kashmir. • End: Establishment of a 740 km ceasefire line patrolled at the time by the UN Military Observer Group; this has been the de facto border ever since. • Left about 65% of the former princely state under Indian administration (Ladakh, Valley of Kashmir, Jammu) and about 35% under Pakistani administration (Northern Areas, Azad Kashmir). • Armed Indian and Pakistani forces are separated by just a few metres.
1948	<p>UN Resolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directed the two countries to withdraw their troops, first Pakistan and then India, after which a plebiscite was to be held to determine public opinion. • The plebiscite was never held (partly because troops were never withdrawn), with India instead negotiating special conditions of autonomy with the state's prominent leader, Sheikh Abdullah.
1965	<p>Second Indo-Pakistan War</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During which Pakistan tried and failed to instigate mass uprisings in Kashmir. • The ceasefire line was maintained.
1971	<p>Third Indo-Pakistan War</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though not fought over Kashmir, it produced the Simla Agreement of 1972 in which the ceasefire line was turned into the Line of Control (LoC), in the hope of moving towards a mutually acceptable international border. • The border, however, remains contested, with regular fighting and skirmishes.
1974	India's first nuclear weapon test
1984	A new front opened on the heights of the Siachen Glacier.
1990s	<p>Ethno-nationalist uprising within Kashmir.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's use of force to suppress it added a new dimension to the issue. • Pakistan sought to internationalize the Kashmir issue by pushing for a UN resolution at the Human Rights Commission on India's human rights abuses in Kashmir. • India countered by alleging that Pakistan provides aid and sanctuary to militants operating in the area and fans religious extremism through groups such as the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen.

(continued)

Table 2.3 (Cont.)

1998	Pakistan's first nuclear weapon test and India's second nuclear weapon test
1999	Kargil War (or Kargil conflict) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fears of a nuclear conflict.
2004	New peace initiative launched by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Following the earthquake that largely struck Pakistan-administered Kashmir in October 2005, various points along the border were opened to enable families to meet and aid to reach isolated areas.
2019	India–Pakistan border skirmishes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 14 February: Pulwama attack; 40 Indian police force personnel were killed.• Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Pakistan-based militant group, claimed responsibility.• Cross-border airstrikes by India and then Pakistan followed.• Indian government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir on 5 August 2019.

The conflict over Kashmir has been the direct cause of wars between India and Pakistan in 1947–8, 1965 and 1999. Furthermore, there has been an ongoing ‘proxy war’ fought between the Indian Army and Kashmiri militants, as well as cross-border terrorism. Much has been written about conflict and insurgency in Kashmir, and it remains to be seen what impact the recent revocation of Article 370 will have on security and stability in the region. Many have argued that the troubles in Kashmir are both an outcome and a symptom of the ideological battle between two different theories of the state in South Asia. The independence movement that began as an all-India freedom movement eventually split into two forces, one represented by the Muslim League and the other by the Indian National Congress. Ultimately, the British ended up negotiating with two leaders, Mohammad Ali Jinnah as leader of the Muslim League and Jawaharlal Nehru as leader of the Indian National Congress, and at independence British India gave way to two states: India and Pakistan.

Box 2.2 Partition

On 14 and 15 August 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided through a partition, giving rise to the two independent states of Pakistan and India. The British Raj, or rule by the British Crown

over the subcontinent, began officially in 1858, taking over from the British East India Company which first gained a foothold in 1612. While the expansion of British power occurred slowly, the withdrawal and transfer of power happened within a few months. In February 1947, the Labour government in London had announced that Britain would withdraw from India by June 1948. However, three months later, amid growing intercommunal violence, the new viceroy Lord Mountbatten decided to bring the date forward to August 1947.

In July 1947, the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act, paving the way towards a transfer of power to the Indian National Congress, representing India, and the Muslim League, representing a Muslim-majority Pakistan. The Indian princely states (in 1947, there were almost 600 of them) were free in theory to choose which state to accede to. Demarcating the boundaries in two former British provinces, in Bengal to the east and Punjab to the west, were two border commissions, mandated to delimit the frontiers based on religious affinity as per the 1941 census. 'Other reasons' such as economic or defence considerations were to be considered.

Partition of the subcontinent created controversies regarding the division of territories, broke up families and disrupted traditional economic relationships between producers and processors. The irrigation systems of the Punjab and Bengal had to be divided, as well as central bank assets and liabilities and the British Indian Army. Pakistan was created, comprising two wings: the East wing, which later became Bangladesh, and the West wing, separated by about 1,600 km of Indian territory.

The Partition was also the site and cause of extreme violence and entailed one of the largest exchanges of population in human history. In 1951, it was estimated that almost half of the population in Pakistan's major cities were immigrants ('muhajirs' as the refugees from India and their descendants were known). Estimates of deaths range from 500,000 to 1 million, with some 10–12 million people crossing the newly created borders.

Border tensions, wars between the neighbouring countries and an unresolved conflict over Kashmir are the enduring and visible consequences of the Partition. Added to this are the long-lasting effects of institutionalized distrust, memories of trauma and resentment that continue to mark relations between two countries that were formerly a single territory before being separated when the two nations were founded.

With the partition of the subcontinent, Kashmir immediately became a flashpoint between the two newly created states. Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim-majority state ruled by a Hindu Maharajah, was claimed by Pakistan as part of their 'two-nation theory', which proclaimed one state for South Asia's Muslims and another for its Hindus. India from the start rejected this proposition and maintained a commitment to secularism as its state doctrine. Kashmir, as the only Muslim-majority state within the Indian federation, thus became a litmus test for both sides. In 1948, facing the prospect of an invasion by armed tribesmen from the northwest with the backing of regular Pakistani troops, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru referred the issue to the United Nations. The reasoning behind this decision has puzzled many people. There would have been the option to engage what was at the time the better-equipped Indian Army to push the Pakistani invaders and incursions back to the northwestern frontier of what was then the princely state of Kashmir. Instead, Nehru's referral to the UN resulted in a UN ceasefire in 1949 and UN monitoring of the ceasefire line, which later came to be known as the Line of Control (LoC), and the promise to hold a plebiscite.⁸

From this point onwards, the Kashmir issue became entangled in the Cold War, becoming a pawn in the rivalry between India and Pakistan, supported respectively by the Soviet Union and the United States. In the 1980s, after many years of mismanagement, a full-scale insurgency erupted. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was activated and applied to the state in 1990, further fuelling resentment and further alienating sections of the population, as well as generating allegations of human rights abuses. State-level and *Lok Sabha* (parliamentary) elections have been held regularly since the mid-1990s. However, tensions and violence continue to trouble the state, and Kashmir remains a cornerstone in Pakistan–India relations (see [Chapter 9](#)).

Box 2.3 Line of Control (LoC)

The LoC runs for about 776 km along the disputed border between India and Pakistan, separating Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Since the Indian government's decision in August 2019 to divide the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the LoC runs through two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The LoC roughly corresponds to the United Nations-mandated ceasefire line following the first India–Pakistan war of 1948, formalized in the

Karachi Agreement of July 1949 between India and Pakistan with two UN observers signing as witnesses.

The Simla Agreement of 1972 (following the third India–Pakistan war) formally created the LoC, removing the UN from the agreement and confirming the bilateral nature of the conflict. Despite India’s advantageous position in the Simla Agreement, the LoC was not converted into an international border, which many believe would be the most feasible solution to the long-running dispute over the territory of Kashmir. However, others argue that an international border could be a soft border with severe security implications. This solution also does not appeal to those parties among the Kashmiri people who favour independence from both India and Pakistan as the ideal solution.

Box 2.4 Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir is India’s northernmost region and since 2019 has been administered as a Union Territory (UT). It has been the site of a territorial and border dispute between India and Pakistan since 1947, as well as with China since 1962 (see the boxes on the Line of Control and Aksai Chin). Kashmir, or the Kashmir Valley, is largely Muslim with a small Hindu and Sikh population. Jammu is predominantly Hindu, though with a significant Muslim population. Most of the population are Kashmiri speakers, although several other languages are represented in this region. The capital of the region shifts between Srinagar in summer and Jammu in winter.

Due to its landscape of valleys, lakes and natural beauty, tourism has been a vital sector of the local economy. However, the protracted conflict over Kashmir between India and Pakistan as well as instability within the region has negatively impacted economic development over decades. The disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir dates to the days leading up to the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. To allow for regional autonomy and as a premise for joining the union of India, the state was granted special status under Article 370, allowing it to have its own constitution and special rights for its residents. This special status was abrogated in 2019, resulting in the reconstitution of the state into two UTs.

Politics within Jammu and Kashmir has been tumultuous. Political parties and local leaders like the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and Sheikh Abdullah initially dominated. However, with the rise of greater militarism and radicalism, along with Indira Gandhi's attempts to centralize power in the 1970s and '80s, various elected governments were dismissed in the state and Governor's Rule was imposed (for example, in 1984 and 1987). A violent insurgency ensued, leading to heavy militarization of the region. This fed into deeply felt local resentment as well as growing calls for secessionism, often supported from across the border.

Since the 1990s, efforts have been focused on holding elections in the state and winning back the trust of the Kashmiri people. An All-Party Resolution was adopted unanimously by the two houses of the Indian Parliament in 1995, affirming Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of Indian territory, signalling that its status was non-negotiable.

In 2002, a new winner emerged from the political party landscape, the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), to form a coalition government with the Congress. Coalitions since then have evolved, creating a more dynamic context for electoral politics in Jammu and Kashmir.

Following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, Pakistan re-emerged once again as a critical strategic partner for the US government and a frontline state in the War on Terror. This reversed a trend initiated under the Clinton administration then with the aim of improving Indo-US relations (see [Chapter 7](#)), and which established the United States as a key player in South Asia's regional politics. Since then, the attractiveness of the Indian market, its role as a potential counterweight in dealing with the rise of China, along with India's diplomatic efforts to court Western powers have injected a sense of balance and pragmatism into India-US relations.

This gradual change in the nature and style of foreign policy is not surprising given that for post-colonial states, foreign policy has been an instrument for nation-building (Chacko 2013). The country's colonial history, post-colonial attempts to revive pre-modern/pre-colonial political symbols and the ongoing framing of democratic and federal politics are all sources of influence on foreign and security policies. Unlike Western nation-states, the products of a long-drawn-out process of

nation-building, industrialization and state formation, states in South Asia experienced an accelerated and compressed version of such transitions. Hence, in defining and promoting the national interest, foreign policy becomes an essential manifestation, demonstration and performance of the state and national identity.

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Notes

1. In the words of the Minister of External Affairs of India, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar: India now aspires 'to be a leading power, rather than just a balancing power. Consequently, there is also a willingness to shoulder greater global responsibilities' (Jaishankar 2015).
2. See for example Rajagopalan et al. (2020).
3. A doctrine can be understood as a cohesive construct that reduces uncertainty. It does so by pulling together three elements: clear objectives, an institutional mechanism for implementation and the capacity to match action with policy. In this sense, India's 'doctrine of minimum nuclear deterrence' is an epitome of ambiguity. Key statements are capable of diverse interpretations, such as the following: 'India will not be the first to initiate a nuclear strike but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail.' See Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (1999) – 'Draft record of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine'.
4. A remarkable demonstration of commitment to the Indo-US Nuclear Framework Agreement took place in 2008. The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government of India risked its very survival in a trust vote. The communist allies of the ruling coalition withdrew their

support. However, the government survived the trust vote by recruiting other allies to replace the communists.

5. The other countries with nuclear warheads are France with an estimated 290 [4], the United Kingdom with 215 [5], Israel 90 [8], and North Korea with 30 to 40 [9].
6. The agreement reached by Prime Ministers Modi and Sharif at Ufa, Russia to continue a dialogue between the two countries was brought to an abrupt end subsequently (see Mitra 2015). Similarly, the surprise visit of Mr Modi to Lahore, putatively to join Prime Minister Sharif in his birthday celebrations but which relaunched dialogue between the two countries, appeared on the verge of collapse following the subsequent terrorist attack on India's Pathankot airbase, originating from Pakistani soil.
7. China depicts Arunachal Pradesh as 'South Tibet' on maps. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2008) country report on India sums up the situation as follows:

'A long-standing dispute between India and China over the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh flared up once again in March [2008]. The dispute has been festering since the war between the two countries in 1962. Both sides agreed in 1993 to maintain peace along the McMahon Line (the existing Line of Control) regardless of their divergent views regarding the sovereignty over the territory. The 1,030 km unfenced border is separated by the McMahon Line which China has not recognised since it was determined during the British Colonial rule in 1914. China claims 90,000 sq km of the territory – that is, nearly all of Arunachal Pradesh.'

For an opinion on the current escalation, in which Chinese and Indian soldiers beat each other to death in June 2020, see Schottli (2020).

8. See Resolution 47 (21 April 1948) by the United Nations Security Council.

3

Classic non-alignment: Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy, 1947–64

Seen variously as 'utopian', 'visionary', realist, patrician populist or authoritarian democrat, assessments of Jawaharlal Nehru's persona and his policies continue to generate discussion.¹ As the country's first prime minister and in power from the time of independence in 1947 until his death in 1964, Jawaharlal Nehru continues to be a larger-than-life figure in Indian politics. He was also the country's Minister of External Affairs over the same period, which meant that both Nehru's persona and office played an inordinately important role in the framing and implementation of foreign policy. As the country's first prime minister and a prominent leader from the nation's freedom struggle, Nehru's policies during the 1950s were synonymous with state- and nation-building.²

To understand and explore Nehru's foreign policy, we need to discuss the unique blend of strategy, vision and tactical errors underpinning his choices and decisions. The foundational years can be divided into three phases: the first phase from 1947 to 1953 saw Nehru emerge as a politician unchallenged at home and evolve into an internationally recognized freedom fighter and leader. The second phase can be said to begin in 1954 with the Panchasheela Agreement, signed between India and China, marking a high point for Nehru. Another such high point followed in 1955 with the Bandung Conference, the first large-scale Afro-Asian or Asian-African conference, and the widespread recognition and acceptance of India's position as a leader in the 'Non-Aligned Movement'. A final phase led to the debacle of the 1962 border war with China, and the accelerated deterioration of Nehru's health and ultimately his death in 1964.

In the early decades after independence, foreign policy was not a significant theme in India's domestic politics. Nehru was an internationalist,

keen to be present on the global stage, and believed foreign policy to be an integral part of nation-building. However, foreign policy was seen as the preserve of the policymaking elites and not the mass electorate. This would be contrasted with subsequent prime ministers who appealed directly to the population in times of foreign policy crises, such as Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1965³ and Indira Gandhi in 1971.⁴ Even after the war and debacle of 1962, the parliamentary and national debates that ensued were tepid in comparison with the discussions that rocked the nation over India's nuclear policy in 2008 or in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Pathankot airbase on 2 January 2016. This change reveals the extent to which foreign policy has become a political issue, integrated within domestic politics and part of interparty competition.

Right from the start, the dispute over Kashmir was to become one of the biggest challenges for Nehru's government and to frame a large part of his legacy. The outbreak of war in 1948 (known as the first India–Pakistan War) was both a crisis for the newly independent state and for Nehru personally as it challenged some of his fundamental assumptions and calculations about the dispute. At the time of independence, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, one of the more than 550 princely states within colonial India that had not been directly governed by Britain, could theoretically choose to join either India or Pakistan, or to remain independent. At the time, it had a majority Muslim population and was governed by Maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu. Unlike most of the princely states, which aligned with one nation or the other, the Maharaja sought independence for Kashmir. In September 1947, as violence increased due to the Partition and pressure mounted on the state to make a decision, armed tribesmen, backed by Pakistani regular troops, streamed across the border. Facing the prospect of an invasion, the Maharaja appealed to India for help, but the Indian Army only entered Kashmir on 27 October 1947 after the Instrument of Accession had been signed, acceding the state to the Indian Union. Two aspects therefore defined Nehru's Kashmir policy: (1) the argument that popular will rather than religious composition ought to be the basis of a state; and (2) the claim that the Instrument of Accession,⁵ signed by the Maharajah of Kashmir at the time, committed Kashmir to join India.

However, instead of resolving the problem, these actions provoked further militarization, including fighting between Indian and Pakistani forces that escalated into a war over the months of November and December 1947. Finally, on 31 December 1947, India referred the Kashmir problem to the UN Security Council. On 17 January 1948, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 39, calling upon India and

Pakistan to refrain from aggravating the situation, and on 20 January Resolution 39 announced a three-member commission to investigate the Kashmir dispute. As a result, the Kashmir dispute has become one of the longest-running disputes in the world. On 21 March 1948, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 47, which outlined a three-step process for resolution of the dispute: Pakistan would withdraw its troops, India would reduce its troops to a minimum level and arrangements would then be made for a plebiscite. The UN Commission took shape as the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan. Both parties rejected the resolution but agreed to work with the Commission.

Internationally, it seems, Nehru misjudged how the UN would react. Nehru found, probably to his surprise, that Western states supported Pakistan's position and thus the 'two-nation' theory upon which Pakistan had been founded. As the designate home for Muslims of British India, it was therefore seen to have a valid claim to the Muslim-majority Kashmir. On the domestic front, Nehru's relations with the influential Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah were fraught. Although at one point Sheikh Abdullah was regarded as a key Kashmiri leader and an essential ally for the Indian National Congress, he later fell out with Nehru once he declared Kashmiri independence as his goal.

Box 3.1 Nehru-Gandhi family

The Nehru-Gandhi family has dominated Indian politics since the country's independence in 1947. Motilal Nehru (1861-1931), a prominent lawyer, nationalist leader and freedom fighter during British colonial rule, served on two occasions as president of the Congress party. His daughter, Vijayalaxmi Pandit, was India's ambassador to the United Nations in the 1950s. Her brother, Jawaharlal Nehru, became India's first prime minister and was re-elected three times, remaining in office until his death in 1964.

Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi (no family ties to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi), became Prime Minister in 1966. One of her two sons, Sanjay Gandhi (his wife Maneka Gandhi and son Varun Gandhi are both members of the Bharatiya Janata Party), died in a plane crash in 1980 and Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her bodyguards in 1984, in retaliation for a violent state-led crackdown on Sikh militants involved in what was also a violent campaign for

regional autonomy. Indira Gandhi's elder son, Rajiv Gandhi, succeeded her as leader of the Congress Party and became Prime Minister in 1984–9. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a Tamil militant, following India's involvement in Sri Lanka's brutal civil war.

Rajiv Gandhi's Italian-born wife and, subsequently, widow Sonia Gandhi took over as Congress party leader in 1998 and was Leader of the Opposition from 1999 to 2004. Despite leading the party to victory in the 2004 elections, Sonia Gandhi recommended Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister, choosing to remain a source of power from behind the scenes.

By 1963, the failure to resolve the Kashmir dispute and the border conflict with China resulted in a major stocktaking and the resignation of a substantial number of chief ministers as well as important members of Nehru's cabinet (known as the Kamaraj Plan). The shake-up laid the groundwork for a significant transition although this foundational period framed and shaped India's foreign policy long thereafter (Mehta 2009).

Nehru's worldview

Viewing himself first and foremost as a great modernizer, Nehru regarded social and economic development as the nation's primary objectives (see Schottli 2017, Chapter 3, for the evolution of Nehru's worldview). For Nehru, defence was, to a large extent, a means to attain these objectives and was less an instrument of deterrence. Planning was introduced early on after the country's independence (the first five-year plan was launched in 1951) for economic development but a defence plan was only prepared in 1964.⁶ His deep distrust of the use of force in politics was reflected in his attitude towards the military (Mukherjee 2019). As a result, and not surprisingly, a coherent security doctrine was not articulated or pronounced during the period of Nehru's stewardship.⁷ Instead, non-alignment emerged as the general guide on how to navigate great power politics, aiming to avoid conflict and preserve the country's moral stance as a leader among post-colonial states (see Box 3.2).

In Nehru's view, any state that based its foreign policy on the traditional concept of power politics was destined to work against its true national interests. Hence, Nehru was staunchly against the realists of his time such as the British geopolitician Sir Halford McKinder, the US

Box 3.2 Non-alignment

Jawaharlal Nehru's very first official pronouncement on foreign policy was delivered over All India Radio on 7 September 1946 and provided a first articulation of non-alignment. Nehru declared:

We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups aligned against one another. The world, in spite of its rivalries and hatreds and inner conflicts, moves inevitably towards closer cooperation and the building up of a world commonwealth. It is for this one world that a free India will work ... We send our greetings to the people of the United States, to whom destiny has given a major role in international affairs ... To that other great nation of the modern world, the Soviet Union, which also carries a vast responsibility for shaping world events, we send greetings. (Nehru 1985a: 74)

As the Cold War took shape, non-alignment gained strategic clarity with its aim of providing India with the room to manoeuvre between the superpowers and the two blocs. By the mid-1950s, non-alignment had gained further conceptual clarity as a doctrine opposed to military pacts and committed to expanding the zone of peace in the world. This was articulated in the form of *Panchasheela* – the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Later these were incorporated into the ten principles in the final communique of the Bandung Conference.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was not an overarching uniform policy but a broad group of countries that shared similar policies on certain questions. Formally taking shape in 1961 at the initiative of Prime Minister Nehru, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah and Indonesian President Sukarno, NAM has met regularly ever since and currently has 120 member states.

geopolitician Nicholas J. Spykman or the US journalist Walter Lippmann. On Lippmann's geopolitical conception of alliances, Nehru wrote: 'Such a proposal looks very clever and realistic and yet is supremely foolish for it is based on the old policy of expansion and empire and the balance of power which inevitably leads to conflict and war' (Nehru 1985b: 551–2). Alliances and containment, two foreign policy instruments that were emerging

during the early phase of the Cold War, were regarded as dangerous and likely to lead to endless policies of encirclement and counter-encirclement.⁸

Five treaties were signed with India's smaller neighbours (Bhutan in 1949, Sikkim in 1950, Nepal in 1950, Burma in 1951 and Sri Lanka in 1954) under Nehru's watch. These provide an interesting insight into Nehru's approach towards and style of bilateral negotiations, as well as showcasing some of the continuities with British imperialism that were engrained in these treaties. On 8 August 1949, the India–Bhutan Treaty of Friendship was signed in Darjeeling. As noted by scholars, the 1949 treaty was basically a version of the 1910 British treaty with the Maharaja of Bhutan which revised certain articles of an earlier treaty (Belfiglio 1972). Article II of the 1949 agreement, an exact duplicate of Article VIII of the 1910 treaty, stipulated that the government of India would not interfere in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the government of Bhutan agreed to be guided by the advice of the government of India regarding its external relations.

On 31 July 1950, India and Nepal signed a treaty of peace and friendship to 'strengthen and develop these ties and to perpetuate peace between the two countries' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 1950). The treaty still stands, based on which an open border exists between the two countries. However, there have been several calls for revisions to be made to the treaty, especially in Nepal.⁹ Article II of the original treaty states that both governments should 'inform each other of any serious friction of misunderstanding with any neighbouring State likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two Governments'. Like the case of Bhutan, Article II of the 1950 India–Nepal treaty is similar to a clause in the 1923 treaty between British India and Nepal, in both cases referring to China.

Force during this phase was used primarily for domestic purposes. From 13 to 18 September 1948, military force was used under the guise of 'police action' against the Nizam of Hyderabad. On the eve of independence, several large princely states (Kashmir being one of them) had declined to join either India or Pakistan. The Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII, a Muslim ruler who presided over a largely Hindu population, sought to choose independence. Although the situation within the princely state deteriorated, Nehru, it is reported, prevaricated. He was reluctant to use force, but particularly so at a time when India was in what amounted to a war (though undeclared) with Pakistan over Kashmir (which came to be known as the first India–Pakistan war). Fearing that instability from Hyderabad might spill over into other parts of the country, the government of India declared a state of emergency on 13 September 1948 and sent troops into Hyderabad State.¹⁰

Much later in his prime ministership, Nehru was faced with another conundrum over the use of force, this time in relation to the question of Portugal's continued presence in and control over Goa, Daman and Diu. This amounted to about 540 square miles (4,000 km²) and a population of 637,591. Resistance had been growing to Portuguese rule, with demands for liberation, and in 1955 a campaign was launched for the freedom of Goa. The situation escalated into the use of violence, but Lisbon remained unyielding, refusing to negotiate over the status of Portugal's enclaves. In fact, in February 1950 when the government of India broached the subject with Portugal, it was argued that Portugal's territory on the Indian subcontinent was not a colony but a part of metropolitan Portugal and hence was non-negotiable!¹¹

Codenamed 'Operation Vijay', the Indian armed forces undertook armed action, involving air, sea and land strikes over two days. There were several Indian and Portuguese casualties and on 19 December 1961 India 'liberated' Goa, bringing to an end 451 years of Portuguese rule. According to Portugal, this was an invasion, equivalent to aggression against its national soil and citizens.¹²

Aside from instances involving a show of force or use of force, it is by and large agreed that India's military policy has been characterized by a high degree of restraint, especially during the early foundational years (Cohen & Dasgupta 2013).¹³ Whether this was the result of choice or a lack of capacity continues to be highly debated and discussed. To gain some insight into this debate, we turn to the idea and implementation of non-alignment as a policy.

Nehru and non-alignment

Nehru made the first official declaration of non-alignment as a policy during a famous radio address on 7 September 1946, in which he put forward the key tenets of India's future foreign policy: 'These were to be non-alignment, anti-colonialism and anti-racism, a reconciliatory attitude towards the West and world peace' (Thakur 2019: 673–4). As part of the definition of non-alignment, he put forward the following criteria:

1. Independent judgement on the merit of the issue.
2. Peaceful and friendly approach to all countries.
3. An action-oriented approach for pursuing national interests in the global arena.

A similar position was also taking shape in other countries, including Burma, Indonesia and Yugoslavia. The leaders Aung San, Sukarno and Tito, along with Nehru, were to become the international faces of the Non-Aligned Movement. As the Cold War intensified with the outbreak of hostilities in Korea (1950–3) and Indochina, the Western strategy of containment gathered steam. Military pacts were being signed, drawing up the dividing lines between the two competing camps. By the mid-1950s, South Asia had been drawn into Cold War politics with Pakistan signing a Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with the United States in May 1954, with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in the same year and the Baghdad Pact in 1955. Each of these were military alliances involving collective defence arrangements.

Opting for non-alignment meant that India avoided any kind of defence or military pact with either of the superpowers (a stance that was maintained until the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation). Reflecting Nehru's preferences and worldview, India and China signed the Panchasheela Agreement in 1954. The term *Panchasheela* refers to the preamble of the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India. Panchasheela, or the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', entailed (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) mutual non-aggression; (3) mutual non-interference; (4) equality and mutual benefit; and (5) peaceful coexistence. At the time, the treaty was hailed as a breakthrough, marking the first diplomatic agreement signed between communist China and a non-communist country (see [Chapter 8](#)).

The outbreak of the Korean War put the country's non-alignment policy to a severe test but also offered an opportunity to demonstrate its utility. India managed to position itself in the role of mediator, acting to mitigate tensions and encourage negotiations between the two blocs. This led to some recognition of the value of non-aligned nations in peace efforts, leading to the emergence of an Afro-Asian group within the UN, and in April 1955 Indonesia hosted the Bandung Conference. President Sukarno described it as 'the first intercontinental Conference of coloured peoples in the history of mankind' (Sukarno 1955: 2), and out of it came the Bandung Principles. The 10 principles issued at the Bandung Conference incorporated the Panchasheela mentioned above and were an articulation of non-alignment as the basis for international relations. These included the right of each country to abstain from collective defence arrangements and to abstain from exerting pressure on other countries.

The Non-Aligned Movement was never meant as a uniform policy that all members should adhere to in the same way. It represented a broad similarity in approach to contemporary international challenges. It was expressed in the form of similar policies on specific questions among these nations. A prominent example is the condemnation of the Suez Crisis in 1956. However, the Non-Aligned Movement also recognized and enabled the need for flexibility. Members decided the response to crises on a case-by-case approach. In a series of consultations, member states would make decisions on the following questions: How to vote in the UN? What approach to take towards the conflicting parties? What facilities to accord the aggrieved nation? Whether to lend support to intervention? Whether to send troops for peacekeeping?

Nehru's foreign policy, an outcome of domestic politics and the international context, did support his main goals of democracy, development, secularism, socialism and peaceful conflict resolution (aside from the use of force on two occasions, Junagadh in 1947 and Goa in 1961). Furthermore, Nehru's active diplomatic role and his persona (along with key individuals such as Krishna Menon, his confidant and India's representative at the UN) projected India abroad, giving the country an international profile that was far beyond its capabilities at the time. However, the 1962 border war and the debacle that ensued exposed India's fundamental weaknesses in terms of military capacity and deterrence strategies. None of the non-aligned countries categorically supported India during the war, and it was the United States that Nehru had to turn to for help. The sense of ambiguity that lies at the heart of India's foreign policy appears to be a part of Nehru's long-lasting legacy. The relationship with China is an essential illustration of this and merits closer examination.

India's foreign policy: from the 1962 border war to the 1965 war

The paradigm of non-alignment had seemed optimal, given Nehru's commitments and priorities at home and abroad. Friendship with China, however, needed to factor in Mao Tse-Tung's agenda of national interests for the newly liberated communist republic, which included: (1) the national security and territorial integrity of China; (2) the abolition of all unequal treaties; (3) the liberation of all China's lost territories such as Taiwan, Tibet and Hong Kong; (4) readjustment and legitimization of the northern and southern territorial boundaries; (5) making China economically and militarily strong and reasserting China's historical and

cultural greatness. In terms of foreign policy, this meant a leadership position for China in the newly emerging Afro-Asian and socialist blocs – setting the stage for a tussle with Nehru, who envisioned a similar role for the newly independent India.

There is an intriguing point of difference between China and India. China is a revolutionary state, which at the time was led by a new leadership emerging victorious from civil war and World War II. India, on the other hand, is a ‘successor state’ to which the outgoing British had transferred power. India, as the status quo power, had the main objective of securing territorial boundaries inherited from the colonial rulers. In Nehru’s worldview, China had to be accommodated in order to meet these goals. Hence the efforts in the early 1950s to develop a relationship of solidarity and friendship, as portrayed by the *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* (‘India and China are brothers’) initiative.

Furthermore, the 1954 Panchasheela Agreement recognized China’s demands vis-à-vis Tibet, renouncing colonial privileges that India had inherited such as trading outposts and military positions.¹⁴ This was not enough, given that India still used a colonial boundary, the McMahon Line, as its frontier between India and Tibet – an imperial legacy that China was not willing to accept. A negotiation process was initiated with a series of interactions and exchanges taking place between Nehru and the Chinese premier, Zhou En-Lai. However, a set of (mis)perceptions ultimately resulted in a breakdown of the talks (see Vertzberger 2019).

Box 3.3 McMahon Line

The McMahon Line, located in the Eastern Himalayas, marks the disputed frontier between India and China. The line pertains to about 860 km of the India–China border in the northeast, between Bhutan and Myanmar. It is named after Sir Henry McMahon, a colonial administrator who convened the Simla Conference in 1914 in a bid to determine British India’s northern frontiers. Three parties were invited to the conference: British India, China and Tibet. However, following the creation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, previous agreements concluded with foreign powers were renounced, including the Simla Agreement and the McMahon Line. India, however, recognized the McMahon Line as its border, creating a major cause of tension with China in the 1950s and one

of the reasons for the outbreak of war in 1962. Heavy fighting occurred along the McMahon Line, including in Tawang. Located in the northeast corner of the McMahon Line, close to Bhutan, the town of Tawang is regarded as sacred by neighbouring Tibet as the sixth Dalai Lama was born there and it is home to the second biggest Tibetan monastery. Today it is in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as part of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The McMahon Line, along with two other disputed sectors of the India–China border (the Western sector and the middle sector) remains a temporary boundary, with armies on both sides of what is known as the ‘Line of Actual Control’.

For China’s leaders, Nehru appeared as a stooge of neo-imperialism, fundamentally bourgeois and Western oriented yet professing Afro-Asian solidarity and socialism. The refusal of Nehru’s India to make a choice, especially on economic policies which veered towards a ‘mixed economy’ rather than a fully planned economy, appeared as prevarication at best, and hypocritical at worst. The radicalization in India’s domestic politics, especially a split within India’s communist movement, opened a window of opportunity for China to export its brand of revolution.

Nehru’s perception of India’s role in the global arena was in sharp contrast to that of the Chinese. Envisioning a pivotal role for India in mediating between the United States and the USSR, non-alignment had delivered an enhanced profile during the Korea conflict. India also found it could bolster its economic and political situation through foreign aid acquired from the West and support from the USSR in the UN Security Council. In terms of relations with China, Nehru’s desire to maintain good neighbourly relations initially meant turning a blind eye to steady incursions by China into an area India regarded as part of the Ladakh region, called Aksai Chin. When these developments became public, especially knowledge of there being a Chinese-built road connecting Tibet and Xinjiang running through Aksai Chin, the Indian Parliament demanded action. Nehru initiated the so-called ‘Forward Policy’, ordering Indian troops to occupy isolated posts located in areas that the Chinese claimed as theirs. This was a risky tactic that escalated, with Nehru stating in Parliament that the Indian Army was under instructions to ‘throw the Chinese out’. Scholars sympathetic to the Chinese point of view have

depicted these actions as evidence of Indian intransigence and aggression (see Maxwell 1970, 1970a: 173–4, 232 on India's 'Forward Policy').

The 1962 war highlighted the asymmetry of India–China relations in terms of perceptions and national strategic capabilities. The number of casualties on the Indian side was larger than their better-prepared adversaries. Chinese figures are uncertain but are considered to have been far less.¹⁵ In the end, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew to pre-war positions while retaining Aksai Chin (see Chapter 8). The reasons behind China's decisions, first to respond with force and then to withdraw, remain controversial. Maxwell, a journalist at the time and sympathetic to Maoist China, argued that the main intention was to show how India retained imperialist residues from the colonial past, such as the McMahon Line, and that it had been provoked to respond. The unilateral Chinese withdrawal was meant to convey a preference for a negotiated settlement and to make India more willing to negotiate. However, a different argument has emerged from more recent research, reported in *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA and the Sino-Indian War* by Bruce Riedel (2015). A different picture emerges based on archival material from the 1960s: China taking advantage of the Cuban crisis in 1962 to launch its attack and painting the Chinese withdrawal as a realistic response to the threat of a potential conflict with the United States.

The impact of the 1962 border war on developments in Indian and regional politics was extensive. India's humiliating defeat accelerated the polarization of opinion both to the ideological left and the right of the spectrum within the country. This began the process of questioning what had become a Nehruvian consensus and accelerated the search for a foreign policy based on national power. India's image and standing in the region also suffered, accelerating the emergence of a close alignment of interests between Pakistan and China. Sino-Pakistan relations, initiated in the 1950s and 1960s, would evolve into one of the most robust bilateral relationships in the region (Dobell 1964). India's defeat in 1962 lowered Nehru's stature and raised questions at home and abroad about the suitability of non-alignment as the basis of its foreign policy.

The debacle of 1962 also set in motion forces that prepared the ground for the 1965 war with Pakistan. Many have argued that the defeat accelerated Nehru's declining health, leading to his death in 1964 (Tharoor 2012a).

Lal Bahadur Shastri took over from Nehru as the country's prime minister. He was a relatively unknown figure in national politics except for a short stint as a cabinet minister. Perhaps because of his low profile, the surprise was even greater when he emerged as a strong leader

during the 1965 war with Pakistan that broke out shortly after he became prime minister. Shastri's slogan *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan* ('victory to the soldier, victory to the peasant') provided a unifying call for the home front and on the battlefield. Indian troops crossed the international frontier as a response to provocations – with India this time retaining the upper hand. Srivastava (1995), who was Shastri's secretary and was with him in Tashkent, provides valuable insights into the thinking of Shastri.

The plan in 1965 on the Pakistani side had been to fight a short war, with tanks playing a pivotal role to cut Kashmir off from the Indian mainland.¹⁶ In power at the time, the military regime realized the value of a battle over Kashmir as an excellent way to rally the people of Pakistan. Pakistan's international diplomacy had also paid off by this point. Relations with China were further institutionalized with the 1963 boundary agreement between Pakistan and China. Under the terms of this agreement, a part of the disputed Kashmir territory was ceded to China, helping to build the Karakoram Highway that created a direct road link between the two countries. At the same time, US–Pakistan relations were also functioning well, with a steady supply of US arms and training for the Pakistan military in place. All this stood in stark contrast with the 'achievements' of India's non-alignment.

The perception and calculations on the Pakistani side were to strike India at its most vulnerable – at a time of transition when the new leadership was untested and unsure. Pakistan aimed to create conditions for 'defreezing' the Kashmir issue. The use of force was aimed at compelling India to negotiate. In many ways, this resembled the Chinese strategy of 1962. Much like the initial incursions along the border in 1959, Pakistani actions began with similar 'probing' manoeuvres, in particular in the marshland Rann of Kutch on the Gujarat coast. In this terrain, the border was difficult to demarcate. The planning of actions revealed a multi-pronged strategy of attacking various weak points along the border in quick succession. It was to begin in the form of 'guerrilla warfare', camouflaged as 'revolt' by the local population, and to be followed by a full-scale assault by the Pakistan Army in the Chhamb area of Kashmir. A massive armoured attack would then capture Amritsar in Punjab, acquiring as much Indian territory as possible in order to use it as a bargaining chip in subsequent negotiations over Kashmir (see Srivastava's 1995 biography of Shastri for details of the Indian perception of the unfolding scenario).

Shastri's tactical response, aided by a general agreement on the need for quick, decisive action to avoid any repeat of 1962, foiled Pakistan's grand strategy (Chaudhuri 2018). One of Shastri's first acts in office had been to establish a personal rapport with defence chiefs, leaders of

the opposition, as well as prominent voices within the Congress party. This helped him build a strong national consensus and support for his position. It was under Shastri's orders that the Indian Army crossed the international frontier and marched in the direction of Lahore – to relieve pressure on the Chhamb sector in Kashmir. This was a bold move not only because it entailed crossing the international border but because by not responding directly with action in Kashmir, it appeared as if land there could be sacrificed as part of an overall strategy. The use of the Indian Air Force right at the outset marked another example of decisiveness.

Conclusion

Even before India's independence, Jawaharlal Nehru had already emerged as the person in charge of foreign policy within the structure of the Indian National Congress from the 1930s onwards. As the first prime minister of India, directing economic, defence and foreign policies, Nehru left his stamp on posterity. Nehru's approach to foreign policy nonetheless went through many metamorphoses under his successors – namely Lal Bahadur Shastri (1964–6), Indira Gandhi (1966–77, 1980–4) and Rajiv Gandhi (1984–9). It oscillated between and blended liberal internationalism with a 'norm-driven' realism.¹⁷ Initially, his approach was characterized by a sceptical view of the United States, reliance on the Soviet Union and support for other anti-colonial movements. The problems facing a weak state in the international system were recognized, and priority was given to foster cooperation where possible and necessary. This set of calculations received a rude jolt with the outbreak of war in 1962 and India's defeat, accelerating the sense of resentment against an unbalanced international power system. For Nehru's successors, subcontinental hegemony was to become the overriding goal of foreign policy with Pakistan, China and the United States, all of whom were regarded as hostile to India. This view of the world and set of strategic calculations reached its peak in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. It persisted until 1991–2 when the liberalization of India's economy opened up new opportunities for international engagement.

Stephen Cohen, one of the early US scholars to analyse India's foreign policy, argued that the Nehruvian framework of strategic thinking in post-independence India would go on to be enriched by two additional currents, which he labelled 'realist' and 'revivalist'. The realists, who also had their origins in the foundational years of the Indian republic, could be traced back to the generally liberal, market-oriented, pro-US

Swatantra party that reached its zenith in the mid-1960s. Holding a pragmatic view of Sino-Indian and Indo-US relations, senior members of the party argued for increased economic openness and integration with international market forces. The revivalists, linked perhaps to the original 'Hindu' party, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, active also in the 1950s, would have had a more regional perspective, emphasizing the cultural linkages as a source of India's influence across South Asia. A synthesis of 'realist' and 'revivalist' perspectives was personified by the National Democratic Alliance Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the late 1990s, and was epitomized by the consensus that developed about nuclearization.

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Notes

1. For a discussion and analysis, see Schottli (2017).
2. For an overview of Nehru's foreign policy, see Power (1964).
3. For a discussion of the 1965 India–Pakistan war and Prime Minister Shastri's response, see Tarapore (2019).
4. For a discussion of the 1971 India–Pakistan war and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's response, see Bass (2015).

5. The Instrument of Accession is a legal document used in 1947 to enable rulers of the princely states, under the colonial doctrine of paramountcy in British India, to choose between joining one of the new dominions of India or Pakistan created by Partition.
6. For a discussion of India's early defence planning with figures and data, see Subrahmanyam (1969).
7. See the analysis by one of the doyens of strategic thinking in India: Subrahmanyam (2008).
8. For further discussion of Nehru's views on power politics, see Schottli (2012).
9. For a discussion of the various clauses in and Nepal's calls for revisions of the 1950 treaty, see Thapliyal (2012).
10. For more details, see Sherman (2007).
11. For a discussion of Nehru's worldview and thoughts on the use of force, see Schottli (2012).
12. For a discussion of the legal arguments, see Wright (1962).
13. For a discussion of the idea of 'strategic restraint' applied to India's decisions during the 1965 war, see Chaudhuri (2018).
14. For full text of the agreement, see the Wilson Center Digital Archive (2023).
15. One estimate puts them as follows. The Indian Army suffered the following casualties: 1,383 killed, 548–1,047 wounded, 1,696 missing, 3,968 captured. See Wortzel (2003: 340–1); Malik (2010: 343). The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) suffered the following casualties: 722 killed, 1,697 wounded. See Ryan et al. (2003); Wortzel (2003: 340–1).
16. For a discussion of the 1965 war, see Tarapore (2019).
17. Raghavan (2016b) refers to Nehru as a 'liberal realist'.

4

Indira Gandhi and the radical break in India's foreign policy

The sudden death of Prime Minister Shastri in 1966, just after he had signed the Tashkent Agreement with Pakistan in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic of the Soviet Union, left Indian politics in disarray. No clear successor was in place, and though the country was riding high on a wave of patriotism in the wake of the 1965 victory, there was no clear policy or institutionalized policymaking body to coordinate security and foreign relations. The Third Five Year Plan (1961–6) had ended with a severe drought, causing catastrophic agricultural failure, and requiring India to rely on food imports from the United States. The World Bank, offering an aid package, had enforced a devaluation of the rupee in 1966, causing a further shock to the economy.

After a phase of intense politicking, a faction within the Congress party selected Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, as leader. In part this was because they regarded her to be weak and thus easy to manipulate and control. The 'Syndicate', as the faction of powerbrokers came to be known, was an informal grouping of key regional leaders and members of the Congress organization and expected Indira Gandhi to remain weak and to be a provisional leader. As it turned out, she quickly found a way to outmanoeuvre her detractors and enemies to become one of the more authoritarian as well as popular leaders of her time (S. Singh 2012).

Box 4.1 Indira Gandhi

Indira was born in 1917 in Allahabad to Jawaharlal and Kamala Nehru. The couple's only child, she grew up to become India's first female prime minister in 1966. Marrying Feroze Gandhi, a Parsee (and no relation to Mohandas Gandhi) in 1942, she acquired the

charismatic surname that created the enduring Nehru–Gandhi political lineage.

When Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri died in office in 1966, Indira successfully contested to succeed him as party leader. Initially regarded by politicians as weak and inexperienced, she developed the reputation of a powerful and strong leader. Indira Gandhi has also been attributed with having a hard realist approach to foreign policy, in contrast to her father, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Her efforts to reorganize the Congress party resulted in a split of the party in 1969 over support for her leadership. A sweeping electoral victory in 1971 based on a populist call to ‘remove poverty’ (‘Garibi Hatao’), combined with a further boost in 1971 when war with Pakistan resulted in dismembering the country and the creation of Bangladesh, cemented her position. Drastic policies included her decisions to nationalize banks, the 20-Year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed with the Soviet Union in 1971, India’s first nuclear test in 1974 and, most dramatically of all, the imposition of emergency rule in 1975. This marked the only break in India’s democracy since independence.

Following 21 months of emergency rule, Indira Gandhi called for elections, which she lost. The first non-Congress government at the centre was formed under a Janata Party coalition. Undeterred, Indira Gandhi made a comeback in the 1980 elections when she was voted back into power. Her younger son Sanjay Gandhi was her close confidant and in politics was being groomed as her successor when he died in a plane crash in 1980.

Indira Gandhi’s third term in power was marked by growing domestic turbulence, with Sikh militancy on the rise in Punjab as well as secessionism in the northeast. When the militant leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale occupied the Sikh’s holy Golden Temple in Amritsar, Indira Gandhi ordered the army to storm the site in June 1984. Codenamed Operation Blue Star, this and the subsequent general crackdown on Sikhs under Operation Woodrose caused widespread outrage, especially among the Sikh community. On 31 October 1984, Indira was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Rajiv Gandhi, her elder son who became prime minister on his mother’s death, was also assassinated – killed by a suicide bomber from the Sri Lanka-based Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in May 1991.

The period between the Indo-China war of 1962 and the India–Pakistan war of 1965 had already caused a significant rethinking of India’s strategic planning and calculations. Furthermore, the fact that in 1967, Congress experienced its worst assembly elections results and a weakened majority in the Lok Sabha provided the right moment for a shake-up in Indian politics.¹ Under Indira Gandhi, this process accelerated. In a direct challenge to the Syndicate, Indira Gandhi sought to re-establish control over the party by engineering a split, fostering a left-wing/right-wing division and two separate parties: Indian National Congress (organization) also known as Congress-O, and Indian National Congress (requisitionist) also known as Congress-R (Hardgrave 1970).

In the area of foreign policy, the momentum for change was galvanized by her willingness to link politics, foreign policy and security. This eventually led to an increase in defence allocations, increased military cooperation with international players and India’s first nuclear bomb tests, or the ‘Peaceful Nuclear Explosion’ (Jaipal 1977) as it was known as, in 1974 (see Chapter 6). Indira Gandhi also turned India in the direction of the Soviet Union, signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation on 9 August 1971.² The defeat of Pakistan in the 1971 war (the third India–Pakistan war) and the creation of Bangladesh significantly altered the balance of power in South Asia. All these elements led to the claim that an ‘Indira doctrine’ had taken shape, envisioning, and indeed delivering, India’s position as the hegemonic power of South Asia (Mansingh 1984).

Box 4.2 Tashkent Agreement

The Tashkent Agreement was an accord between India’s prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Pakistan’s president, Ayub Khan, ending the 17-day war between Pakistan and India in August–September 1965. It was brokered by the Soviet Union and signed in what was then the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (today Uzbekistan) on 10 January 1966. The Indian prime minister Shastri died under mysterious circumstances the next day. The agreement entailed an understanding between the warring parties to withdraw to pre-conflict positions, not to interfere in each other’s internal affairs and to work towards restoring economic and diplomatic relations.

In this chapter, we look at major foreign policy events during Indira Gandhi's terms as prime minister (1966–77 and 1980–4), namely the war with Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Overall, this was a time of tremendous ferment within Indian domestic politics. As mentioned above, the INC had suffered its first losses in state elections in 1967 (leading to a loss of power in seven states) and precipitating the split of the party into two divisions. It was also a period of economic turbulence. In 1966, a foreign exchange and food shortage coincided with the political succession struggle, leading to a steep devaluation of the rupee (a drop of 57%) amid the country's first balance of payments crisis. This was followed by other dramatic economic policies, such as the decision to nationalize 14 of the country's largest private banks in July 1969 (Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister and Finance Minister at the time). Generally, it was regarded that these decisions reflected Indira Gandhi's need and wish to introduce radical reforms. In a radio speech in 1969, Indira Gandhi invoked the 'socialist pattern of society' to highlight the need for nationalization.

Indira Gandhi won a huge electoral mandate in the 1971 general elections and following the success of the December 1971 war against Pakistan, she was widely referred to as 'Mother India', 'Empress of India' and the invincible 'Durga', a Hindu goddess. In 1974, a catchy slogan, 'India is Indira. Indira is India', gained popularity within the party. However, centralization, misrule and corruption spawned a growing grassroots political movement. The J. P. movement named after its leader, the Gandhian socialist Jayaprakash Narayan, mobilized students, peasants and labour unions in a call for a non-violent transformation of Indian society. On 12 June 1975, the Allahabad High Court (in the state of Uttar Pradesh) found the prime minister guilty on charges of misusing government machinery for her election campaign and declared her election null and void, moving to unseat her from her seat in Parliament. In the midst of rallies and widespread disturbances across the country, Indira Gandhi moved to declare a state of emergency on 25 June 1975. This lasted for a 21-month period.

Returning to power through elections in January 1980, Indira Gandhi's third term was largely preoccupied with domestic politics, primarily the challenge of Sikh separatist aspirations in the North Indian state of Punjab. Anxieties relating to religious and linguistic rights fuelled a political movement that ultimately turned violent. This led to Indira Gandhi's decision in 1984 to storm the holy Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, where armed separatists had established their headquarters. The military operation, codenamed Operation Blue Star, subsequently led to her assassination by two of her Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984.

In this chapter, we examine the style and substance of Indira Gandhi's response to the domestic and regional crises she faced during her tenure as prime minister and assess her legacy. We also contextualize the calculations driving foreign policy priorities in terms of crucial domestic developments, including the country's economic troubles, social unrest, the outbreak of a violent insurgency in the state of Punjab, the use of draconian measures by Indira Gandhi to curb these challenges and, ultimately, her assassination.

Strategy and context: Indira Gandhi and a new decisiveness in Indian foreign policy

While India was going through an uncertain phase of transition and succession, Pakistan was experiencing its second generation of military leaders with General Yahya Khan, who had taken over in 1969. He appeared well-positioned to raise the country's international profile, brokering what was to become a significant historical moment in Sino-US relations with the 'opening to China' (Ziring 1974). However, a major domestic crisis erupted in Pakistan following the general elections of December 1970 (the country's first party-based general elections) when the main party in East Pakistan, the Awami League, swept the polls in East Pakistan and won an overall majority in Pakistan's national assembly. Laying claim to form the country's government, this triggered a regime crisis and a confrontation between the East and West wings of Pakistan that highlighted differences despite a shared religion of Islam. These were differences based on language and region – Bengali and Bengal.³ Negotiations broke down between the Awami League leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Pakistan's president, General Yahya Khan, and the independence of Bangladesh was declared on 26 March 1971. Having prepared for this moment, the Pakistan Armed Forces had already launched a campaign, ordered by the central government in West Pakistan, to retake control of the major cities in East Pakistan and to eliminate the Bengali intelligentsia and opposition.

An army of 40,000 West Pakistani soldiers carried out 'Operation Searchlight', which has been described as a reign of terror in East Pakistan. The leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was arrested and airlifted to a jail in West Pakistan. The bloodshed caused by the Pakistani Army created a massive flight of refugees to India, eventually reaching a figure of 10 million. Aside from the refugee challenge, instability across the border threatened to adversely impact a region

that was already precariously balanced in terms of ethnic and religious diversity in the northeastern states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur and West Bengal. Already in the 1960s, Maoist guerrilla violence had begun in West Bengal,⁴ and counter-insurgency actions were being taken against Mizo and Naga rebel tribesmen in the northeast.

Indira Gandhi was therefore presented in 1970 with a major crisis and an opportunity. The crisis was both humanitarian and political in scale and nature. At the same time, an opportunity presented itself, a chance to expose and undermine the country's rival, Pakistan, and to disprove the two-nation theory, used by Pakistan's founding figures to justify the creation of a Muslim state for the Muslims of South Asia. It was also an opportunity for Indira Gandhi to silence her critics by demonstrating leadership and taking firm action, especially as she was facing elections in the subsequent year. While Indira Gandhi had launched a campaign with the slogan 'Garibi Hatao' (remove poverty), the opposition forces had responded with 'Indira Hatao' (remove Indira). As a result, the upcoming elections were to be a referendum on Indira Gandhi and her leadership.

A key question is often raised about India's involvement in the burgeoning crisis. Why did India wait to intervene until December 1971? By March 1971, Mujib Rahman had declared independence and shortly thereafter was arrested. Why didn't India intervene in March or April of 1971? In fact, Indira Gandhi opted to pursue a gradual and careful strategy of diplomacy, creating a step-by-step process of escalation, leading up to a full-scale war. All the while, a provisional government-in-exile had been set up in India. Training camps for the *Mukti Bahini* or the Liberation Army formed out of the East Pakistan regime of the Pakistan Army were presumed to be operating on Indian soil, at times mixed into the refugee camps or active in the jungle areas along the border.

On the one hand, the gradual approach to intervention was due to very specific military calculations. It is reported that in early 1971, the Indian Army Chief, General Sam Manekshaw, told Indira Gandhi that he needed nine months to prepare for war (Cohen & Dasgupta 2013: 8). On the other hand, it reflected an effort on the part of Indira Gandhi to mobilize both domestic and international opinion in favour of India's position and to establish a case for humanitarian intervention (Bass 2015). The parliamentary debates of March and May 1971 reveal a gradual escalation from a position of restraint to invoking a threat to India's national interest. During this time, Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh travelled to Moscow, Bonn, Paris, London, New York, Washington and Ottawa to highlight the mounting crisis.

A crowning moment for the Indira doctrine came in August 1971 with the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. With this came the veto support of the USSR in the United Nations Security Council and a mutual defence commitment.⁵ Indira Gandhi also travelled to Western capitals in October and November to convey the Indian position. This included an unsuccessful trip to the United States in early November.⁶ Meanwhile, in Pakistan, a ‘state of emergency’ had been declared on 25 November and on 3 December pre-emptive strikes were launched against India. At this point, Indira Gandhi pronounced that ‘the war in Bangladesh has become a war on India’ and authorized retaliatory strikes. A full-scale invasion of Pakistan was launched, involving the Indian Air Force, Navy and Army. On 16 December, a ceasefire was announced, after the Eastern Command of the Pakistan military signed the Instrument of Surrender in Dhaka.

In military terms, the war was a complete victory for India. When the Pakistani Army capitulated in Bangladesh, a total of 93,000 officers and men were taken as prisoners of war. In terms of political outcomes, however, the record is less clear-cut. The 1971 war briefly established India’s primacy in South Asia. The 25-year Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed on 19 March 1972 with the People’s Republic of Bangladesh appeared to confirm and institutionalize India’s success and position in the region. However, the Simla Agreement (see [Box 4.3](#)) signed between India and Pakistan in July 1972 did not yield a decisively positive outcome for India.⁷ Indira Gandhi failed to secure a lasting solution to the Kashmir dispute despite returning territory on

Table 4.1 Losses in the 1971 war

	India	Pakistan
Soldiers killed (estimate) ⁸	2,500–3,843	9,000
Tanks destroyed (estimate) ⁹	80	200
Aircrafts destroyed (estimate) ¹⁰	45	75
Naval (major) losses	One frigate (INS <i>Khukri</i>) in the Arabian Sea	One submarine (PNS <i>Ghazi</i>) in the Bay of Bengal
Territory	–	15,000 sq.km in the West occupied by India; returned in 1972 Simla Agreement ¹¹

the Western front that the Indian Army had taken control of during the conflict. Commentators have criticized Indira Gandhi for failing to get any commitment from the Pakistan side, for example, on formalizing the Line of Control (Dhar 2000). The agreement simply stated that both sides must respect the Line of Control without prejudice to the recognized positions of either side. Neither side was 'to seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations, both sides were to refrain from the threat or use of force in violation of this line' (United Nations Peacemaker 1972).

Box 4.3 Simla Agreement

The Simla Agreement, signed on 3 July 1972, sought to normalize relations between India and Pakistan following the 13-day war which took place in December 1971, and which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh out of the Eastern wing of Pakistan. Sub-clause 4 (ii) stated that the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir resulting from the ceasefire of 17 December 1971 would be respected. A commitment was made to resolve all conflicts between the two countries through bilateral negotiations. A private understanding is reported to have existed between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to turn the LoC gradually into an international border. No written record of this exists as Bhutto is said to have argued that an official statement would threaten both his political survival and the chances of working towards gradual acceptance of the LoC.

The war and peace agreement spawned a generation of decision-makers in Pakistan intent on avenging the 1971 humiliation. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, president of Pakistan at the time and Indira Gandhi's counterpart at the signing of the Simla Agreement, had already by then, it is reported, held secret meetings with nuclear scientists to discuss weaponizing the country's nuclear programme (see Chapter 6). The rump state of Pakistan regrouped its forces swiftly and strengthened its pivotal role as a go-between for the United States and China, securing support from both. The only part of the Simla Agreement which came across as being in the interest of India was the clause declaring that conflicts between the two parties would be resolved bilaterally. This removed the argument of third-party intervention, a position Pakistan often had and would

continue to raise as a way of internationalizing the Kashmir dispute.¹² Furthermore, both sides agreed to refrain from organizing, assisting or encouraging any act detrimental to the maintenance of peaceful and harmonious relations.

Indira Gandhi's legacy

As the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi was born into politics in 1917. The struggle for India's independence was underway. Her father was often away, and famously cultivated a relationship with her through letters he wrote to her while on his travels or from jail, with reflections on the country's history and international politics.¹³ By the 1950s, she had become his personal assistant and in 1956 was elected president of the youth wing of the Indian National Congress, later being elected to Parliament in place of her father when he died in 1964. Surprising her critics and detractors, she emerged to become one of the country's most powerful and, at times, most popular prime ministers. According to her biographer, Inder Malhotra, she was an astute and shrewd politician who understood the importance of power and the need to manipulate it.

Others have argued that her strength as a leader was derived from her representation of and ability to tap into an 'assertive nationalism' (Puri 1985). India's victory over Pakistan in 1971; the incorporation of or, for some, the annexation of Sikkim into the 22nd state of India in 1975; the tilt towards the Soviet Union and growing identification with the 'third world' conveyed a sense of autonomy and determination. In many ways, Indira was therefore a rallying force and a unifying figure – appealing to militant nationalists who admired the position of strength and defiance towards foreign powers and no-nonsense attitude towards ethnic and religious movements within the country. At the same time, leftists agreed with the anti-Western stance taken on international matters and liberals would have shared the concern about subnational identities, regarded to be parochial and detrimental to the creation of a unified and strong nation-state.

The personalization of power and a process of deinstitutionalization are also closely associated with Indira Gandhi's tenure as prime minister. A process of centralization and the use of loyalists in key positions continued throughout her time in office. This was exemplified in her reliance on her son Sanjay Gandhi, who gained tremendous power during the Emergency. He died in 1980 but by then Indira Gandhi only trusted family members, and she persuaded her second son Rajiv Gandhi to enter

politics. As a result, the notion of 'dynastic politics' in the Indian political system gained further institutionalization.¹⁴

Several significant developments were taking place at the time that acted as foreign policy determinants. The dominant position that the USSR had achieved as peacemaker between India and Pakistan in 1966 was being eroded and challenged by a resurgent Pakistan and the growing US–China–Pakistan axis. The United States was providing Pakistan with military aid. China was already challenging the USSR for leadership in the communist world (see [Chapter 8](#)). Moreover, China was successfully acting as a counterweight to India through the alliance with Pakistan. The Indian response was the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, signed in 1971, which guaranteed mutual consultation in the case of an attack on either and appropriate measures to ensure peace with security for its signatories.¹⁵

As the crisis over East Pakistan intensified, the Nixon administration tilted towards Pakistan. In December 1971 after fighting had broken out between India and Pakistan, the nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* was dispatched to the Bay of Bengal, along with nine supporting warships, to deter India. An official US State Department history of the war, drawing on declassified documents and published in 2005, states that US actions:

also involved encouraging China to make military moves to achieve the same end, and an assurance to China that if China menaced India and the Soviet Union moved against China in support of India, the United States would protect China from the Soviet Union. China chose not to menace India, and the crisis on the subcontinent ended without a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union (Smith 2005).

Bass (2013) documents the US involvement and failure to intervene in order to stop the crisis, which turned into what has been described as a genocide. At this point, the USSR came to India's rescue, applying the veto three times in the Security Council to block resolutions calling for a ceasefire. This acted as a crucial balance against US actions, which aimed at containing India, especially to deter India from any plans of using the crisis to take large-scale military action in Kashmir.

In 1983, another crisis was developing nearby, in Sri Lanka where tensions between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities had been simmering. In July 1983, violent riots broke out. Once again, this presented a challenging security dilemma for India. On the one hand, Delhi was

committed to providing safety for the Tamils of Sri Lanka (thanks to the ties with Tamils in the Southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu). On the other hand, it sought to assure the Sri Lankan government of its position of non-interference. The country's External Affairs Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao was sent as an envoy and discussions were initiated with Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene – efforts which Indira Gandhi had hoped would resolve the escalating crisis. Instead, and despite dialogue, suspicions continued to mount on either side. Reports that Sri Lanka was seeking military assistance from the United States and other extra-regional powers were unacceptable to India. At the same time, President Jayewardene remained sceptical of India's goals and motivations and reluctant to enable Indian involvement.

By 1984, thousands of Tamil refugees were arriving in India. Their plight and the Sri Lankan Army's crackdown turned into political issues in India, highlighted by the two major political parties in Tamil Nadu, the ruling All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and its rival Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). With general elections approaching in 1985, the Congress party, which depended on an alliance with one of the regional parties, had to appear to take a stand. While maintaining an official position of non-interference, New Delhi did not take action to prevent Tamil militants from setting up a base for operations in Tamil Nadu. It was stated that Indira Gandhi granted formal authorization to India's principal counterintelligence and counterespionage organization, the Research and Analysis Wing, to provide training and assistance to the various Tamil militant groups (Ganguly 2018). The situation in Sri Lanka evolved further and in 1987 India sent peace-keeping troops (see [Chapter 5](#)). In many ways, the challenges mirrored the quandaries and dynamics experienced and learned from during the earlier East Pakistan/Bangladesh crisis. For India, there were national security concerns and geopolitical implications with the involvement of foreign powers. At the same time, the crisis served to highlight the limits to India's role as a regional power.

Conclusion

In retrospect, the talk of an 'Indira Doctrine' emerging from the years of her stewardship in Indian politics appears to have been 'more rhetoric than reality' (Mitra 2009: 27). The gains of 1971 to India's international profile, regional standing and the capacity to act as a regional power were short-lived. Within two years of signing the Simla Agreement, Pakistan

was busy mobilizing support within the UN across Islamic countries to bolster its claims to Kashmir. Furthermore, by this time it had also become a big buyer of US arms.¹⁶ The tilt towards China, engineered by President Nixon and his National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, and facilitated by Islamabad, significantly elevated Pakistan's role in Cold War politics.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan quickly became the primary beneficiary of massive US support. This was despite US economic and military aid being cut off in April 1979 because of Pakistan's efforts to secretly develop a uranium enrichment plant capable of making atomic bomb material. By the end of the year, however, in a major policy reversal, the Carter administration asked Congress to lift the ban on aid to Pakistan. Ushering in a phase of cooperation between Pakistan and the US against the Soviet Union, from 1980 to 1989, this reduced the significance of close ties between India and the Soviet Union, which had been regarded as *the* diplomatic coup for Indira Gandhi in 1971.

With domestic politics consuming more energy, India's regional role and ambitions were also curtailed. The assassination in August 1975 of Bangladesh's founding father and first president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, removed a source of support for India. This created an opportunity for Pakistan to shape its relationship with the new country (which it formally recognized in 1974) and to foster relations with Bangladeshi politicians and army officials (most of whom had served a united Pakistan administration or military) during the power struggle that ensued. Ultimately, Major General Ziaur Rahman became the chief martial law administrator in 1976 and president of Bangladesh in 1977. During his regime, an initiative was launched by Rahman with the support of other South Asian countries to launch the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (see [Box 9.1](#)). In India, this was perceived mainly as an attempt by smaller countries in the region to set limits to any hegemonic ambitions India may have harboured after the military victory over Pakistan in 1971.¹⁷

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Notes

1. For a discussion of the implications of the 1967 elections for India's party politics, see Kothari (1971).
2. For the full text of the 1971 treaty between India and the USSR, see Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (1971).
3. For a discussion of Bengali Muslim nationalism, see Khan (1985).
4. This was known as the Naxalite movement, named after the village of Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal. For more details, see Gupta (2007).
5. For an analysis of the treaty, see Kapur (1972).
6. Relations between President Nixon and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi are known to have been extremely fraught. See Bass (2016).
7. For the full text of the agreement, see United Nations Peacemaker (1972).
8. Kapur (2010: 11); Leonard (2013: 806).
9. Leonard (2013: 806).
10. For more details, see Leonard (2013: 806).
11. For more details, see Nawaz (2008: 329).
12. For a discussion of the dynamics of India–Pakistan negotiations and the contrasting principles and approaches, see Makeig (1987).
13. Published, at Nehru's request, in 1929 by the *Allahabad Law Journal*, and titled 'Letters from a Father to His Daughter'.
14. For a discussion of dynastic politics in India, see Chhibber (2013).
15. For a full text of the agreement, see Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (1971).
16. Bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States had been consolidated with the signing of the 1954 Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement that provided US\$ 2.5 billion and US\$ 700 million as economic and military aid, respectively, to Pakistan. The relationship continued to improve and deepen, despite US sanctions and arms embargos imposed in 1965 and 1971.
17. For a discussion on the formation of SAARC, see Dash (1996).

5

From Rajiv Gandhi to Narendra Modi: continuity and change in India's foreign policy

The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her two Sikh bodyguards, seeking revenge for the Indian Army attack codenamed 'Operation Blue Star' on the holy Golden Temple in Amritsar, tested the resilience of the Indian state. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, it is estimated that about 3,000 Sikhs were killed in retribution across the city of Delhi.¹ Within the space of a decade, violent separatist movements were raging in the states of Punjab and the northeast. Under Indira Gandhi, authoritarian measures had been increasingly used, including the imposition of President's rule numerous times and in several states,² culminating in the suspension of democracy under emergency rule over 21 months from 1975 to 1977. As the major actor in the South Asian region, the country appeared to turn inwards, preoccupied with various subnational movements and other domestic challenges.

Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son and successor, swept the 1984 general elections, winning a massive majority for the Congress party, heralding the potential for a new phase in politics and a fresh approach in foreign policy. Favouring the promotion of technology and modernization, Rajiv Gandhi was a new face (he had mostly eschewed involvement in politics until his mother's assassination) who, many hoped, would bring about an era of peace, reconciliation, cooperation and progress in South Asia. The parallel ascent to power of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first female prime minister, similarly galvanized expectations for a potential reset in India–Pakistan relations. Just 35 years old when she became Prime Minister of Pakistan for the first time in 1988, Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi, 40 years old when he was catapulted into power in 1984, were both youthful leaders.

Rajiv Gandhi's stint in power (1984–9) was marked by several significant developments that once again highlighted the intricate interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy outcomes. Although he was keen to modernize India and tackle corruption, Rajiv Gandhi's government ironically ended up embroiled in what became one of the country's largest political scandals involving a large weapons contract with the Swedish arms manufacturer Bofors. Several Congress party politicians, including the prime minister, were directly implicated, accused of receiving kick-backs from the Bofors company. Despite a long-running and international investigation into the allegation, it was never conclusively proven. The story broke in 1987, tarnishing Rajiv Gandhi's corruption-free image, sapping the government's initial momentum and ultimately contributing to a significant defeat for the Congress party in the 1989 elections.

While this domestic crisis was unfolding, old differences with Pakistan over the status of Kashmir were resurfacing, culminating in a crisis in January 1987 with both sides mobilizing troops for action. It remains unclear to what extent his generals had fully informed Rajiv Gandhi about the details but the codenamed 'Operation Brasstacks' was a major war game the Indian Army played out in Rajasthan. Pakistan took the planning as a threat and by 1987 had put its entire nuclear installations on 'high alert'.³ The crisis and tense standoff along the border were diffused by March 1987, but by then the next regional crisis was already brewing.

A rapidly deteriorating and violent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, which had significant implications for Tamil Nadu, prompted India to get involved. In July 1987, following discussions with the Sri Lankan government, Rajiv Gandhi took the unprecedented decision to send in Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) as part of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord (also known as the Indo-Lanka Accord: see [Box 5.1](#)). This had been signed in the Sri Lankan capital city, Colombo, on 29 July 1987, between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene and was expected to help resolve the civil war that had been raging in the country. India's decision to become involved in Sri Lanka's civil war highlights most starkly the role that domestic pressures can have on foreign policy decisions and the impact those decisions can have on domestic dynamics.

Following the involvement of about 80,000 troops and the loss of 1,200 lives, the IPKF completely withdrew from Sri Lanka in 1990. Widely regarded as a failure, the mission quickly turned into a counter-militancy operation. The IPKF found itself caught between the warring forces of the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and losing trust with the local population.

Box 5.1 Indo-Lanka Accord

On 29 July 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene signed the Indo-Lanka Accord, aimed at resolving some of the key problems driving the civil war in Sri Lanka. The agreement contained several concessions including, on the part of Colombo, a devolution of power to the provinces, the withdrawal of Sri Lankan troops to their barracks from the north and the surrender of arms by Tamil rebels. Additionally, a merger of the northern and eastern provinces was to be considered, subject to a referendum in the east, as well as official status for the Tamil language. India in turn offered to send peacekeeping troops if requested (the Indian Peace Keeping Forces) to maintain peace in the northeast and to convince militant groups to surrender their arms.

Box 5.2 Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF)

In the wake of the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, an IPKF was dispatched. Invited by Sri Lankan President Jayawardene, the IPKF was expected to help establish order in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Under the terms of the Indo-Lanka Accord, militant groups had been expected to surrender their arms to the IPKF. However, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) refused to disarm. Within a few months, the peacekeeping mission of the IPKF turned into peace enforcement and the IPKF found itself engaged in bloody police action against the LTTE. As a result, the IPKF was no longer viewed as a neutral actor on the ground. Back in India, across the narrow Palk Strait separating the two countries, the IPKF actions provoked the ire of Tamils in the Southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Caught in the middle, the IPKF began to scale back its operations in 1989, withdrawing completely in March 1990. After almost three years, an estimated 1,500 Indian troops had been killed, and many were wounded in a jungle war in which they had received little intelligence support or coordination from political leaders at home and on the ground.

In 1984, Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister on a groundswell of popular support reflecting the desire for a new era and a generational change in politics. Five years later, he and the Congress party were punished by the electorate in the 1989 elections, which led to a short-lived non-Congress party government (Andersen 1990). By 1991, the Congress had returned to power, albeit in the form of a minority government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. The decade of the nineties was flanked by two major policy shifts at either end. Momentous economic reforms were implemented under the Congress government in the early 1990s and in 1998, under a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, the country's second nuclear tests were carried out. In combination, these policies contributed to the perception that India was an 'emerging power'.⁴ The rise of the BJP as a political force revealed both a deepening of India's democracy and the fragmentation of the country's party system. Coalition governments were to become the norm until the 2014 elections, which provided the BJP and its allies with a landslide victory.⁵

The chapter begins with Rajiv Gandhi and his leadership during the 1987–90 period when India became directly involved in Sri Lanka's civil war. This civil war was a central theme during his single term as prime minister and the cause behind his assassination in 1991 while campaigning in Tamil Nadu for the general elections, in which he hoped to make a comeback. A suicide bomber, a known member of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), carried out the attack in which 14 others were killed in addition to Rajiv Gandhi. India's role in the Sri Lankan civil war through the IPKF has been described as the worst kind of decision that a regional power can make – being drawn into an ethnic conflict of a neighbouring state (DeSilva 1993). We discuss the immediate fallout and longer-term impact of the IPKF operations. It has been argued that the intervention marked a departure from traditional practices and norms of peacekeeping and it has been studied as a useful case study of peacekeeping in the post-Cold War security environment (Bullion 2007). Set against other instances of 'intervention' (the 1986 'Operation Flowers' in the Seychelles and 'Operation Cactus' in the Maldives in 1988),⁶ we examine the question of whether Rajiv Gandhi's term in power marked a watershed in India's regional politics and policies.

India's involvement in Sri Lanka's civil war

On becoming prime minister in 1984, Rajiv Gandhi expressed concern at the deteriorating ethnic situation in Sri Lanka. At that point, however,

he stated that India did not want to interfere in the internal affairs of another country. Already by then, the steady flow of Tamil refugees into India had begun to raise domestic pressure on the government to deliver a credible response. Initially, some breakthroughs were achieved, for instance when the Sri Lankan government was persuaded to undertake secret talks with the Tamil 'terrorists'. However, by early 1987, no progress had been made on negotiations, and when Sri Lanka decided to impose a military blockade on the northern province of Jaffna peninsula, India felt compelled to intervene. Facing a humanitarian crisis where the Tamil civilian population was not receiving food or medicine, India decided to airdrop food, violating Sri Lanka's air space in the process. This bold action demonstrated a determination and willingness to play the role of regional peacemaker.

Signed on 29 July 1987, the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement set out the specific conditions needed to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka. These included the recognition of Tamil as an official language, lifting the state of emergency and a commitment not to seek military help from any other country. In return, India was to ensure that its territory would not be used for 'activities prejudicial to the unity, integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka'.⁷ Finally, India was to provide military assistance for the implementation of the accord. Indian troops were thus organized as the IPKF and airlifted to Sri Lanka. Many authors have written about the lack of planning and the fact that there was no consensus on the perception of the mission by the key players involved.⁸

For India, there was a double commitment on the one hand to the peaceful resolution of an internal, bloody, ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and to securing the rights and protection of the Tamils, an important issue in the politics of Southern India.⁹ For Sri Lanka, while there may have been a consensus on using the IPKF to counterbalance the Tamil Tigers, there was limited commitment to the idea of delivering a genuine federal power-sharing arrangement as in India. The Tamil Tigers, the main insurgency group, welcomed the arrival of the IPKF as a short reprieve from the Sri Lankan Army onslaught. However, their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, had not been invited as a party to the accord, and as a result, their commitment to the terms of the accord was next to none. They used the time to regroup and strengthen only to turn against the IPKF. The 1989 elections in Sri Lanka voted out the government that had negotiated the Indo-Lanka Accord and brought in a Sinhala national government under Prime Minister Premadasa. Upon taking office, the new government asked India to withdraw the IPKF, and the overall verdict has been that it was a 'dismal failure' (Nugent 1990: 116).

Rajiv Gandhi's foray into playing the role of regional policeman and mediator reveals some of the structural constraints and shortcomings of Indian foreign policy. Four key factors can be identified. Firstly, Indian foreign policy has often been identified with the personality of a particular prime minister rather than seen as the outcome of an institutionalized process of decision-making. This can to some extent explain the lack of coordination between the government and its intelligence agencies, which characterized the country's position on Sri Lanka.

Secondly, the doctrine of Panchasheela had entrenched itself within the foreign policy intelligentsia, setting an ideological limit to the idea of national power. Instead, the vision was to combine a blend of liberal goals with enlightened self-interest. In practice, this set of principles produced suboptimal outcomes, combining the worst of both worlds – promoting liberal ideals portraying India as hegemonic and the claim of 'enlightened' self-interest as hypocritical. Thirdly, India's international profile and size injected a deeply skewed asymmetry into relations with neighbouring countries. India was too large compared to any given neighbour and yet not powerful enough to unambiguously dominate Pakistan or even the combined diplomatic strength of all its neighbours in regional and international organizations. Finally, India's domestic politics must be considered. The countervailing forces of various institutions, the regional parties and electoral calculations constrained the making of a cohesive foreign policy.

The 1990s: a shift in the main trend of Indian foreign policy

During the early 1990s, India faced three significant changes. Firstly, the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which not only removed a key source of support for India internationally but also meant that non-alignment was rendered obsolete. Secondly, India's economy had been dangerously moving towards a balance of payments crisis, and this fully erupted in the middle of 1991. While the first crisis was an external event with immediate global reverberations, the second was mostly home-grown and resulted in several significant economic reforms. Thirdly, the emergence of Hindu nationalism as a political force in India's domestic politics, and into government, brought in long-time critics of non-alignment as decision-makers of Indian foreign policy.

Each of the above translated into change at the level of institutionalized preferences and perceptions of the world and India's economy and

political identity. Two short-lived governments in 1989 and 1990 and Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991 paved the way for a Congress-led minority government, headed by Narasimha Rao (see [Box 5.3](#)). He was the first person from outside the Nehru–Gandhi family to serve as prime minister for a full term. Having served as a chief minister in the state of Andhra Pradesh, as well as Minister for Home Affairs, External Affairs and Defence, he came with an extensive portfolio of political experience.¹⁰

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the proclaimed triumph of the Western bloc dealt a blow to India's international and domestic politics. Since the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, socialism had been one of the pillars of India's economy and politics. The goal then had been to industrialize with the use of Soviet-inspired planning while remaining a parliamentary democracy. This vision and logic were largely upheld through the 1950s, '60s, '70s and even '80s, with variations along the way. It also informed India's non-aligned stance. With the end of the Cold War, India could no longer rely on Russian backing in the Security Council, on Russian armaments and a favourable Rupee–Rouble trade arrangement. The need to find new allies and allegiances gained even further urgency with India's economic crisis of 1991 and subsequent decisions to liberalize the economy.¹¹

Box 5.3 Narasimha Rao

Mr Pamulaparthi Venkata Narasimha Rao led the country as prime minister from 1991 to 1996, winning elections in the aftermath of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Prime Minister Rao took up the reins of power at a time when the economy was under severe stress. Between 1989 and 1991, India's external debt had tripled and within two years the trade deficit had risen by 36 per cent. At one point, it was expected that India would have to default on its external liabilities, forcing the country to turn to the International Monetary Fund for a bailout package. In addition to economic crisis, the world was undergoing tumultuous global geopolitical changes with the Gulf War underway and a US-led coalition of 35 countries preparing to respond to the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait. Amid such existential challenges, the choice of Narasimha Rao as prime minister was intriguing. Despite being a veteran administrator, including experience as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, seven terms as a Member of Parliament and having held crucial portfolios of

External Affairs, Home and Defence, many commentators at the time regarded Rao as a surprise candidate.

However, over the course of his tenure Narasimha Rao proved adept at navigating challenges at home as well as abroad. He ensured a minority government remained in office for the full term, implemented revolutionary economic reforms and engaged in reinventing India's role and opportunities abroad. Vinay Sitapati, author of the biography, *Half-Lion: How P.V. Narasimha Rao Transformed India* (Penguin Viking, 2016), gives Rao credit for being a realist and pragmatic, with reference to his outreach to the US, Israel, Iran and East Asia. The Look East policy, attributed in large part to Narasimha Rao, is widely regarded as a significant turning point in Indian foreign policy. Long-term politician and prolific author Shashi Tharoor in his book, *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century* (Penguin Books, 2012), credited Rao's Look East policy with initiating a strategic reset in India's vision of and approach to its role in the world economy.

Economic reforms and liberalization: 1991 as a turning point in Indian politics

Many dispute the role that 1991 played as a cutoff or turning point in India's path towards liberalization and integration with a global economy. Several authors instead locate various points in the 1970s and '80s when leaders attempted to open up the economy (Kohli 2006a, 2006b). However, regardless of this ongoing discussion, the reforms of the early 1990s were by far the most comprehensive to date. As part of the bailout package negotiated with the International Monetary Fund, these reforms were in no small extent 'forced upon' India. However, the government's implementation of reforms under the leadership of both Prime Minister Rao and his Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, stimulated a longer-term commitment to the liberalization process. Reforms included the dismantling of controls, tariffs and duties; the lowering of taxes and the breakup of state monopolies, all of which were aimed at opening up the economy to trade and investment and encouraging private sector enterprise and competition.

The Indian economy had been stagnant for half a century before independence. Between 1900 and 1950, economic growth in India averaged 0.8% a year – a rate that matched population growth and therefore

did not deliver an increase in per capita income. Economic growth did pick up throughout the 1950s to the 1980s, averaging 3.5%. However, population growth continued to accelerate as well. Per capita income increased by just 1.3% per year. Some scholars referred to this low Indian growth rate as the ‘Hindu rate of growth’.¹² GDP picked up from the early 1990s, reaching an unprecedented 7% growth rate for three consecutive years from 1994 to 1997. This achievement was recognized internationally with an idea launched in the early 2000s and which quickly gained traction, of the ‘BRIC’ economies – Brazil, Russia, India and China – and later BRICS (with the addition of South Africa), emerging as significant drivers of the global economy (Goldman Sachs 2001). The economic performance over time in terms of GDP per capita of the BRICS economies is shown in Figure 5.1. In 2020, China had a GDP per capita (in current US dollars) of US\$ 10,435, followed by Russia (US\$ 10,127), Brazil (US\$ 6,797), South Africa (US\$ 5,656) and India (US\$ 1928) – compared with Pakistan’s GDP per capita of US\$ 1,189.

The economic reforms of the 1990s led to a decade of economic growth. These reforms also enabled an institutionalization of policies that underpinned a deeper ideational change. This meant moving away from the socialistic, inward-oriented and planned economy towards greater integration with the global economy. At about the same time, a political realignment within Indian politics came to the fore, with the emergence of the BJP as a major electoral force.

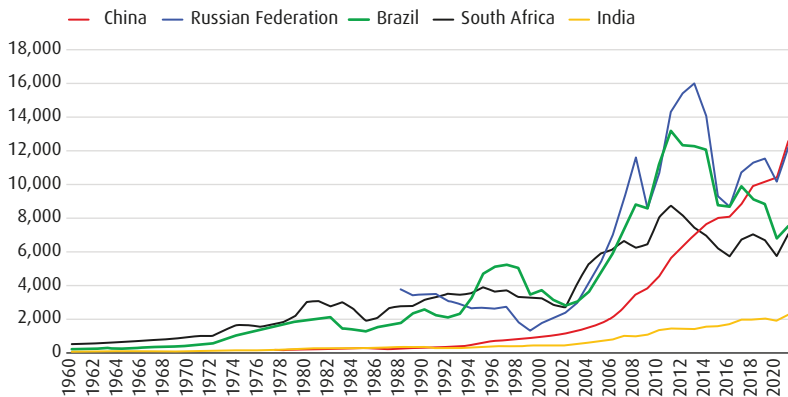


Figure 5.1 Gross domestic product per capita (current US\$): Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) and Pakistan, 1960–2021

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023d)

Political change: the rise of the BJP and 'Hindu nationalism'

There is broad agreement that between 1950 and 1990, the principal battlelines of Indian politics had been bipolar with the Congress as the party of government and all other parties opposed to it. However, by the early 1990s, a triangular contest had developed between the leftist parties, the Hindu nationalists, and the Congress party. In the past, coalitions had formed to challenge the Congress party. By the 1990s, coalitions were increasingly taking shape against the BJP. This development is one of the reasons offered to explain why major economic reforms were pushed through even with a minority government under Congress leadership.

Starting with the 1989 general elections, the BJP's share of national votes and Lok Sabha seats began to rise (see Figure 5.2) and to determine critical electoral issues.

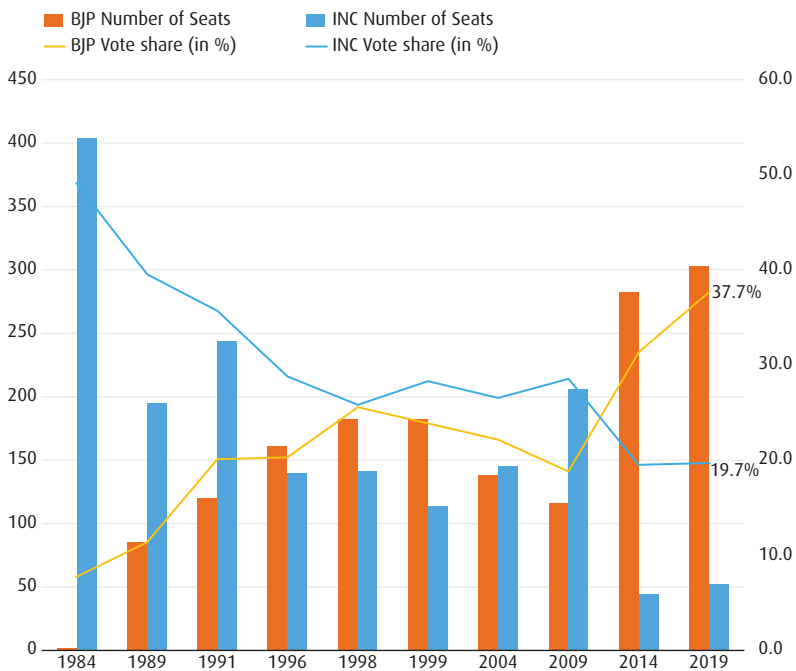


Figure 5.2 BJP's political dominance now matches the Congress's dominance of the 1980s

Source: Graph, author. Data source, Indian Election Commission (<https://eci.gov.in/>)

Many authors have described the rise of the BJP as the ‘saffronization’ of Indian politics. Many observers use this concept to indicate the growing role that religion and cultural nationalism play in Indian politics. ‘Hindu nationalism’ is the term used to refer to the depiction of culture and Hinduism, in particular by the BJP, as a core component of the country’s national identity.¹³ The attempt to rally and mobilize a Hindu vote was perhaps most evident in September 1990 when a BJP leader launched a *Rath Yatra* (‘chariot journey’). This was a rally lasting over two months, with the leader travelling across the country in support of the movement to erect a temple to the Hindu deity Ram on the site of the Babri Masjid (see [Box 5.4](#)). Hugely controversial, the movement triggered religion-inspired violence, culminating in December 1992 when a vast mass of Hindu *karsevaks* (volunteers, engaged in sacred activity) demolished the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 ([Box 5.4](#)). While the effort to mobilize religious sentiments seemed to yield a huge electoral payoff for the BJP in the 1991 and subsequent elections, it can be seen in [Figure 5.2](#) that this did not last, and vote share began to fall after the 1998 elections.

The Babri Masjid demolition triggered anti-Hindu riots in neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh and raised fears about retribution against Hindu communities living in these countries. Both leaders at the time, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, sought to raise the security of Muslims in India as an issue in international fora such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a strong warning and other Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey and Afghanistan sent protest notes to New Delhi. India’s Ministry of External Affairs had to take action to stem the negative fallout, protecting its diplomats across the world from attacks and lobbying allies within the United Nations.

Box 5.4 Ayodhya conflict

Located in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Ayodhya gained international attention after the demolition of a sixteenth-century mosque, which sparked communal violence across the country. The Babri Masjid was built in 1528 by a general of the Mughal Emperor Babar, on a site that has been a source of religious contestation. Hindus have claimed that the mosque was built to replace an

ancient eleventh-century Hindu temple marking the birthplace of Lord Ram, one of Hinduism's most revered deities. During colonial times, the British erected a railing around the mosque and created separate places of worship for Muslims and Hindus.

In the aftermath of the Partition, the building was locked in a bid to avoid sparking communal tensions. This remained the status quo until the mid-1980s when the Hindu nationalist organization, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), began an agitation to unlock the gates and build a temple for Ram. In 1986, a district and sessions court ruled that the disputed site should be open to the public for worship. This triggered communal violence and protests and prompted both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) to instrumentalize the issue for political gain. In 1989, L. K. Advani, the BJP's president, undertook a 'rath yatra' (a political and religious rally), mobilizing people to converge upon Babri Masjid. Under a Congress government in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the VHP succeeded in opening the gates and conducted a foundation-laying ceremony for the promised Ram temple. In 1992, and by this time with a BJP government in UP, VHP supporters tore down the mosque. Communal violence erupted across the country and rioting resulted in the deaths of an estimated 2,000 people.

In 2001, the VHP once again raised the 'Ram Janmabhoomi' (Ram's birthplace) issue, pledging to build a Hindu temple on the site. However, this time the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) central government refused to condone the construction. Nonetheless, hundreds of 'volunteers' converged on the site. In 2002, a train carrying returning Hindu pilgrims from Ayodhya and the demolished mosque site was set on fire in the town of Godhra, leading to the deaths of 59 people. This instigated a three-day period of intercommunal violence in the western Indian state of Gujarat, one of the country's most violent experience of riots.

In April 2002, High Court hearings were initiated to determine ownership of the site and in early 2003 archaeologists began a court-ordered survey to explore whether a Ram temple predated the mosque. The 2003 archaeological findings and 2010 High Court ruling were disputed and criminal proceedings against the involvement of Hindu leaders in the 1992 destruction were initiated. The matter was then taken up by the Supreme Court of India,

which on 9 November 2019 ordered the land be handed over to a trust to build the Hindu temple. It also ordered the government to give an alternate 5 acres of land to the Sunni Waqf Board to build the mosque.

Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the BJP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh took moral responsibility for the failure to uphold law and order and resigned. Over the next few years, the BJP appeared to moderate its stand on cultural and religious issues, leading to the emergence of Atal Bihari Vajpayee as a frontrunner. During the short-lived tenure of Vajpayee as prime minister in 1998, the party focused more on good governance and less on Hindu nationalism. In fact, it was during this time that Vajpayee's government took the important decision to conduct the country's second nuclear tests (see [Chapter 6](#)) with long-lasting ramifications for India's foreign policy. Returning to office in 1999 and serving a full term until 2004, with the BJP as the largest partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Vajpayee was able to stay the course in terms of pursuing a moderate, pragmatic line for the BJP (see [Box 5.5](#)). In 2004, the BJP called for early elections, expecting a comfortable win based on its record in office and the personal popularity of the prime minister. Instead, the Congress Party made a comeback, leading the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and ushering in another decade of coalition politics. Despite this, the BJP's vote share started to climb dramatically again in 2009, continuing to grow in 2014 and 2019 subsequently. What the impact has been of a BJP agenda for Indian foreign policy will be considered closely in [Part 2](#) of the book.

Box 5.5 Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Atal Bihari Vajpayee served three terms as India's prime minister. Born on 25 December 1924 in the city of Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, he took office from 16 May 1996 until 1 June 1996, from 19 March 1998 until 27 April 1999 (in acting capacity following the government's fall in April 1998) and from 13 October 1999 until 22 May 2004, leading the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government until its electoral defeat in 2004.

Vajpayee's political career began during the independence struggle when he joined the 'Quit India Movement' of 1942–5. Initially sympathetic to the left, in 1951 he became a founder member of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Sangh (BJS), predecessor of the BJP. Opposing the Emergency (1975–7) under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, he was imprisoned in 1975. Upon release he joined the Janata coalition government of Prime Minister Morarji Desai and served as External Affairs Minister from 1977 until 1979. In 1980, Vajpayee was a co-founder of the BJP, serving as its first president from 1980–6. Often described as the moderate face of the Hindu-nationalist BJP, Vajpayee developed a nationwide appeal that was key to the BJP's electoral gains.

Vajpayee's governments were marked by major events such as the country's nuclear tests in May 1998, his bus journey to Pakistan in February 1999, the Kargil War and the communal violence during the Gujarat riots of 2002. In 2004, Prime Minister Vajpayee met Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on the sidelines of a South Asian conference in Islamabad. Vajpayee is credited with having resumed formal talks with Pakistan in a bid to recover the peace process.

Conclusion

Domestic and regional politics largely determined India's foreign policy for much of the Cold War. This was in part due to limited resources and the need to focus on pressing regional security challenges. These included territorial disputes along the borders with two of India's biggest continental rivals, Pakistan and China, as well as with the smaller neighbours of Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where transnational ethnic ties further complicated bilateral relations. Under Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, a more assertive approach was adopted towards the region, including India's involvement in the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the civil war in Sri Lanka and military intervention in the Maldives in 1988.

The economic reforms of the 1990s and nuclearization in 1998 opened 'new' opportunities and expectations for a more global orientation in India's foreign policy. There was also domestic pushback against further liberalization and opening up of the economy. This is evident in the trials and tribulations experienced during negotiations for the 2008 India–US nuclear deal (see [Chapter 7](#)). It has also been a constant feature

in the unending EU–India talks for a free trade deal, which were initiated in 2007 (see [Chapter 10](#)).

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the perceptions of and discussions about India’s rise as an emerging power and economy gained widespread traction among academics,¹⁴ within government circles and in reports issued by international rating agencies, investment funds and banks. Accompanied by a phase of sustained and accelerated economic growth, this laid the basis for what one might expect to be a more proactive foreign policy. Instead, spiralling levels of corruption diverted attention inwards.¹⁵ This coincided with a world focused on the global war on terror, the international financial crisis of 2008 and the arrival of China as a new heavyweight partner and contender with the United States. The resurgence of India seemed to be on hold.

The openness of an economy to trade can be conceptualized and measured as the ratio of overall trade (exports plus imports) to the gross domestic product (GDP). As shown in [Figure 5.3](#), India’s openness to trade grew from a low base of around 10% of GDP in the 1960s and 1970s to a high of 56% in 2011 and 2012. In the last years on record, it came down to around 40%. However, interpreting this change is less straightforward. A comparison with China shows a similar pattern: starting from around 6% in the 1960s, steadily increasing to a high of 64% in 2006, and then decreasing to around 36% in the last years (see [Figure 5.4](#)). This pattern in both China and India might reflect the increased purchasing power of the domestic middle class and the

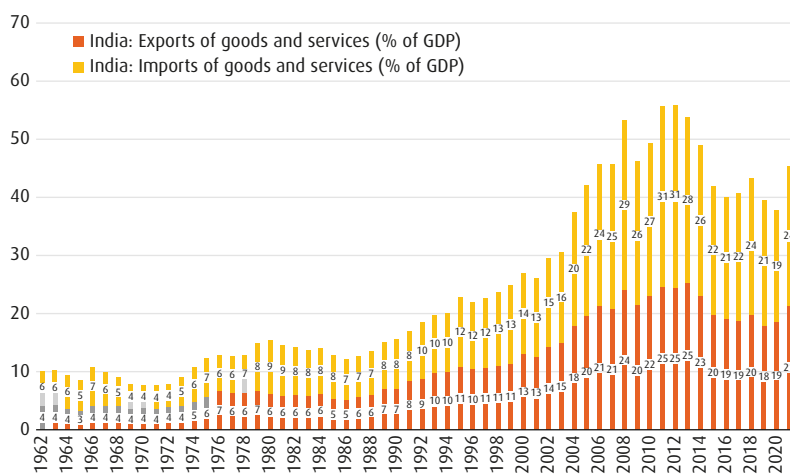


Figure 5.3 Openness Index for India

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023a) and World Bank (2023e)

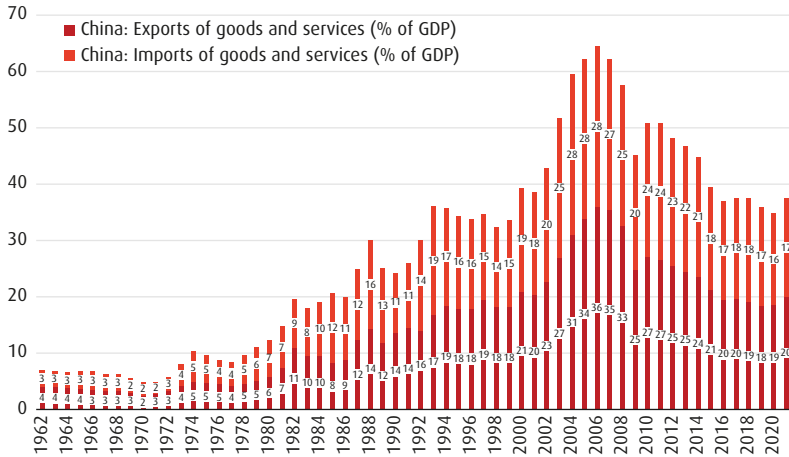


Figure 5.4 Openness Index for China

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023a) and World Bank (2023e)

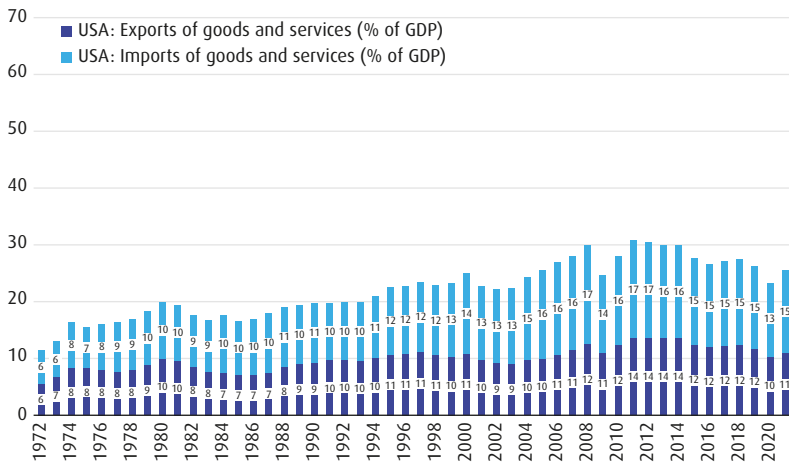


Figure 5.5 Openness Index for the United States

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023a) and World Bank (2023e)

increased trust in and attractiveness of domestic products and services. The comparison with the United States, an advanced economy with a large population (see Figure 5.5) shows an openness to trade of around 27% in the last years (up from 12% in the early 1970s – note the different timespan compared to the figures for China and India, here starting from 1970).

The landslide victory for the BJP in the general elections of 2014 ushered in a new phase of Indian politics with the BJP no longer in need of coalition partners to govern. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, previously Chief Minister in the state of Gujarat, foreign policy appeared to gain a fillip. An unprecedented invitation issued to all South Asian leaders to attend the prime minister's inauguration ceremony in 2014 was followed by a busy schedule of visits to many countries, some of which had not received an Indian prime minister for more than 30 years. A renewed focus on key strategic partnerships with the United States, China and the European Union, as well as efforts to improve India's standing and room to manoeuvre in the Middle East, the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, gained momentum. These developments, an assessment of the driving forces behind them and the implications of India's global reorientation, as well as the choices and effectiveness of foreign policy tools used, are the focus of [Part 2](#) of this book.

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Notes

1. For a discussion of how the Indian state has tried and struggled to investigate the riots and killings, see Jeffery and Hall (2020). Operation Blue Star caused uprisings in the Indian Army. After the military operation, 309 Sikh soldiers left their barrack in a state of shock and later they were court-martialled for deserting the army.
2. The Constitution of India provides for three forms of emergency rule when, in the opinion of the President of India, lawful governance is not possible. Article 352 provides for a national emergency, during which, the President of India, by proclamation, can suspend key features of democratic rights. The suspension of a state government and imposition of direct central government rule in a state is detailed under Article 356 of the Constitution of India. Article 360 provides for a financial emergency. During the rule of Indira Gandhi, both the articles of national and state emergencies were used.
3. For one of the few books on this crisis, see Bajpai et al. (1995).
4. One of the first books to address this phenomenon was Cohen (2001).
5. For a discussion on the 'Critical Realignment and Democratic Deepening: The Parliamentary Elections of 2014 and 2019 in India', see Mitra et al. (2022c).
6. For details and background, see Brewster and Rai (2013).
7. For full text of the agreement, see United Nations Peacemaker (1972).
8. For a critique, see Chari (1994).
9. For a discussion at the time of the details in the agreement, see Rupesinghe (1988).
10. Many commentaries on Indian foreign policy have minimized or overlooked the impact of foreign policy changes introduced by the P. V. Narasimha Rao government which handled the crucial transition years at the end of the Cold War. For an example of Rao's legacy see, *Diplomacy at the Cutting Edge* (Rana 2016), which provides valuable insights into the negotiations between Prime Minister Rao and Chancellor Kohl regarding the entry of India into the European market. 'Subsequent to this meeting, Germany became one of the most important sponsors of India in Europe.' This point was emphasized in personal communication with Ambassador Rana on 3 April 2023.
11. As a result of external shocks (oil prices) and domestic financial policies, in June 1991 India faced a severe balance of payments crisis. With just \$1 billion in foreign reserves, this was enough dollars to meet about three weeks of imports.
12. For a discussion of the controversial term and its contextualization, see Nayar (2006).
13. For a detailed discussion of the term and its manifestation in India's politics and society, see Jaffrelot (2009).
14. For example, see Eichengreen et al. (2010); Panagariya (2010); Cohen (2001).
15. In 2013, India ranked 94th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, alongside Mongolia and Colombia and below neighbours like China and Sri Lanka. In 2022, India was ranked 85th out of 180 countries – it increased its score within a decade from 36/100 (in 2012) to 40/100 (in 2022), where 100 stands for 'very clean' (Denmark, Finland and New Zealand achieved the best score of 88) and 0 for 'highly corrupt' (South Sudan has the worst score of 11); see Transparency International (2023).

Part 2: India's search for power in a post-Cold War, multipolar world

Overview of Part 2

At the beginning of the new millennium, books and journal articles began to appear, drawing attention to and raising questions about the emergence of India on the international stage and within the international system. George Perkovich, at the time Vice-President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, asked the following question in a 2003 article: 'Is India a major power?' Drawing on Kenneth Waltz's definition of power, he posited that India lacked great power in terms of the ability to influence other states, being unable to compel or persuade others to change their behaviour in a way that benefitted India. This included long-standing desires such as gaining access to nuclear technology and materials, obtaining preferential trade terms in the World Trade Organization negotiations, achieving the isolation of Pakistan, and gaining a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. However, the author went on to point out that, despite the above constraints, 'India does have the capacity to resist most if not all demands placed upon it by other states, including the recognised major powers' (Perkovich 2003: 129).

This insight points to the central paradox and ambiguity that often complicates efforts to 'measure' India's standing and relative power. A further point made in the same article is that 'Statecraft can increase or decrease a country's influence relative to its material capabilities'. Power, therefore, is not merely a function of material investments but also derives from 'the combination of leadership, strategic vision and tactics, moral example and suasion, and diplomatic acumen' (Perkovich 2003: 140). Finally, the author also noted the ability to shape rules

through international institutions as another critical form of power or 'authority'. India's situation was particularly complicated at the start of the twenty-first century given that policymakers were grappling with an internal process of change – dismantling the ideological and institutional constraints of a planned economy – and the global transformation into a post-Cold War world. Finding and creating the opportunities to enhance India's leverage have, therefore, been key to solving the conundrum about the exact magnitude of India's emerging power.

Part 2 begins in [Chapter 6](#) with India's important decision in 1998 to test nuclear weapons, marking a change in the way policymakers thought about the purpose and instruments of power. [Chapter 7](#) turns to examine the rapprochement with the United States, bringing the analysis up to date with the latest developments in what has become one of India's most important bilateral relationships. Then we look in [Chapter 8](#) at China and Russia, an old rival and an old friend, respectively, which have begun to, or continue to, influence the course of India's economy but also act as a constraint on the country's growing aspirations and ambitions. In [Chapter 9](#), we follow developments in the India–Pakistan relationship and the challenges of designing an effective neighbourhood policy. In [Chapter 10](#), the final chapter in this part of the book, we consider the importance of other strategic regions and India's policies towards them. These include the European Union, the Middle East, Southeast and East Asia, each a key component in India's emergence as a major power.

6

Nuclearization in 1998 and the Kargil War in 1999

India's nuclearization

On 11–13 May 1998, India conducted a series of five nuclear tests. Known as the *Pokhran II* tests, these were followed on 28 May by Pakistan's *Chagai-I*, which consisted of five simultaneous underground nuclear tests. At the time, the tests were greeted with jubilation with public celebrations on the streets of prominent Indian cities and stock market rallies in India. Central questions that quickly arose included: what did India seek to achieve with its openly nuclear status? Would it help to advance its security interests over those of arch-rival Pakistan or bring about greater strategic parity, making up for the imbalance of conventional forces between the two rivals? How was this going to affect stability in the region? India needed to have a nuclear doctrine to answer such questions. However, this was only officially released in January 2003 (Sundaram & Ramana 2018), articulating India's commitment to a posture of 'No First Use' of nuclear weapons. The key decisions leading up to the 1998 tests require an investigation of whether this represented a significant shift in the tenets and principles guiding India's foreign policy.

Some scholars have explored the “culturally-situated” logic of (in)securities' (Das 2008: 68), pointing to the BJP's use of cultural and even communal terms to justify India's 1998 tests. The argument is made that insecurity under previous Congress governments were perceived by the state primarily in political, economic and developmental terms. The question, however, that arises is how to combine an analysis of the often emotive language and rhetoric surrounding an event like a nuclear test with the strategic logic underpinning such a decision or longer-term continuity in nuclear policy.¹ While the Hindu nationalist-led National

Democratic Alliance (NDA) government made the decision to test in May 1998, the preparations for a test and operationalization of nuclear weapons in 1995 and 1996 (Subrahmanyam 2004) occurred under Congress party leadership. At the time, the United States detected the preparations through satellite imagery and persuaded India not to test, in order to avoid an arms race in the region.

It is important to remember that the nuclear programme was initiated long before and was continued under the watch of various Congress governments. Early on, even before the country had gained independence, organized research in nuclear science had begun with the establishment in 1945 of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay, as it was known at the time. Homi Jehangir Bhabha was one of the leading scientists, strongly supported by the first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who wanted to invest in modernization and industrialization. The Atomic Energy Act was passed in 1948, stating India's objectives for the development and use of atomic energy for civilian and peaceful purposes. A Department of Atomic Energy was created in 1954 along with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, which began to focus on developing indigenous capacity and knowledge in the area of nuclear technology.

Both Nehru and Bhabha publicly campaigned for nuclear disarmament. However, they also realized that India could not give up entirely the military option, until and unless a commitment to universal disarmament was achieved. As a result, India did not support control mechanisms that were being proposed at the time as these sought to limit India's nuclear potential and decision-making choices in the future. The primary focus continued to be on civilian nuclear technology through the 1950s and into the mid-1960s. In the aftermath of the 1962 border war with China and China's own nuclear tests in October 1964, the calculations began to change, prompting policymakers to discuss the option of nuclear weapons. By 1965, plans and preparations were underway to carry out a subterranean nuclear explosion. However, the deaths of both the prime minister at the time, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Bhabha in 1966, coupled with political instability and economic crisis, meant a postponement of the tests.

About a decade later, India carried out its first underground nuclear test in 1974 under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. The test demonstrated India's capability to conduct a test but due to a reluctance to label itself a nuclear weapon power, it sought to classify the tests as a 'peaceful nuclear explosion'. Observers have pointed out that the 1974 test illustrated the 'tension between India's moral rejection of nuclear weapons and the security imperative of acquiring them' (Mohan 1998: 378). This

conundrum and state of 'nuclear ambiguity' continued through the 1970s and 1980s with Indira Gandhi prevaricating on whether to conduct further tests and to weaponize the programme. In the end, weaponization was ordered by her successor, Rajiv Gandhi, in the late 1980s. A committee that was tasked to examine nuclear weapons issues is reported to have recommended to Rajiv Gandhi that 'India build a minimal deterrent force, guided by a strict doctrine of no-first use and dedicated only to retaliating against a nuclear attack in India' (Perkovich 1999: 274). Ambiguity, however, continued to prevail, including confusion over when and if India would use nuclear weapons as a response to a nuclear attack (Sundaram & Ramana 2018: 155).

The tests of 1998 were a shock to the non-proliferation regime and implied a major turnaround in India's policy on nuclear weapons. An explanation for why India ultimately moved towards *overt* nuclearization in the late 1990s lies less with the individuals at the helm and more with the international context, namely the changes that were taking place in the international regime controlling nuclear weapons.² The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) had entered into force in 1970, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), a multilateral treaty banning all nuclear tests, for both civilian and military purposes, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 September 1996. As required by the 1970 NPT, following a period of 25 years, the parties to the NPT met in May 1995 and agreed to an indefinite extension for the agreement. For India, this meant the continuation of a two-tier system where nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states would be expected to abide by hugely different sets of rules.

Initially, India had in fact supported the CTBT at the time negotiations were initiated. However, on 20 June 1996, India declared its unwillingness to sign the CTBT, stating that because the treaty 'is not conceived as a measure towards universal nuclear disarmament',³ it would not subscribe to it. Prior efforts by Indian diplomats to push for universal nuclear disarmament, for example with the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan, had also received little support from the key powers. In combination, the NPT and CTBT were regarded as unequal and, ultimately, untenable. China was already a nuclear-weapons state at this point and Indian intelligence had gathered evidence that China was aiding Pakistan in a clandestine nuclear programme (Pant 2002).

While the world reacted with sanctions and stark warnings, preparations were underway within India for another surprising twist to India's foreign policy. Two events were to stand out. Firstly, the 'bus diplomacy' epitomized by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee travelling

Box 6.1 Lahore Declaration

On 21 February 1999, a bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan was signed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lahore. The summit was considered a breakthrough given the strained bilateral relations, especially following the 1998 nuclear tests. Prime Minister Vajpayee arrived in Pakistan using a maiden bus service that was meant to link New Delhi and Lahore.

The Lahore agreement included a mutual understanding on the development of nuclear arsenals. Both countries committed to give each other advance notification of ballistic missile flight tests and any accidental and unauthorized use of nuclear weapons.

The Lahore treaty was reported on favourably in Pakistan and India, hailed as a step to normalize bilateral relations. However, it was noted at the time that many members of the Pakistan military did not approve of the treaty. The reception for Vajpayee was boycotted by chiefs of the military, including the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and army chief General Pervez Musharraf. Relations suffered a complete reversal with the outbreak of the Kargil War in May 1999.

by bus from India to Lahore in Pakistan, in February 1999. Secondly, a personal reception by Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Lahore Declaration of 1999, laying out commitments towards the management of the two countries' nuclear arsenals (see [Box 6.1](#)). Both were major breakthroughs in the strained relationship.

The 1999 Kargil War

However, in May 1999 a dramatic U-turn occurred with the outbreak of the Kargil War – the fourth war between India and Pakistan, this time as nuclear-armed states. In a sign of the changing times, the United States intervened to mediate behind the scenes through the office of President Bill Clinton. This in fact set off a process enabling Indo-US rapprochement and helping to build rapport between negotiators on both sides. A book written by Strobe Talbott, then Deputy Secretary of State (1994–2001) and one of the key actors involved in discussions, describes the period

from June 1998 to September 2000 as the most extensive dialogue ever between the United States and India (Talbot 2010). Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh met fourteen times in seven countries on three continents, and successfully managed to defuse the crisis. This helped pave the way for the transformational visit of President Bill Clinton to India in March 2000.

The war of 1999 took place in the Kargil district of Kashmir and along the Line of Control (LoC). It occurred three months after the historical Lahore agreement and was the first India–Pakistan war in 28 years. In a bold manoeuvre, elements of the Pakistan armed forces were training and sending troops in the guise of mujahideen (local insurgents) into territory on the Indian side of the LoC. Within Kashmir, a proxy war had been raging. It began with an outbreak of insurgency in 1987 and growing militancy in the region through the activation of various routes of infiltration. Alarmed by the steps taken by the civilian government to normalize relations with India before resolving outstanding conflicts, the aim was twofold: firstly, to occupy the high-altitude areas of Kargil, which the Indian Army vacated for the winter. Secondly, to interdict a key highway connecting Leh (in Ladakh) with Srinagar in Kashmir. The calculation was that this would force Indian troops to vacate the claimed Siachen Glacier area, giving Pakistan a vantage point.

India's strong and yet restrained reaction – unlike previous wars in 1965 and 1971, the Indian Army and Air Force did not cross the international frontier and invade Pakistani territory or airspace – and US pressure on Pakistan foiled the plans of the authors of the Kargil War. Within Pakistan, a tussle of power between the civilian leader Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and head of the armed forces General Pervez Musharraf culminated in a *coup d'état* on 13 October 1999. Musharraf took over as President in 2001, placing Nawaz Sharif under house arrest and initiating criminal proceedings against him.

Strategic stability in South Asia

The timing of the war, so soon after the 1998 nuclear tests and a very recent peace initiative, raised serious questions about the stability of India–Pakistan relations. This has led to a vibrant academic discussion about the impact of nuclear weapons on regional security in the case of South Asia (Ganguly 2008; Kapur 2005). This is known as the stability/instability paradox where nuclear weapons at a strategic level may produce stability but can also instigate instability at lower levels of conflict.

The presumption is that if this is the case, levels of violence can be managed and contained as was the case during the Cold War. However, the prognosis is based on the Cold War experience of the two nuclear superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, which were separated by more than 8,000 km. The same logic and dynamics may not be applicable in South Asia where India and Pakistan share an unstable border and deep cultural, interregional connections.

According to some scholars, South Asia suffers from a situation of profound instability. At the strategic level, nuclear escalation is a real possibility but rather than acting as a deterrent, it has emboldened, in this case Pakistan, to launch limited conventional attacks on India. As one author concludes, 'Thus a significant degree of instability at the strategic level, which Cold War logic predicts should discourage lower-level violence, has promoted tactical instability on the subcontinent' (Kapur 2005: 151).

Another question that has been raised is how a significant peace initiative between India and Pakistan was possible under the watch of the BJP, a Hindu nationalist party? Although the Kargil War demonstrated the fragility of any such efforts, it nevertheless revealed the willingness of the government to take a significant step and risk losing voter support, with moves like Vajpayee's bus diplomacy.

Perceptions of Vajpayee and the evaluations of his foreign policy vary. However, three legacies stand out: (1) the bomb as a symbol of power became accepted Indian policy; (2) the opening up towards Pakistan taken by a Hindu nationalist government; and (3) the resolve to continue with a global economic orientation, as pursued by the previous government. In retrospect, the Vajpayee government is an excellent example of the impact that individual leadership can have on policy, and the moderating effect which the holding of an office can have on policy. The Lahore Declaration, unlike the Simla Agreement, while still using the language of bilateralism to regional conflict, explicitly recognized Kashmir as an 'issue' and recommended a composite integrated dialogue, confidence-building measures (see Box 6.2) and a joint resolve to combat terrorism. The Congress-led coalition government that succeeded the NDA in 2004 continued most of these policies.

The Kargil War also generated momentum for a review of the country's national security system, which had not undergone much reform since independence in 1947. The government set up a Kargil Review Committee on 29 July 1999 tasked with reviewing the events leading up to Kargil and with making recommendations for the future. A report (Kargil Committee 2000),⁴ was tabled in February 2000 and

Box 6.2 Confidence-building measures (CBMs)

Confidence-building measures (CBMs) are the collective or unilateral action of states aimed at increasing trust and reducing tensions between countries in a particular area of concern. CBMs can take the form of military, diplomatic, economic and cultural measures. For India and Pakistan, CBMs have had a long and ambiguous place in bilateral negotiations and agreements. They took on particular importance in the wake of the 1998 nuclear tests and in what subsequently came to be known as the Composite Dialogue between them. Standing agreements between the two countries include non-attack of nuclear facilities (1988); pre-notification of military exercises (1991) and ballistic missile flight tests (2005); non-violation of airspace (1991); non-harassment of diplomatic personnel (1992); and crisis communication hotlines (1971 and 1989), among others.

Efforts were made to use CBMs in the form of improved people-to-people contact, such as the Srinagar–Muzaffarabad bus service for public travel and a truck service for trade. Other bus routes have been explored. Another important measure under consideration has been the establishment of meeting points across the LoC for divided families of Kashmir. Most recently, in 2019 India and Pakistan signed a landmark agreement to open the historic ‘Kartarpur Corridor’ to allow Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit the holy Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.

CBMs also exist between India and China. For example, the norm of territorial integrity is referenced in three key agreements signed between the two countries: the 1993 Agreement on Peace and Tranquility along the Border; a 1996 agreement on confidence-building measures and the 2005 Protocol. These agreements sought to prevent dangerous military activities, including preventing the opening of fire within 2 km of the Line of Actual Control.

identified several intelligence lapses in part due to a lack of coordination among the different agencies: the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), Intelligence Bureau and military intelligence collection just before the war. The committee suggested a ‘thorough review of the national security system in its entirety’. Specific recommendations included the

creation of a full-time National Security Advisor and closer integration of the armed forces across the three services as well as greater involvement in policymaking.

Conclusion

The decision to 'go nuclear' under the watch of the BJP raises one of the most intriguing questions about India's foreign policy. Why did India, long-time advocate of nuclear disarmament, turn into a candidate for nuclear status and power? Answering the question takes us back to Jawaharlal Nehru who initiated India's nuclear programme, and which began in 1945 under the stewardship of Homi J. Bhabha. Given an institutional shape in 1948 with the establishment of the Atomic Energy Commission, the country opened its first two civilian nuclear reactors in 1956 and 1960. China's nuclear tests of 1964 caused anxiety, especially in the aftermath of the 1962 border war debacle, but the internal leadership struggles at the time eclipsed decisions regarding nuclearization.⁵ Nonetheless, it can be argued that from the start, there was a dual nuclear strategy, with a nuclear energy and weapons programme underway (Abraham 1998; Perkovich 2001). Furthermore, the fact that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remained frozen in its two-tier structure of nuclear 'haves' and nuclear 'have-nots' meant that many decision-makers in India began to question the Indian policy on nuclear disarmament.

In 1974, India tested a 'peaceful nuclear device'. This triggered an embargo on India, heavily impacting the further development of nuclear research and industry. To circumvent some of the restrictions, a nuclear doctrine of 'recessed deterrence' came into vogue. This meant the nuclear warheads would remain separate from their delivery systems, and the nuclear weapons themselves would be either semi-assembled or completely unassembled during peacetime. At the time of the 1998 tests, India once again faced international embargos, including the reaction of Japan, which cut off its substantial overseas development aid to India. However, by this point, the 1991 economic reforms had transformed India into an attractive market for international investments and businesses. This, combined with India's active cooperation in the global war on terror, plus a much more effective campaign led by Indian diplomats, accelerated the partial lifting of trade embargos.

If the question of who benefitted from the nuclear tests is asked, one answer lies in the massive electoral victory for the BJP-led National

Democratic Alliance in the general elections of 1999 (the alliance won 303 seats out of the 543 seats in Lok Sabha). At the international level, while India was criticized for fanning a regional arms race and international sanctions were widely imposed, President Clinton's ground-breaking March 2000 visit (the first by a US president in 22 years) helped to lift the two years of US sanctions. This provided a cue for others (like Japan) to follow suit and re-engage with India. During President Clinton's visit, an effort was made to get India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (one which the United States itself had not ratified); India, however, was able to resist this pressure. Bill Clinton's visit of 2000 was regarded as a big success for India (Malone et al. 2015: 1064). It has been described as part of an overarching process leading towards the *de-hyphenation* of US–Pakistan and US–India relations, that is, no longer viewing the two bilateral relationships as inextricably interlinked.⁶

It can be argued, therefore, that there were many reasons and intentions behind the Indian government's 1998 decision to conduct nuclear tests. These included the acquisition of status and prestige, enhancing security as well as grasping a window of opportunity to act before it was too late. The decisions of 1998 need to be seen as a particular moment in time, involving key actors and political contingencies, but also as the result of a longer-term process of nuclearization. Scholars have approached the discussion of India's nuclear programme in several ways. Some used a 'historical narrative' (Chakma 2005: 190) to highlight critical junctures when strategic factors shaped decision-making and choices. Some authors have used critical constructivism to analyse the discourse surrounding policies of nuclear securitization (Das 2008). Others analysed the path-dependency effect, caused by institutional dynamics and decision-making in the past (Kampani 2014).

In the following chapters, we will raise a similar methodological question of how to study change and continuity in foreign policy. On the one hand, due recognition must be given to 'breakthrough' agreements, 'watershed' moments and 'turning points' in specific areas of statecraft and diplomacy. It is undeniable that each of these rests upon the acquired experience, knowledge and practices of the past. These have been refracted through individual personality, the intersubjectivity of perceptions and the contingency effects of politics. In [Part 1](#) of this book, we focused on the role of specific leaders – how they responded to specific foreign policy challenges and opportunities and shaped vital debates and decisions. This provides the basis for [Part 2](#), which takes a more diachronic approach, examining the development of crucial bilateral relationships in a post-Cold War world and in the wake of India's nuclear

tests and economic reforms. We examine the transformation of Indo-US relations ([Chapter 7](#)); relations with China and Russia ([Chapter 8](#)); the challenges for India as a regional power within the context of South Asia ([Chapter 9](#)); and moving beyond to other core regions ([Chapter 10](#)).

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Notes

1. For a discussion, see Basrur (2001).
2. For a detailed discussion, see Mistry (1998).
3. Statement by Ambassador Arundhati Ghose at the Conference on Disarmament Plenary, 20 June 1996. This statement is quoted in Ghose (1997: 255).
4. The report was made public, with some sections blanked out, and without appendices.
5. For a detailed timeline of nuclearization and related developments, see Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control (2018).
6. For a discussion of this transition, see Tellis (2008).

7

Major shifts in Indo-US relations: from ambivalence to engagement

During the Cold War, the US perception of India was framed mainly by US policymakers who found India's non-alignment an irritating form of posturing, compounded by pro-Soviet leanings. The two countries were often described as 'estranged democracies' (Chaudhuri 2014; Gould & Ganguly 2019; Kux 1994; Limaye 1993; McMahon 1994). Pakistan, on the other hand, grew to be described as America's most allied ally in Asia, portrayed as the lynchpin of US alliances in South, Central and East Asia.

Initially, India's position may have been more nuanced. In Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's own words, he had noted, 'All the evils of a purely political democracy are evident in the United States; the evils of the lack of political democracy are present in the U.S.S.R.' (Nehru 1985b: 562–3). However, the tilt away from the US gathered steam as the Cold War's ideological divisions hardened during the 1950s. On 25 February 1954, President Eisenhower announced that the United States had decided to give military assistance to Pakistan for the purpose of 'strengthening the defensive capabilities of the Middle East'. By May that year, the two countries had formally signed a Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement. Pakistan was a founding member of two US-led military and defence alliances, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), formed in 1954, and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), originally known as the Baghdad Pact, established in 1955. For its part, the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles characterized neutralism as 'an obsolete conception, and, except under very exceptional circumstances ... an immoral and short-sighted concept'.¹

During the 1960s, India's dealings with the Soviet Union deepened to include military relations, while the relationship with the United States focused mainly on economic aid and in particular the

need for food shipments. Following the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, the USSR had emerged as a peacebroker through the Tashkent Agreement as well as establishing the USSR as India's chief supplier of arms. Until the early 1970s, however, India's criticism of the United States and its foreign policy, in particular its actions in Vietnam, remained constrained. By the end of 1971, this had dramatically changed.² Indo-US relations had reached their nadir,³ and during the years of 1971–7 India–USSR relations developed rapidly. This was enabled and compounded by two major Cold War geopolitical developments, the Sino-Soviet split and Sino-American rapprochement. The announcement in July by President Nixon of a planned historic visit to China (one that had been facilitated by Pakistan), the India–USSR Friendship Treaty of August 1971 and the India–Pakistan war in the winter of 1971 must be seen in this context. The US role during the 1971 war and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 reinforced the distance between India and the United States. The latter event further entrenched Pakistan's importance within the US foreign policymaking machinery and establishment.

The end of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan by 1989 led to diminishing US interest in South Asia. However, moves towards economic liberalization in India began to offer lucrative opportunities for US companies looking for a market and trade partner. The 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests by India had led to outright condemnation by the US and an automatic imposition of wide-ranging economic sanctions. However, the Indian government very quickly was engaged in an outreach effort to convince foreign governments of India's reliability and responsibility as a nuclear power. A conversation initiated soon after, by then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot, is credited with having provided the basis for reconciling relations in the aftermath of the tests.⁴

What has been the driving force behind this relationship, especially since the end of the Cold War? Numerous analyses of Indo-US relations refer to a *transformation* of the relationship (Mishra 2005). Relations have improved on multiple levels, including economic, military and defence, strategic coordination, and the levels of institutionalized interactions.⁵ Several explanations are offered, including the influence of structural dynamics and the role of key actors that can induce a substantive change in a country's overall foreign policy direction. Given that India was a close ally of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, it has required significant changes in legislation and mentality (on both sides) to reach a state of transformation. Several 'turning points' in the relationship can be

identified,⁶ including: (1) the visit of President Clinton to India in 2000; (2) the 2005 breakthrough civil nuclear deal with the United States; and (3) in 2016, the designation of India as a ‘major defence partner’ to a point where today the discussion revolves around putting India officially on a par with US NATO allies.

The rest of this chapter considers the role of key actors (individuals and lobby groups) and the gradual shift within India towards engagement with the United States, and the parallel tracks of improved economic and security relations. Examining two phases, under the BJP-led government of 1999–2004 and the first Congress-led UPA government from 2004–8, the chapter draws out the role of individual leaders, personalities, public opinion and politics. The conclusion examines India–US relations in more recent times, which has been described as a ‘global *strategic partnership based on shared democratic values* and increasing convergence of interests on bilateral, regional and global issues’ [emphasis added] (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2017).

From Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Manmohan Singh: building a domestic consensus

Following the historic visit of US President Bill Clinton to India in 2000 and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s visit to the United States in the same year, an intense period of negotiations over India’s nuclear status was initiated. However, the 9/11 attacks broke the momentum. US attention once again focused on Afghanistan, the Middle East and Pakistan as a ‘frontline state’ in the war on terror. India’s ambivalence towards the United States was manifest during the invasion of Iraq on 20 March 2003. The Indian Parliament passed a unanimous resolution condemning the military action and plan for regime change:

Reflecting national sentiment, this House (Lok Sabha) deplores the military action by the coalition forces led by the USA against a sovereign Iraq. This military action, with a view to changing the Government of Iraq, is unacceptable. The resultant suffering of the innocent people of Iraq, especially women and children, is a matter of grave human dimension [*sic*]. This action is without the specific sanction of the UN Security Council and is not in conformity with the UN Charter. The House, therefore, expresses profound anguish and deep sympathy for the people of Iraq. (Lok Sabha 2003)

Prime Minister Vajpayee and the National Democratic Alliance government were criticized for giving in to the anti-US lobby and reversing a positive trend in India–US relations. Furthermore, as the United States prepared for a post-invasion reconstruction of occupied Iraq, the pressure on India to contribute ground troops began to mount. Over three months, negotiations continued with various senior leaders meeting in the United States, Europe and India. Amid mounting speculation and widespread discussions among strategic analysts and scholars, it was finally conveyed officially on 14 July 2003 that India would not send troops. In a statement released, carefully chosen wording avoided the use of negative phrases and did not appear as if India was directly turning down the US request. Instead, it read: ‘Were there to be an explicit UN mandate for the purpose, the Government of India could consider the deployment of our troops in Iraq’ (Archive, Press Information Bureau, Government of India 2003).

The decision taken by Prime Minister Vajpayee, described as the all-party consensus, has been analysed by various scholars. Chaudhuri (2014), who interviewed several people involved on the Indian and US sides, argues that Vajpayee made up his mind early on against sending troops. Vajpayee reportedly stuck to his decision despite growing pressure from the United States and against the advice of key members within his cabinet. This particular decision is an opportunity to examine the role that individual leadership, personality and public opinion can play in politics (Blarel & Pardesi 2012). In many ways, both the political class and popular opinion were not yet ready to support a move that would have signalled a significant turnaround in India’s foreign policy. During a trip to Europe in June 2003, Vajpayee raised five questions at a press conference held at Lausanne in Switzerland.

1. What are Indian forces being asked for?
2. Would they be tasked with maintenance of law and order, or in the event of any potential revolt, would they be required to use force?
3. How long would our troops be required to stay?
4. What is the roadmap for Iraq?
5. Under whose command would our troops function? (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2003)

It could be argued, especially in hindsight and given the legal uncertainties surrounding the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, that deciding *not* to get involved without a UN mandate was an extremely pragmatic one. Furthermore, it allowed for a consensus to develop, across parties, on the

extent and limits to which India was prepared to engage with the United States. Furthermore, India's 2003 equivocation does not seem to have derailed India–US talks entirely. By January 2004, both sides were willing to sign a declaration titled the 'Next Steps in Strategic Partnership'. This initiative set out ways to expand cooperation in three specific areas, namely civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programmes and high-technology trade, and laid out a framework for future talks. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (see [Box 7.1](#)) subsequently took this up under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government that won the general elections of May 2004. Marking the extent to which a consensus had evolved about Indo-US relations, there was a strong thread of policy continuity despite regime change.

Box 7.1 Manmohan Singh

Manmohan Singh was born on 26 September 1932 in West Punjab, in what is today Pakistan. A long and illustrious career in government administration included influential positions as Chief Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, governor of the Reserve Bank of India, and advisor to the Prime Minister and Finance Minister in 1991 during the crucial phase of economic reforms. On 22 May 2004, Manmohan Singh was sworn in as the country's 14th prime minister and first Sikh to hold the position and the first prime minister not to have won a seat in the general elections. Instead, he was appointed based on being a member of the upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha, whose members are elected indirectly by the elected members of the State Assemblies; his high credentials as a government bureaucrat and expert; as well as being a close confidant of Sonia Gandhi, the leader at the time of the Indian National Congress party. Although Sonia Gandhi had been the face of the Indian National Congress' 2004 electoral campaign, she sought to nominate Manmohan Singh to head the coalition government that was formed.

Manmohan Singh was closely associated with the economic liberalization agenda of the early 1990s during his position as Minister of Finance. However, his time as prime minister (over two terms in 2004 and 2009) did not entail a second round of deeper economic reforms. Instead, his legacy is primarily associated with the landmark India–US nuclear deal. In the run-up to the historic

agreement, Manmohan Singh chose to risk a no-confidence vote in the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government that he was heading following the withdrawal of four Left parties from the coalition to protest against the nuclear deal. The trust vote in 2008, a year before the UPA faced Lok Sabha elections, was one of the most dramatic in Parliament's history. Not only did it lead to the signing of the India–US nuclear deal, but it also enabled the UPA to go on and win the next general elections with an improved tally. Manmohan Singh went on to become the first prime minister from outside the Nehru–Gandhi family to complete two consecutive terms in office.

The 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal: its significance and aftermath

In July 2005, a summit between the two leaders, Manmohan Singh and George W. Bush, resulted in a detailed joint statement that resolved ‘to transform the relationship between their countries and establish a global partnership’ (The White House, President George W. Bush 2005). A significant part of the statement dealt with India’s civilian nuclear energy programme and the commitments on either side to further cooperation between the two countries in this area. Crucially, it mentioned that the President would ‘seek agreement from Congress to adjust US laws and policies, and the United States will work with friends and allies to adjust international regimes to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation and trade with India’. For its part, India agreed to assume the same responsibilities and practices as other leading countries with advanced nuclear technology. These were specified as:

identifying and separating civilian and military nuclear facilities and programs in a phased manner and filing a declaration regarding its civilians facilities with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); taking a decision to place voluntarily its civilian nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards; signing and adhering to an Additional Protocol with respect to civilian nuclear facilities; continuing India’s unilateral moratorium nuclear testing; working with the United States for the conclusion of a multilateral Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty; refraining from transfer of enrichment and

reprocessing technologies to states that do not have them and supporting international efforts to limit their spread; and ensuring that the necessary steps have been taken to secure nuclear materials and technology through comprehensive export control legislation and through harmonization and adherence to Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines. (The White House, President George W. Bush 2005)

On 2 March 2006, President Bush and Prime Minister Singh signed a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in New Delhi, which laid the groundwork in the form of separating India's civilian nuclear programme from the military programme. The agreement was regarded as a significant further step moving forward towards convincing the US Congress and Indian Parliament on the merits of a deal with the United States. It is generally regarded that the nuclear deal was a key turning point in India-US relations. In the United States, a powerful and dominant lobby had entrenched itself and was against cooperation with India on the basis that India had not signed, and did not intend to sign, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Cooperation with India would thus encourage other countries to develop nuclear weapons. At the same time, in India, there was significant opposition and scepticism regarding cooperation with the United States given the Cold War experience and, most importantly, the United States' ongoing military relationship with Pakistan.⁷ As a result, influential domestic constituencies on both sides had to be won over.

Manoeuvring domestic constraints

President Bush's National Security Advisor (and later Secretary of State) Condoleezza Rice, who came into office in 2001, is often credited for her determination to cement a strong partnership with India. Together with the help of her foreign policy strategist, Under Secretary of State Nick Burns, she sought to convince sceptics about the merits of collaborating with a rising India. As a foreign policy advisor to the Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush in 2000, she wrote in an important policy-related publication that the United States 'should pay closer attention to India's role in the regional balance. There is a strong tendency conceptually to connect India with Pakistan and to think only of Kashmir or the nuclear competition between the two states. But India is an element in China's calculation, and it should be in America's, too. India is not a great power yet, but it has the potential to emerge as one' (Rice 2000: 45–62).

On 18 July 2005, India's prime minister, Manmohan Singh, visited Washington, and in a joint statement with George W. Bush, India and the United States agreed to enter into a civil nuclear agreement. This was a landmark agreement given its implicit recognition of India as a nuclear weapons power. Alongside this, the Next Steps in Strategic Partnerships (NSSP), which aimed at increasing cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programmes, high-technology trade and missile defence, had also been completed. At its core was the issue of nuclear energy and an emphasis on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. India, while not joining the NPT, was to gain the same benefits and advantages as other leading nuclear powers. In return, India committed to a series of actions including the separation of civilian and military nuclear facilities, placing these civilian nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, and refraining from the transfer of enrichment and reprocessing technologies to states that do not have them.

Within India, the terms of the deal were heavily criticized, and the prime minister was also uncertain as to whether the agreement would get the support it needed in Parliament.⁸ Heading a coalition government at the time, led by the Congress Party, Manmohan Singh's government required the support of allies from the Left, including communist parties. In what was, at the time, a remarkable move, and a demonstration of its commitment to the Indo-US Nuclear Framework Agreement, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government of India risked its very survival in a trust vote on 22 July 2008. The Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front had withdrawn support from the government, over India approaching the IAEA for the Indo-US nuclear deal. Manmohan Singh opted for a floor test to prove his government still commanded a majority. After two days of debate, the UPA government won the motion with 275 votes in favour, and 256 against. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), while a supporter of India-US ties, decided to vote and campaign against the government's deal, pledging that if voted into power, it would negotiate a better one.

In the United States, Congressional approval for the US-India Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy (123 Agreement) was granted in October 2008. This was an agreement which was billed as helping to 'transform the partnership between the world's oldest and the world's largest democracy' (Rice 2006). However, although a certain momentum ensued and continued under the Democrat administration of President Barak Obama, by the early 2010s a level of scepticism had crept back in. This was partly due to

discrepancies that had emerged over nuclear reactor contracts. US firms had been expecting lucrative deals in the aftermath of the US–India civil nuclear deal. However, problems emerged over legislation for a nuclear liability regime.

After many twists and turns, in August 2010 the Indian Parliament passed a bill that held nuclear suppliers (rather than operators of the plant) liable for accidents and damages.⁹ This appeared contrary to international norms and made it financially too risky for US firms to invest in India’s nuclear sector. This impediment continued to be a significant policy issue and was regularly discussed in US–India strategic talks. Following the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, in which the BJP received a big electoral mandate, a fresh start appeared possible (Hudson 2014). However, a first hurdle had to be cleared in the form of a visa ban on Narendra Modi, put in place by the US government in 2005 in response to the riots that took place in Gujarat in 2002 that left 2,000, mostly Muslims, dead.¹⁰ Multiple high-level investigations into Modi’s alleged role did not result in formal charges. However, as Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat at the time, human rights groups and other analysts accused him of being complicit in the anti-Muslim violence, of showing gross dereliction of duty in his response. As a result, the Bush Administration had denied Modi a visa in 2005, and the US government subsequently had no official contact with Modi until he met with the US ambassador to India in late 2013.¹¹

During their first meeting in September 2014, Prime Minister Modi and President Obama committed to resolve the liability issue and to reset ties between the countries. The aim was to broaden cooperation in various fields including defence, intelligence, counter-terrorism, Afghanistan, space exploration and science (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary 2014). A compromise on the liability matter was announced during Obama’s visit to India in January 2015 when he became the first US president to be the chief guest at India’s Republic Day parade (Haidar 2015a).

A personal rapport between Presidents Obama and Modi injected new energy into the relationship. In 2014, they published a joint editorial in the *Washington Post* titled ‘Forward together we go – “*chalein saath saath*”’, defining the path forward for a twenty-first-century partnership and evoking several famous people who had inspired movements of resistance and empowerment in both countries. Modi’s September 2014 visit also marked the first of his addresses to the Indian-American diaspora, appealing directly to them in a Madison Square speech to contribute to the development and betterment of India.

India and the United States: a 'natural partnership'?

Scholars have tended to agree that although the pace has been slow, there has been an undeniable and potentially irreversible convergence in policies and strategic objectives between India and the United States (Mistry 2016). The sentiment in recent times echoes Vajpayee's vision and depiction of the relationship as a 'natural partnership'. It is interesting to note that there has been continued investment in the bilateral relationship by both a Republican (under President Bush) and Democrat (President Obama) administration. In India too, the change from a Congress-led coalition to a BJP government did not alter the path of convergence. This implies that in both countries, the idea of a partnership has become a bipartisan one. Following President Trump's inauguration in 2017 and Prime Minister Modi's re-election in 2019, the relationship has further strengthened, due to both domestic as well as external causes.

On 21 June 2019, the US Department of State issued the following statement:

The U.S.-India partnership is founded on a shared commitment to freedom, democratic principles, equal treatment of all citizens, human rights, and the rule of law. The United States and India have shared interests in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity. The United States supports India's emergence as a leading global power and vital partner in efforts to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is a region of peace, stability, and growing prosperity. The strong people-to-people ties between our countries, reflected in a four million-strong Indian-American diaspora, are a tremendous source of strength for the partnership. (United States Department of State 2021)

A few months later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeared together with President Donald Trump at a public event titled, 'Howdy Modi', addressing a 50,000-strong crowd of Indian nationals in Houston, Texas, during his state visit to the United States. This was the largest-ever gathering with a foreign political leader in the United States and was reciprocated during Trump's official visit to India on 24 February 2020 when he addressed an event titled, 'Namaste Trump' in Ahmedabad, Modi's home state of Gujarat, to a gathering of 100,000 people. The events were aimed at respective home audiences, as well as the Indian diaspora, conveying the level of bonhomie between the two leaders and closeness in

the bilateral relationship. Key elements of the visit included economic as well as military deals, including a US\$3 billion defence deal.

Central to the 'new' strategic convergence between India and the United States has been the emergence of the 'Indo-Pacific' as a region. While exact definitions of this region vary, the Indo-Pacific has become a signifier, marking the existence of an arena of unified, strategic significance as well as galvanizing a cohort of countries that share similar priorities and preferences. India's position as a maritime power within the Indian Ocean would appear as the obvious partner for the United States. However, for India in particular, the process towards overt alignment with the US view and interpretation of the Indo-Pacific has been a gradual, tempered process. This is compounded by the fact that there are important differences in the official definitions and depictions of the Indo-Pacific used by both countries. India's view of the Indo-Pacific includes the entire Indian Ocean, stretching up to the eastern seaboard of the African continent, while the US official demarcation stops at the western coastline of India.¹² While official statements have been made on the US side that suggest an extended US view of the Indo-Pacific this is constrained by the institutional and organizational divisions within the United States armed forces. Thus, the formerly known United States Pacific Command was renamed to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) on 30 May 2018. The USINDOPACOM's Area of Responsibility encompasses the Pacific Ocean and parts of the Indian Ocean, east and south of the line from the India/Pakistan coastal border. The rest of the Indian Ocean is divided between the US Central Command and the US Africa Command (see [Box 7.2](#)).

Box 7.2 Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean is the third largest of the world's five oceans. It is bounded by Iran, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to the north; the Malay Peninsula, the Sunda Islands of Indonesia and Australia to the east; the Southern Ocean to the south; and Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to the west. At the southern tip of the African continent, it joins the Atlantic Ocean, and to the east and southeast the Indian Ocean merges with the Pacific Ocean. As a result, the Indian Ocean provides livelihoods and resources for a vast littoral as well as being home to some of the world's busiest shipping and trade routes, including the transportation of energy resources for major economies in the world. There are four critically important

waterways and access points: the Suez Canal in Egypt; the Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; Bal el Mandeb between the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa; and the Strait of Malacca between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

Among the indigenous navies of the region possessing major surface and sub-surface equipment, India has the dominant navy. It has of late positioned itself as a net-security provider. All the major powers seek to have bases or access to bases within the Indian Ocean. Diego Garcia is, and has been since the 1960s, the United States' major geostrategic and logistics support base in the Indian Ocean. China set up its first and only overseas military base in the eastern African state of Djibouti in 2017, located near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait linking the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

Relations between the United States and India have nevertheless reached an unprecedented level of institutional coordination and engagement, particularly in the areas of defence and military cooperation. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was signed in 2002. It was followed in 2012 by the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), which laid out a broad strategic understanding between the two countries. Within a much faster period came the renewal of the 'Framework for India-US Defence Relationship' in June 2015, setting in motion a process to sign key military accords with the United States. These included the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) of 2016 and the Communications Compatibility And Security Agreement (COMCASA) of 2018.

LEMOA allows Indian and US defence forces to use each other's facilities for logistical support, supplies and services during authorized port visits, joint exercises, joint training and humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. The COMCASA agreement was signed on the sidelines of the first 2+2 dialogue, another elevation in terms of annual ministerial meetings. With this agreement, India gained access to procuring specialized encrypted communications equipment for US-origin military platforms, in order to enable greater communications interoperability between the militaries of India and the United States.¹³ A third foundational accord, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), was signed in October 2020, enabling the sharing of sensitive and real-time geospatial intelligence gathered from satellites and other space-based platforms.

India's relationship with the United States has evolved dramatically over the past decade, moving rapidly towards formalization of the Quad, a grouping comprising India, the United States, Japan and Australia, drawn together by their concerns over an assertive China. India's balancing strategies have included closer engagement with other maritime powers, namely Japan (for an overview, see Horimoto 2019) and France (see Mohan & Baruah 2018). In 2020, India had reciprocal military logistics arrangements with the United States, France, South Korea, Australia and Singapore. Furthermore, India has strengthened its naval capabilities to project power eastwards. This includes upgrading military-related infrastructure on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, an archipelago of over 572 islands in the Bay of Bengal. Stretching out towards Indonesia, the islands lie at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca, the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This is one of the world's busiest shipping routes, with more than 90% of crude oil flows transiting through the Strait and into the South China Sea.

Conclusion

The case of India–US bilateral relations illustrates the role that some actors as well as systemic and structural forces play in shaping diplomacy. In terms of determining the strength or depth of a bilateral relationship, it is useful to consider a whole range of indicators and how they interact with each other. For instance, bilateral trade between India and the United States has been limited. Exports from the United States to India in 2020 totalled US\$ 33 billion, constituting 2% of US exports (World Bank 2021). Exports from India to the United States, on the other hand, totalled US\$ 51 billion, constituting 16% of Indian exports – followed by exports to the United Arab Emirates (9%), China (5%) and Hong Kong (4%) (World Bank 2021). Efforts to deepen trade, investment and market access opportunities have been a significant driver of the relationship. Notably, defence trade has increased dramatically, putting the United States among India's largest arms suppliers.

Despite the difficulties discussed in the chapter, Indo-US relations have reached a strong and stable basis, a fulcrum around which the relationship continues to evolve. One of the factors that has underpinned and pushed the relationship forward is the presence of two million Indian Americans and the lobbying that has taken place to improve and foster closer relations.¹⁴ Furthermore, strategic cooperation between India and the United States has accelerated recently due to a growing and shared

perceived threat emanating from China's actions. A widely monitored indicator of growing alignment was whether India would invite Australia, a fourth member of the informal Quad grouping, to join its 2020 Malabar naval exercises. The annual naval exercises already involve India, Japan and the United States and including Australia would mark a significant step towards a formalization of security relations between members of the Quad. After much speculation, India ultimately did invite Australia and in March 2021 an inaugural virtual summit was held with leaders of the Quad member states.

Recent provocations, such as the violent border standoff between India and China in 2020 and the stark asymmetry in power capabilities between India and China, have provided further justification within Indian policy circles on the need for closer alignment with the United States. Several developments stand out for their contribution to a remarkable turnaround in the US–India relationship. Firstly, the long-term, gradual investment in institutional arrangements at the bilateral level. Secondly, the range of policies making it easier for Americans of Indian origin to travel, work, invest in and live in India. Thirdly, the celebration of high-profile Indian Americans in both countries as well as key individuals in leadership positions and policymaking circles. Finally, the immense and deep geopolitical implications of a powerful China on India's borders has emerged as a major foreign policy challenge for India's policymakers and planners. China's rank and status globally and its presence across the region of South Asia and the expanse of the Indian Ocean have grown in tandem. Added to this are the dynamics of a complex relationship between Russia and China, with important implications for India's strategic calculations, a topic to which the [next chapter](#) turns.

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Notes

1. *Time* (1956) Foreign Relations: Correcting the Slip. 18 June. <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,862210,00.html>. Accessed 2-Sep-23.
2. For a discussion of India's Vietnam policy, see Thakur (1979).
3. For an illustration of President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's views on India, see the declassified Nixon tapes: Richard Nixon Museum and Library (1971/2021a); Richard Nixon Museum and Library (1971/2021b); Richard Nixon Museum and Library (1971/2021c) Richard Nixon Museum and Library (1971/2021d); Richard Nixon Museum and Library (1971/2021e).
4. For details on how this came about and how the conversation continued, see the memoir by Talbott (2010).
5. For a visual depiction conveying the change, see the *Brookings* article by Madan (2014).
6. For a timeline detailing key events in the relationship, see Albert (2017).
7. US aid to Pakistan continued to be high through the 2000s. See Center for Global Development (2013).
8. In her memoirs, Condoleezza Rice (2011) details the last-minute manoeuvres to get the deal through.
9. Domestic reasons for this include the sitting government's dependence on coalition partners who were opposed to or not convinced by the provisions of the nuclear deal, as well as the bitter memories of how safety and liability issues were badly mismanaged during a major industrial disaster in Bhopal involving a US chemical company.
10. The US State Department had taken the 2005 action under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, enabling the barring of entry to foreign government officials found to be complicit in severe violations of religious freedom. See the discussion in Goel (2014).
11. For a discussion of different US views on Narendra Modi and relations with India at the time, see Congressional Research Service (2014).
12. For an Indian definition and depiction of the Indo-Pacific, see Indian Navy (2015). For a US perspective, see The Department of Defense, United States of America (2019).
13. For further analysis of these agreements, see Singh (2018).
14. For more details, see Sharma (2016).

8

India's relations with China and Russia

China and Russia are two countries with which India has deep historical ties. Leftist politics and socialism have both played key roles in Indian domestic politics,¹ though communism has not been a platform upon which to base bilateral or trilateral relations with the Soviet Union, later Russia, or the People's Republic of China (PRC). Nevertheless, and in contrast with the former colonial powers or the United States, perceived by many to have pursued a neocolonial agenda during the Cold War, there has been a sense of solidarity and brotherhood, expressed at different times, with China and Russia. Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War and China–Russia relations in contemporary times have also had important implications for India. Sino-Soviet relations have shifted over time. While the USSR may have initially been the ‘big brother’ when the PRC was created in 1949, by March 1969 the Sino-Soviet border clash signalled the militarization of a long-standing conflict between the two ideologically aligned neighbours. However, once the Soviet Union unravelled, and the Russian Federation emerged from under the remains and China surged ahead in global prominence, a new relationship emerged between the two. The war in Ukraine has led to an even closer relationship between China and Russia. These developments have deep implications for India's relations with both countries. We examine relations with China and Russia in one chapter as there is a triangular dynamic that links India with both.

The chapter has two main parts, examining recent developments in Sino-Indian and Indo-Russian relations. The border dispute between India and China retains its central place in the framing of Sino-Indian relations. Although efforts during the 1990s sought to go beyond the border, accepting the status quo and turning attention to an improved economic relationship, the territorial disagreement remains

alive and highly salient. In fact, the border problem is both unresolved and a potential trigger for conflict between the two giant Asian neighbours. As a result, this chapter examines the landmark agreement of September 1993, which pledged to 'maintain peace and tranquillity' on the border and explores the reasons why relations have recently plummeted. Placed in the context of an essential but skewed economic relationship and a growing strategic rivalry that is playing out within South Asia and across the Indian Ocean, the chapter argues that the border dispute is both a symptom of rivalry and a cause of endemic tensions between the two countries. Strong diplomatic relations between India and the Soviet Union have their origins in the 1950s when India's decision-making elite looked to the successful industrialization of the USSR as an economic model. Furthermore, India was among the first major countries to use Soviet military hardware and to demonstrate their effectiveness. This marked the beginning of an important defence relationship, which continues today. This chapter's second half examines how the past has continued to shape the contours of what is a critical geopolitical relationship. Moscow and New Delhi have supported each other in their respective international politics and share several interests, for instance, in developing vast connectivity projects linking Europe to Asia.²

Soon after India's independence in 1947, formal relations with both communist countries were established, and the leadership looked to the Soviet Union as an economic model, based on planning, and China as a fellow Asian power. During the Cold War, however, following the 1962 border war, Sino-Indian diplomatic relations were broken off for 15 years, while official relations grew closer with the Soviet Union in the 1970s and '80s. In the aftermath of independence, India strongly supported the entry of China – an ally at the time of the USSR – into the global arena. The Sino-Soviet split of the 1970s and China's growing relationship with the United States led to a severance of relations.

In 1971, India, in the face of growing tension in relations with Pakistan, signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, which for many US policymakers confirmed the view that India was no longer a non-aligned country. However, for others, the decision was not based on ideology but rather on expediency. At the time, a severe India–Pakistan crisis was brewing (leading eventually to a third war between the neighbours), and a significant realignment of Cold War calculations was taking place with US President Nixon's 'opening to China' (including his visit to China in 1972), facilitated by the US ally Pakistan. For India, the growing nexus between Pakistan and China (and

with the further addition of US support) was alarming, further raising the possibility of a 'two-front war'.³ Seen in this light, a closer relationship with the USSR was an act of balancing and deterrence.⁴

However, of late a new form of triangular dynamics underpin Chinese–Russian–Indian relations. This was evident with Russia acting as an unofficial mediator between India and China during the 2020 border tensions and also within the institutional settings of the BRICS (see [Chapter 10](#)) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, of which all three are members. At the same time, Sino-Russian relations are deepening, especially in the wake of the 2022 Russian 'special military operation' in Ukraine and a more united Western position emerging against China's power in the South China Sea. For India, triangular dynamics have become more intricate – in large part owing to India's growing role in global politics and as an economic player. On the one hand, relations with Russia continue to be important due to long-standing arms transfers. The relationship has even deepened and diversified, with substantial increases in oil and fertiliser imports. On the other hand, India is collaborating and cooperating far more extensively with the United States and with European partners in several areas such as climate change, trade and security. At the same time, India's relationship with China, always complicated by the territorial dispute and regional strategic competition, has hardened, especially following the lethal border skirmishes in summer 2020. As a result, India has to balance multiple concerns and calculations relating to the regional balance of power, key economic interests, national security concerns and evolving great power politics.

India has become a significant economic and security actor. This has implications in terms of geopolitical opportunities and challenges for Indian policymakers. Core strategic challenges include effectively balancing a powerful and assertive China and preservation of the relationship with Russia at a time when India–US relations are evolving into a close partnership. The chapter concludes by considering the formation and dynamics of different yet interconnected strategic triangles involving India, China, Russia and the United States.⁵

Sino-Indian relations

Since the border war of 1962 when India–China relations sank to their lowest point and following the restoration of formal diplomatic relations in 1976, the volume of trade, high-level visits and tourism has

been growing between the two countries.⁶ The most significant spurt in improved economic relations has occurred during the past two decades. In 1990, the bilateral trade value between the two neighbouring giants stood at a mere US\$ 190 million. By 2018, this had reached an all-time high of US\$ 106.8 billion – with US\$ 16.4 billion being exports from India to China and US\$ 90.4 billion being exports from China to India (World Integrated Trade Solution, World Bank 2020). The latest figures for 2022 are US\$ 19 billion of exports from India to China and US\$ 59 billion of exports from China to India (World Integrated Trade Solution, World Bank 2023). This has also led to the most significant single trade deficit India has with any trading partner and has become a central talking point among analysts and policymakers. Pressures began to grow on policymakers to improve their negotiations with China on the issue of greater market access for sectors such as Indian pharmaceuticals, IT services, engineering and agricultural products.

In addition to this, there is a widening asymmetry in military terms, with China's defence budget in 2020 calculated to be four times that of India's (Reyar 2020). The uneven material dimensions of the relationship are compounded by the lingering lack of trust and a severe mismatch in threat perceptions. Hence, the fact that China holds territory that the government of India claims as part of India is a constant source of tensions and a potential flashpoint for conflict. China's support of Pakistan, an 'all-weather friend', exacerbates this even further and the various infrastructure and big-ticket projects, pursued under the umbrella of the Belt and Road Initiative, have added to China's influence in the region of South Asia.

Once upon a time, there had been talk of China and India acting together to jointly buttress the global economy and ushering in the 'Asian Century'.⁷ Today it is their strategic calculations that dominate discussions. In May 2020, the two countries were engaged in a violent standoff at the Himalayan heights, in the region of Ladakh, resulting in casualties on both sides and a long-running impasse. The festering territorial dispute over Arunachal Pradesh; frequent standoffs and skirmishes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC); China's policy of questioning and challenging India's policies on Jammu and Kashmir; and blocking of India's membership into the Nuclear Suppliers Group have revealed the tenuous foundation upon which contemporary India–China relations rest.⁸ It is essential to consider who makes India's 'China policy' to understand the change that has occurred in terms of expectations and perceptions.⁹ To what extent have commercial stakeholders and military strategists been involved in the process of policymaking? Do institutionalized forums

exist where the two neighbours can raise concerns and discuss disputes? To what extent is the bilateral relationship embedded within multilateral frameworks? Does trade continue to be the central driver of relations despite emerging geopolitical considerations?

Economic drivers: trade as the basis for peace and cooperation?

In 1988, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China was considered a breakthrough, coming at a point when the economies of both countries were on a positive trajectory. At the time, China was already entering its second decade of economic reforms, initiated and implemented under the guidance of the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Discussions about the ‘opening up’ of the Indian economy usually focus on the 1991 balance of payments crisis and the country’s subsequent liberalization policies. This resulted in India’s era of economic growth, which occurred about two decades after that of China, a time lag that has had ongoing repercussions and continues to frame the relationship in terms of India’s effort to ‘catch up’ with China. [Figure 8.1](#) shows how the two economies compare over time in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) growth and GDP per capita growth.

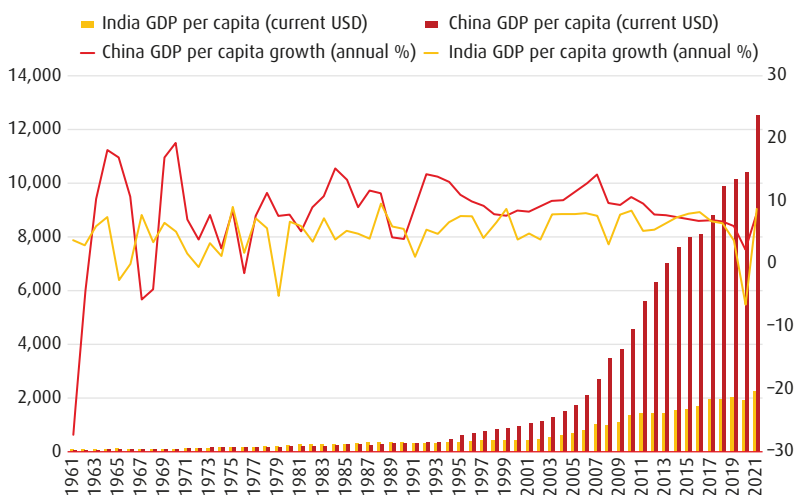


Figure 8.1 Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (current US\$) and GDP per capita growth (annual %): China and India, 1961–2021

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023c)

China’s GDP per capita is much higher than that of India. The latest GDP growth figures from 2021 are 8.1% for China and 8.7% for India – that is if we take them at face value; see [Figure 8.1](#). Net inflows from FDI, which played an important role in China’s economic success story, have increased steadily since the 1990s and took off in the early 2010s. FDI flows into China have dipped for some years recently, but are now (with the latest data from 2022) at an all-time high of US\$ 334 billion – compared to US\$ 45 billion for India ([World Bank 2023b](#)) (see [Figure 8.2](#)). However, the Trump administration-initiated trade war with China, increased policy discussions in Western countries regarding security concerns when deploying Chinese technology and the first signs of relocations of production sites supplying Western companies might change the FDI picture in the long run.

FDI has not played a significant role in China’s economic strategy towards India, with estimated investments of less than US\$ 400 million over the period 2004–14. While India’s regulatory barriers are cited as an explanation, it is also argued that other South Asian countries have offered more attractive conditions, yielding more significant political dividends because of Chinese investments. However, since 2014, China’s FDI has grown five-fold and its cumulative investment in India exceeded \$8 billion in December 2019 ([Raghavan 2020](#)). To protect Indian companies hit by the economic shock induced by the Covid-19 lockdown, India has revised its FDI policy to prevent ‘opportunistic takeovers’. While the policy is clearly aimed at potential takeovers by Chinese companies, it applies to all entities ‘of a country that shares a land border with India’ ([Government of India 2020](#)), which from now

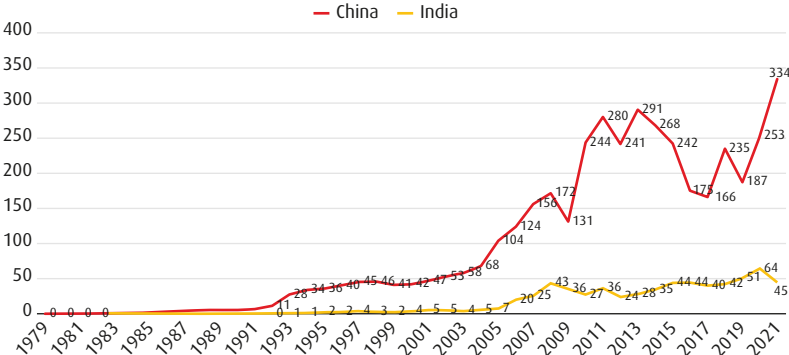


Figure 8.2 Foreign direct investment (FDI), net inflows (balance of payments, current US\$): China and India, 1979–2021 (US\$ billion)

Source: Graph, author. Data source, [World Bank \(2023b\)](#)

on must first obtain the approval of the Indian government. China has condemned this new FDI policy as a violation of international trade principles (Raghavan 2020).

An analysis of the economic complexity of the Chinese and Indian economies shows that there is still a vast gap regarding product exports (see Table 8.1). However, India holds its own when it comes to service exports, through the country's highly competitive back office and IT sector. Here the gap is far smaller with US\$ 208 billion service exports by China and US\$ 119 billion by India, ranked second and sixth globally. Yet overall, the economies still play in different leagues when it comes to GDP per capita (current US\$) with US\$ 12,556 in China (world rank 70) and US\$ 2,257 in India (153) (World Bank 2023d) (see Table 8.1).

One of the main challenges for Indian policymakers has been the realization that correcting the deficit is especially tricky given the composition of India's exports to China. These have been dominated by primary and resource-based products (see Table 8.2). In 2010, Amit Mitra,

Table 8.1 Economic complexity in 2020: China and India (US\$, world rank in brackets)

	China	India
Economic complexity	0.96 [28]	0.56 [40]
Product exports	\$2.65 trillion [1]	\$0.284 trillion [18]
Exports per capita	\$1,880 [89]	\$206 [178]
Product imports	\$1.55 trillion [2]	\$0.372 trillion [12]
Imports per capita	\$1,100 [138]	\$269 [192]
Service exports	\$208 billion [6]	\$101 billion [13]
Service imports	\$378 billion [2]	\$103 billion [13]
Gross domestic product (current US\$)	\$17.7 trillion [2]	\$3.2 trillion [5]
Gross domestic product per capita (current US\$)	\$12,556 [70]	\$2,257 [153]

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) (2023a)

Table 8.2 Top exports by product type: China and India (US\$), 2020 data

Rank	China	India
1	Broadcasting equipment \$223 billion	Refined petroleum \$25.3 billion
2	Computers \$156 billion	Packaged medicaments \$17.8 billion
3	Integrated circuits \$120 billion	Diamonds \$16 billion
4	Office machine parts \$86.8 billion	Rice \$8.2 billion
5	Other cloth articles \$60.7 billion	Jewellery \$7.6 billion

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) (2023a)

Secretary-General of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), warned:

Not only is India's exports to China less than one-third of China's exports to India, hidden in the statistic is the quantum of raw material exports from India like iron ore which at one time, smacked of neo-colonial trade relations. Obviously, such large imbalances in trade and the skewed components in the trade basket are not sustainable. They are not conducive to a deepening economic friendship and needs urgent correction.¹⁰

China's top five exports in 2018 were telecommunication, IT, office hardware and cloth. India's top five exports in the same year included pharmaceutical products – together with refined petroleum, diamonds, jewellery and rice. China is India's second largest export destination worth US\$ 18.5 billion (in 2020) – after the United States with US\$ 50 billion. India, on the other hand, is China's ninth top export destination with US\$ 75.5 billion (2018) – after the United States, Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, South Korea, Vietnam, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (see Table 8.3).

The election of Narendra Modi in 2014 initially led to a positive outlook for Sino-Indian relations. Prime Minister Modi, as Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, had travelled to China on official business four times, intending to stimulate economic engagement. Within a month of taking office, China sent its Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, as a special envoy of President Xi Jinping, to chart out a future course for relations. The objective of the visit was to emphasize economic relations as the priority,

Table 8.3 Top export destinations for China and India (US\$, % of total exports in brackets), 2020 data

Rank	China	India
1	United States \$438 billion (16.5%)	United States \$50 billion (17.5%)
2	Hong Kong \$262 billion (9.9%)	China \$18.5 billion (6.5%)
3	Japan \$151 billion (5.7%)	United Arab Emirates \$18.1 billion (6.4%)
4	Germany \$112 billion (4.2%)	Hong Kong \$9.2 billion (3.2%)
5	South Korea \$110 billion (4.1%)	Germany \$8.8 billion (3.1%)

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) (2023a)

and to display the complementarity of the two economies with China as a global manufacturer and India as a primary service provider.¹¹ One way forward, touted at the time, was that in addition to increasing India's exports to China, an increase in Chinese FDI would contribute towards a correction of the trade imbalance.

In September 2014, during a state visit to India, President Xi Jinping announced that China would invest US\$ 20 billion over the next five years. For China, the opportunities to invest, particularly in infrastructure projects, were highly attractive.¹² However, despite these efforts, the trade deficit continued to increase, with Indian exports failing to grow in value while Chinese imports increased. To an extent, this stems from a structural imbalance where India continues to export low-end, basic raw materials while becoming a dumping ground for Chinese finished products. For example, in 2020, India's total exports to China were worth US\$ 18.5 billion – with iron ore worth US\$ 3.4 billion, constituting 18.5% of the total value, followed by refined petroleum (5.9%), cyclic hydrocarbons (a solvent, chemical raw material; 5.7%) and hot rolled iron (4.2%) (The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) 2023c). In the same year, 2020, India imported a total of US\$ 64.2 billion worth of Chinese products – primarily technology products and parts such as computers worth US\$ 3.9 billion (6.1% of the total import value), telephones (5.8%), broadcasting equipment (4.2%), integrated circuits (3%) and semiconductor devices (2.5%) (OEC 2023b).

For most Indians, Chinese products are the most visible representation and evidence of China's presence in India. When tensions arise,

the response has been to target and call for a boycott of Chinese products. In most recent times, the trend has moved in the opposite direction with more voices of caution about gaining further access to the Chinese market, with claims that this could turn into another relationship of dependency.

Since Prime Minister Modi took office, there have been many high-profile visits by Indian leaders to China, many of them aimed at finding a balanced economic relationship between India and China. Prime Minister Modi has met Chinese President Xi Jinping at least 15 times (see [Table 8.4](#)). However, the data suggest that these visits have not yielded conspicuous results in terms of promoting Indian interests, both in the economic as well as security spheres.

Table 8.4 Meetings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping

2014 Jul	First meeting at the 6th BRICS summit in Brazil.
2014 Sep	Xi Jinping first official visit to India.
2015 May	Modi visits China.
2016 Jun	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
2016 Sep	G20 leaders' summit at Hangzhou, China.
2016 Oct	BRICS summit in Goa, India.
2017 Jun	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Astana, Kazakhstan; first meeting after India boycotted the high-profile Belt and Road Forum in May 2017 in Beijing.
2017 Jul	Informal Modi–Xi discussion at G20 summit in Hamburg, a day after China ruled out a formal meeting due to border standoff in the Sikkim sector.
2017 Sep	9th BRICS Summit and the Dialogue of Emerging Market and Developing Countries, in Xiamen, China.
2018 Apr	First informal China–India summit in Wuhan, China.
2018 Jun	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Qingdao, China.
2018 Jul	BRICS summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.
2018 Nov	G20 summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
2019 Jun	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
2019 Oct	Second informal China–India summit in Chennai, India.
2019 Nov	11th BRICS summit in Brasilia, Brazil.
2022 Sep	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit. First in-person meeting since the pandemic. Prime Minister Modi meets President Putin and declares that now is 'not an era of war'.
2022 Nov	G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia. Informal meeting at dinner.

Confidence-building mechanisms and embedded irritants in the relationship

The institutional mechanisms and formats established to manage the bilateral relationship have been through several key developments in the 1990s and 2000s. The visit of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to China in 1993, regarded as a significant milestone in Sino-Indian relations, led to a vital border agreement. Indian and Chinese troops pulled back from the Sumdorong Chu Valley, which had become a flashpoint in 1987. Chinese President Jiang Zemin paid a reciprocal visit to India in 1996, the first by a Chinese head of state, leading to another agreement on confidence building between the two countries.¹³ The 1998 nuclear tests led to a temporary setback, primarily due to statements by India's then Defence Minister, George Fernandes, that India's nuclear arsenal was aimed not principally at Pakistan but rather at China (*The New York Times* 1998). [Table 8.5](#) signposts the complex evolution of relations.

Table 8.5 India–China, 1993–2023: a critical chronology

Year	Type of international relations	Event
1993	Diplomacy Border	Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao visits China and signs an agreement on the border.
1995	Border	India and China agree to pull back their troops on the Sumdorong Chu Valley in the Eastern sector – the site of a standoff between India and China in 1986–7.
1996	Diplomacy	Chinese President Jiang Zemin visits India, the first visit to India by a head of state from China. Agreement on Confidence Building.
1998	Conflict	India conducts three nuclear tests in the Pokhran range in Rajasthan. China strongly condemns them. China urges India and Pakistan to give up their nuclear ambitions and sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
1999	Diplomacy	Indian 'bus diplomacy' towards Pakistan.
2000	Economy Cooperation	India and China sign a bilateral trade agreement in Beijing to facilitate China's early entry into the WTO. India and China initiate the first-ever bilateral security dialogue in Beijing on global and regional issues of mutual interest.

(continued)

Table 8.5 (Cont.)

Year	Type of international relations	Event
2001	Conflict	China urges both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and engage in dialogue to resolve their differences.
2005	Economy Border	Increase in Sino-Indian cooperation in high-tech industries. India and China sign an agreement aimed at resolving disputes over their Himalayan border.
2006	Border	China and India reopen Nathu La Pass. The dispute over Arunachal Pradesh.
2009	Economy	Bilateral trade surpasses US\$ 50 billion, and China becomes India's largest trading partner in goods.
2010	Military Diplomacy	India cancels defence exchanges with China after Beijing refuses to permit a top Indian Army officer a visa because he 'controlled' the disputed area of Jammu and Kashmir. Official visit by the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to India, invited by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
2011	Military	China and India restore defence cooperation at the BRICS summit in China.
2012	Military	India tests an Agni-V missile, which can carry a nuclear warhead to Beijing. China condemns the test.
2013	Border Diplomacy Border	A standoff between Chinese and Indian troops at the Line of Actual Control between Jammu and Kashmir's Ladakh region and Aksai Chin was defused after three weeks. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visits India – focus on diplomatic cooperation, trade and border dispute solutions. Indian President Pranab Mukherjee visits Arunachal Pradesh – an Indian state in the northeast, which China claims as 'South Tibet' and calls the area an 'integral and important part of India'. China condemns his visit and speech.
2014	Border	Chinese troops reportedly entered 2 km inside the Line of Actual Control in the Chumar sector.

Table 8.5 (Cont.)

Year	Type of international relations	Event
2017	Border	Doklam standoff: Chinese troops started to extend an existing road southward in Doklam, a territory that is claimed by China as well as Bhutan, India's ally. Bhutan and India condemned this as a security threat. 270 Indian troops entered Doklam to stop the construction work. After one month, China and India agreed to disengage.
2018	Cooperation	China and India agreed to coordinate their development programmes in Afghanistan.
2019	Diplomacy	Chinese President Xi Jinping meets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Tamil Nadu, India for a second informal meeting.
2020	Diplomacy	For the 70th anniversary of China–India diplomatic ties, 70 events are planned in celebration.
2020	Border	Violent clashes in Eastern Ladakh and Sikkim leading to fatalities on either side.
2021–2	Border	Border skirmishes near Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
2020–2	Diplomacy Border	17 rounds of India–China corps commander-level meetings to discuss disengagement.

Nonetheless, economic ties improved, paving the way for an interlinking to take place between Indian and Chinese markets. In 2003 and 2005, two high-level visits were made by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao, leading to crucial documents that were to lay the foundation for the future development of relations. A Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation signed on 23 June 2003 stated that ‘the common interests of the two sides outweigh their differences’, and that they would ‘fully utilize the substantial potential and opportunities for deepening mutually beneficial cooperation’. Furthermore, both sides agreed to pursue a ‘long-term constructive and cooperative partnership’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2003). Foreign ministers would hold annual consultations, and there would be personnel exchanges between ministries, parliaments, political parties and the militaries of both countries. The

Declaration also marks the first public acknowledgement of the need for an eventual solution to the territorial dispute based on political considerations. A mechanism of Special Representatives' Meetings was set up to explore the framework for a boundary settlement.

Another significant step taken in 2003 was the decision to reopen border trade through the Nathu La Pass, as part of the confidence-building measures. Closed since the 1962 war, Nathu La was also the location where the last major military skirmish between India and China took place in September 1967. The pass located in Sikkim has been a historically important link between India and Tibet. In 1975, Sikkim merged with India to become the 22nd state of the Indian Union, which at the time China did not recognize. The decision to open the pass in 2003 indicated a change in China's position and a willingness to recognize Sikkim's status. In 2005 during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit, an official map presented clearly indicated Sikkim as an integral part of India. In 2006, the pass was opened, but the high expectations for a flourishing trade route have not been met. Furthermore, there have continued to be tensions and skirmishes in this area, most recently in May 2020 (Haidar & Peri 2020).

The bilateral agreements of 2003 and 2005 are widely regarded as essential keystones in the move towards normalizing and deepening relations between India and China. Concerted efforts at the time sought to find areas where cooperation would be mutually desirable, such as energy security. In November 2006, President Hu Jintao visited India, presenting a ten-pronged strategy that comprised the following elements:

1. Ensuring the comprehensive development of bilateral relations;
2. Strengthening institutional linkages and dialogue mechanisms;
3. Consolidating commercial and economic exchanges;
4. Expanding all-round mutually beneficial cooperation;
5. Instilling mutual trust and confidence through defence cooperation;
6. Seeking an early settlement of outstanding issues;
7. Promoting trans-border connectivity and cooperation;
8. Boosting cooperation in science and technology;
9. Revitalizing cultural ties and nurturing people-to-people exchanges;
10. Expanding cooperation on the regional and international stage.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2006)

A fundamental problem continues to be that the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is not demarcated. This is unlike the Line of Control (LoC) between India and Pakistan. Both sides, therefore, send patrols up to the points which each *perceives* to be the LAC in some areas, often resulting in border transgressions from both sides. In 2009, Indian media reports about Chinese ‘incursions’ helped to raise tensions further. Indian Foreign Secretary at the time, Nirupama Rao, stated that:

The correct term is transgression and not incursion. There are transgressions from time to time when Chinese troops come over to our side of the line of actual control, and occasionally we are told that we cross into their side’. She said such issues had to be discussed rationally. ‘There is no point in trying to raise the temperature and to accentuate tension. (*Hindustan Times* 2011)

In 2012, during the 15th round of the Special Representatives’ Meeting, an Agreement on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India–China Border Affairs was signed. This was aimed at monitoring cases of border transgression and to provide a mechanism through which to address such cases. Overall, it has been pointed out that the mechanisms have worked to keep the border disputes from boiling over into more general conflict. However, the lack of political will to reach a resolution means the border will continue to be a major source of mutual distrust and runs the risk of entrenching divergent perceptions and positions on either side.

Despite efforts to enhance communication, build trust and extend relations through trade, two major irritants have continually resurfaced and threaten to become critical flashpoints in the relationship. These are the issue of Tibet, the presence of the Tibetan government-in-exile in India and the long-established and deepening strategic partnership between China and Pakistan.

Tibet has been a significant irritant in India–China relations and has implications for the border as well. Since 1959, the Tibetan-government-in-exile has been headquartered in Dharamshala, India. Over the decades, led by the incumbent Dalai Lama and the community of exiled Tibetans living in India, the issue of Tibet has been successfully internationalized and kept alive. Furthermore, there is the issue of reincarnation for the next Dalai Lama, which adds an element of unpredictability to current and future Sino-Indian relations. Traditionally, the successor to the Dalai Lama is identified by senior monastic disciples, based on spiritual signs and visions. In 2011, however, the Chinese foreign ministry declared that

only the government in Beijing would be able to appoint the next Dalai Lama. China has accused India of using Tibet and the Dalai Lama to damage diplomatic ties. The Chinese government regards the Dalai Lama as an anti-national separatist. A formal protest was lodged with the Indian government when the Dalai Lama visited the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh in 2017 (a territory that is regarded as disputed by China) and where Tawang is located, home to India's largest Buddhist monastery.

A strategic rivalry

In 2001, the US political scientist and long-time India observer Stephen Cohen predicted that any improvements in Sino-Indian relations would give way to a more competitive relationship.

As its own requirements for Middle Eastern oil draw it into the Indian Ocean, China could also emerge as a naval rival to India. The realists in Delhi see China continuing its strategy of encircling and counterbalancing India, preventing it from achieving its rightful dominance of the Subcontinent. This next decade is seen as a transition period, when India must cope with expanding Chinese power, achieve a working relationship with the Americans, and cautiously use each to balance the other's military, economic, and strategic influence. India's new balancing act combines appeasement of China on the issues of Tibet and Taiwan with the pursuit of improved ties with China's other potential balancers, especially Vietnam and Russia. (Cohen 2001: 56)

Prescient at the time, many of these predictions have come true. China has expanded its naval capacities with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) capable of carrying out ambitious and active expeditionary missions in the 'far seas' (see [Chapter 13](#)). In 2017, China established its first offshore military base in Djibouti, located in the Horn of Africa. This provided a significant upgrade in terms of capacity to monitor the Indian Navy's movements in the Indian Ocean. China's showpiece project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, has further cemented relations between the two countries. It provides the Chinese Navy with another access point to the Indian Ocean, through the Arabian Sea.

While Cohen in 2001 had foretold that a policy of appeasement would continue in combination with various forms of balancing, recent discussions revolve around the need for India to move towards a more overt strategy of deterrence. This includes enhancing India's ability

to inflict severe costs far exceeding the benefits of offensive action by China (Joshi & Mukherjee 2019). India has been preparing for this with improved infrastructure along the border and the acquisition of strategic military equipment (for example, Apache attack helicopters, Rafale fighter aircraft and Chinook heavy-lift helicopters). This logic seems to have been behind the decision to deploy the Indian Navy's frontline warship in the South China Sea following the Galwan Valley clash on 15 June 2020 in Eastern Ladakh. While these moves certainly increase the stakes, it remains to be seen whether this will effectively deter China, especially along the LAC, and whether it will lead to greater militarization of the Indian Ocean region.

The unprecedented speed and scale of China's rise,¹⁴ together with the transformation of India (see Ayres 2018 for an overview) into one of the world's fastest-growing economies, have set the stage for a terrific contest between neighbours (both Asian and populous countries) and between two systems (democracy versus authoritarian). Furthermore, this is taking shape in the context of uncertain global politics and poses several challenges for the world's incumbent superpower, the United States. This combination of factors means that, unlike during the Cold War, India and South Asia are moving centre stage. The stage looks set for an emerging geopolitical contest, taking place across the Eurasian landmass and Indo-Pacific. In both geographical arenas, India's relationship with Russia plays an important role.

Indo-Russian relations

During the Cold War, Russia (then the Soviet Union) became one of India's main sources of support, especially as a permanent member on the UN Security Council with veto-wielding power. The USSR came to India's support at critical moments and emerged as one of the country's leading arms suppliers. The Soviet Union supported the Indian position on several sensitive issues including Kashmir and India–Pakistan disputes. During the 1950s and 1960s, the USSR blocked votes in Security Council resolutions put forward by the Western bloc, which tended to favour Pakistan, a Cold War ally at the time. In 1971, India and the USSR signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, which gave the impression of a close alliance. However, there were essential divergences on issues such as the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan during the late 1970s. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 caught India's policymakers by surprise, placing them in a difficult position. On

the one hand, it was argued the invasion was unwarranted; on the other hand, India could not afford to voice disapproval publicly and risk losing Soviet support. Pakistan at the time was mobilizing Islamic forces within Afghanistan and US arms supplies were flowing into the country to combat the Soviets. This created a dangerous security situation.¹⁵

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War challenged and questioned the *raison d'être* of the bilateral relationship. Russia began to look to the West, and India was forced to explore new opportunities, coinciding with its economic crises of the early 1990s. Economic activity between the two countries declined, while cultural, scientific and technological collaborations and military–technical cooperation were much reduced. At the time, Russia was keen to improve relations with the United States and sought to distance itself from the legacy of Soviet foreign policy, including the special relationship with India. In November 1991, Moscow voted for a Pakistan-sponsored UN resolution calling for the establishment of a South Asian nuclear-free zone. Russia urged India to support the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and in 1993 suggested withholding formerly decided obligations to provide India with the necessary technology to manufacture engines for its rocket programme.

A special and privileged strategic partnership

President Boris Yeltsin's visit to India in January 1993 injected new momentum into the relationship. Yeltsin spoke of Moscow's new 'purposeful Eastern policy'. Calling for a move away from a 'pro-Western emphasis', Yeltsin described his country as a 'Euro-Asian power' (Hazarika 1993). During the trip, the leaders signed a new Friendship Treaty – dropping a vital security clause promising that either side would come to the assistance of the other in the case of armed conflict – a significant change from the 1971 treaty. The visit also served to resolve economic differences and to confirm Mr Yeltsin's unequivocal support for New Delhi's position on Kashmir.

The 2000 Declaration on Strategic Partnership elevated ties to a new level – only the second such agreement signed by India, the first being with France in 1997 (for relations with the European Union and European states, see [Chapter 10](#)). By this time, India's economy was on a strong trajectory, and improved relations with the United States were paving the way towards greater recognition of its status as a Non-Proliferation Treaty nuclear power. This allowed for greater

convergence on issues such as international terrorism, especially in the wake of 9/11 and the global war on terror. In January 2004, Russia and India signed several weapons and technology contracts, including a US\$ 1.5 billion deal to upgrade Russia's *Admiral Gorshkov* aircraft carrier for delivery to India by 2008. In 2010, a further upgrade pushed relations to the level of a 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership' and initiated a regular annual summit between the Russian president and Indian prime minister.

For Indian policymakers, among the key objectives since the end of the Cold War have been the need to expand partnerships across the world, diversify its arms and weapons imports and improve the indigenous manufacturing capacity. Overall, Russia remained India's top supplier of defence items during 2017–21 (see [Table 8.8](#)). However, Russia's position as top supplier has been shrinking over time (see [Figure 8.3](#)). The challenge is twofold. Firstly, to break the path dependency of relying on Russian technology and Russian spare parts for arms and weapons systems acquired in the past. Secondly, to negotiate new deals that indigenize defence production and establish joint ventures with foreign defence manufacturers through a 'Make in India' initiative. Given that India was the world's largest importer of arms for the period 2017–21 (see [Table 8.6](#)) and the United States was the world's largest exporter of arms for the same period (see [Table 8.7](#)), this transition has global implications.

Table 8.6 Global arms trade (US\$ million): top 10 recipient countries, 2017–21

Rank	Recipient	2017–21	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
1	India	15,356	4,414	2,813	3,444	1,705	2,980
2	Saudi Arabia	14,946	1,723	2,543	3,485	3,266	3,929
3	Egypt	7,785	1,355	1,323	1,039	1,680	2,388
4	Australia	7,294	1,235	1,657	1,189	1,557	1,656
5	China	6,561	901	870	1,436	2,052	1,302
6	Qatar	6,194	1,767	943	2,199	620	665
7	South Korea	5,643	720	1,292	1,480	1,100	1,052
8	Pakistan	4,069	884	760	669	879	877
9	UAE	3,778	440	534	800	1,151	853
10	Japan	3,591	885	699	911	654	441

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2023)

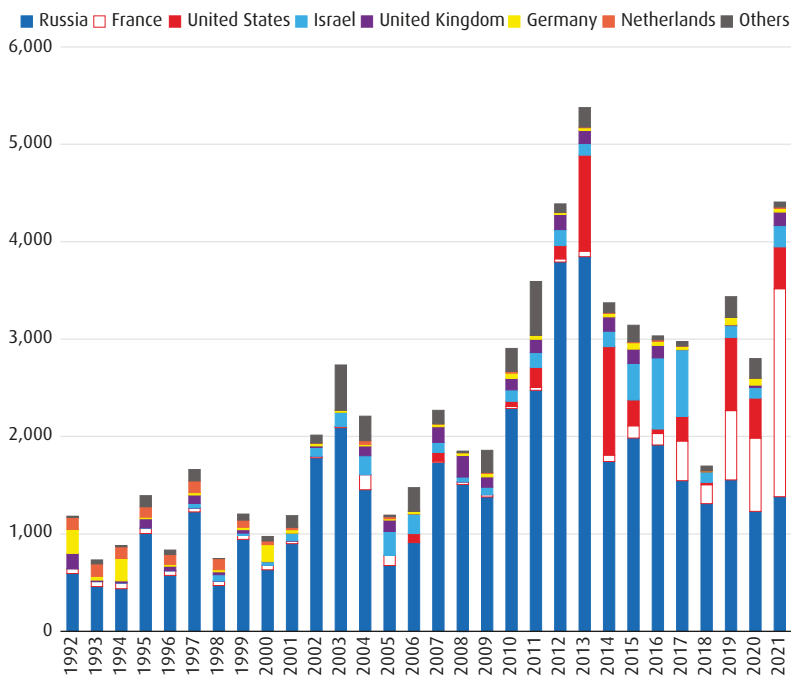


Figure 8.3 Arms exports to India by country, 2011–20, top 9*

* Figures are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) expressed in millions.

Source: Graph, author. Data source, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database; URL: <http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>, data accessed on 10 June 2021.

Table 8.7 Global arms trade (US\$ million): top 10 supplier countries, 2017–21

Rank	Supplier	2017–21	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
1	United States	52,502	10,613	9,233	10,923	9,824	11,909
2	Russia	25,293	2,744	3,686	5,531	7,097	6,234
3	France	14,490	3,954	2,484	3,713	1,996	2,343
4	China	6,270	1,085	775	1,504	1,306	1,601
5	Germany	6,152	914	1,217	1,000	1,073	1,948
6	Italy	4,185	1,717	847	351	496	774
7	United Kingdom	3,992	601	556	957	704	1,173
8	South Korea	3,836	566	778	694	1,056	742
9	Spain	3,398	612	962	303	704	817
10	Israel	3,326	606	400	349	704	1,268

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2023)

Table 8.8 Arms trade: India's imports (US\$ million): top supplier countries, 2017–21

Rank	Supplier country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total 2017–21
1	Russia	1,551	1,322	1,562	1,241	1,392	7,068
2	France	411	192	712	749	2,134	4,198
3	United States	252	23	752	411	425	1,863
4	Israel	688	108	118	108	225	1,247
5	South Korea	0*	26	190	190	26	432
6	Germany	33	5	71	67	36	212
7	United Kingdom	2	4	13	28	137	184
	Others	43	25	26	18	40	152
	Total**	2,980	1,705	3,444	2,813	4,414	15,356

* '0' indicates that the value of deliveries is less than 0.5m.

** Other weapon supplier countries in 2017–21 included South Africa (2017–21 total: US\$ 55 million), Ukraine (ranked 48), Brazil (21), the Netherlands (10), Italy (8), Denmark (5) and Kyrgyzstan (5).

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2023)

Overall, trade with Russia has not been a major determinant of relations. In 2018, Sino-Indian trade reached US\$ 85 billion in volume and Indo-US trade reached US\$ 75 billion while trade with Russia remained at US\$ 11 billion. The two economic sectors that have buttressed the relationship are energy and military trade. Between 2014 and 2018, Russia alone accounted for 54% of India's arms purchases (compared with Israel at 15% and the US at 12%). However, this marked a significant decrease compared to the period of 2001–14 when Russia had a 70% share of the Indian defence market.

During Prime Minister Modi's visit to the United States in 2020, President Trump announced a major arms deal. India became one of the major buyers of US weapons – with US\$ 3.4 billion in 2020 (up from \$6.2 million in fiscal year 2019). Other major buyers of US weapons in 2020 were Taiwan (\$11.8 billion), Poland (\$4.7 billion), Morocco (\$4.5 billion), the United Arab Emirates (\$3.6 billion) and Singapore (\$1.3 billion) (*The Hindu* 2020).

Bilateral naval exercises have also been taking place, for example in the Bay of Bengal in 2018 and a joint force exercise in Vladivostok in 2017. India imports most of its energy needs from the Middle East, but it has been gaining interest in the Russian Far East. The Indian state-owned

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has invested in the oil and gas fields of Sakhalin, and an Indian consortium is present in the Siberian Arctic. Meanwhile Rosneft, the Russian government-controlled energy giant, invested in Indian energy companies, and Russia has been developing nuclear power plants in India.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence as a guest of honour at the fifth Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September 2019 further confirmed the strengthening of bilateral ties and India's interest in the Russian Far East. Together with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, also a guest of honour, a proposal was made for a Russia–India–Japan trilateral mechanism. This marked, at the time, a new development in the evolving geopolitics of Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific and reflected a convergence then arising from each country's respective bilateral relationship with China.¹⁶ The extent, however, to which such a trilateral mechanism would be able to deliver outcomes depends on several factors, including domestic politics in each country, the rapport between leaders and the ability to overcome outstanding bilateral issues.¹⁷

Although there are no outstanding territorial issues between India and Russia (unlike between India and China, between Japan and China and between Russia and Japan), there has been tension over Russia's relationship with Pakistan. In 2014, Pakistan–Russia relations reached a milestone when Moscow lifted its self-imposed arms embargo on Pakistan, eventually exporting Mi-35 assault helicopters to Pakistan despite strong opposition from India. Russia also backed Pakistan's full membership (and India's) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, an important regional organization including China, Russia and the Central Asian states.

An explanation for Russia's overtures towards Pakistan has been the emergence of Russia's new Afghan policy, including a series of diplomatic initiatives at the regional level. Russia started negotiations with the Taliban to regain some of its traditional influence in the region. Russia also began reaching out to Pakistan, and to deepen its partnership with China. For instance, on 27 December 2016, a meeting of representatives from Russia, Pakistan and China met in Moscow for a trilateral summit on Afghanistan. Expanding the format to include India, Moscow launched a structure titled the 'Moscow format' and in February 2017 hosted talks with representatives from China, India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. This was later further expanded to include the five Central Asian states. Russia has since become an essential player in the ongoing peace talks with the Taliban (*The Guardian* 2019). According to analysts, Russian policy is aimed at limiting Western strategic influence across the

broad arc of Syria, Iran and through to the Afghanistan–Pakistan region and Central Asia, a swathe of territory that Moscow refers to as ‘Greater Eurasia’ (Lewis 2020).

Within this evolving picture of strategic developments, especially in the context of Afghanistan where India holds significant interests (see Chapter 9), relations with Russia have assumed additional importance. In May 2018, Prime Minister Modi met President Putin for an informal summit at Sochi. This was the first informal summit format in India–Russia relations, coming just a month after the Wuhan informal summit between Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Wuhan summit did not generate any specific outcome such as a road map for Sino-Indian relations. The Sochi summit, on the other hand, led to a joint statement titled ‘Enduring Partnership in a Changing World’. It entails several concrete steps including: (1) finalizing the contract for the supply of the S400 anti-aircraft weapon system; (2) collaboration between the Indian *NTTI Aayog* and the Russian Ministry of Economic Development;¹⁸ (3) starting talks on a free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and India.

As demonstrated above, India’s relations with Russia are refracted through several evolving and overlapping dynamics, including Russia’s rapprochement with China and Pakistan and India’s deepening relations with the United States. All three major powers (Russia, China and the United States), together with India and its rival, Pakistan, have vested interests in Afghanistan where they have been, at varying points in time, either on the same side or at opposite ends of the negotiating table. Navigating this complex interplay of regional and global geopolitics is a major contemporary challenge for India’s diplomats and policy planners.¹⁹ India’s delicate balancing act in the wake of and in the midst of the war in Ukraine requires manoeuvring between Russia and the NATO-led Western bloc. It has been argued that the state has demonstrated diplomatic capacity on the one hand, following its national interests, while on the other hand continuing to simultaneously have a functional relationship with all the major powers.²⁰

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, the India–China relationship has become both deeper and more acrimonious. Diplomatic relations have become multifaceted, thanks to enhanced economic ties and mutual interests in each other’s markets. Meetings are now held at the highest level. There

has been coordination within regional institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as well as in multilateral settings such as the BRICS grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. International student numbers and tourists have also been on the rise in both countries. At the same time, the long-running boundary dispute has flared up on several occasions including at Depsang in 2013, at Chumar in 2014, a 73-day standoff at Doklam in 2017 and the most recent face-off in 2020 following clashes at multiple points along the border.

While there is a commitment to finding a resolution via diplomacy, the tensions and mistrust have also been increasing. Following the 2020 showdown, the government of India took the unprecedented step of using punitive economic measures against Chinese companies, especially in the technology sector (Bloomberg 2020). There is a growing perception that China seeks to encircle India. It achieves this not only through ties with Pakistan but with other South Asian neighbours as well, and with the perceived aim to hamper India's rise, keeping India's armed forces concentrated on the continental threat and thus distracted from the Indo-Pacific. One example that comes to mind is China's continuous efforts to block India's admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

In contrast, Russia–India relations, which weakened in the 1990s and 2000s, regained momentum at a time when Sino-Indian relations have been waning. Following the standoff in summer 2020 and amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh made it a priority to visit Russia in June to attend the country's giant military parade, marking the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Germany in World War II. On another visit to Moscow in September 2020, Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart met to discuss increasing defence ties and, following India's request, there was a pledge from Russia to follow a policy of 'no arms supply to Pakistan' (*Hindustan Times* 2020).

South Asia is an important component that also features strongly in the calculations framing India's major bilateral relationships. This includes relations with Russia, China and the United States. Indian foreign policy towards the neighbourhood has oscillated between strategies of engagement, disengagement and at various points in time a stated commitment to prioritizing the near neighbourhood. As will be argued in the [next chapter](#), India's power has been constrained by the structure of South Asia's international politics. China's growing presence in and influence within the region, through infrastructure investments and political engagement, is a crucial dynamic factor. Russia has also sought to extend relations with countries in the region, most notably Pakistan and, in the past, Afghanistan. As the war in Ukraine has

reminded the world, hard military force is an instrument that countries are willing to use. Furthermore, the ability to withstand and to engage in warfare requires substantial economic resources and skilful global diplomacy. In the [next chapter](#), we examine India's role in South Asia, a region that has been the site of five wars in the last 75 years,²¹ and where a number of unresolved inter- and intra-state territorial conflicts continue to fester.

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Notes

1. For a discussion of the role played by communism in the 1950s, see Overstreet (1958); Rothermund (1969).
2. For example, the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which consists of land and sea multimodal corridors connecting South Asia to Northern Europe via the Persian Gulf and the Caspian region, which is seen by some as equally groundbreaking as the better-known Belt and Road Initiative. See Contessi (2020).
3. The 'two-front' war scenario continues to be discussed today among military officials and analysts. See, for example, Sareen (2020).
4. See Kapur (1972) for a discussion of how the 1971 treaty acted as a deterrence mechanism.
5. See, for example, a recent book by Madan (2020a) which examines how an India–China–US triangle has shaped Indian foreign policy calculations.
6. For an overview of different facets of the relationship, see Bajpai et al. (2020).
7. In the first decade of the twenty-first century there was talk of *Chindia*, a 'loose economic entente' between China and India, with both pooling and using their resources for mutual benefit. This gained some traction among Indian policymakers. For example, see Ramesh and Talbott (2005), co-authored by the Indian politician Jairam Ramesh.

8. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multilateral export control regime, a group of nuclear supplier countries that seek to prevent nuclear proliferation by controlling the export of materials, equipment and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons. India has sought membership since 2016 and has received backing from a majority of the 48 members.
9. Two recently published books by 'insiders' provide some insights into the calculations and process of Indian foreign policy, also specifically vis-à-vis China: Saran (2017) and Menon (2016).
10. Amit Mitra (2010), Secretary-General of the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), in *India-China Ties: 60 Years 60 Thoughts*, cited in Lu (2016:30).
11. See media interview with Foreign Minister Wang Yi: Krishnan (2014).
12. Three months before Prime Minister Modi took office, a Chinese working group submitted a five-year trade and economic planning cooperation plan, offering to finance as much as 30% of the US\$ 1 trillion targeted investments in infrastructure during the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012–17) to the tune of about US\$ 300 billion. Seth and Seth Sharma (2020).
13. These two agreements are: Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity Along the LAC (1993); Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC (1996).
14. It took less than 70 years for China to emerge from isolation and become one of the world's greatest economic powers.
15. See a 2006 interview with I. K. Gujral, former Ambassador to the USSR, Minister of External Affairs and Prime Minister for insights into the situation: Gujral (2006).
16. For an overview of Russia–China relations, see Stent (2020), and for an overview of Japan–China relations, see Vogel (2019).
17. For a discussion of drivers and obstacles in contemporary Russia–Japan relations, see Kireeva (2019).
18. *NITI Aayog* is Hindi for 'Policy Commission' and an abbreviation for the 'National Institution for Transforming India', a policy think-tank of the government of India and successor to the Planning Commission.
19. For a portrayal of India's interests in the Central Asian states and into neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran, see Wani (2020).
20. Experts comment that New Delhi's 'steady and time-tested relationship' with Moscow continue to be good, but the long-term prognosis is complicated, especially by China; see Rajagopalan (2022). India's External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar's visit to Russia to co-chair the meeting of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) (November 2022) was keenly watched, especially in the West, to gauge the evolution of Indo-Russian relations. One of the issues of particular interest was India's purchase of oil from Russia. Responding to a question during the press briefing, Jaishankar stated that 'there is a stress on the energy markets ... created by a combination of factors. But as the world's third largest consumer of oil and gas, a consumer where the levels of income are not very high, it is our fundamental obligation to ensure that the Indian consumer has the best possible access, on the most advantageous terms, to international markets'; he continued by saying that 'the India-Russia relationship has worked to our advantage. So, if it works to my advantage, I would like to keep that going.' Cited in Rajagopalan (2022).
21. Where the definition of war is any violent conflict with at least 1,000 combatants killed per year; see Correlates of War (2023b).

9

India and South Asia

As a region, South Asia officially comprises eight nation-states – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The eight states are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC – see [Box 9.1](#)).¹ Usage of the term South Asia has gained acceptance within the region, although outside the region there continues to be a tendency to confuse South Asia with Southeast Asia, which comprises the member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since its inception in 1985, SAARC has been critiqued as a mere talking shop; for failing to stimulate greater cooperation and integration within the region. A recent report from the World Bank reported:

Many South Asian countries trade on better terms with distant economies than with their own neighbours. This can be shown through an index of trade restrictiveness. Based on global trade data, such an index generates an implicit tariff that measures a country's tariff and nontariff barriers on imports. In India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the indexes are two to nine times higher for imports from the South Asia region than for imports from the rest of the world. (Kathuria 2018: 1)

In other words, both the costs of and barriers to trade in South Asia are much higher than within other regional blocs. Port restrictions on some bilateral trade in the region have undermined the advantage of shared land borders. Pakistan, for example, allows only 138 items to be imported from India over the Attari–Wagah land route, the only land port between the two countries, despite the long, shared land border.

The report goes on to mention two underlying causes for this situation: the high costs of connectivity and a lack of mutual trust between

countries. To explore this further, and in particular through the prism of India's foreign policy, this chapter is organized in the following way. Firstly, we examine the India–Pakistan relationship as an example of extreme lack of trust and high connectivity costs. The chapter then compares India's past and present initiatives towards the regional neighbourhood where each of the South Asian neighbours (except for Afghanistan) shares a land and/or maritime border with India. In conclusion, it is argued that China's growing engagement with each of the neighbours has dramatically raised the stakes, propelling India's policymakers to seek new ways of overcoming the central impediments of high connectivity costs and low levels of trust.

Box 9.1 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Formed on 8 December 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional intergovernmental organization, at the time consisting of seven South Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It was established at the suggestion of Bangladesh's president, Ziaur Rahman. It added Afghanistan as its eighth member state in April 2007 and has, over the years, granted observer status to Australia, China, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea and the United States. The Association's primary objective was to strengthen and deepen regional cooperation, in particular economic development. According to the SAARC charter, the goal of the organisation was to contribute to 'mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems'. However, its role as a regional organization has been limited due to India–Pakistan hostilities as well as a tendency of India's neighbours to regard India as a hegemonic regional power. There is no comprehensive trade agreement for the region and there continues to be limited regional collaboration on areas such as security, energy and infrastructure.

SAARC summits, involving leaders of the member countries, are usually held biennially. The 18th and last SAARC summit was held in 2014. Pakistan was scheduled to host the 19th summit in 2016. However, following the alleged involvement of Pakistan in the Uri terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Prime Minister

Modi refused to participate. Soon after, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka also pulled out of the summit, citing fears of regional insecurity.

Despite a disappointing performance to date, the SAARC grouping is an economic bloc consisting of the largest group of people in the world, representing a population of 1.967 billion (as of 2021, according to the United Nations).

The India–Pakistan conflict

The ongoing local conflicts along the Line of Control (LoC), and the generally bellicose relationship between India and Pakistan, have few parallels in international politics. Attempts to draw a parallel with the Cold War, especially in the wake of nuclearization on the subcontinent in 1998, have been challenged. Unlike the United States and the Soviet Union, this is a case of enduring, protracted conflict between two directly contiguous neighbours (Kapur 2005). Furthermore, unlike the ideological contest between the superpowers, there is a visceral dimension to the India–Pakistan conflict which draws on sentiments of envy, resentment and wrath but also nostalgia and regret.

As successors of British colonial rule, India and Pakistan gained independence at the same time, separated by a single day in August 1947. An inbuilt and inevitable dynamic of rivalry has characterized the relationship ever since. Conflict is what usually makes the headlines, but there have also been concerted efforts to build peace, most notably at the level of people-to-people interactions and sentiments, away from high politics and diplomacy. This has also taken the form of an effort to rebuild linkages between the two Punjabs on either side of the international border. In 2019, the Kartarpur Corridor opened to facilitate religious pilgrimages by Sikh devotees from India and Pakistan to cross the border and access holy places. However, such efforts are more often than not sidelined or eventually superseded by national security concerns. The continued occurrence of cross-border terrorism, the fact that Pakistan is known to give sanctuary to well-known terrorist groups and leaders and the close relationship that the country has nurtured with China are ongoing and very real causes for concern within New Delhi's policymaking circles and agencies.

The background to India–Pakistan relations, and the four wars they have fought (1947–8, 1965, 1971, 1998) are covered in [Part 1](#) of the book (see also [Table 9.2](#)).² In this chapter, we focus on more recent

Table 9.1 Intra-state conflicts in India after independence

Year	Name	Duration (months)	Side A [deaths]	Side B [deaths]	Total deaths
1948–50	Telangana Rebellion	27	Indian state [250]	Hyderabad Communists [2,000]	2,500
1956–7	Naga Insurgency	11	Indian state	Naga Home Guard	1,000
1970–1	Naxalite Rebellion	17	Indian state	Naxalite Marxists	1,400
1984	Indian Golden Temple War of 1984	2	Indian state [250]	Sikh Rebels [750]	1,000
1989–93	Punjab Rebellion	48	Indian state [1,500]	Sikh Guerillas [6,000]	7,500
1992–2005	Kashmir Insurgency	168	Indian state [5,000]	Kashmiri Guerillas [18,476]	23,476

Source: (Correlates of War 2023a)

Table 9.2 Inter-state conflicts involving India after independence

Year	Name(s)	Side A [battle deaths]	Side B [battle deaths]	Total battle deaths
1947, 26 Oct–1949, 1 Jan	First Kashmir War	India [2,500]	Pakistan [1,000]	3,500
1962, 20 Oct–22 Nov	Sino-Indian War; Indo-China War; Sino-Indian Border Conflict; Clash on the Roof of the World; Assam ³	India [1,353]	China [500]	1,853
1965, 5 Aug–23 Sep	Second Kashmir War; Indo-Pakistani War	India [3,261]	Pakistan [3,800]	7,061
1971, 3–17 Dec	Bangladesh War of Independence; Bangladesh Liberation War	India [3,241]	Pakistan [7,982]	11,223
1999, 8 May–17 Jul	Kargil War; Kargil conflict	India [474]	Pakistan [698]	1,172

Source: Correlates of War (2023a)

developments to explore whether attitudes have hardened on the Indian side.

A new volatile phase in India–Pakistan relations began in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the emergence of four main terrorist groups – Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM). Operating training camps in Pakistan, with the implicit or explicit cognizance of the state, they were responsible for carrying out terrorist attacks across the border. JeM was held responsible for the terror attack on the Indian Parliament, which occurred in 2001 and led to a tense and drawn-out standoff between Indian and Pakistani armed forces along the border. The 2008 terror attack on the financial capital of Mumbai generated substantial evidence to prove the LeT's responsibility, as well as numerous debates over the extent to which it had been carried out with the knowledge or approval of Pakistan's army or intelligence services. Some analysts argue it was possibly instigated by sectors of the Pakistani military seeking to change the course of the government's policies towards India at the time (Rabasa et al. 2009).

With the coming to power of the BJP and Narendra Modi as prime minister in 2014, it was expected that a tougher stance would be adopted thanks to the influence of groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). With its calls for cultural nationalism, in the form of Hindutva, the RSS has also proclaimed the need to aspire for *Akhand Bharat*, an irredentist term literally meaning 'Undivided India'. Others pointed out that it had been during a previous BJP government, led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, when the room to manoeuvre and opportunity for pragmatic compromise with Pakistan was at its highest. To the surprise of many, Narendra Modi invited Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, along with all the other South Asian leaders, to his swearing-in ceremony on 26 May 2014. Against the reservations of the Pakistan Army, Nawaz Sharif accepted the invitation and visited India, paving the way towards a more positive relationship that was on display during the 2014 SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal. In December 2015, Modi paid an unscheduled visit to Pakistan on his way back from Afghanistan to hold a meeting with Nawaz Sharif in Lahore (Haidar 2015b).

However, on 2 January 2016, the Pathankot attack carried out by a heavily armed group on a base of the Indian Air Force caused the death of six Indian soldiers. The attack was a major security breach for India and was widely condemned in India and abroad. An obscure Kashmir-based militant group claimed responsibility, but the killed terrorists were subsequently suspected of belonging to JeM (which by this point had been designated a terrorist organization not just by India but also the United

States and the UK). Although there was pressure on the state to deliver a strong response, the government opted to use personal diplomacy, with the two prime ministers and two national security advisors speaking over the phone. Talks between the foreign secretaries also continued in an effort to sustain the bilateral dialogue process and a team of Pakistani investigators visited the site of the terror attack to carry out a joint investigation. Pakistani authorities reportedly arrested several JeM members, though not Masood Azhar (founder of the organization), who was placed in protective detention. On 26 April, India and Pakistan resumed diplomatic talks and on 3 May, in its final report, the Standing Committee of the Pakistan Ministry of Home Affairs blamed the Indian government for its poor state of preparedness and intelligence failures. Suggestions were made that the government had allowed the attack to happen, using it as a propaganda tool against Pakistan (Business Standard 2016). On 26 June, it was reported that Pakistan 'would consider' allowing an Indian investigation team into Pakistan, but by August relations had broken down to the point that the Indian Minister of External Affairs categorically ruled out any prospects of further dialogue until substantive steps had been taken on the inquiry. In an echo of the past, the minister stated that 'terror and talks cannot go hand-in-hand'.

A subsequent attack on 18 September 2016, this time on an army camp in Uri, a town close to Srinagar in Kashmir, resulted in the deaths of 19 Indian soldiers. This came at a time of mounting unrest within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, following the killing of Burhan Wani, a commander of the militant organization Hizbul Mujahideen, by security forces. Unleashing mass protests, it was described as the largest anti-India protests in recent years. All the militants involved in the Uri attack were killed but reports emerged of connections with Pakistan, leading to growing demands from Indian ministers and leaders for stern action. India's participation in the SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Islamabad, was cancelled and ten days later, the Modi government announced it had carried out raids or 'surgical strikes' on camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. This marked a major escalation as it involved crossing the LoC to carry out a 'pre-emptive strike' against terrorist teams that were alleged to have been planning further attacks. The actual details of the operation were disputed by Pakistan.

Although the decision to cross the LoC surprised many due to its boldness, a certain amount of choreography behind the scenes is likely to have taken place to manage the escalation. In the aftermath of the officially announced surgical strikes, Prime Minister Modi asked his ministers to avoid chest-thumping statements. Furthermore, although India's

opposition parties had been demanding proof of the surgical strikes, it was only in mid-2018 that the government released video footage, and which appeared to imply the countermeasure had consisted of cross-border shelling (a common occurrence along the border) rather than a novel surgical strike. By not releasing the video footage immediately, the Indian government was able to control the narrative, and, in the process, the element of ambiguity helped the Pakistani government tone down calls for revenge against India.

Between 2016 and 2018, there were reports that at least three major Indian army bases were attacked. These included the Uri base (described above), Sunjuwan Camp and the 166 Field Regiment in Nagrota. All experienced fatalities and each occurred in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In February 2019, a Kashmir-born suicide bomber drove a vehicle into a convey of security personnel on the Jammu Srinagar National Highway in the Pulwama district of the state. This resulted in the deaths of 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel and the attacker. JeM claimed responsibility for the attack and the government of India blamed Pakistan, which was denied by Islamabad.

In the immediate aftermath of the Pulwama attack, a diplomatic campaign by India was launched to rally support from major Western countries. A concerted effort was launched to get the JeM chief, Masood Azhar, branded a global terrorist, an objective that was achieved when China finally lifted its veto in the UN Sanctions Committee. On 26 February, two weeks after the attack, 12 Mirage 2000 jets of the Indian Air Force crossed the LoC and dropped bombs on Balakot. India claimed it had targeted a JeM training camp and that a large number of terrorists had been killed. Pakistan alleged that it had scrambled its own jets, forcing the Indian planes to quickly return. A Pakistan Air Force airstrike into Jammu and Kashmir was conducted in retaliation, although both sides agreed that no damage was caused. However, in the process, an Indian MiG-21 was shot down over Pakistan and its pilot captured. Over a tense few days, negotiators on both sides worked hard to secure the release of the pilot on 1 March.

As the events over the last few years have shown, India's ability to prevent and deter attacks from taking place on Indian soil, directly or indirectly supported from across the border, is limited. There have been attempts to change the dynamics of the game by using airstrikes and the idea of 'preventive' surgical strikes. Ashley Tellis, long-time observer of India-Pakistan relations, described the Balakot airstrike as representing 'the erosion of a major psychological barrier – namely India's reluctance to frontally challenge Pakistan's nuclear coercion – and opens the door to

future punitive actions' (Tellis 2019). In May 2019, following a decisive re-election, Prime Minister Modi decided to invite the leaders of another regional grouping to his swearing-in ceremony. This time, instead of SAARC, the leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, members of BIMSTEC, or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, were invited to New Delhi. The new External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, stated that BIMSTEC fits in with India's diplomatic priorities under the government's next tenure due to its 'energy, mindset and possibility', implying a shift in the country's neighbourhood policy, one that sought to exclude and isolate Pakistan in the region.

In a further and even more dramatic move, the newly elected government announced on 5 August 2019 that it was revoking the special status granted under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This provision, in place since the promulgation of the Constitution in 1950, had allowed for limited autonomy, which according to the Modi government had actually worked against a process of gradual national integration. The original Article 370 was intended as a temporary instrument. According to the government, over time it had instead fostered separatism and a sense of difference and distinctiveness. Others put forward an alternative counter-argument – that it is precisely Kashmir's distinctiveness that matters, and which requires protection and preservation. Furthermore, it is pointed out that Article 370 was the basis upon which the state joined the Indian Union in 1947. In addition to revoking the state's special status, the government also decided to bifurcate Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories (ruled directly from the centre) – separating Jammu and Kashmir as the Muslim-majority region from Ladakh, a Buddhist-majority region.

At the same time, the government of India moved to cut off communication lines in the Kashmir Valley, the region considered to be the most restive. Several prominent Kashmiri politicians were placed under house arrest with the argument that restrictions would help maintain law and order. There has been much discussion and criticism within India about the domestic implications and fallout of these decisions. However, it is interesting to note that India has managed to divert and contain international criticism. Perhaps most significant was the reaction of China, which openly disapproved of India's move to make Ladakh a separate Union territory, stating that it 'challenged China's sovereign interests' (Business Standard 2021). In August 2019, Beijing tabled the Kashmir issue at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), raising it for the first time in the UNSC in almost half a century. In January 2020, Beijing

again raised the issue of Kashmir at an informal, closed-door session of the UNSC. On both occasions, India successfully lobbied with Western powers to thwart China's efforts.

While India has sought to isolate Pakistan internationally, particularly in view of the possibility of a two-front war, there are reports that Chinese military personnel are stationed in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, as part of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Scholars have pointed out that this further complicates the situation because any offensive strikes undertaken by India could inadvertently hit Chinese troops and civilians based in Pakistan, triggering a Chinese response (Pant & Bommakanti 2019).

In light of the 73-year conflict over Kashmir, state identity and regional rivalry, reconciliation with Pakistan looks set to remain a challenge for any government in India. For some analysts, the endemic nature of the conflict is due to structural problems that adversely affect ties between the two countries. Pakistan's army is widely recognized to wield immense influence over the country's foreign policy and one of the primary forces that keeps the 'Kashmir cause' alive. This serves as a valuable legitimating device, enabling the army to maintain control over the state's institutions and as justification for the vast resources that go into maintaining parity in conventional forces with India.

India's neighbourhood policy: economic diplomacy and strategic factors

Trade and connectivity projects across South Asia have received a boost with China taking a lead, through its massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's growing use of economic diplomacy as part of its neighbourhood policy.⁴ India's investments in projects have often been criticized for delays in implementation and poor management. China's role in the region has also been under the spotlight for what has been described by critics as 'debt-trap diplomacy', an instrument of China's soft power diplomacy more broadly (Voon & Xu 2020) but also specifically within South Asia. Seeking to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via a network of land and maritime routes, it claims to enhance regional integration and stimulate economic growth. India, however, has been a sceptic since the BRI was launched with much fanfare at the inaugural Belt and Road Forum in 2017. India turned down an invitation to attend, warning that China's transnational infrastructure initiative would act as a possible debt trap for countries that accepted Beijing's assistance.

Furthermore, India objected on the grounds that the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – a key segment of the BRI – passed through disputed territory, namely Pakistan-administered Kashmir, thus violating India’s sovereignty claims.

In the years since the inaugural summit of 2017, China has bolstered its position in South Asia.⁵ By 2019, all of India’s neighbours, with the exception of Bhutan, had signed up to the BRI. According to a recent report, trade between China and the region reached US\$ 1.5 trillion in 2018, five times more than India’s commercial exchanges with its neighbours. Chinese foreign direct investment in Sri Lanka totalled 35% as opposed to India’s share of 16% (Xavier 2020). Investments have also clearly moved beyond infrastructure with the Dhaka Stock Exchange in Bangladesh selling 25% of its shares to a consortium of Chinese buyers (Reuters 2018). Bangladesh has also stepped up defence cooperation with China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2019); a Chinese naval ship made its first port call in Chittagong, Bangladesh’s largest port in 2016. China has also become the largest arms supplier of the Bangladeshi military, providing 73.6% of the country’s foreign military acquisitions between 2010 and 2020 (Center for Strategic and International Studies

Box 9.2 South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)

Concluded on 6 January 2004 at the 12th SAARC Summit, the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) was conceived as a step forward from the earlier South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA). Coming into effect in January 2006, SAFTA was aimed at reducing tariffs for intra-regional trade among the SAARC members, reducing customs duty down to zero on the trade of nearly all products in the region by a set date. The Agreement created the SAFTA Ministerial Council (SMC), the highest decision-making body of SAFTA, responsible for the administration and implementation of decisions and arrangements made under the Agreement and consisting of the Ministers of Commerce/Trade of member states, who should meet at least once every year.

Although SAARC exports and imports did increase initially, the intra-SAARC trade has not amounted to much more than 1% of SAARC’s GDP. This is often contrasted with ASEAN in Southeast Asia where the region’s intra-bloc trade is measured at 10% of its GDP.

[CSIS] 2020). Counter-terrorism operations are also envisaged as a new area of cooperation.

The other South Asia country where Chinese operations have a significant physical presence as well as close cooperation with the government is the strategically placed Indian Ocean island state of Sri Lanka. Ties between China and Sri Lanka have long focused on commerce, stretching back to ancient seafaring times. However, relations began to blossom after 2005 when Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected president and China offered support through money, arms and diplomacy, helping to bring an end to the island's brutal and long-running civil war in 2009. Around the same time, Chinese lenders and builders began to fuel a major infrastructure boom, particularly in Colombo city. The story of Hambantota port is an example of China's growing vested interests in South Asian domestic politics, including the pitfalls as well as the unease it causes among India's policymaking elite (see [Box 9.3](#)).

Constructing a port at Hambantota, located on a southern tip of the island, and sitting astride one of the busiest international shipping routes in the world, was long part of the Sri Lankan government's development vision and plans. Various feasibility studies, however, had argued that the port would not be competitive and was unnecessary given that Colombo was already a major seaport. Following the devastation caused by the massive Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the then

Box 9.3 Hambantota Port

The Hambantota International Port is a deep-water port located 240 km (150 miles) south of Colombo and is Sri Lanka's second largest port after the port of Colombo. Hopes have been voiced for turning Hambantota into the region's premier port of call for crude oil tankers, food and goods imports and vehicle parts. However, feasibility studies consistently pointed to weak economic viability and limited rationale in developing a second port so close to Colombo. Chinese investment and loans started flowing early into the project and kept growing, even as the price of the project continued to increase. In 2016, the port was still operating at a loss and in 2017 the Sri Lankan government had little choice but to hand over 80% of the port's ownership to China Merchant Port Holdings Company on a 99-year-long lease, along with a large swathe of land. This situation was described by many as a 'debt trap'.

President Rajapaksa sought to develop several large, prestige projects in his home state, including an international airport, a cricket stadium and the port. Using Chinese financing and Chinese contractors, the first phase of the port project was financed with a US\$ 307 million loan from China at a very high interest rate. Since then, the pattern has been repeated with countries opting for high-interest loans from China in part because the conditions for safeguards and reforms are not as stringent as those imposed by multilateral development banks.

Following Rajapaksa's electoral loss in 2015, the new government had decided to halt construction on the port. This resulted in a situation whereby about 95% of Sri Lankan government revenue was being used to service the country's debt with China. After the government defaulted on its loans, negotiations led to a 99-year lease deal, with the Chinese state-owned operator physically taking control of the port in late 2017. China also gained control over a large swathe of land around the Hambantota port. Causing an outcry domestically and abroad, this case has been often cited as an example of China's 'debt-trap diplomacy'. However, it must be noted that this is also a story of local corruption and political machinations on the ground as much as it is about China's strategic outreach.

India has also stepped up its engagement in the region with the newly elected government of 2014 announcing a *Neighbourhood First* policy. Having invited all South Asian leaders to New Delhi for the government's oath-taking ceremony, Prime Minister Modi's first foreign tour was to Bhutan, followed by Nepal (where he was the first Indian prime minister to visit in almost two decades). In 2015, the prime minister was in Bangladesh to ratify a historic agreement to simplify the border by exchanging more than 150 enclaves of land.⁶ Other agreements were signed, including one on bus services between the countries' cities, an important step towards Bangladesh allowing road transit which would help India gain better access to its northeastern states. Further negotiations recently resulted in Bangladesh allowing the use of its two ports for movement of goods to and from India through its territory. Three landlocked states in the northeastern region of India (Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura) will gain access to open sea trade routes from Bangladesh's Chattogram and Mongla ports.

In 2015, Prime Minister Modi was the first Indian prime minister to undertake an official bilateral state visit to Sri Lanka in almost 28 years and in August 2020 he was the first leader to congratulate Mahinda Rajapaksa on his victory in parliamentary elections. Aside from symbolic milestones and messaging, substantive steps have also been taken to increase India's development aid. A recent housing project is one example

of how India has tried to reconcile bilateral with subnational dynamics – a pledge to help construct 63,000 houses in Sri Lanka includes 46,000 to be built in the war-hit regions of the north and east. Earmarking a grant of US\$ 350 million, this is reported to be the largest Indian grant assistance project in any country abroad.

Let us focus for a moment on India's trade with its South Asian neighbours. All Indian exports to South Asia total US\$ 22.6 billion or 7% of India's global trade (see [Table 9.3](#)). The imports from South Asia to India constitute a meagre 0.8% of India's global imports. [Table 9.3](#) shows India's top 10 export products to South Asia – led by intermediate, consumer and capital goods as well as fuels and textiles/clothing. The top import products from South Asia are consumer goods, vegetables, textiles/clothing and raw materials. India's main trading partner in South Asia is Bangladesh, followed by Nepal and Sri Lanka. Given the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan, their marginal trade exchanges come as no surprise – Indian exports are still ahead of conflict-ridden Afghanistan and the much less populated states of Bhutan and the Maldives. India has a *positive* trade balance with all South Asian countries, which is another way of saying that India exports more to than it imports from its neighbours.

Nepal: borders between brothers

Relations between Nepal and India are unusual for several reasons. Nepal is the only other Hindu-majority country in the region and yet religion has rarely played a role in contemporary bilateral relations. There is a strong historical link between the two countries given the shared history of a freedom struggle in which the Nepali Congress and the Indian National Congress Party were closely aligned. Finally, it is the only case in South Asia where an open border has existed, with a mutual visa-free policy for citizens from either country. Yet despite relatively positive conditions, relations between the two countries have been fractious.

Most recently, a 335 km² triangle, marked by the positions of Limpiyadhura–Kalapani–Lipu Lekh, currently in India's possession and claimed by Nepal, developed into an open feud between the two countries. Although the dispute had been festering, the timing of the recent flareup, its connection with other border tensions and the unprecedented actions taken by the Nepalese government gained attention. On 20 May 2020, Nepal published a new official map including the above region as part of its territory, a decision that was pitched as being a direct response

Table 9.3 India's exports to and imports from South Asian countries, 2019 onwards: value, % of India's global trade, top product groups and trade balance

	Export (US\$ million) [% of India's global trade]	Export top product groups (in order of value)	Import (US\$ million) [% of India's global trade]	Import top product groups (in order of value)	Trade balance (US\$ million)
South Asia	22,576 [7%]	(1) Intermediate goods (2) Consumer goods (3) Capital goods (4) Fuels (5) Textiles, clothing (6) Chemicals (7) Transportation (8) Metals (9) Raw materials (10) Vegetables	3,674 [0.8%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Vegetables (3) Textiles, clothing (4) Raw materials (5) Intermediate goods (6) Capital goods (7) Transportation (8) Metals (9) Food products (10) Plastic, rubber	18,901
Bangladesh	8,242 [2.6%]	(1) Textiles, clothing (2) Capital goods (3) Consumer goods	1,213 [0.3%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Intermediate goods (3) Raw materials	7,029
Nepal	7,108 [2.2%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Intermediate goods (3) Capital goods	649 [0.1%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Vegetables (3) Intermediate goods	6,459

Table 9.3 (Cont.)

	Export (US\$ million) [% of India's global trade]	Export top product groups (in order of value)	Import (US\$ million) [% of India's global trade]	Import top product groups (in order of value)	Trade balance (US\$ million)
Sri Lanka	4,226 [1.3%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Intermediate goods (3) Capital goods	994 [0.2%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Capital goods (3) Transportation	3,232
Pakistan	1,186 [0.4%]	(1) Intermediate goods (2) Chemicals (3) Textiles, clothing	67 [0.01%]	(1) Intermediate goods (2) Raw materials (3) Vegetables	1,118
Afghanistan	891 [0.3%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Textiles, clothing (3) Intermediate goods	495 [0.1%]	(1) Vegetables (2) Raw materials (3) Consumer goods	396
Bhutan	694 [0.2%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Intermediate goods (3) Fuels	249 [0.05%]	(1) Intermediate goods (2) Metals (3) Minerals	445
Maldives	226 [0.1%]	(1) Consumer goods (2) Raw materials (3) Capital goods	6 [0%]	(1) Metals (2) Raw materials -	220

Source: World Bank 2023h

to Indian government actions. On 8 May, India had inaugurated a newly built road link to Kaishal Mansarovar in the Tibetan Autonomous Region that runs through the Lipu Lekh Pass. Even earlier, in November 2019, the Nepalese government had objected to India's 'new' political map, released after the internal reorganization of boundaries and status of Jammu and Kashmir. Nepal had then protested at the inclusion of Kalapani, a 35 km² area in the Pithoragarh district under the control of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, as part of India. However, it must be pointed out that maps since 1905, released by the Survey of India, the national survey and mapping organization, have shown this area as Indian territory. Furthermore, India has had an army base in the Kalapani region near the Lipu Lekh Pass since the early 1950s and, despite requests, has not given up this position due to its strategic value. The high ground at the pass enables the Indian Army to monitor passes that connect with Tibet.

Nepal's latest moves to assert its position and to pressure its neighbour have included a decision by the governing party to table a bill in Parliament to amend the Constitution and update the new political map as part of the national emblem – a proposal that was unanimously endorsed by the lower house. Describing Nepal's new official map as 'artificial' and unacceptable, Indian government officials have portrayed the actions as unilateral. What explains this rapid deterioration in relations and the willingness of the Nepalese regime to escalate tensions with its neighbour and to challenge the status quo? While it is true that India had chosen to ignore the problem, the current hardline stance on the part of the Nepalese government has reduced the room to manoeuvre in finding a resolution through dialogue.

At a more general level, the latest crisis highlights a fundamental challenge that India has often faced in its bilateral relations with neighbouring countries in the form of complicated domestic and triangular dynamics. This time these involve India and Nepal, two countries that have long been described in brotherly terms. At stake is a relationship that has been defined by an open border and contiguous regions with deep interconnections of marriage, migration and economic exchange. Given the location of the dispute in a tri-junction area, there is also the role of China, which requires close examination, especially given the ongoing tensions along the Sino-Indian Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Two recent events in particular have caused friction between the neighbours. Firstly, an unofficial blockade of exports to Nepal was seen as an effort by India to pressure the government on the matter of 'Madhesi' demands (an ethnic group living mainly in the southern plains of Nepal, close to the border with India). India was seen to be acting on behalf of the

Madhesi community for better political representation and thus a direct interference in Nepalese politics. Secondly, the election of a Communist Party government under the leadership of K.P. Sharma Oli in 2018 has acted as an amplifier for long-term undercurrents of anti-India sentiment. The recent flareup also appears at a time when China's involvement in Nepal's politics and economy has increased. This was exemplified by President Xi Jinping's state visit in October 2019. Numerous agreements including on trade, investment, security and border management were signed, a 3.5 billion RMB (US\$ 493 million, € 447 million) aid package to be delivered between 2020 and 2022 'to uplift the living standard of Nepali people' (*Asia Times* 2019) was announced and ties were elevated to the level of 'strategic partnership'.

In several ways, these latest incidents confirm the predicament that both smaller states and India find themselves in with the growing role of China in South Asia's politics and economics. Willingly or otherwise, the smaller states are caught in the reverberations of a more assertive China and India. In terms of China's regional role, the assertiveness is visible in several ways: in the form of a push for military dominance in key strategic areas and in the form of economic outreach – specifically to South Asia, not least through the multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative. On India's part, a greater effort to secure border areas has also altered the status quo that had previously prevailed. A real danger nevertheless lurks in the all-round growing trend towards greater assertiveness which runs the risk of escalating into violence.⁷

Conclusion: India and South Asia – the constraints on India's regional policy

Much of this chapter relates to what kind of power India seeks to become and the extent to which India's policymakers have been and will be able to leverage locational advantages and overcome disadvantages bestowed by history and geography. While India is undoubtedly the most powerful country in material terms within South Asia, its ability to wield its power is limited by several factors. The perception of India – as the 'regional bully or vulnerable giant' – varies widely within South Asia.

As considered in the first section of the chapter, the rivalry with Pakistan has been kept alive for more than seven decades, propelled by the asymmetries that characterize the relationship. India's relative superiority in terms of conventional forces has been overcome by Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and alliance with China. However, this has not served

to make Pakistan more secure and has in fact fuelled the rivalry further (see [Chapter 6](#) for a discussion of the 1999 Kargil War). With the remaining South Asian neighbours, other factors have constrained India's room to manoeuvre. These include a certain myopia in policymaking towards the region (especially from the 1950s to 1980s). To a large extent, this was a result of an inherited colonial outlook, founded upon an assumption of India's centrality to, and within, the strategic unity of South Asia. India's objective pre-eminence in the region (measured in terms of territory, population, resources and economy), it was projected, would allow it to define the broad parameters framing the foreign policy of all South Asian states. The legitimacy of India's regional predominance, it was assumed, would be accepted by all states in the region.⁸

Few would question the fact that India is the predominant power within South Asia relative to all its neighbours. However, the material capability of any state is not by itself a measure of statecraft or the ability to influence events within the region. India has engaged in acts of intervention, most notably in the case of Sri Lanka in 1987. Turning to another neighbour, in the eyes of many Nepalese, India is guilty of interference in Nepalese politics, and the treaties and agreements dating back to the 1950s have been unequal and beneficial to India. Nonetheless, by and large India has refrained from using heavy-handed approaches in disputes (over resources such as river sharing or the movement of people across borders) with its neighbours. It has also avoided projecting itself in the role of peacemaker or peacebuilder within the region. In the case of the long-running civil war in Sri Lanka, for example, India was often criticized for its apparent lack of interest in cooperating with international actors during the different phases in the Sri Lankan peace process.⁹

The 'Gujral doctrine', named after the minister of external affairs at the time, and later prime minister, I. K. Gujral, proclaimed that India's interests lay in the region's stability and that this was more important than worrying about external threats. Most importantly, I. K. Gujral argued for an approach of engagement based on non-reciprocity in the relations with neighbours. While the doctrine is often lauded as an example of India's outreach to the neighbourhood, it was not long-lasting, in part because the late 1990s and 2000s were a period of great domestic political instability. Coalition governments became the norm and power within the country shifted somewhat to regional political parties, some of which became powerbrokers within national governments. As a result, the cross-border ethnic, sociopolitical and economic linkages between Indian states and regions and their counterparts across boundaries gained an added political salience. Regional parties were able to

challenge national policy decisions. While this was seen as positive in terms of states becoming more like foreign policy actors (particularly in the realm of economic diplomacy) (Jenkins 2003), it also raised the risk of jeopardizing national goals. For example, in 2011 the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, refused at the last minute to accompany then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to a bilateral meeting with Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Protesting the terms of a critical agreement over river water sharing that was to be discussed at the meeting, West Bengal's interests and politics trumped national foreign policy objectives.¹⁰

It has also been noted that although India has been successful in constructing and sustaining a democratic political system, it has not made the promotion of democracy a central plank of its foreign policy. (Cartwright 2009; Mallavarapu 2010; Mehta 2011; Mohan 2007). This was partly born from necessity with foreign policy aimed at fulfilling the basic parameters of security, trade and energy needs. It is also, in part, a legacy of the colonial experience which precluded the idea of intervention in the name of improving or bettering another country's society or politics. More recently, it has been argued that as India's relationship with the United States has warmed and with India's rising international profile, the importance given to the promotion of democracy has grown within Indian foreign policy. India has increasingly used its bilateral development aid to share technical expertise with countries in the neighbourhood, namely Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal, and has promoted the building blocks of democracy in these countries through infrastructure, education, human security and civil society projects.¹¹

A further development in India's emerging regional profile has been a growing recognition of its role as 'net security provider'. The term is usually used in reference to the Indian Navy, which has undertaken a number of security operations within the Indian Ocean Region over many years. India has been a close partner in capacity-building efforts involving the Indian Ocean littoral states, gifting ships and aircraft, together with improving maritime domain awareness in countries like Mauritius, Seychelles, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In 2015, the country's updated Maritime Strategy defined the notion of net security provider as a 'state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing prevailing threats, inherent risks and rising challenges in a maritime environment, against the ability to monitor, contain and counter all of these' (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), Government of India 2016). Interestingly, the strategy argues that India sought to augment the maritime capacity of regional states rather than acting as a regional

'policeman'. While the term 'net security provider' may be a recent addition to the discourse and official strategy, the Indian Navy has been a long-term provider of security for the international sea lines of communication. Nonetheless, there continues to be ambiguity in the description of what 'net security' is or would be; what different types of security threats exist and how these are to be ranked, from non-traditional challenges to the threats of a nuclear attack.

India's role within and policies towards the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific demonstrate how the geographical framing of foreign policy can shift substantially over time. This is a function of capabilities and state capacity (having the funds, the personnel and the political will to carry out strategic projects), the ambition of policymakers and the external environment. The rise of China's presence and influence within South Asia has indisputably been an important game changer.

China's interest in South Asia is, however, not new. Relationships with Pakistan and Nepal have been cultivated over a long period of time for geostrategic and political reasons. Pakistan acted as an intermediary to the United States during the Cold War and is a valuable access point to the Arabian Sea, through the port of Gwadar. Both Pakistan and Nepal are geostrategically important, given they share a border with regions of China that have been restive in the past, namely Xinjiang and Tibet (respectively). China has also invested in major engineering feats like the Qinghai–Tibet railway, which connected the Tibet Autonomous Region for the first time to any other Chinese province. India's border infrastructure, in contrast, has been woefully underfunded and lacked the vision and ambition of Chinese planning. While Indian strategic thinkers may have inherited the attitude of regarding the Himalayas as a natural and effective barrier, China has sought to overcome natural barriers. Hence, for example, there have been talks to develop a Nepal–China rail link, which would help to break the Himalayan nation's sole dependence on India in terms of trade and transit.

It is undeniable that China's presence in the region has widened and deepened significantly. This has injected both an element of strategic dynamism and instability into regional politics. From the perspective of India, it has been a wake-up call to improve and enhance relations with the neighbours. From the viewpoint of the smaller South Asian states, China offers new developmental opportunities but also the challenge of managing relations with two big Asian players. While it may have been possible for countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to reap benefits from a competitive India–China relationship, it has also become an electoral issue within domestic politics. Furthermore, as tensions between India

and China grow, it remains to be seen how South Asia's economies and politics maintain a balancing act.

Finally, the globalization of India's economy has gradually extended the interests of the Indian state, Indian diaspora and corporate giants beyond the region to opportunities for global connectivity. This has come at the cost of the loss of a regional perspective to Indian policy planning. The figures of relative trade tell their own story, as will be evident in the [next chapter](#)'s focus on other regions of importance to India's foreign policy.

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Literature: further reading

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Notes

1. Afghanistan was not a founding member but joined formally in April 2007.
2. For a list of intra-state conflicts since Independence in India, see [Table 9.1](#).
3. Name of war in Correlates of War Data Set 'Inter-State War v4.0'.
4. For an overview of the BRI and China's aims, see 'How Will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China's Interests?' by the ChinaPower Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (2017).
5. For an overview of security-related and strategic developments, see White (2020).
6. The enclaves along the 4,000 km border are a legacy of colonial times – the British departed India before the border was properly demarcated – and it has been a contentious issue between the two nations for over two decades.
7. For a discussion of how Bhutan has sought to balance its overwhelming dependence on India with the necessity of normal diplomatic relations with China, see Mitra and Thaliyakkattil (2018).
8. For an early discussion of India's regional aspirations and obstacles to their achievement, see Ayoob (1989).
9. For examples of where India has preferred not to get involved in regional issues, see Adhikari (2018).

10. While the Teesta River water dispute remains unresolved between India and Bangladesh, the BJP-led government has managed to resolve long-standing land boundary issues as well as delimitation of maritime boundaries. For a critical analysis of both agreements, see Banerjee and Chaudhury (2017) and Bissinger (2010).
11. India's substantial aid to Afghanistan (by January 2019, India had given assistance exceeding US\$ 3 billion and was the largest donor in the region) and especially its financing of the construction of Afghanistan's new parliament building have been highlighted as examples of India's soft power and support for democracy (Pate 2018).

India and the EU, the Middle East and BRICS

This chapter considers India's engagement with two major regions and regional organizations and one trans-regional grouping of countries. These are the Middle East and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Europe and the European Union (EU) and the BRICS constituted of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. India's foreign policy towards each has emerged gradually over time, responding to an evolving set of priorities and reflecting key changes in India's international position. A focus on Southeast and East Asia can be found in [Chapter 13](#), which examines India's multilateral engagements with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asia.

The chapter begins with the Middle East, with which India shares deep historical, cultural and commercial linkages, stretching across the entire Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf countries. The GCC members (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait) have long been crucial to India's energy security and the region is a key market for Indian products as well as being the source of one of the world's largest remittance flows, sent home by Indian migrant workers in the region (see [Figure 10.1](#)). As a regional trading partner, the GCC is currently one of India's most important, with overall trade estimated at US\$ 100 billion in 2019. The chapter examines how India's own large Muslim population and the challenges of the India–Pakistan relationship have framed India's engagement with the Islamic world. Furthermore, two bilateral relations have been key to India's Middle East policy, namely India–Israel and India–Iran relations. India's balancing act in managing relations with the region's key actors and rivals will be considered.

Turning to Europe, the chapter offers a brief analysis of the filters through which Indian and European policymakers have viewed each other. These have been refracted through the complicated legacies of

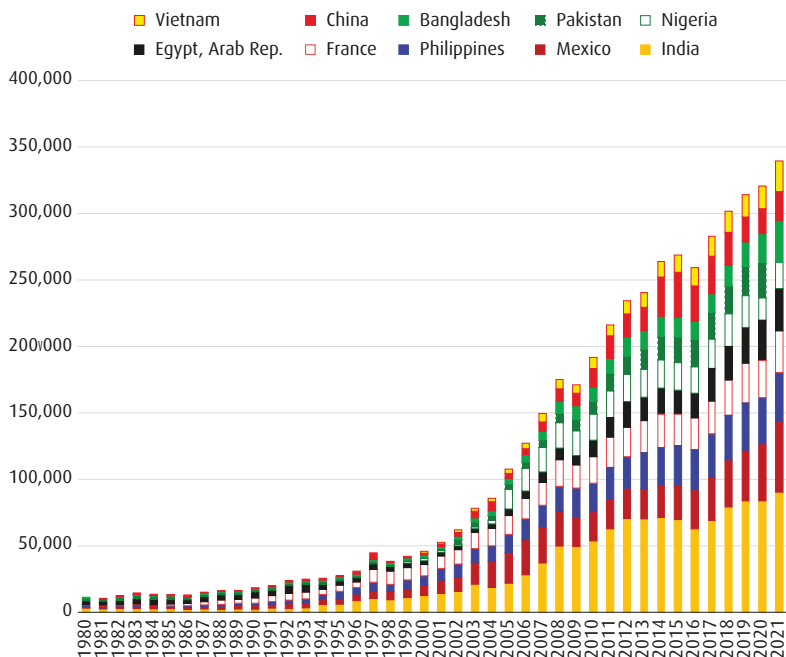


Figure 10.1 Personal remittances received (current US\$ million), top 10 countries: India, Mexico, Philippines, France, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and Vietnam, 1980–2021

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023f)

colonialism and imperialism. This lens has shaped and obstructed a relationship which also stands to gain from strategically using and building upon the knowledge and connections generated from the colonial past. Relations between India and the EU have developed slowly, gathering momentum in the 1990s and 2000s. Today, India’s biggest share of trade is with the EU bloc and the chapter explores why the economic weight of the relationship has not generated closer political engagement. As an illustration, the long-running negotiations (launched in 2007) for an India–EU free trade agreement are examined.

The chapter then turns its attention to India’s role within the BRICS framework. Concocted in 2001 by investment bankers as an acronym, it referred to the emerging markets and economies of, initially, Brazil, Russia, India and China, and was later expanded to include South Africa. The BRICS developed an institutional dynamic of its own, with various levels of dialogue and interaction among members of the group. The first BRIC summit took place in 2009 and in 2014 the group set up a multilateral development bank called the New Development Bank. The chapter

examines India's role in the formation and evolution of a group that professed the creation of a more balanced and fairer division of international financial powers and responsibilities. Initial momentum was derived from large emerging-market surpluses and the section explores the extent to which convergent interests managed to bring together a remarkably diverse set of actors.

Concluding the chapter and bringing the book's [Part 2](#) to a close, we discuss the ways in which to 'measure' transformation in the nature and substance of India's foreign policy since independence and into the twenty-first century. Internal pressures, because of an economic crisis in 1991 and deep structural shifts in the Indian polity, combined with systemic opportunities that were unleashed by the collapse of a Cold War order. It so happened that India's response to dramatic change in the international system during the 1990s and 2000s was mediated by prime ministers generally regarded to have been pragmatists: Narasimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. Their role in pushing forward an agenda for the liberalization and internationalization of India's structures and global outlook needs to be highlighted. That is what explains the continuity of foreign policy despite changes of government and ruling parties. We end the chapter by raising several key questions that will be addressed in the book's final part on India's multilateral engagement.

India and West Asia

Rather than use the term Middle East, the Indian government and officials decided at an early stage to refer to the region as 'West Asia'. In 2005, steps were taken to deepen economic and commercial ties and the initiative was labelled the Look West policy, juxtaposed by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with the success of the country's Look East policy (Government of India 2005). The rationale behind a Look West policy was primarily an effort to bolster and diversify India's energy portfolio. Over the period of 2005 to 2014, the United Progressive Alliance government led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh delivered several important agreements with the region's key energy players including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. In addition to energy, improving trade opportunities, developing strategic ties and protecting the interests of a five-million-strong diaspora, spread out across the region, were key components of India's Look West policy. Building upon crucial overtures made by his direct predecessor, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (for example, the ground-breaking visit to Iran in

2001; see Khan 2001), the Manmohan Singh government provided the cornerstones for what is today a highly nuanced and complex foreign policy towards the region. Once again, Modi continues to Look East, following in the footsteps of Manmohan Singh. This goes to show how, in international politics, the actors might change but the structural constraints and determinants continue to shape policy. One measure of the extent to which India's foreign policy has changed (both towards West Asia but also more broadly) is widely considered to be the way in which the bilateral relationship with Israel has also evolved (Blarel 2015).

Change in foreign policy: India-Israel relations and the Gulf War

For most of the Cold War, India took a principled stance on international issues. Based on principles of socialism, anti-colonialism, anti-racialism and a proclaimed desire to refrain from engaging in power politics (non-alignment), this translated specifically into a strong backing for the Palestinian cause as well as pan-Arab nationalism. Despite being an old haven for Jewish peoples, India opposed the creation of Israel and its admission to the United Nations in 1949. This was in large part due to the experience of colonialism and the partition of the subcontinent based on religion. Ideas that had permeated across generations of Congress leadership during the freedom struggle included the objection to the creation of states and the imposition of divisions based on religion. This made it difficult to accord formal recognition to Israel.

Over the next 40 years, India's relationship with Israel remained informal. Admitting it himself, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stated that 'we would have [recognized Israel] long ago, because Israel is a fact. We refrained because of our desire not to offend the sentiments of our friends in the Arab countries' (Kumaraswamy 1995: 129). According to the Ministry of External Affairs website, India was the first non-Arab state to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974. As time went by, the pro-Arab position grew entrenched, to the extent that politicians feared the backlash from Muslim voters were Israel to be granted formal recognition by the Indian government. The leaning towards the Arab world also had geostrategic and pragmatic motivations given the larger diplomatic strategy of trying to counter Pakistan's influence in the Muslim world, as well as safeguarding oil supplies from the region and the jobs and remittances from thousands of Indians employed in the Gulf.

After decades of non-aligned and pro-Arab policy, India formally established relations with Israel when it opened an embassy in Tel Aviv in January 1992. This occurred under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and in 2000, BJP leader L. K. Advani became the first Indian minister to visit the state of Israel, while later in the same year, Jaswant Singh became the first Indian foreign minister to visit. In 2003, Ariel Sharon was the first Israeli prime minister to visit India.

Another measure of change is the ways in which India has responded to crisis and war in the Middle East. During the 1990 Gulf War, India was just emerging from its own internal crisis, which had been compounded by the sky-rocketing oil prices caused by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Dependent on Iraq and Kuwait for about 40% of oil imports, there were also an estimated 185,000 Indian workers stranded in the crisis zone. Furthermore, Iraq as a secular state in the region had been a traditional ally of India, supporting India's position in the Kashmir dispute against Muslim states like Saudi Arabia which sided with Pakistan. As a result, the Indian government initially adopted a rather ambivalent stance, refusing to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

By November 1990, India had altered its stance and was willing to support the UN Security Council's Resolution 678, which issued an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein. This was despite the fact that at this point Saddam Hussein had linked the invasion to resolving the Palestine issue (he called for the withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories and Syria from Lebanon). However, although India moved away from its initial position, it refused to join US-led multinational forces in what became the first Gulf War. Both the government at the time and all the main political parties remained largely silent in the run-up to the bombardment of Iraq which began on 17 January 1991. Nonetheless, the revelation in January 1991 that India had allowed US military aircraft to use refuelling facilities, en route to the Gulf, unleashed a heated public controversy that almost toppled an already shaky minority government.

The Gulf crisis of 1990–1 spurred a serious public debate in India's foreign policy community over the challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War era. Both Iraq and Kuwait were members of the Non-Aligned Movement in which India had been a leading exponent of non-alignment. The Gulf crisis had highlighted the limitations of using a non-aligned stance and position to direct policy, especially in a post-Cold War context. As the first major crisis in India's proximate neighbourhood after the end of the Cold War, the first Gulf war revealed an important shift internally as well as externally. The crisis exposed divisions within the Arab world and even an eroding sympathy among several Arab

countries for Palestine. This opened up space for India, which had traditionally been such a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause. With a slight tilt in its position towards the United States, the first Gulf War heralded the beginning of a major change of course in Indian foreign policy (Baral & Mahanty 1992).

In the aftermath of 9/11, India offered the United States its full and unreserved support in the 'war on terror' in a rare declaration of international solidarity with a Western power. However, the United States decided to name Pakistan as one of its key allies in the 'war on terror', which was a severe setback for India given the support this entailed for the Pakistani government. Between 2002 and June 2008, the United States gave nearly US\$ 11 billion in military and economic assistance grants to Pakistan, most of which was channelled through Pakistan's military for security-related programmes (Bruno & Bajoria 2010).

At the same time, US policymakers sought to pressure India for direct military participation in post-conflict stabilization operations within Iraq. While New Delhi briefly considered sending troops to Iraq under the aegis of a UN mission, this option was quickly retracted when a consensus in the UNSC failed to materialize. Once again, a crisis in the Middle East served to illustrate and draw out internal debates about India's view of itself as an international actor and its relationship with the United States, the world's pre-eminent power.

Crafting a balancing act: strategic calculations and regional engagement

During the two Congress-led UPA governments (2005–9 and 2009–14) when Manmohan Singh was prime minister, the turn towards a more pragmatic foreign policy continued. For example, in 2010, Manmohan Singh became the first Indian prime minister to visit Saudi Arabia in nearly 30 years, leading to the Riyadh Declaration which instituted a framework for enhanced cooperation on security, defence and economic matters (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2010). However, overall engagement remained at a transactional level, primarily focused on India's energy needs and the interests of its expatriate workers. In part, this can be explained by the domestic pressures on the UPA government due to complex coalition politics as well as several high-profile corruption cases which distracted attention away from foreign policy initiatives. It has also been noted that during the Arab Spring, India sought to stay mostly on the sidelines, though it did react to the situation in Libya and

Syria as part of the agenda in the United Nations Security Council during India's tenure as a non-permanent member (Kumaraswamy 2012) (see also Chapter 14.)

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party government (since 2014), the partnership with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states has deepened and developed a strategic dimension. This includes a more complex economic engagement, attracting investment from the UAE and Saudi Arabia in sectors such as petrochemicals, infrastructure, refining, mining, manufacturing and agriculture. Observers and analysts have also noted a form of 'religious diplomacy' whereby Narendra Modi personally engages with, in this case, a Muslim diaspora and audience (Gupta et al. 2019).

Relations with Iran, the region's largest Shiite-majority country and main rival to the Saudi-led Sunni bloc in the region, have also evolved. Building on the steps and overtures made during the Vajpayee (1998–2004) and Manmohan Singh (2004–14) governments, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid what was described at the time as a historic visit to Iran in May 2016. Coming just after the signing of the international Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), adopted on 18 October 2015 which lifted the UN sanctions on the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India would build and operate a key Iranian port after talks with President Hassan Rouhani. A total of US\$ 500 million was committed to develop the strategically important Chabahar port (Amirthan 2017), close to Iran's border with Pakistan, opening up a transit route to Afghanistan and Central Asia for Indian goods and products and avoiding the land route through Pakistan. The extent and success of India's involvement in the Chabahar project has been constrained by the uncertainty caused when the United States, under President Donald Trump, withdrew from the JCPOA. Overall, relations with Iran, while strategically very important, have had to be carefully calibrated so as not to negatively impact India's partnerships in the region, namely with Saudi Arabia and Israel as well as the United States.

India's relationship with Israel and Saudi Arabia plays a key part in the country's overall engagement with the region. In July 2017, Narendra Modi became the first Indian prime minister to travel to Israel, a trip that resulted in various agreements on international development, agriculture and space cooperation (Keinon 2021). Ahead of this, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas arrived with a delegation on an official visit to India, providing a way for Modi to avoid travelling to Palestine during his trip to Israel. Seeking to de-hyphenate the

Israel–Palestine relationship the government of India also created more room to manoeuvre in terms of dealing with each separately. In fact, less than a year later, Narendra Modi visited the Palestinian territories, arriving unusually by air from Jordan and escorted by the Israeli Air Force, rather than the usual route that most leaders have had to take through the entry points controlled by Israel.

The transformation in India–Israel relations has been, both in symbolic and substantive terms, one of the most dramatic. In 1992, relations were formalized but *normalization* remained rather implicit, cloaked in ambiguity. By 2017, India–Israel bilateral relations were underscored by strategic cooperation, overt and fully visible with Israel being one of India’s key defence suppliers.¹

Along with external developments, including a rapprochement between Arab countries and Israel, which played an important enabling role for India’s Look West policies, there is a realism that appears to guide India’s engagement with multiple partners in the region. This is evident in the way relations with key players and positions on key political issues have been calibrated to consider regional and international sensitivities. Furthermore, a more adept and integrated foreign policy has consisted of involving multiple ministries and coordination of communications to convey clear positions and responses. Together, these external and internal factors have generated greater room to manoeuvre and opened new avenues for cooperation. These claims will be explored further in terms of India’s engagement with European partners and the EU (below) as well as with Southeast Asia and East Asia (see [Chapter 13](#)).

India and Europe

The relationship between India and Europe can be viewed from several angles. India has a long-standing relationship with the European Union, a bloc of 27 countries which in 2021 was India’s largest trading partner. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community in 1962. Relations were framed first and foremost by trade and development concerns, leading to commercial agreements and institutional arrangements that emerged in the 1970s and ‘80s (for an overview, see [Abhyankar 2009](#)). In 1994, the two sides signed their first Joint Political Statement, along with what was described as a wide-ranging third-generation agreement, taking bilateral relations well beyond merely trade and economic cooperation (Council

of the European Union 2005). This agreement initiated annual ministerial meetings and broader political dialogue and for the first time mentioned respect for human rights and democratic principles as the basis for cooperation. In the section below we will examine the slow evolution of institutional arrangements between India and the EU, including the signing of a Strategic Partnership in 2004 and the long-running, inconclusive free trade agreement negotiations.

Specific bilateral relations provide an additional angle through which to examine India–Europe engagement. These have also primarily focused on trade and commerce. Germany, France and the United Kingdom (especially post-Brexit) are considered some of the key European bilateral partners.² In each case, however, there has been a substantive turn towards strategic relations based on defence trade as well as a move towards greater coordination and cooperation within global multilateral settings (a topic which will be examined further in Chapter 14).

The India–EU relationship

In 1994, relations moved beyond trade and the economy towards a more political relationship, establishing the pattern of annual ministerial meetings. The first India–EU summit in Lisbon solidified this trend. In 2004, the relationship was upgraded to the level of ‘Strategic Partnership’, part of a general spurt of strategic engagement on the part of Indian officials. Between 1997 and 2017, New Delhi entered a total of 31 strategic partnerships, a number of these with European states but about half with Asian countries. As an instrument of its foreign policy, the ‘strategic partnership’ has allowed India to upgrade and intensify relations with several actors and has been described as the turn from non-alignment to ‘multi-alignment’ (Hall 2016; Tharoor 2012b). It has also been justified as a way of bolstering India’s claim to preserve ‘strategic autonomy’. However, it has been pointed out by officials that a strategic partnership does not specify any obligations and is primarily declaratory. The India–EU strategic partnership is distinguished by being the only one to issue formal documents in the form of joint action plans.

Similarly, on the part of the EU there is no standardized definition of a strategic partnership and its purposes. They are simply described as being ‘a useful instrument for pursuing European objectives and interests’, with trade as the cornerstone in most of its strategic partnerships. This instrument gained popularity during the 1990s in a bid to engage with and incorporate the emergence of new powers and as part of an

effort led by Brussels to better coordinate the national diplomacies of Member States. As a result, for both sides (India and Europe) the move towards a strategic partnership was founded upon pragmatic calculations of adaptation to a post-Cold War and emerging multipolar world. Thus, the focus was placed on trade and investment, access to markets, principles of strategic autonomy and sovereign equality. Nonetheless, the litmus test of a free trade agreement between India and the EU has not been concluded, even though negotiations were initiated in 2007 and despite trade being so central to the relationship. Reasons for the impasse are manifold ranging from specific issues (such as liberalization of tariffs on certain goods, agricultural subsidies, intellectual property rights protection, inclusion of human rights clauses) to the fact that the relationship has not been allowed to acquire true *strategic* relevance. This is a development that some argue would help override outstanding disagreements and discrepancies.

Many studies of India–EU relations have explored the role that images and perceptions play in shaping or hampering the relationship (Jain 2014). As democratic, pluralistic political entities and federated systems capable of compromise, it is argued that shared values and institutions ought to have provided a crucial basis for cooperation and coordination on global issues. Instead, scholars have depicted India–EU relations as underperforming and unconsummated (Mitra 2006; Muenchow-Pohl 2012). In the area of security, there has also been very limited and slow progress towards greater cooperation on matters such as international terrorism or maritime security. Both are issues where India and the EU share serious concerns and real threats, be it in the form of international jihadi networks or the dangers for international sea lines of shipping and communication that run through the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, despite what seem like common interests, cooperation has been halting and gradual.

Explanations for the deep-seated reticence on both sides of the India–EU relationship include institutional as well as ideational arguments. It has been pointed out that practical cooperation, for example in terms of surveillance technology, military equipment and intelligence sharing, has occurred largely at a bilateral rather than multilateral level (Jain 2014). Hence, relations between India and France have deepened and widened both in quantitative and qualitative terms. This, to a large extent, is driven by France's successful defence industry and its visible, active role as an international security actor with strategic assets and a military presence in Africa and the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Aside from the fact that bilateral relations have been easier for both sides to push forward and process, it is argued that a fundamental

divergence, especially around India–EU trade negotiations, stems from the differences in self-perception. For the EU, engagement with external partners, including trade deals, is framed by a commitment to promote and extend social, economic and ideological norms that have been successful in the European integration project. In other words, there is a clear mandate to work towards shaping the world in its own image. While this can certainly lead to a diffusion of best practices, it has also resulted in a deadlock over normative issues that have precluded or eluded negotiations.

In 2020, it was widely believed that a new momentum was driving the India–EU strategic partnership. Following the 15th EU–India summit in July 2020, the ‘EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025’ was released, outlining a joint action plan for the next five years. Today, the EU is India’s biggest trading partner, with more than EUR 100 billion trade in goods and services and although India’s exports to the EU have been declining as a percentage of total exports and imports, there is renewed hope that a trade agreement will be reached, capitalizing on existing strengths and creating new economic opportunities.

The European Union is India’s third largest trading partner. According to the European Commission (2021), trade in goods was worth EUR 62.8 billion in 2020. This accounts for 11.1% of total Indian trade. India traded more only with China, accounting for 12% of total Indian trade, and the United States, accounting for 11.7%. Regarding exports, the European Union is India’s second largest export destination, accounting for 14% of the total – second only after the United States. India, on the other hand, is the EU’s tenth largest trading partner. Trade with India accounted for 1.8% of total EU trade in goods in 2020 – substantially behind that with China (16.1%), the United States (15.2%) and the United Kingdom (12.2%). There has been a 72% increase in the trade of goods between India and the European Union in the last 10 years (European Commission 2021).

In 2020, trade in services between India and the European Union accounted for EUR 32.7 billion. The European Union is also the largest foreign investor in India with a share of 18% in foreign investment inflows to India (up from 8% a decade ago). While European Union foreign direct investment stocks in India stood at EUR 75.8 billion in 2019, they are still substantially lower than those from the EU in Brazil (EUR 318.9 billion) or China (EUR 198.7 billion) (European Commission 2021). More than 6,000 companies from the European Union are present in India, and according to the European Commission (2021), they directly provide 1.7 million jobs and indirectly 5 million jobs.

Table 10.1 Trade between the European Union and India in 2020, by product categories and subcategories

Product category	Imports 2020 – to European Union from India			Exports 2020 – from European Union to India		
	Subcategory, Top 5 harmonized system	Value, in millions EUR	% Total	Subcategory, Top 5 harmonized system	Value, in millions EUR	% Total
Industrial products		30,059	91%		31,560	98.1%
	Products of chemical and allied industries	7,055	21.4%	Machinery and appliances	9,352	29.1%
	Machinery and appliances	5,120	15.5%	Products of chemical and allied industries	4,785	14.9%
	Textiles and textile articles	4,864	14.7%	Transport equipment	4,110	12.8%
	Base metals and articles thereof	3,442	10.4%	Pearls, precious metals and articles thereof	2,992	9.3%
	Pearls, precious metals and articles thereof	1,703	5.2%	Base metals and articles thereof	2,630	8.2%
Agricultural products (WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA))		2,364	7.2%		597	1.9%
Fishery products		605	1.8%		6	0%

India and the United Kingdom

India–UK relations are briefly examined here separately, due to the particularly close and complicated historical relationship between them and the implications of the UK operating as an international actor outside of the EU. The colonial relationship and its legacy continue to be debated among academics, generating new research and controversies over the historical and long-term impact of imperialism (see, for example, Tharoor 2018). A large South Asian diaspora settled in the UK, an outcome also of decolonization and post-colonial dynamics, has had a part to play in shaping British domestic politics and engagement with India.

As in the case with the EU, India's strategic partnership with the UK, also dating from 2004, has often been criticized for falling short on promise and potential. This is further reflected in the economic relationship, which despite the existence of what has been termed a 'living bridge' of an estimated 1.5 million Indian diaspora in the UK, has remained below par. Thus, for example, in 2019 trade with India comprised only 1.5% of the UK's total trade. Britain's Foreign Affairs Committee published a report titled 'Building Bridges: Reawakening UK–India ties', noting that the UK had gone from being India's second-biggest trade partner in 1998–9 to 17th in 2018–19 (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, UK 2019). This period of decline in trade relations has been attributed to the fact that India was opening up and as an emerging market had a number of other more attractive trade partners to choose from. In fact, this has been described as a fundamental asymmetry in the relationship with India becoming more important to the UK than the UK is to India in economic and political terms (Scott 2017). Nonetheless, it is important to note a certain parity in the confidence in, value of and perhaps familiarity with each other's systems given that both are leading investors in each other's economies.

However, with the rise of China recognized both by India and the UK (as well as the EU) as a serious strategic challenge, there are mutual benefits to be had from strengthening the relationship. In 2019, in a strategic communication on how to deal with Beijing, the European Commission departed from its usual language and described China as 'an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance' (Burchard 2019). Similarly, the UK has opted for a more stringent position in its dealings with China. In the wake of disputes over Hong Kong, the British government announced an earlier than expected date by which to ban installation of new equipment by the Chinese phone-maker Huawei in the UK's telecommunications networks on the basis that it constituted a

security risk (Bowler 2020). Likewise, it is argued that India's experience of a tense and long drawn out border standoff with China in 2020 has led to a hardening of official views on China within India (Madan 2020b).

The extent to which India–UK relations are moving towards a more nuanced and political partnership needs to be gauged by examining the extent to which small shifts are evident on particular points of disagreement and contention. This can be tracked, for example, on the topic of Kashmir, on which Britain has voiced strong views in the past with regard to human rights and the conflict itself. India has always regarded the Kashmir conflict to be an internal matter rather than a bilateral problem involving Pakistan.³ Other examples include Britain's position during the Khalistan insurgency and separatist movement in the past and the role of prominent Sikh figures in the UK (for a current example, see Mohan 2020b). For its part, India has also challenged the UK in international fora, for example, on the right of the UK to govern the Chagos Islands (home to the strategic US Diego Garcia naval airbase) in the Indian Ocean. India has long supported Mauritius and most recently took its side in a high-profile though non-binding hearing in the International Court of Justice (India Global Business 2019).

In the aftermath of Brexit, it remains to be seen whether both the UK and the EU will find greater freedom to pursue the deeper relationship with India that both have claimed will happen. A document written by members of the European Parliament on the Trade Committee argued that the UK had been a hurdle in various rounds of trade talks with India, objecting for example to the granting of visas for skilled workers (Boffey 2017). For their part, pro-Brexiteers argued that by leaving the EU, the country would regain autonomy and greater flexibility to strike its own trade deals, India being a case in point. The question this raises from the perspective of India's foreign policy and strategic planning for the years to come concerns the ways in which bilateral relations like the India–UK relationship, as well as the India–EU relationship more broadly, can be leveraged, internationally and in multilateral settings. This, it will be argued in the final part of the book, is an essential part of India's statecraft in the twenty-first century, in order to enhance and buttress India's global position.

The BRICS

The first formal BRIC summit took place in Russia on 16 June 2009 with leaders from Brazil, Russia, India and China attending. Core to the

group's formation was the context of the global financial crisis: the need to improve the global economic situation (which had largely spared the BRIC countries) and a call for reform of international financial institutions. In 2010, South Africa was admitted to the group, leading to the subsequent acronym BRICS. As part of efforts to cope with current and future global economic uncertainty, the BRICS nations created an initial US\$ 50 billion fund with equal stakes for each of the BRICS members. Furthermore, the BRICS economies also agreed to establish the Contingent Reserve Agreement (CRA), amounting to US\$ 100 billion, to deal with any future financial crisis.

What is interesting to note is India's initial position of cautiousness towards the emerging BRIC framework. When in 2009 the BRIC grouping was elevated to a leaders' level summit in 2010, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh adopted a low-key presence, in contrast with Brazil's president, Lula de Silva. However, it has been noted that by 2011–12 this had begun to change with India, in fact, taking the lead in the creation of a 'South–South' or development bank. This would ultimately become the New Development Bank (NDB) established in 2014. Negotiations about the nature of and composition of the NDB brought into the open, perhaps for the first time, the substantive differences between India and China (a rift that would deepen and go public). While Indian officials proposed an initial capital of US\$ 50 billion with each BRICS country making an equal contribution of US\$ 10 billion, China proposed a contribution based on each country's financial capacity and an overall capital base of US\$ 100 billion. Ultimately, China's proposal prevailed, with China providing the bulk of the bank's initial capital. Furthermore, the NDB's headquarters were to be located in Shanghai. More tensions emerged over the issue of the bank's currency with Indian officials voicing concern that China sought to push and legitimize use of the Yuan as an international currency. Despite tensions and differences, the NDB was established with its founding director an Indian national.⁴

In terms of creating a brand-new institution, both India and China hailed the setting up of the NDB as a success. However, the extent of actual cooperation between the two Asian economic giants within the BRICS framework has been limited and the NDB itself has been eclipsed with the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2016. Despite its waning significance, the BRICS annual five-nation summit continues to be held. Critics have argued that the grouping is incongruous – for example, the Chinese economy in 2020 is about 36 times bigger than that of South Africa and joint statements are carefully

crafted to avoid anything controversial. Nonetheless, the annual summit has in the past provided an opportunity for world leaders, foreign ministers and national security advisors to meet and discuss tensions, in particular the Sino-Indian rivalry. Some have suggested that the organization itself acts as a constraining force, pushing the two countries to negotiate ahead of meeting as seemed to happen during the 2017 Doklam standoff (Rej 2017) between India and China (see Chapter 8) and the 2020 border crisis in Ladakh (Mohan 2020a).

India's involvement in the BRICS can be compared with its role within the G20. Formed in 1999, the Group of Twenty (G20) brought together 20 of the world's largest economies as a forum to discuss international economic and financial stability. In the wake of the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the 2008 global financial crisis, the format was upgraded to a gathering of G20 leaders. In addition to discussing economic and financial matters, the group also meets to coordinate policy on pressing global issues such as the Iranian nuclear crisis and in recent years a core theme is selected for each annual meeting. Scholars have posited that turning the G20 into a leadership summit marked an important moment in the recent history of global governance, bringing together established powers and emerging economies ostensibly as equal partners (Cooper & Bradford, Jr 2010).

India's response to this development has been described as cautious, a position of 'strategic defensiveness' (Cooper & Farooq 2016). While the opportunity to engage at a higher level in a multilateral setting was recognized, there was cautiousness among policymakers and politicians who worried about being pushed into complying with new financial regulations, driven by the developed world and potentially serving their interests. This reflected the emerging power/developing economy conundrum that India was faced with at the time, and which would also be evident during the negotiations leading up to and during the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (see Chapter 12). India's emergence as a major economy justified recognition and integration into global governance structures. At the same time, its large and poor population meant there were particular constraints and concerns such as maintaining a robust food security system and protecting a heavily subsidized and inefficient agricultural sector. These points of difference were evident within the G20 format but particularly so within the World Trade Organization (see Chapter 11), where India earned the reputation of being a difficult partner (Narlikar 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter has considered how India's foreign policy in the 1990s and the first two decades of the twenty-first century was marked by a steadily growing, outward orientation. While India was a vocal actor on the international stage during the Cold War as part of the Non-Aligned Movement, its focus was security concerns within the near neighbourhood (extending across the Indian Ocean, particularly in the 1980s) and navigating the East–West divide. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, this chapter has sought to highlight the greater importance given to regions beyond South Asia and the steps taken towards a significant diversification of partners. This was in large part thanks to the role of individuals, steering forward liberalization and economic reforms as well as the country's foreign policy. This was evident in the way the Vajpayee government managed outcomes of the 1998 nuclear tests, including the international response, and in the way the Manmohan Singh government negotiated at home and abroad to reach a civil nuclear deal with the United States.

It is interesting to consider the role played by ideology and the challenges posed of coalition governments between 1998 and 2014. As discussed in this chapter, the entrance of the BJP as a major national party enabled a different set of policy ideas to enter policymaking circles and institutions. It helped that Prime Minister Vajpayee had served in previous governments as Minister of External Affairs and that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had been Minister of Finance during the crucial years after 1991. Both individuals therefore had a predisposition towards pursuing outward-oriented policies and the need to be pragmatic rather than dogmatic in terms of adherence to party ideology. Relations with countries to the west of India – West Asia and, further afield, Western Europe – were pursued with the aim of building up India's credentials abroad.

By the turn of the century, scholars and analysts were referring to India as an 'emerging power' (see, for example, Cohen 2001). The famous BRIC acronym coined in 2001 by a Goldman Sachs economist included India as one of four economies predicted to dominate the world economy by 2050. The recognition accorded to, and the interest in, India at this time eventually translated into opportunities and expectations, at home and abroad (Basrur & Sullivan de Estrada 2017), for the country to play a greater role globally. The chapter has discussed the format of the BRICS and the G20 to identify some of the constraints and cautiousness that characterized India's position and approach to international fora at the

time. In part this was the lingering effect of viewing the world through a ‘developed versus developing economies’ prism. It also reflected the challenges of navigating a shifting global order, including the so-called unipolar moment with the United States as the world’s pre-eminent power; the short-lived idea of a G2 world that marked the ascendancy of China; and the aspirations for a multipolar system, advocated by various regional players including India.

India’s strategies for shaping a favourable environment in the twenty-first century will be examined closely in the next and final part of the book. We turn to India’s multilateral engagements to look at negotiations on trade, climate change, international security and the challenge of managing great power competition. Each of these areas provides an insight into how India’s role and behaviour as an international actor is adapting, both as a result of domestic politics and external change. We devote a chapter ([Chapter 13](#)) in [Part 3](#) to India’s foreign policies towards the East. The Look East policy, as it came to be known, also has its origins in the transitional post-Cold War period and could have been examined in this chapter, alongside the Look West policy. However, we chose to place India’s engagement with ASEAN and the Far East in the final part of the book. This is due to the number of multilateral initiatives involving India occurring at a subregional and regional level across Asia. We explore how India’s foreign policy is responding and contributing to regional and international politics, a result of the global geopolitics of our time, reflected in the grand visions, for example, of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo-Pacific.

Literature: core reading

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- Pradhan, Prasanta Kumar. *India and the Arab Unrest: Challenges, Dilemmas and Engagements*. Routledge, 2021.
- Stuenkel, Oliver. *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.

Literature: further reading

- Blarel, Nicolas. *The Evolution of India’s Israel Policy: Continuity, Change, and Compromise since 1922*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

- Ebert, Hannes & Daniel Flemes. *Regional Powers and Contested Leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Tharoor, Shashi. *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India*. Allen Lane, 2018.

Notes

1. For a discussion of key shifts in India's policy towards Israel, see Pate (2020).
2. For an overview on foreign relations between India and Germany, see Rothermund (2010) and between India and France, see Racine (2002).
3. For a discussion on some of the challenging issues in India–UK relations, see Roy-Chaudhury (2020).
4. For a discussion of India and China's approaches towards the BRICS, see Cooper and Farooq (2016).

Part 3: India's multilateral engagements

Overview of Part 3

In the literature examining India's contribution to global multilateralism, it is widely acknowledged that India was an early supporter of international multilateral arrangements (see, for example, Mukherjee & Malone 2011). This was most notable in its role as a founding member of the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund in 1945, even before the country had gained formal independence. [Parts 1](#) and [2](#) of the book covered India's early contributions to multilateral institutions during the Cold War and in the post-Cold War era. We also highlighted disagreements and differences arising from India's role as a non-aligned actor and the domestic compulsions leading to what was often seen by Western powers as a contrarian position, such as India's refusal to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Debates have continued over whether Indian policymakers prefer bilateral formats for negotiations (as in the case of trade agreements) and seek to chart an independent course in global geopolitics in the name of 'strategic autonomy'. As we argue in the following chapters, India's domestic priorities of combatting poverty, creating jobs, meeting climate change targets as well as ensuring security increasingly hinge on the ability of the country's international negotiators to secure favourable terms of trade, in order to enhance and stabilize investment flows into the country, together with acquiring access to sensitive and strategic technologies and information. India has been criticized for being the naysayer in global negotiations (for instance, in the WTO), for contradicting its own claims of representing the interests of developing countries and economies (such as in climate change negotiations) and for remaining

ambiguous in its positions relating to global security (within the Quad format and on the issue of the Russian ‘special operation’ in Ukraine).

The following four chapters track the country’s evolving position within various multilateral settings. This includes negotiations and outcomes in the realms of trade and aid (Chapter 11); climate change and energy policies (Chapter 12); in terms of the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific (Chapter 13); and in facing collective global security challenges (Chapter 14). In each case, multilateralism is now a core element of the country’s foreign policy. India is credited with taking on leadership roles in global institutions, for example, as president of the G20 in 2022, especially at a particularly tense and fluid time in terms of great power politics. As competing international actors seek to either preserve, challenge or call into question the legitimacy of the existing ‘rules-based order’, India’s position, preferences and predilections will be a central component in constructing and maintaining a future multipolar and multilateral system. The current discussion of constraints and drivers behind India’s vision of a cutting-edge digital governance architecture, with crucial implications for transnational regulation and global values about openness and control, is a very contemporary case in point (see Thomas 2019).

Globalization and India: trade, international organizations and aid

India's trade policy was overall very protectionist for more than three decades after its independence until the economic reforms in the early 1990s. This chapter examines how India engages the world through multiple means – treaties, understandings, conventions, trade and other means – based on an analysis of how liberalization impacted India's imports, exports, tariffs and the complexity of its economy. In particular, the chapter analyses India's trade with the European Union (as India's largest overall trading partner), China (as India's largest source country for imports) and the United States (as India's largest country-level export market). In this chapter, we examine the (re)integration of India into the world economy through trade, international economic organizations and aid policies.¹

Trade: India and the United States

The relationship between India and the United States has changed substantially over the last decades, evolving from a period of mutual mistrust to a new strategic partnership initiated and fostered under the administration of George W. Bush Junior. This Indo-American partnership, as well as trade relations, have deepened and accelerated not least due to China's unprecedented economic rise and increased assertiveness. At the same time, the 'America First' strategy of US President Donald Trump, combined with a general upswing of protectionist sentiments around the world, have drawn out uncertainties about trade relations and globalization more broadly.

The Trump administration – despite the perceived good personal relationship between US President Trump and Prime Minister

Modi – affected Indian trade interests adversely. Firstly, India’s exports took a hit due to the increase of the general tariffs on steel (25%) and aluminium (10%). While India introduced retaliatory tariffs, like many other countries such as Canada, China, the EU, Mexico and Russia, these were merely symbolic. Secondly, the United States worked against India’s interests by terminating the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for India. The GSP has existed since 1972 and India has benefited from it from the beginning. However, these unilateral declared trade concessions for developing countries (regarding specified products) can also be unilaterally terminated with two months’ notice, as was done by President Trump. The Biden administration has yet to restore the GSP status of India (as of July 2023). However, at the US–India Trade Policy Forum (TPF), which was resumed in November 2021 after four years, the United States stated it would consider India’s request to restore its GSP status.

The strategic partnership between the world’s oldest democracy, the United States, and the world’s largest democracy, India, could benefit both from investment leaving China due to the ongoing economic and political tensions between Washington and Beijing as well as due to the rethinking of security concerns and political risk for supply chains in companies.

Trade: India and China

The relationship between India and China is highly complex, with economic interests on the one hand and geopolitical interests and nationalistic rhetoric on the other, pulling sometimes in opposite directions. China was already the largest source for Indian imports in 2019.

In 1984, India and China concluded a trade agreement which accorded both countries Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status. In 2005, China and India signed a strategic partnership agreement. However, a vast un-demarcated border, open territorial disputes and a delicate geopolitical context bring out dynamics of competition and conflict between the two Asian powers and rivals. Nonetheless, there have been ever-growing interactions between the two neighbours, including trade. The trade balance is vastly in favour of China, which raises concerns and draws political attention in India. Furthermore, issues of infrastructure, urbanization, corruption and governance provoke regular stocktaking on the Indian side, leading to heated debates on the success and failure of two different political systems in India and China. A central question that will arguably determine the future, not only of Asia but also the

international system, is whether trade will continue to be the abiding priority on both sides or if emerging geopolitical considerations look set to shape the repertoire of concerns and ambitions?

Dependencies and asymmetric interdependence are a sensitive subject in India vis-à-vis relations with China. However, this is a common feature of international economic relations and not unique to the relationship of the two most populous countries of the world. Nonetheless, it has been argued that globalization has brought about a ‘weaponized interdependence’ (Farrell & Newman 2019), which means that countries that have power over network hubs for global goods and service production can instrumentalize these to their advantage. Examples include China’s export controls for rare earth minerals, Europe’s Covid-19 emergency export restrictions for medical supplies or the United States’ inclusion of scientific instruments in the US export control list (Mehta 2021a).

The global pandemic has increased awareness about the risks to countries’ health security, food security, and communications and IT network security. Narlikar (2021) argues that India’s old, but persisting, narratives of protectionism have gained a new relevance in this context where more countries attempt to diversify their supply chains to preempt the ‘weaponization’ of their dependence on other countries. India might benefit from this trend as the world’s largest democracy, an emerging economy with a huge domestic market and increasingly as a strategic partner in Asia.

Trade: India and the world

Most of India’s imports come from East Asia and the Pacific (38.2%) and most of India’s exports are to the same region (23.5%) (see Table 11.1). Given the role of China as India’s prime import and third largest export partner – combined with other core partners from the region such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore or Japan – this does not come as a big surprise. What might appear more puzzling is the marginal role that India’s South Asian neighbours play in India’s trade. In fact, India imports nearly nine times more from Sub-Saharan Africa and nearly six times more from far-away Latin America and the Caribbean than from its neighbours in South Asia. This amounts to a negligible 0.8% for South Asia as an Indian trade partner (see Table 11.1). Also, in terms of India’s exports, South Asia features with a meagre 7% of total Indian exports (only followed by Latin America and the Caribbean with 4.2%). Given that India had a negative trade balance with all but two regions in 2019, South Asia is still the region with the largest positive trade balance

Table 11.1 India's imports, exports and trade balance (US\$ billion), 2019

Partner name	Import (US\$ billion)	Import partner share (%)	Export (US\$ billion)	Export partner share (%)	Trade balance (US\$ billion)
World	478.883	100.0	323.250	100.0	-155.633
East Asia & Pacific	182.946	38.2	76.040	23.5	-106.906
Middle East & North Africa	113.329	23.7	57.916	17.9	-55.412
Europe & Central Asia	80.876	16.9	66.302	20.5	-14.573
North America	38.826	8.1	57.192	17.7	18.366
Sub-Saharan Africa	32.964	6.9	23.349	7.2	-9.614
Latin America & Caribbean	21.437	4.5	13.665	4.2	-7.772
South Asia	3.674	0.8	22.576	7.0	18.901

Source: World Bank (2023h)

for India (US\$ 18.9 billion), followed by only one other region with a positive trade balance for India, North America (US\$ 18.4 billion: see [Table 11.1](#)). India's largest negative trade balance by far exists with East Asia and the Pacific (-US\$ 106.9 billion), with China contributing the largest share (- US\$ 51.1 billion: see [Tables 11.1](#) and [11.2](#)).

India's trade statistics regarding its top 12 import as well as export partners show that three trading partners stand out, namely China, the United States and the United Arab Emirates (see [Table 11.2](#)). The imports from China amounted to US\$ 68.402 billion in 2019 (so before the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic) and made up 14.3% of all imports to India. This was nearly double the share of imports from the United States (7.3%), which accounted for US\$ 34.917 billion in 2019. The United States is followed by the oil-exporting countries United Arab Emirates (6.3%), Saudi Arabia (5.6%) and Iraq (4.6%) (see [Table 11.2](#)).

The imports from the United Arab Emirates are primarily mineral products – such as crude petroleum (29.2% share of imports from the UAE), refined petroleum (6.4%), petroleum gas (5.3%) – as well as precious metals, such as diamonds (19.4%), and gold (12.3%) (The Observatory of Economic Complexity [OEC] 2023a). The imports from the United States to India are more diversified. They still include a

Table 11.2 India's trading partners: top 12 import, top 12 export and trade balance (US\$ billion), 2019

Top 12 – Imports from...	Import (US\$ billion)	Import partner share (%)	Top 12 – Exports to...	Export (US\$ billion)	Export partner Share (%)	Trade balance (US\$ billion)
China [1]	68.402	14.3	China [3]	17.278	5.4	-51.123
United States [2]	34.917	7.3	United States [1]	54.288	16.8	19.370
U. Arab Emirates [3]	30.308	6.3	U. Arab Emirates [2]	29.539	9.1	-769
Saudi Arabia [4]	27.000	5.6				-21.026
Iraq [5]	22.085	4.6				-20.066
Switzerland [6]	17.722	3.7				-16.445
Hong Kong [7]	17.385	3.6	Hong Kong [4]	11.478	3.6	-5.907
Korea, Rep. [8]	16.111	3.4				-11.457
Indonesia [9]	15.563	3.3				-11.049
Singapore [10]	14.893	3.1	Singapore [5]	10.738	3.3	-4.155
Japan [11]	12.744	2.7				-7.929
Germany [12]	12.272	2.6	Germany [8]	8.569	2.7	-3.702
			Netherlands [6]	8.906	2.8	5.158
			United Kingdom [7]	8.797	2.7	1.918
			Bangladesh [9]	8.242	2.6	7.029
			Nepal [10]	7.108	2.2	6.459
			Malaysia [11]	6.268	1.9	-4.139
			Belgium [12]	6.184	1.9	-3.169

Source: World Bank (2023h)

substantial share of mineral products – such as crude petroleum (15.9% share of imports from the United States), coal briquettes (5.6%) – as well as precious metals, such as diamonds (13.1%) and gold (4.5%); but also gas turbines (5.4%). The most diversified imports of India stem from China with a substantial share being machines (5.8% telephones; 4.7% computers; 3.6% integrated circuits; 2.7% semiconductor devices; 2.3% broadcasting equipment) and chemical products. (OEC 2023a).

India’s exports to China, on the other hand, comprise primarily mineral products (including refined petroleum, 10.9% of total Indian exports to China; 10.6% iron ore), chemical products (9.8% cyclic hydrocarbons) but also animal products (5.5% crustaceans), textiles (4.4% non-retail pure cotton yarn), plastics and rubber (4.2% ethylene polymers) and machines (2.7% electrical transformers) (OEC 2023a). The majority of value from Indian exports to the United Arab Emirates is in two sectors, namely precious metals (jewellery, 29.3% of total Indian exports to the UAE; 6% diamonds) and mineral products (17.5% refined petroleum), but also machines (7.4% broadcasting equipment). Finally, India’s largest export partner is the United States, but from India there is a more diverse range of goods – from chemical products (packaged medicaments, 12.3% of total Indian exports to the United States), precious metals (13.8% diamonds, 3.4% jewellery) to textiles, machines, mineral products (5.7% refined petroleum) and transportation goods like vehicle parts (OEC 2023a).

Figure 11.1 visualizes the exceptional role of China and the United States in India’s trade. China is by far the largest source for imports – and the country with which India has by far the largest negative trade balance. The United States, on the other hand, is by far the largest export

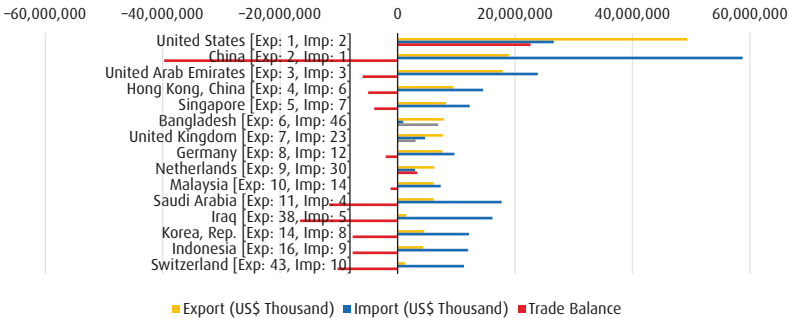


Figure 11.1 India’s trading partners: top 12 import, top 12 export and trade balance (US\$ billion), 2020

Source: Chart, author. Data source, World Bank (2023h)

destination, with the most diverse products, well beyond mineral products and precious metals.

A time series of the role of individual countries as destinations for Indian exports shows that the United States was most of time the largest export destination, which then further accelerated in the 2010s (see [Figure 11.2](#)). Of course, already in the top 10 export destinations the role of East Asia and the Pacific with Hong Kong and Singapore – beyond merely China – becomes clear. The same applies to the role of European countries such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany. This becomes even more apparent in the visualization of Indian export destinations by region (see [Figure 11.3](#)).

As discussed in [Chapter 10](#), the European Union, a bloc of 27 countries, is India’s largest trading partner. This is reflected in [Figure 11.3](#) with Europe and Central Asia featuring as the second largest region for Indian exports, behind the vast region of East Asia and the Pacific, which includes economic heavyweights like China, Japan and South Korea, as well as the fast-emerging markets of Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand, Philippines and Malaysia, to name just a few.

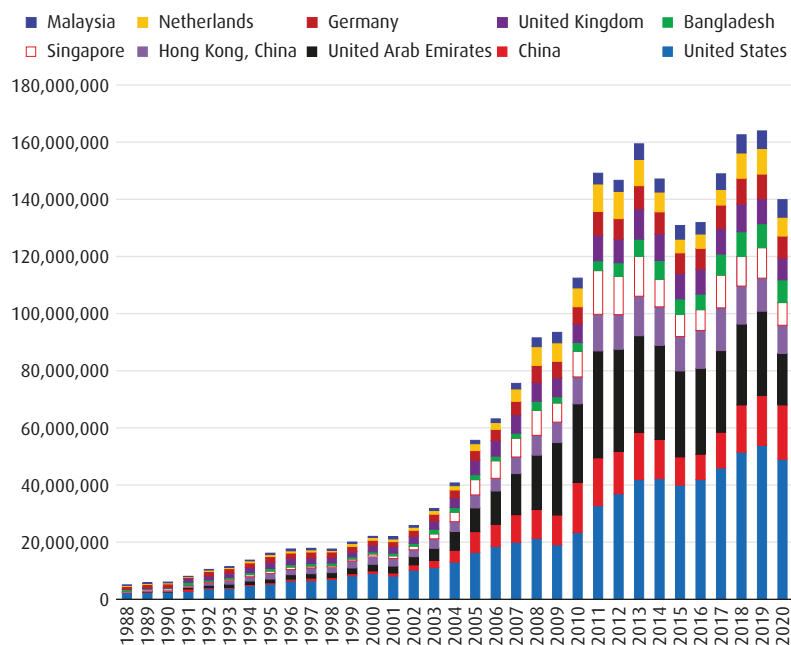


Figure 11.2 India’s exports (US\$ thousand): all products, top 10 countries, 1988–2020

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023h)

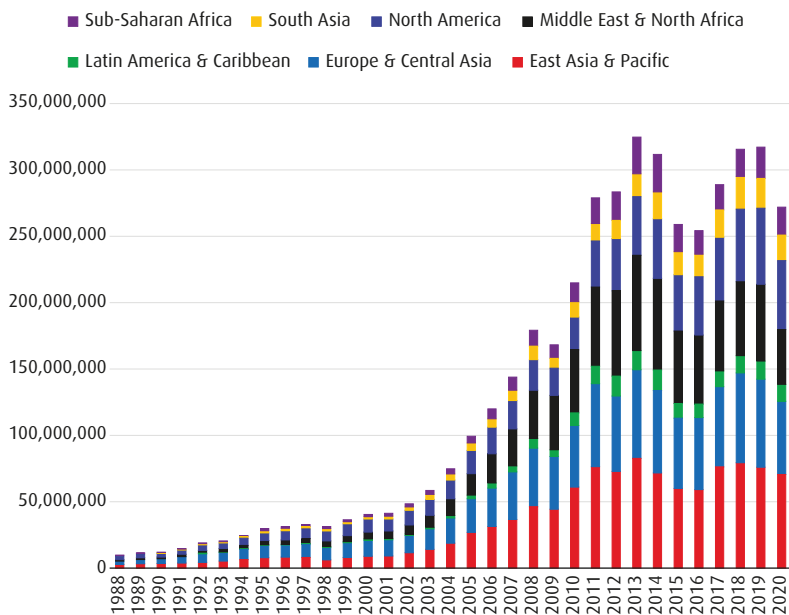


Figure 11.3 India's exports (US\$ thousand): all products, by region, 1988–2020

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023h)

Insightful and characteristic of the change in attitude and policy regarding trade is a time series of the applied tariff rate on primary products by BRICS countries over time (see Figure 11.4). China cut its average tariff rate on primary products substantially in the early 2000s – from 25% in 1996 to 6% in 2002. India's average tariff rate hovered longer, around 20%, but was brought down substantially in the latter part of the 2000s – from 23% in 1999 to 6% in 2008. The applied average tariffs in Brazil and South Africa on primary products were already substantially lower in the latter half of the 1990s than those of China and India, and stayed at a low level comparable to those of China in the 2010s. Russia, on the other hand, upheld its high(er) tariffs – the highest among the BRICS in the 2010s. Russia also implemented the highest year-to-year *increase* in the dataset: from 3.8% in 2018 to 11.7% in 2019 (again, *before* the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic). Also, South Africa and India increased their tariffs in the last year (of available data), but to a lesser extent.

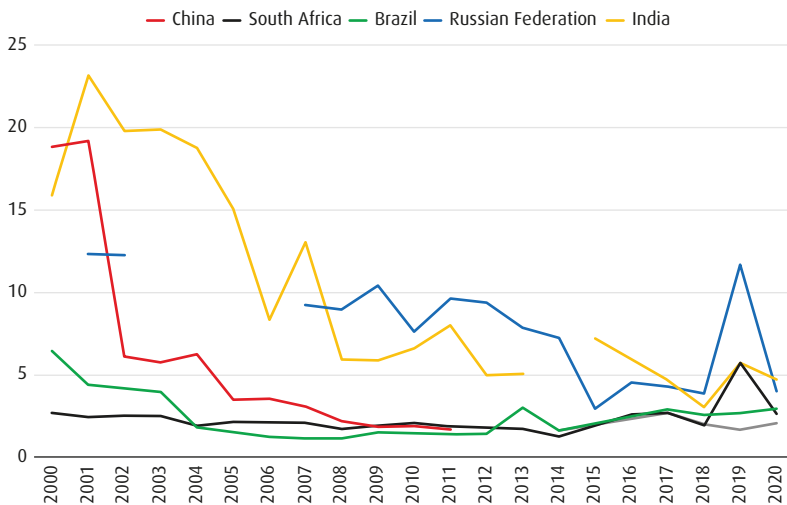


Figure 11.4 Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) tariff rate, applied, weighted mean, primary products (%), 2000–20

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2023g). Note: please note that the gaps in the graph are due to the lack of data in the World Bank dataset on tariffs.

The return of economic statecraft

Aggarwal and Reddie (2021) argue that strategic competition once again features prominently in international relations, namely the use of economic statecraft tools in the name of national security. Such tools include (a) trade restrictions, (b) industrial policy and (c) changed investment rules. Prominent, recent examples include the US Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) classification of the Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE as national security risks, a decision upheld by the US Appeals Court (CNBC 2021).

Another example is that of China’s industrial policy, named ‘Made in China 2025’, which was introduced in 2015 aimed at fostering high-tech industries – such as artificial intelligence, robotics, information technology (IT) and telecommunications, new mobility solutions including electric cars – through subsidies, state-owned enterprises and intellectual property acquisitions (Ip 2021). Amid a chip shortage, which affected (not only) carmakers worldwide, the US Biden administration announced a 100-day review of supply-chain vulnerabilities focusing on four industries: semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, batteries, as well as strategic materials (Leary 2021).

Businesses and industry are entering a new era of production, in the form of smart automation involving machine learning, machine-to-machine communication (M2M) and the internet of things (IoT) (using widespread sensors and cloud computing). This Fourth Industrial Revolution – after the socioeconomic revolutions triggered by the emergence of the steam engine, the conveyer belt and computers – it is argued, will determine the success or failure of many economies (Philbeck & Davis 2018). The German government coined the term ‘Industrie 4.0’ and presented its National Industry Strategy 2030 in February 2019, insisting that ‘[o]nly those who have and command the new technologies can lastingly assert their position in competition’ (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany 2019a). The report gives the example of the nationally critical automobile sector: ‘If the digital platform for autonomous driving with Artificial Intelligence were to come from the USA and the battery from Asia for the cars of the future, Germany and Europe would lose over 50 per cent of value added in this area’ (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany 2019a). The joint Manifesto on Industrial Policy by Germany and France aims to foster industries in the areas of autonomous driving, artificial intelligence (AI), digitalization, automated production and the platform economy (online infrastructures that enable a range of human activities, for example those created by Google, Amazon, Salesforce or Etsy) (Kenney & Zysman 2016).

A third example is that of the two leading EU economies taking ‘into greater consideration the state-control of, and subsidies for undertakings within the framework of merger control’ – without naming any specific country (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany 2019b).

India and international economic institutions: the World Trade Organization

Soon after independence in 1947, India implemented an inward-looking development strategy, reflected by its import-substitution policy which was based on a widely held export pessimism at the time (Dubey 2007). However, despite facing protectionism by industrialized countries – especially in agriculture, textiles and clothing – East and Southeast Asian countries managed to use exports to increase growth and reduce poverty. India’s realization of these opportunities translated into export promotion policies starting from the Third Five Year Plan (1961–6) (Dubey 2007). Yet, they were accompanied with inflexible import

regulations – hampering cost-efficient production due to the lack of imported machinery, raw materials and spare parts. Import liberalization on its own is unlikely to foster export expansion if the preconditions for making exports competitive are lacking, such as adequate skills (energy and transportation), infrastructure, regulatory framework and hence lower production and transportation costs (Dubey 2007: 101) and higher production quality. This became evident when India’s imports increased substantially in the 1980s without a major increase in exports – laying the foundation for the 1990–1 balance of payment crisis. The import controls implemented during the crisis were all scrapped in the phase that followed, known as the liberalization of the Indian economy.

India’s role in negotiating the international trading system

In 1948, India was one of 23 founding members of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which in addition to several Western European countries, the United States, Canada, Australia and China also included countries like Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Pakistan, Syria, Brazil and South Africa. Many regard the GATT’s achievements as mixed for developing countries like India. Due to the ‘principles of reciprocity and principal suppliers rule, duties were reduced mainly on products of export interest to industrialised countries’ (Dubey 2007: 102). India suffered from quantitative restrictions on textile products – India’s most important export item until the 1980s and top two export items long thereafter (Dubey 2007: 102). India strongly supported the move to redesign GATT rules to better accommodate the special needs of developing countries. India also played a central role in pushing for a UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which ultimately led to changes in GATT’s philosophy, as well as legal and institutional structures. In 1968 during the second UNCTAD, held in Delhi, a consensus on the basic design of a Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) was achieved. The United States then became the first industrialized country to grant preferences under the GSP – through 10-year GATT waivers, which later was legalized under the Enabling Clause (Dubey 2007).²

India’s foreign economic policy continuity under Modi

Analysing India’s negotiations within the WTO context, Narlikar (2022) finds that India has barely changed its trade policy positions under the Narendra Modi government. This runs counter to what observers

Table 11.3 GATT and WTO negotiation rounds and selected ministerial conferences since the 1980s: negotiations and developing countries' role

Round/ meeting	Year	Negotiations and developing countries' role
Doha Round	2001 till ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triple loss for developing countries: new round, Singapore issues central on agenda, and <i>Implementing Issues</i> part of Round not addressed separately. • Wins for developing countries: flexibility provided by Declaration on the TRIPS and Public Health (benefitting the Indian pharmaceutical industry); provisions on Special & Differential Treatment (Dubey 2007). • Liberalization of trade in agriculture as central issue: potential gains for developing countries from market access; yet bringing down tariffs would negatively impact millions of farmers in developing countries; substantial reduction of domestic subsidies not ensured by developed countries (Dubey 2007). • Negotiated items: agriculture, services, market access for non-agricultural products (NAMA), trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS), trade & investment, trade & competition policy, government procurement transparency, trade facilitation, anti-dumping, subsidies, regional trade agreements, dispute settlement, trade & environment, electronic commerce, trade & debt and finance, trade & technology transfer, technical cooperation & capacity-building (integrated framework for trade-related technical assistance to least-developed countries), special and differential treatment, implementation, commodity issues, coherence, aid for trade. (For agreements on each of these items, see World Trade Organization (WTO) 2022.)
Seattle Meeting (MC3)	1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting failed. EU, Japan, Canada and Switzerland pushed for new WTO round, the Millenium Round, and the inclusion of new items – esp. labour standards, environmental protection, competition policy, investment.

Table 11.3 (Cont.)

Round/ meeting	Year	Negotiations and developing countries' role
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dubey (2007: 108) argues that three goals became the 'permanent brief' for India and other developing countries: '[1] prevent the further widening of the WTO agenda; [2] oppose the launching of any new round of negotiations; [3] seek to remove the inequities and imbalances in the Uruguay Round agreements'.
Singapore (1st Ministerial Conference MC1)	1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Singapore issues</i> added to WTO agenda: trade & investment, trade & competition policies, government procurement transparency, trade facilitation. • Developing countries failed to stop Singapore items from being added but succeeded in preventing the issue 'trade & labour standards' from being added. The ministers 'reject the use of labour standards for protectionist purposes' (World Trade Organization [WTO] 1996)
Geneva Meeting	1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laid ground for TRIPS Agreement. • TRIPS surrender after <i>Group of 10</i> collapse due to 'collapse of India–Brazil solidarity' (Dubey 2007: 107).
Montreal Meeting (mid-term review of Uruguay)	1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collapsed due to issue of agriculture. No legally binding outcome. • Group of 10's 'fragmented unity' (Dubey 2007: 106) leads to two achievements (with India playing an important part): (a) making GATS flexible for developing countries; (b) preventing stretching the mandate for intellectual property rights as pushed for by developed countries.
Uruguay Round	1986–94	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing countries opposed the push by developed countries to include services. Their arguments were threefold: (a) GATT's mandate only for goods. (b) Little to gain from service liberalization. (c) Focus on redressing asymmetries in world trade instead.

(continued)

Table 11.3 (Cont.)

Round/ meeting	Year	Negotiations and developing countries' role
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services were included, nevertheless. Developed countries determined to put services under the GATT dispute settlement mechanism and succeeded. Both goods and services were put under the same new WTO mechanism. • <i>Dunkel draft text</i> by GATT Director General Mr Dunkel was presented without giving developing countries the chance to negotiate TRIPS clauses and last minute addition to Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS), fostering developed countries' push for investment and competition rules (Dubey 2007: 107).

expected, given Modi's prior economic reform credentials and rhetoric. Narlikar explains this in terms of a persistence in the protectionism narratives in Indian politics. She draws on the work on Shiller (2017), who established 'narrative economics' to analyse 'the spread and dynamics of popular narratives, the stories, particular those of human interest and emotion, and how these change through time, to understand economic fluctuations' (2017: 967). Narlikar points to crucial domestic economic policy reforms that have been introduced under the Modi administration, such as the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), improvements regarding the access to healthcare, financial services like small loans and bank accounts, sanitation facilities and swifter government services. Given the projected promise of 'Modi-nomics' (Schottli & Pauli 2016), observers expected a more ambitious agenda in the realm of foreign economic policies. However, Narlikar (2022: 162) observes 'important continuities in the narrative that underpins India's negotiation behaviour, [which] are also reflected in its bargaining strategy and coalition formation. This negotiation behaviour had, in previous years, ... generated mixed outcomes.'

Development aid for India and from India

From being one of the largest recipients of foreign aid in the mid-1980s, India transitioned over the next few decades into a net donor. Between 1951 and 1992, India received US\$ 55 billion in foreign aid, becoming

the world's largest recipient (though when translated into per capita terms it appears much less reliant on aid). In 2003, India became a net creditor to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Food Programme after having been a borrower from these organizations for years. India laid out its new policy in June 2003, stating it would not accept any tied aid in the future. Bilateral aid was only to be accepted from five countries, namely the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, Germany and Japan, in addition to the European Union (EU). Furthermore, it was also decided that debt owed to India by heavily indebted poor countries, including Ghana, Mozambique and Tanzania, would be cancelled outright and India repaid debts amounting to US\$ 1.6 billion belonging to several countries.

In the 2019–20 budget, the Indian government allocated US\$ 1.32 billion for foreign aid, the second largest sum ever (Mullen 2019). India has been a provider of development assistance since independence. In the early 1950s, the country started providing assistance to Nepal and Bhutan. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation or ITEC programme was launched in 1964 with the objective of sharing knowledge and skills with fellow developing countries.³ At the time and during the Cold War, development cooperation with Asia and Africa was strongly positioned as part of India's commitment to solidarity with other non-aligned countries and Third World politics. However, it is noted by scholars that by the 1980s and 1990s India's foreign economic policies, including the development assistance programme, had become more commercially oriented.⁴ India has traditionally focused on technical cooperation, providing access to educational and training places, cultural exchanges, capacity-building and transfer of skills programmes. While this continues to be a significant (and growing) dimension of India's development assistance, there has been an increase in the use of debt relief, grants and soft loans, and, in particular, lines of credit.

India has for the most part focused on regional neighbours, with Afghanistan becoming a major partner country prior to the return of the Taliban. A current, ongoing project is the housing project for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka, which aims to deliver 50,000 houses using an owner-driven model, characterized by direct cash transfers to beneficiaries, who build their own houses with logistical and technical support from a reputed NGO. Many African countries have been long-standing partners, dating back to the 1960s. However, the move noted in recent years from Southern and Eastern Africa to Central and West Africa is attributed to the more strategic calculations being based on resources and geopolitics.

Challenges relating to timely and effective implementation both on the recipient's side as well as that of the grant-giver continue to be voiced. These have given rise to calls for improved coordination and better public outreach programmes aimed at enhancing knowledge about such initiatives, as well as suggestions to bring in partnership with India's private sector investments as an effective way of expanding India's development footprint abroad. In 2012, the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) was set up in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), with the objective of enhancing coordination of India's development cooperation activities and to ensure more effective and timelier implementation and evaluation. When discussing the institutional framework and mandate of the DPA, other models were examined such as USAid and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). It was pointed out that the DPA was to remain a part of the MEA, tasked with implementing and not formulating development assistance policy.

Conclusion

India's multilateral engagement, through trade and aid policies, has become a key instrument in the strategy to enhance economic development at home and the country's international standing. The latter is not related to discussions about reputational power but rather the desire and need to attract investments to fund big infrastructure projects and to bolster the 'Make in India' campaign.⁵ Recently, attention has been drawn to the importance of global value chains for national security and the vulnerabilities that corporations and nations can be exposed to in times of crises such as the global pandemic or disruptions to global shipping routes. As India positions itself within an evolving framework of global value chains and prepares for the implications of carbon taxes being imposed on goods and services exported (see [Chapter 12](#) on climate change), the question of when India will enter into new free trade agreements becomes more critical and pressing.⁶

However, despite recognizing the importance of being open for business and supporting integration with the world economy, Indian politicians and negotiators have been faced with domestic constraints. These include the country's high trade deficits with several leading economies and the power of interest groups at home, unwilling to support further liberalization and international competition. India's last-minute withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic

Partnership (RCEP) agreement is a case in point. On 15 November 2020, after 8 years of negotiations, 15 Asian-Pacific economies including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand and ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) concluded the RCEP. The countries involved in the agreement accounted for nearly 30% of global GDP in 2019. Covering a third of the world's population, RCEP would also become the world's largest export supplier and second largest import destination. However, in what was a last-minute decision, India opted to exit discussions in November 2019, citing concerns over 'significant outstanding issues'. Explanations included ongoing tensions with China and the fear that a significant reduction in tariffs would open domestic markets to a flood of imports, hurting local producers and provoking a backlash from lobby groups at home. Critics argue that by not signing the RCEP, India has lost out on being part of a mega trade deal with the potential to shape regional trade patterns and economic integration.

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- Srinivasan, T. N. & Suresh D. Tendulkar. *Reintegrating India with the World Economy*. Columbia University Press, 2003.

Notes

1. For an analysis of India's trade policies and negotiating positions in terms of the country's national economic imperatives, before and after the 1991 economic reforms, see Srinivasan and Tendulkar (2003).

2. 'The Enabling Clause is the WTO legal basis for the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). Under the GSP, developed countries offer non-reciprocal preferential treatment (such as zero or low duties on imports) to products originating in developing countries. Preference-giving countries unilaterally determine which countries and which products are included in their schemes.' World Trade Organization (WTO) (2023).
3. For an overview of India's development assistance programme, see Mullen et al. (2015).
4. See, for instance, Mawdsley (2012).
5. For details on this, see the government website, www.makeinindia.com, Government of India (2023).
6. In 2022, India is engaged in multiple bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations and speculations abound about the possibility of free trade agreements being concluded with Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf Cooperation Council and with the European Union.

12

Climate change and international negotiations

Human-caused climate change is one of the most critical challenges of our time (see [Box 12.1](#)).¹ Moreover, it is a challenge that requires unprecedented change in a wide range of sectors, including energy production, heating, transportation, industry, construction and agriculture. The special responsibility of the largest emitters is highlighted by the cumulative carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from 1751 (nine years before the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) to 2017. The largest emitters are the United States (25% of cumulative global emissions), the European Union EU-27 plus the United Kingdom (22%), China (14%), Russia (7%) and Japan (4%) (Our World in Data [2022](#)).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, released in March 2022, pinpointed India as one of the vulnerable hot-spots. Projections include several regions and large cities facing a very high risk of climate disasters such as flooding, rising sea levels and heat-waves (IPCC [2022](#)). At the same time, ‘70 to 80 per cent of the India of 2030 is yet to be built’, estimated a report by McKinsey ([2010: 207](#)). As soon as 2023 India was forecast to overtake China as the most populated country (BBC [2022](#)). By 2030, India will have a population of 1.5 billion, compared to 1.43 billion in China (World Bank [2022b](#)). More than every 5.6th person on the planet will be Indian. So, it matters not only to Indians but to the world how sustainable India’s infrastructure will be.

In this chapter, we analyse how India’s climate change policy is framed, formulated and implemented, and argue that it requires carefully balancing domestic and international interests. The dilemma of fast economic growth versus sustainable development is considered, as well as the short term versus the long term. In this chapter we introduce emission trends and climate change impacts in India. We then analyse India’s international and domestic climate change policies – from Paris

Box 12.1 Climate change

Is there any doubt about the science of climate change and that climate change is caused by human activity? No, not among the scientific community. A meta-analysis of journal articles about climate change that take an explicit position on the existence of climate change shows that 97% affirm that it is occurring (Cook et al. 2013). Similarly, surveys of climate scientists show that most of them are convinced about the anthropogenic (human) contribution to rising temperatures (Carlton et al. 2015). Is there doubt about what must be done? Not regarding the question that we must reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as they get trapped in the atmosphere and end up causing climate change. What are the main GHG emissions globally? The United Nations' IPCC (2014) identified the following main global GHG emissions: (1) Carbon dioxide (CO₂) from burning fossil fuels and industrial processes (65%) and in addition further CO₂ from human activity impacting forestry and other land use (11%), such as deforestation, land clearing for agriculture and degradation of soils. (2) Methane (CH₄) from agricultural activities, waste management, biomass and energy use (16%). (3) Nitrous oxide (N₂O) from agricultural activities, especially fertilisers, and to a lesser extent from fossil fuel combustion (6%). And which economic sectors contribute the most to global GHG emissions? The main GHG-emitting sectors are electricity and heat production (24%), agriculture, forestry and other land use (24%), industry (21%), transportation (14%), other energy (10%) and buildings (6%). The biggest single source of global GHG emissions is the production of electricity and heat by burning fossil fuels – oil, coal and natural gas (IPCC 2014).

to Glasgow and New Delhi to rural India – and some core constraints and opportunities that Indian policymakers face.

Global emission trends

India's share in global emissions was merely 6% in 2021 (see Table 12.1), whereas the Indian population at the same time was nearly 18% of the global population. This compares to a current global emissions share of

27% by China (18% of the world’s population) and 16% by the United States (4% of the world’s population). These are current global emissions.

The share of *cumulative* CO₂ emissions by geographic region shows that from 1850–1990, Europe and the United States accounted for just over 70% of all historical emissions (Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR) & Brookings Hamilton Project 2019). Since then, primarily China’s emissions have increased substantially (see Figure 12.1) – so that for the period 1850–2017, Europe and the United States account for just over 50% of all historical emissions, China for just over 10%, India for around 3% and the rest of the world represents more than 25% (Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR) & Brookings Hamilton Project 2019).

The world is estimated to have a remaining ‘carbon budget’ of 945 gigaton emissions to ensure a 66% chance of warming below 2°C above pre-industrial levels (Borunda 2021). Despite the substantial reduction in economic activity around the world due to Covid-19 restrictions, including full lockdowns, the world still added 40 gigatons in 2020 – 34 from fossil fuels (down from 36 in 2019) and six from land-use change such as deforestation. We would spend the total outstanding carbon

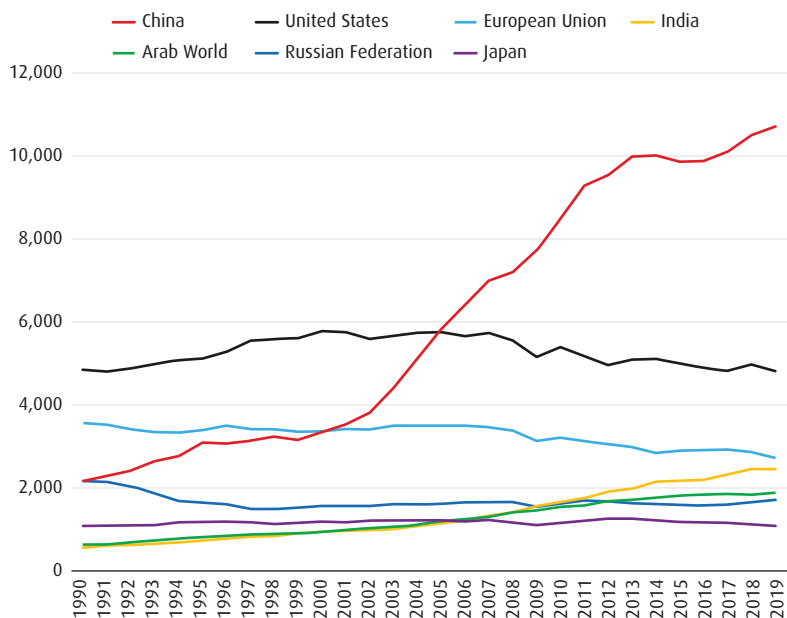


Figure 12.1 Annual CO₂ emissions by geographic region, 1950–2019

Source: Graph, author. Data source, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR) & Brookings Hamilton Project (2019)

Table 12.1 Biggest emitters in 2021 (China, United States, EU, India, Russia, Japan): global share, per capita consumption, growth rate, 2011–21 and primary energy consumption by source

	Global share	Growth rate per annum 2011–21	Gigajoule per capita 2021	Oil	Coal	Natural gas	Hydroelectric	Renewables	Nuclear energy
China	27%	3.4%	109	19%	55%	9%	8%	7%	2%
United States	16%	0.05%	280	38%	11%	32%	3%	8%	8%
EU	10%	-0.6%	135	35%	11%	24%	5%	13%	11%
India	6%	4%	25	27%	57%	6%	4%	5%	1%
Russia	5%	0.7%	215	21%	11%	55%	6%	0%	6%
Japan	3%	-1.3%	141	37%	27%	21%	4%	7%	3%
World	100%	1.3%	76	31%	27%	24%	7%	7%	4%

Data Source: BP Global 2022; Percentages: authors' calculations.

budget in less than 25 years at this level of emissions. For a 66% chance to stay below the more ambitious 1.5°C target – which the Paris Agreement parties agreed to ‘pursue efforts’ towards – the world has merely 195 gigatons left from its carbon budget. This translates to only five years to achieve net zero at the current emissions level.

Net-zero means that total emissions are around zero – after accounting for carbon sequestration, another word for the long-term removal or capture of CO₂ from the atmosphere. Carbon sequestration helps to slow down or reverse CO₂ pollution in the Earth’s atmosphere and thus to mitigate or reverse global warming. Carbon sinks retain carbon and prevent it from entering the atmosphere of the Earth. Forests, as well as oceans, are such carbon sinks. While deforestation leads to the release of the stored carbon into the Earth’s atmosphere, planting forests, on the other hand, is a form of carbon sequestration. Negative emissions – in the form of reforestation or carbon capture and storage – play an increasingly significant role in policy scenario planning.

Most primary energy consumption in the world (still) comes from fossil fuels – a stunning 82% in 2021 (see [Table 12.1](#) – columns oil plus coal plus natural gas).² Oil (31%), coal (27%) and natural gas (24%) still contribute on a different scale than hydroelectric (7%), renewables (7%) and nuclear energy (4%) (BP Global 2022).

In the United States, energy consumption was 280 gigajoules per capita, compared to 109 in China and 25 in India. This is despite production having moved East. So, a substantial part of China’s per capita energy consumption is on producing exported goods. This is reflected in the data on the largest CO₂ emitters in 2021: China (27%), the United States (16%), the European Union (10%), India (6%), Russia (5%) and Japan (3%) (BP Global 2022). The largest emission growth rates for the period 2009–19 (so before Covid-19 brought many economies to a halt) have occurred in Vietnam (10.9%), Bangladesh (7.4%), the Philippines (6.5%), Oman (6.4%), Sri Lanka (5.8%), Qatar (5.6%), Iraq (5.5%), Turkmenistan (5.4%), Peru (4.9%), Indonesia (4.6%) and India (4.5%) (BP Global 2021: 15). Economic growth and emissions (still) go hand in hand. Hence, it is not a surprise that (fast) emerging markets, including Vietnam, Bangladesh and India, also have some of the highest emission growth rates. This highlights the increasing importance that large emerging markets with high economic growth rates, such as India or Indonesia, are central to addressing climate change. While the emissions in the United States were stagnating in the last decade, those of China rose by 3.4%, and those of India by 4% (see [Table 12.1](#)).

So, we need to focus on the climate change commitments and policies of these fast-emerging markets with large populations, not least India. But why should India bother? Apart from an arguably moral obligation of all countries to be part of the solution, and apart from co-benefits like cleaner air – a strong argument in a country containing many of the world’s cities with the highest air pollution³ – there are vast economic opportunities in renewable energy, electrification and sustainability.

The world faces a massive challenge in achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, which would provide a 50% chance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, according to the World Energy Outlook by the International Energy Agency (IEA) (2020a). The 2016 UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change aims to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming ‘to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C’. (UNFCCC 2015, Article 2.1.a). But what would this entail? The IEA’s 2020 World Energy Outlook ‘Net Zero Emissions by 2050’ case requires a range of ambitious measures to be successful, including: (1) *Solar photovoltaics investment* to increase five-fold by 2030. (2) Most major *coal plants* to be shut down by 2030 or their emissions captured. (3) *Electric cars* to make up 50% of the cars sold in 2030 – in contrast to 9% in 2021 (triple the market share compared to 2019) (IEA 2022a). (4) The *retrofitting of buildings*, such as adding insulation and changing the heating source to renewables, to progress at an unprecedented pace. (5) *Industrial production* to use *energy sources* for heat that hardly exist today. (6) A range of 11 *behavioural changes*, including video conferencing instead of short-distance flights, reducing the standard temperature in buildings and limiting the speed of cars. Before we examine India’s international and domestic responses to climate change, let us first look at India’s predicted climate change impact.

The impacts of climate change on India

The United Nations predict various adverse climate change impacts for India, ranging from extreme heat to monsoon rainfall decline – while the heavy rainfall frequency increases. Depending on the region, this will lead to a rise in droughts and flooding. Melting glaciers and the rising sea level are visible effects (see Box 12.2). Less known is the decline of groundwater resources. The impact on agriculture will have profound implications for India, where this is still the largest employment sector. The livelihood of most Indian rural households (70%) depends primarily on agriculture. Most farmers (82%) are classified as small or marginal farmers (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO]

2021). Moreover, most Indian agriculture (58%) is monsoon dependent (IPCC 2019, ch.6: 17). This makes India particularly vulnerable to the impact of changes in rainfall patterns.

The IPCC (2019) warned that parts of India were already heavily affected by desertification and salinization. Desertification in India affected 81.4 million hectares in 2005 – more than three times the size of the United Kingdom. Salinization refers to the accumulation of salts in the soil, which, if above a certain threshold (3,000–6,000 ppm salt), prevents most cultivated plants from taking water from the ground and growing. Salinization in India affected 6.7 million hectares in 2009 – an area the size of Ireland. There are notable improvements in irrigation – with drip irrigation methods significantly reducing the water consumed in production. For instance, this can equate to reduced water consumption of 45% for cotton, 44% for sugarcane and 37% for grapes while increasing the overall yields by up to one-third (IPCC 2019, ch.5: 25). Yet, such adaptation measures cannot make up for the overall decrease in the yield of certain water-hungry crops, such as wheat, which decreased by 5.2% between 1981 and 2009 (ibid.).

Severe droughts have occurred in 8 of the 15 years between 2002 and 2017 – resulting in significant yield declines (IPCC 2019, ch.6: 17). The projected further increase in droughts, heatwaves, wildfires and extreme weather events will most likely negatively impact food production, food security and the livelihoods of millions of Indian farmers.⁴ Policy solutions must address the interlinked challenge of poverty, inequality and climate change. Empowering women (Yadav & Lal 2018) and increasing access to financial services (Pauli 2019) are arguably essential to future policy solutions. Access to credit, insurance and saving accounts – also for direct transfer of welfare benefits and emergency relief – can help with climate change adaptation, such as to mitigate the negative impact of crop failure due to droughts or flooding.

Box 12.2 Impact of climate change

Since 1880, human-caused climate change has increased the average global surface temperature by around 1°C compared with before the Industrial Revolution (NASA 2021a). Given the current policies, the latest projections by the Climate Action Tracker (CAT) (2021) estimate a warming of 2.7°C by the year 2100. Suppose all the current 2030 targets (without long-term pledges) given by countries as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement are fulfilled. In that case, the CAT estimates a

2.4°C warming by the year 2100. For the most optimistic scenario, CAT includes all net-zero targets (in addition to the Paris pledges) and their effect on non-CO₂ emissions. CAT estimates a 2.1°C warming in this best-case scenario.

What is so problematic about having higher temperatures?

Firstly, heatwaves, droughts and wildfires – their number and devastation increased in the last decade, which was the hottest on record. 2020 is tied with 2016 as the hottest year on record, followed by 2019, 2017, 2021, 2015 and 2018 (World Meteorological Organization [WMO] 2022). Most recently, June 2022 was tied with 2020 as Earth’s warmest June on record (Masters 2022).

Secondly, extreme weather events become more frequent and intense. Hurricanes and typhoons get their energy from warm ocean waters and are predicted to become even more frequent, more intense and longer lasting than the records set in the last decade. Changes in rainfall patterns are also expected. They are likely to lead to more flooding in some countries, not least those already heavily affected, like Bangladesh. And they are likely to lead to more desertification and droughts in other regions.

Thirdly, sea-level rise has already occurred – around 20 cm since reliable data became available in 1880. Different scenarios predict a further sea-level rise between 30 cm and 2.4 metres by 2100, depending on the increase in temperature (NASA 2021b). Why is this the case? Because of the additional water from melting land ice and the expansion of seawater as it warms.

Fourthly, the Arctic is predicted to be ice-free. There will also be longer seasons without frost, which are expected to affect agricultural production – increasing food production in some countries (for example the US) and decreasing food production in many countries, not least those closer to the equator.

Fifthly, the future impact on food security, conflicts (not least regarding resources like freshwater), and internal and international migration remain unknown, but the projections are not promising. The U.S. Department of Defense, in its 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, depicted the effects of climate change as ‘threat multipliers’, increasing the stress of challenges ‘such as poverty, environmental degradation, political instability, and social tensions – conditions that can enable terrorist activity and other forms of violence’ (U.S. Department of Defense 2014: 8). Hence resource conflicts and migration are likely to increase.

Negotiating the Paris Agreement

India's role and position in international climate change negotiations have changed substantially. Dubash (2009) identifies three competing Indian climate-change policy narratives: (a) Growth-first stonewallers – focus on economic development and poverty reduction; equity as a principle and strategy. (b) Progressive realists – unfair international negotiations, but climate change is seen as a real threat, with opportunities for action and development with co-benefits. (c) Progressive internationalists – poorest countries most affected, opportunities for shaping the international process and moving to low-carbon technology. Mohan (2017) argues that India's climate policy positions evolved from growth-first stonewaller (during the 1990s), via progressive realists (Copenhagen 2009), to progressive internationalists (Paris 2015). The latter policy is best understood as a subset of India's foreign policy agenda and as moving towards playing a more prominent role 'in solving global challenges and shaping the rules, norms and processes that guide those efforts' (Dubash 2009).

Does the Paris Agreement's voluntary approach – in the form of NDCs (see [Box 12.3](#)) – render it a failure? We must examine the discourse surrounding the Paris negotiations to answer this question. Many developing countries, including India, argued convincingly that for climate justice reasons, the main polluters should be obliged to reduce their emissions first, as was evident in earlier UN agreements. Industrialized countries were to carry the significant burden and help developing countries sustain their economic development.

Box 12.3 International climate change agreements

The significance of climate change as a global challenge has ultimately led to several international agreements. The main international treaty on fighting climate change is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 1992, to which 197 parties have signed up (196 states plus the European Union). The 1997 Kyoto Protocol was the world's first legally binding tool for reducing GHG emissions. It is built on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities of developed and developing countries, as laid out in Article 4 of the 1992 Framework Convention of Climate Change and the need for industrialized countries to act first. The Kyoto Protocol covered

a mere 12% of global emissions (European Commission 2020) because many major emitters did not participate or simply opted out, like the United States in 2001, followed by Canada, Australia, Japan and Russia.

The 2015 Paris Agreement succeeded the Kyoto Protocol. It was adopted by all UNFCCC Parties and is the first legally binding global climate agreement. The analysis by Cléménçon (2016) points to the double victory of the United States in core international climate agreements, which in his view ‘obstructed effective climate action for more than two decades’. Firstly, to get the United States on board the Kyoto Protocol, the EU had to follow the principle of emissions *trading*. This contrasted with the EU’s preference of scaling up carbon and energy *taxes*. Cléménçon (2016) argues that this ‘set climate politics back by two decades’. Secondly, the EU pushed since the late 1980s for binding emission targets and timetables, but – to get the Paris Agreement signed – finally gave in to the US demand for voluntary contributions. Hence, the Paris Agreement’s core element is Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Was India the roadblock to an agreement in Paris, as portrayed by *The New York Times*? In a cartoon titled ‘India at the Paris Climate Conference’, *The New York Times* depicted India as an elephant blocking a steam engine train labelled ‘Paris Climate Summit’ – with the caption: ‘The emerging economy could pose many demands on developed countries before agreeing to a deal’ (Kim 2015). *The New York Times* article ‘Narendra Modi Could Make or Break Obama’s Climate Legacy’ (Davenport & Barry 2015) from a week earlier states these demands clearly: ‘India is expected to challenge the United States on three counts: to speed up emissions reductions by wealthy countries to compensate for emissions growth in poor countries, to pay more to poor countries to assist in mitigation plans, and to provide clean-energy technology to poor countries.’

All of the above are excellent bargaining positions, given historical and current per capita emissions. The arguments are also well-considered, given that the United States and other *advanced* economies have opted out of the Kyoto Protocol – as well as the significant challenge of development and poverty reduction, the financing gap, and the need for technology transfer to scale up and speed up mitigation and adaptation efforts of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. Therefore, a more fitting depiction might be framing the

situation as India joining the big party of economic growth and consumption late and being asked to share the burden of tidying up the emissions in equal measure.

The same *The New York Times* article points to two crucial aspects of the politics of international negotiations. Firstly, the role of individual leaders: referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's book on climate change, titled *Convenient Action* (Modi 2011); and quoting Anand Mahindra, the chairman of the Mahindra Group: 'I believe that Modi wants to be remembered as the person who turned India green' (Davenport & Barry 2015). Secondly, the two-level game approach of climate change negotiations: referring to editorials in India's newspapers 'urging negotiators to stand their ground, even at the cost of being labelled obstructionists or spoilers' (Davenport & Barry 2015). Quoting the former Indian Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh: 'The more criticism India comes under in Paris, the more applause [Prakash] Javadekar [India's Environment Minister] will get in Parliament and elsewhere. ... This is the dichotomy of the situation' (Davenport & Barry 2015).

What complicated the bargaining position of India was the 2014 joint statement by China and the United States that China's CO₂ emissions will probably peak by 2030. Before this, China was mainly taking climate change positions like other emerging markets such as India and developing countries – especially that developed countries must reduce emissions first before other countries are asked to do the same. However, given that China became the most significant contemporary GHG emitter around 2005, it started to share more climate change positions with the largest historical emitter, the United States. The pressure on India grew – not least from the United States – to commit to a specific, near-term date for its emissions to peak. However, India made it clear that it could not commit to such a timeline, given its mandate to fight poverty and foster economic growth to enhance its people's living standards and overall wellbeing.

Developed countries promised US\$ 100 billion in climate finance for developing countries per year. Unfortunately, by any measure, the reality is far from this pledge. Moreover, no clear international accounting standards exist that clarify what constitutes 'climate finance'. A controversial OECD report claimed that developed countries have made substantial progress towards this goal and mobilized US\$ 62 billion in 2014, up from US\$ 52 billion in 2013 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] & Climate Policy Initiative 2015) However, this claim was firmly rejected by the Indian government, pointing to

severe problems with the report's accuracy, methodology and verifiability (Climate Change Finance Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of India 2015).

In the account of one of the Indian negotiators involved in the Paris Agreement, the 2015 agreement preserves India's core interests. First and foremost, the Paris Agreement is 'firmly anchored in the UNFCCC ... since it safeguards policy space underpinned by key principles such as equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR&RC)' (Lavasa 2019: 181). In other words, India's core interest in (economic) development is not constrained by a top-down approach, as the contributions are nationally determined. That many developing and developed countries perceived the Paris Agreement as an overall success is often attributed to the French leadership of the conference.

Yet, the Paris Agreement remains ambivalent. On the one hand, it arguably abandons the ambition of global equitable burden-sharing and of multilaterally negotiated *binding emissions targets* and *timetables* for each country, the foundation of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (Cléménçon 2016). This starkly contrasts with the poster-child example of successful international environmental agreements – the 1987 Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances, which was built on binding reduction targets and timetables and differentiated responsibilities for developing and industrialized countries (Benedick 1991). On the other hand, the Paris Agreement was an important milestone to legitimize and prompt more climate action effectively.

Climate change policies in India

The 2008 National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was a significant step for India in addressing climate change. It is centred around the pursuit of co-benefits and is often seen as India's response to pressures from the international community. It includes eight missions (see Table 12.2). The national missions initiated by the 2008 NAPCC are accompanied by additional institutions (see Table 12.3).

In addition to the ministries mentioned above, their respective national missions and the accompanying institutions, climate change policies are also spearheaded by the Special Envoys Office on Climate Change in the Prime Minister's Office, the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change (which is leading the National Action Plan on Climate Change), as well as the Executive Committee on Climate Change. What

Table 12.2 The eight National Missions from the Indian 2008 National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)

Mission name [Ministry in charge]	Start	Main objectives
(Jawaharlal Nehru) National Solar Mission [Ministry of New and Renewable Energy]	2010	'promote ecological sustainable growth while addressing India's energy security challenges ... establish India as a global leader in solar energy by creating the policy conditions for solar technology diffusion across the country as quickly as possible. The Mission targets installing 100 GW grid-connected solar power plants by the year 2022' (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India 2022).
National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency [Ministry of Power]	2011	'strengthen the market for energy efficiency through implementation of innovative business models in the energy efficiency sector. ... consist of four initiatives to enhance energy efficiency in energy intensive industries which are as follows: <i>Perform Achieve and Trade</i> (PAT) – improving efficiency in energy intensive sectors; <i>Energy Efficiency Financing Platform</i> (EEFP); <i>Framework for Energy Efficient Economic Development</i> (FEEED) – development of fiscal instruments to promote energy efficiency; <i>Market Transformation for Energy Efficiency</i> (MTEE) – accelerating shift towards energy efficient appliances' (Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Power, Government of India 2022).
National Mission on Sustainable Habitat [Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs]	2010	'aims at (i) Promoting low-carbon urban growth towards reducing GHG emissions intensity for achieving India's NDC and (ii) Building resilience of cities to climate change impacts and strengthening their capacities to "bounce back better" from climate related extreme events and disaster risks' (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India 2021).

(continued)

Table 12.2 (Cont.)

Mission name [Ministry in charge]	Start	Main objectives
National Water Mission [Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation]	2011	‘...ensure integrated water resource management helping to conserve water, minimise wastage and ensure more equitable distribution both across and within states. ... optimise water use by increasing water use efficiency by 20% through regulatory mechanisms with differential entitlements and pricing. ... ensure that a considerable share of the water needs of urban areas are met through recycling of waste water ... adoption of new and appropriate technologies such as low temperature desalination technologies that allow for the use of ocean water. ... ensure basin level management strategies to deal with variability in rainfall and river flows due to climate change’ (Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India 2022).
National Mission for Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem [Ministry of Science & Technology]	2010	‘address some important issues concerning a) Himalayan Glaciers and the associated hydrological consequences, b) Biodiversity conservation and protection, c) Wild life conservation and protection, d) Traditional knowledge societies and their livelihood and e) Planning for sustaining of the Himalayan Ecosystem’ (Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India 2010b).
Green India Mission [Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change]	2014	‘protecting, restoring and enhancing India’s forest cover and responding to Climate Change. The target under the Mission is 10 m ha on forest and non-forest lands for increasing the forest/ tree cover and to improve the quality of existing forest’ (Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India 2014).
National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture [Ministry of Agriculture]	2010	‘promoting sustainable agriculture through a series of adaptation measures focusing on ten key dimensions encompassing Indian agriculture namely; “Improved crop seeds, livestock and fish cultures”, “Water Use Efficiency”, “Pest Management”, “Improved Farm Practices”, “Nutrient Management”, “Agricultural insurance”, “Credit support”, “Markets”, “Access to Information” and “Livelihood diversification”’ (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, Government of India 2022).

Table 12.2 (Cont.)

Mission name [<i>Ministry in charge</i>]	Start	Main objectives
National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change [<i>Ministry of Science & Technology</i>]	2010	'serve as Support mission for generating and providing strategic knowledge to all other 7 national missions ... with in built capacities for continuous and mid course changes in trajectories to take into account of international developments in climate change related issues' (Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India 2010a).

Table 12.3 Climate change institutions in India: beyond ministries and missions

	Name [<i>Ministry/Institution in Charge</i>]	Founded
AIPA	Apex Committee for Implementation of Paris Agreement	2021
NAFCC	National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change	2015
	Energy group [<i>Niti Aayog</i>]	2015
CCFU	Climate Change Finance Unit [<i>Ministry of Finance</i>]	2011
NSCCC	National Steering Committee on Climate Change [<i>Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change</i>]; task: 'ensure that the SAPCCs were designed and implemented in accordance with the NAPCC [2008 National Action Plan on Climate Change] ... composed of secretaries of various ministries and departments, and chaired by the environment secretary' (Dubash & Ghosh 2019: 341)	2011
LCSIG	Expert Group on Low Carbon Strategies for Inclusive Growth [<i>Planning Commission Government of India</i>]; terminated	2008–14
SAPCC	State Action Plan on Climate Change; prepared by each of the 29 states and 7 union territories	2010
INCCA	Indian Network on Climate Change Assessment [<i>Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change</i>]	2009
CDMA	Clean Development Mechanism Authority [<i>Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change</i>]	2003
BEE	Bureau of Energy Efficiency [<i>Ministry of Power</i>]	2002

is more, the multilevel climate governance also involves the subnational governments in the states and cities. Some authors argue that a centralized command-and-control climate governance regime is required for a coordinated action plan – which, in practice, is contested by a decentralized governance structure and respective institutional arrangement. Jørgensen et al. (2015: 280) analyse multilevel climate governance in India and find, unsurprisingly, that ‘Indian states do not act solely as mere implementers of federal top-down policies, rather India’s states experiment with individual approaches to develop renewable energy, tailored to regional specifics.’ Finally, multilevel climate governance involves the Indian civil society, think tanks, and domestic and international development actors such as the Indian National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), bilateral donors and international agencies. (For a depiction of the complex governance structure of climate change in India, see Dubash and Ghosh 2019, Figure 19.1: ‘Institutions in India’s climate change governance’.)

In India, several specific schemes have been implemented to address climate change in agriculture. The Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a global partnership of organizations researching and promoting food security, fosters the so-called Climate-Smart Village (CSV) in India (IPCC, 6–17). CSVs focus on reducing carbon emissions (for example no tillage, residue management), enhanced water management (for example direct-seeded rice, micro-irrigation), new technologies for weather forecasting, index-based insurances and ICT-based agricultural services, as well as enhancing knowledge on nutrition (Hariharan et al. 2020).

The Indian government also implemented a range of emission mitigation policies – in the addition to the aforementioned original National Missions. Examples from the transportation sector include: (1) The *National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage*, which promotes the supply chain for electric vehicles and battery storage production in India (Press Information Bureau, Government of India 2019). (2) The FAME-II scheme, which fosters demands for electric vehicles via supporting electric buses (seven thousand), three-wheelers (five hundred thousand), passenger cars (fifty-five thousand incl. hybrids) and two-wheelers (one million) – with funding of US\$ 1.4 billion (Rs. 10,000 Crore) for three years until March 2022 (National Automotive Board (NAB), Department of Heavy Industry, Government of India 2020). (3) An example of mitigation policies in the built environment sector is the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP), which aims at squaring the growing cooling needs with climate action needs such as energy

efficiency and the phase-down of heat-trapping hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) – as agreed in the Montreal Protocol and the Kigali Amendment (Jaiswal 2019).

The Indian government submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) in 2015 (Government of India 2015). The latest update regarding India's climate change commitments was announced in the context of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021 in Glasgow. They include:

1. Reach a non-fossil energy capacity of 500 GW by 2030. This would be 60% of India's power capacity, well above the 40% committed by India under the Paris Agreement.
2. Meet 50% of energy requirements with renewable energy by 2030.
3. Reduce total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now to 2030. Prime Minister Modi pointed to the role of Indian Railways' energy efficiency.
4. Reduce the economy's carbon intensity to less than 45% by 2030.
5. Achieve net-zero emissions by 2070. (Kwatra 2021)

The last target has been widely criticized – that the year 2070 is not ambitious enough as the net-zero timeline. The United Nations stated in mid-2022 that:

More than 70 countries, including the biggest polluters – China, the United States, and the European Union – have set a net-zero target, covering about 76% of global emissions. Over 1,200 companies have put in place science-based targets in line with net zero, and more than 1000 cities, over 1000 educational institutions, and over 400 financial institutions have joined the Race to Zero, pledging to take rigorous, immediate action to halve global emissions by 2030. (United Nations 2022)

India's net-zero-by-2070 target embodies the central tension felt by the Indian government to achieve economic growth, not least through industrialization and education to create jobs, while being part of the solution regarding climate change. Another example of this is the criticism due to India's and China's insistence on changing the wording in the COP26 pledge – from 'phase out' coal to 'phase down' coal (Pickard 2021).

Given this perception of India as an obstructor in climate change negotiations, it seems surprising that the country ranks high in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) by the NGOs German Watch,

Climate Action Network (CAN) and the New Climate Institute. The CCPI is an independent, annual tracking of countries' climate change mitigation performance. The CCPI covers 57 countries, which account for 90% of global GHG emissions. India is ranked tenth in the CCPI – behind Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, Morocco and Chile. The first three ranks were left vacant as the authors did not rate any country's performance as 'very high'.

The countries with 'very low' climate change performance are led by the worst performers – Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Canada, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Malaysia, Russia and the United States (ranked 55 out of 64); followed closely by five EU member countries: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Belgium (German Watch, Climate Action Network & NewClimate Institute 2022). The United States at least moved up from the last position in the ranking in the previous year, thanks to the climate change commitment of the Biden administration, based on the Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution & Environmental Justice, which echoes the proposed Green New Deal by Representative Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Markey, including a significant role for carbon capture and storage technology (Kraner 2021). The very-low-ranked European countries are also likely to improve their positions in the coming years given the funding and pressure provided through the European Green Deal – 'Europe's man on the moon moment', as the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, called it. The European Green Deal aims for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 for the EU, and a 50–55% cut in emissions by 2030 (compared with 1990 levels) (Harvey & Rankin 2020).

The CCPI scale goes from 'very low' for countries with a terrible climate change performance via 'low', 'medium', 'high' to 'very high'. The GHG emissions ranking contributes 40% to the overall score. It captures the complication that large emerging markets like India embody. On the one hand, current *levels* of GHG emissions per capita are (still) minimal – hence the very positive ranking of India as 'very high'. On the other hand, the current *trend* of GHG emissions per capita is a substantial increase of emissions due to high economic growth (fuelled predominantly by fossil fuels) – hence the very negative ranking of India as 'very low'. On the positive side, the GHG 2030 Target is also ranked as 'very high' and compatible with a well below two-degree benchmark.

Similarly, while the current level of renewable energy is rated 'medium', the corresponding trend is ranked as 'high' (German Watch, Climate Action Network & NewClimate Institute 2022). The consulted experts praise the (1) significant increase of renewables targets (450 GW renewable electricity capacity by 2030), (2) the emphasis on Nationally

Determined Contribution targets implementation, and (3) the target of 30% electric vehicle share by 2030. The CCPI consultants, however, lament the lack of concrete plans to phase out coal – and that the ‘pipeline of proposed coal power plant development is the world’s second-largest and one of the few that have increased since 2015’ (German Watch, Climate Action Network & NewClimate Institute 2022).

So, what speaks in favour of India being a leader in climate change performance? India is projected to overachieve its 2030 emission reduction targets – including the more ambitious 40% non-fossil capacity share target. The ‘National Solar Mission’, one of the major policies for renewable energy, was launched by Prime Minister Singh in 2010 with a 20 GW target by 2022. Prime Minister Modi increased the target to an ambitious 100 GW by 2022 in the 2015 budget. However, India will miss its 2022 solar target of 100 GW by about 27 GW. According to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) and JMK Research, this will be due to the slow growth of rooftop solar, which is likely to reach 15 GW – instead of the target of 40 GW. On the other hand, utility-scale solar is forecast to achieve around 97% of the 60 GW target by the end of 2022 (PV Magazine 2022). While there were delays in installation in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions, India is regarded by the International Energy Agency to be the most significant contributor to the record renewables upswing in 2021 – with the other major renewable capacity additions taking place in China, the EU and the United States as in the previous years (International Energy Agency [IEA] 2020b, 2022b).

How does solar production in India and other Asian countries compare? The global solar energy production share of the Asia Pacific was 56%, followed by Europe with 19% and North America with 18% (BP Global 2022). The top five solar energy producing countries are China (world share: 32%) – with a gap – followed by the United States (16%), which is followed – with a considerable gap – by Japan (8%), India (7%) and Germany (5%) (BP Global 2022) (see Figure 12.2).

How does India’s wind energy performance compare? The global wind energy production share of the Asia Pacific was 42%, followed by Europe with 27% and North America with 24% (BP Global 2022). The top five wind energy producing countries are China (world share: 35%) – with a gap – followed by the United States (21%), which is followed – with a considerable gap – by Germany (6%), Brazil and India (both 4% world share) (BP Global 2022) (see Figure 12.3). The country which plays a surprisingly marginal role – given its emissions share, advanced economy and potential for wind power generation – is Japan, with a 0.4% world share, behind Greece, Ireland and Chile (BP Global 2022).

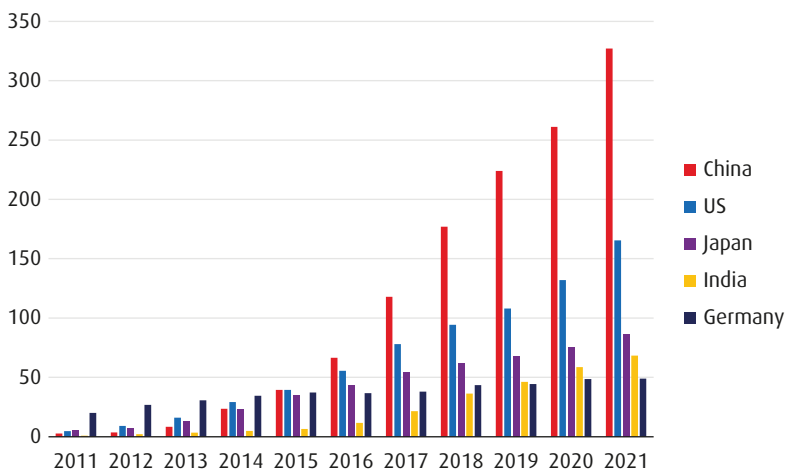


Figure 12.2 Global top 5 solar energy producing countries, 2011–21 (terawatt-hours)

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2022a). Statistics are taken from national statistical agencies, international organizations and other proprietary sources.

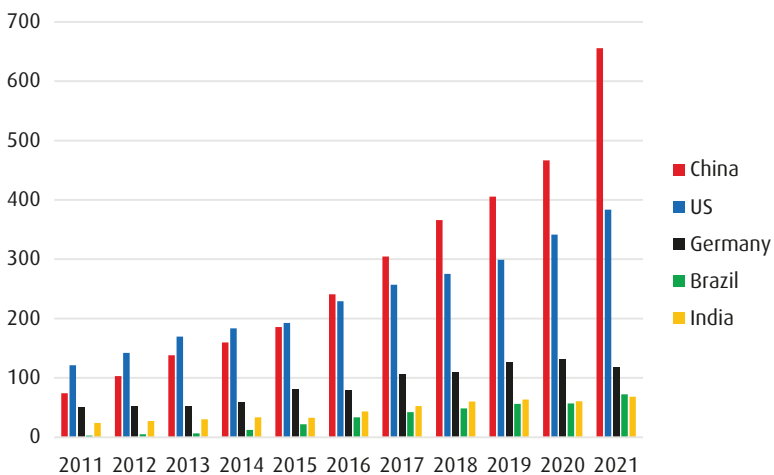


Figure 12.3 Global top 5 wind energy producing countries, 2011–21 (terawatt-hours)

Source: Graph, author. Data source, World Bank (2022a). Statistics are taken from national statistical agencies, international organizations and other proprietary sources.

To summarize: at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow in November 2021, Prime Minister Modi announced India's target of net zero by 2070, with the interim goal of an emissions reduction of 33–35% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. While this commitment is less ambitious than that of OECD countries, it reflects India's concern about how fast the triangulation of poverty reduction, sustainable growth and climate change action is feasible. Therefore, the Indian government re-emphasized the essential role of climate finance in supporting developing countries in their transition to net zero.

India: constraints and opportunities

One of the main caveats regarding India's climate change ambitions is the country's plans regarding coal mining and the construction of additional coal power plants. While no new coal power plant was constructed in 2020, there are still plans to do so in the future. This is even though the share of coal in India's power mix has fallen for the second year in a row and, as some analysis suggests, peaked in 2018 (Rathi & Singh 2021). Energy analysts use the levelized cost of energy (LCOE) to compare the price of electricity generation through different technologies of unequal life spans, project size and capital costs – for example, natural gas, wind and solar. LCOE measures lifetime costs (construction, maintenance and operation of a power plant over an assumed lifetime) divided by energy production (U.S. Department of Energy & Office of Indian Energy 2015). Such LCOE analysis shows that – thanks to the dramatic cost reductions – utility-scale solar and onshore wind 'became cost-competitive with conventional generation several years ago on a new-build basis' (Lazard 2020). Given this price competitiveness of renewables and the (likely further increasing) public pressure regarding climate change mitigation, energy analysts warn about newly built coal plants turning into stranded assets.

A few key facts stand out in India's energy future. India surpassed China as the most populous country in 2023. Given India's population size and projected economic growth, India will see the 'largest increase in energy demand of any country over next 20 years' (IEA 2021). The International Energy Agency points out the following: 'India's energy future depends on buildings and factories that are yet to be built, and vehicles and appliances that are yet to be bought ... nearly 60% of its CO₂ emissions in the late 2030s will be coming from infrastructure and machines that do not exist today' (IEA 2021).

This provides an excellent opportunity for sustainable investment. The International Energy Agency estimates that over the next 20 years, further financing for clean energy technologies of around US\$ 1.4 trillion is required. It also projects that ‘the benefits are huge, including savings of the same magnitude on oil import bills’ (IEA 2021). The switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy requires a substantial surge in power system flexibility. Electricity grids must become ‘smart’, and storage capacity must increase. In early 2022, India’s Ministry of New and Renewable Energy entered a *strategic partnership agreement* with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) to broaden its renewable technology base, including investment in green hydrogen (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA] 2022).

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, India is well suited for this challenge as it is becoming a global leader in battery storage. The energy transition also requires fading out the substantial fossil fuel subsidies. In India, fossil fuel subsidies are multiple times higher than those for renewables. India has the fifth largest fossil fuel subsidies in the world – around US\$ 22 billion – behind Iran (US\$ 86 billion), China (US\$ 31 billion), Saudi Arabia and Russia.

As a G20 member, India committed in 2009 to phase out ‘over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support for the poorest’ (G20 2009). Recently, India committed to a G20 peer review of its fossil fuel subsidies. Of course, fossil fuel subsidies are a highly political and politicized issue with strong vested-interest groups. This explains why subsidies for fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal) were more than seven times higher (US\$ 12.4 billion) than subsidies for renewables and electric mobility (US\$ 1.7 billion) in the financial year 2019 (International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD] 2020: 5). In general, consumption subsidies are rising as more people access energy. Under-priced electricity at the state level is India’s costliest – and not well-targeted – subsidy policy, costing US\$ 9.5 billion. Many people, including vulnerable groups, benefit or depend on fossil fuel subsidies. That is why reforms must be designed carefully and phased in gradually.

Developing countries cut back subsidies as energy prices declined during the pandemic. Also, India increased taxes on diesel and gas fuel. Yet, the significant rise in energy and living costs in 2022 – not least due to the war by the Russian regime – triggered a revision of some of these subsidy cuts. The trend in reduced fossil fuel subsidies – reduced by half from 2019 until the start of the war in Ukraine – was primarily driven by lower oil prices and (to a lesser degree) also by policy reforms and increased renewable energy and electric vehicle subsidies – a 3.5 times increase since 2019. This reflects a green energy commitment by the Modi government.

Conclusion

Given the well-grounded concern of developing countries with poverty alleviation and job creation for their increasing population, this chapter sought to counter the common, often Western, narrative of India as an irrational, counterproductive roadblock in climate change negotiations. Our chapter has sought to understand the Indian position of coming late to the economic growth and consumption party and being asked to pay the price of tidying up (emissions) in equal measure. We argued that those countries with the largest cumulative CO₂ emissions – the United States (25%), the EU-27 plus the United Kingdom (22%) and China (14%) – have a special responsibility to address climate change.

This responsibility goes beyond domestic climate change policies and refers to transferring funds and technology to developing countries to foster climate change mitigation and adaptation. While promises in this regard have been made (US\$ 100 billion in climate finance for developing countries per year), the reality is still far from being realized. We also showed that the emissions in the two largest emerging markets determine the list of the current largest emitters – with China accounting for most (27%), followed by the United States (16%), the EU (10%) and India (6%).

We elaborated on the negative impacts of climate change on countries with already high temperatures, agrarian crises and limited resources for adaptation. India is particularly vulnerable given that more than two-thirds of its rural households depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Droughts, heatwaves, wildfires, extreme weather events, desertification and salinization constitute a real threat to food production, livelihoods and food security. In addition, climate change works as a ‘threat multiplier’ – aggravating stressors like poverty, social tensions and political instability, potentially fostering terrorism, violent conflict and forced migration.

We showed that the current government shows ambition regarding climate change mitigation, which is, among other things, reflected in the raised goals of the National Solar Mission, initially initiated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. India arguably is a leader in climate change *performance*, as reflected in its top rating in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI). It is easy to identify several other promising policy initiatives, from air conditioning efficiency to electric vehicles and an area in which India shows ambition and promise: battery storage.

However, we also drew attention to the substantial shortcomings of Indian climate change policies: Firstly, coal – the current role of and, worse, the (still existing) plans for increasing coal mining and coal

power plant construction. Secondly, fossil fuel subsidies are multiple times higher than subsidies for renewables. This is a delicate political issue with significant implications for many election-determining poor citizens – hence accompanying ‘just transition’ measures are essential.

Literature: core reading (general works on climate change)

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Literature: further reading

- Dubash, Navroz K. *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
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Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter has been published in Mitra et al. (2022a).
2. Eurostat provides the following definition: ‘Primary energy consumption measures the total energy demand of a country. It covers consumption of the energy sector itself, losses during transformation (for example, from oil or gas into electricity) and distribution of energy, and the final consumption by end users. It excludes energy carriers used for non-energy purposes (such as petroleum not used for combustion but for producing plastics)’ (Eurostat 2021).
3. Another critical issue is air pollution. Of 30 cities worldwide with the worst air pollution in 2022, 22 were based in India (CNN 2021; IQAir 2023). The Supreme Court rejected in June 2020 a request by power producers to extend a deadline to install emission-reducing equipment (*Times of India* 2020). While utilities have missed earlier deadlines (at the end of 2017 and 2019), citing costs and technical difficulties, the Indian Ministry of Power asked for further extensions for coal-fired power plants around New Delhi in 2020 (Varadhan 2020).
4. For an insightful report on food security in the face of climate change, including policy recommendations, see Beddington et al. (2012).

India, ASEAN, the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific

This chapter begins by exploring the drivers of India's foreign policy engagement with Southeast Asia. Examining the turn eastward, which formally took shape in the early 1990s because of the government's Look East policy, the chapter considers the nature and implications of interactions with ASEAN, the region's premier regional organization, and with single member states, most notably Singapore. While the initial thrust behind India's Look East policy was economics driven, political engagement soon followed with India joining several regional organizations including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996; the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005; the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) in 2010; and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) in 2012.

Trade relations between India and ASEAN have grown steadily, with ASEAN turning into India's fourth largest trading partner. There have been hopes to grow this relationship further, expressed in the creation of the ASEAN-India Free Area which came into effect in 2010. In this chapter we begin by examining the notion of an 'extended neighbourhood'. This provided the initial conceptual framework for extending and expanding India's external relations in a post-Cold War context. The next section turns to the Look East policy and the purported sequence of phases in India's eastward orientation, leading up to an Act East policy, launched in 2014. By this point there was a clear strategic dimension of India responding to and managing the challenge posed by China's rise as a global and regional power. In particular, the implications of China's growing presence and influence within South Asia are revisited in the next section of this chapter.

Leveraging its maritime geography and growing number of partnerships, India's strategy appears to be aimed at building a coalition with

the help of France, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Each of these partners has significant maritime assets that are key to consolidating India's position in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean links India with Southeast Asia and the South China Sea, through the Malacca Strait. As a result, relations with the dynamic economies of ASEAN and key partners in Southeast Asia are key building blocks for India's strategy towards the Indo-Pacific.¹

Extending the neighbourhood

In terms of foreign policymaking and implementation, it is widely agreed that the 'extended neighbourhood' took root as a concept in the late 1990s, becoming part of a national consensus (Scott 2009). The term was used extensively by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as well as by the subsequent Congress Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and their respective external affairs ministers. For several different reasons, it was argued that Indian foreign policy needed to look towards an extended neighbourhood. This included the endemic and structural impediment of India–Pakistan relations, characterized by mistrust and rivalry and a number of tensions with neighbours due to overlapping ethnic groups. A further argument made in the past has been that the economies of South Asia being too similar to each other in composition lacked opportunities for commercial exchange and trade. The lack of political will and leadership as well as limited physical infrastructure have also been noted as prime reasons for severely limited economic integration in South Asia. It will be argued that the growing role, influence and presence of China in the region is pushing India towards a more proactive regional role, driving efforts to shore up what has been termed a Neighbourhood First policy.

The chapter tracks the competing and complementary dynamics pushing and pulling Indian foreign policy towards expanding and consolidating its position within and beyond the near neighbourhood. Primary geoeconomic concerns, most vitally energy imports, as well as trade more broadly are compelling India to look beyond its own region. This was the case with the Gulf region (considered in [Chapter 10](#)), as well as with Southeast Asia, as will be examined below. Expanding trade and commercial ties have been followed by strengthened and deepened security cooperation – a pattern that is similar in terms of India's westward and eastward engagement. However, an additional dimension of India's Look East and subsequent Act East policies is the aspect of connectivity initiatives. Unlike India's western flank, where the hostile relationship

with Pakistan prevents a direct land route with Afghanistan and Iran or into Central Asia, to the east there are opportunities for India to build upon and support subregional initiatives.

A further impetus to India's 'extended neighbourhood' has been India's historical, cultural and political ties across the Indian Ocean littoral. The government has sought to develop cultural initiatives such as Project Mausam to connect countries on the Indian Ocean.² The idea of SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region – has been used to promote a vision for a region linked through the Indian Ocean.³ Each of these examples showcase the change from an outlook that was once largely focused on South Asia's regional security (Hagerty 1991) to a situation where the country's primary and secondary 'areas of interest' extend all the way across the Indian Ocean and to the Malacca Strait.⁴ India's own growing economic interests and growing economy have propelled engagement with Southeast Asia as well as with the East Asian powerhouses, China, Japan and South Korea. The need for enhanced security arrangements, including investments in India's own military capabilities as well as integration into regional security bodies, are a natural corollary of this and is reflected in the step-up from a Look East to an Act East policy.

From Look East to Act East

While some have traced India's eastward orientation in terms of a cumulative logic, others have argued it is necessary to examine each government's approach separately (Bajpae 2017). For the purpose of this chapter, we provide a broad overview of key developments, signposting useful analyses and literature along the way.

ASEAN and Southeast Asia holds an important place in India's foreign policy. India shares borders with two ASEAN members: to the east, a land border with Myanmar (with whom it also shares maritime borders)⁵ and to the south, a maritime border through the Andaman Sea with Indonesia. In the mid-1990s, specific actions were taken to initiate and facilitate India's Eastward orientation. For example, the bilateral border trade agreement with Myanmar in 1994 was seen as an economic opportunity for the bordering states of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. Despite this breakthrough, the volume of trade between the two countries remains very low due to trade restrictions, a large amount of informal trade and limited infrastructure enabling connectivity.⁶

The 1990s brought to a head a number of crises for India. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant the loss of India's core

economic and strategic partner in global affairs and the Gulf crisis of 1990–1 deeply impacted India through energy prices and remittances. It is estimated that during the Gulf crisis, India lost remittances of US\$ 205 million from Indians employed in Iraq and Kuwait. Without the former USSR, India also suffered a loss of trade with Eastern European countries and by mid-1991 was facing a severe balance of payments crisis. Politically this was a time of great instability with three successive governments formed within two years. Finally, in June 1991 the Congress Party emerged as the single largest party and with the support of regional parties was able to form a Congress-led minority government with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao as prime minister. This was the first time that a Congress government was led by a politician not from the Nehru–Gandhi family and only the second prime minister to come from a non-Hindi-speaking region and the first from South India. Perhaps as a result and having been Minister for External Affairs previously, as prime minister, Rao was more amenable to looking beyond the near neighbourhood for ways to cope with the economic and geopolitical crises facing India.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is widely credited with having coined and initiated India's Look East policy, although the exact origins of the term continue to be debated. A biography published in 2016 gives credit to Rao not only for expertly managing the economic crisis but also for significantly altering the country's foreign policy (Sitapati 2016). To develop closer ties with ASEAN countries, Prime Minister Rao visited Southeast Asia in 1994, using his stop in Singapore to deliver a speech in which he called for 'forging a new relationship' with the region. This is widely regarded as the official beginnings of the Look East policy (although it was first mentioned in a Ministry of External Affairs report only in 1995–6), harnessing India's economic liberalization to a new regional outlook.

The established regional organization of ASEAN provided a critical institutional framework that facilitated and shaped India's deepening formal engagement. India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992, a member of the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) in 1995, and a full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1996. Annual summit meetings between India and ASEAN commenced in 2002. This gradual and institutionalized format of diplomatic relations paved the way towards collaboration on more sensitive political issues such as the security challenges along the land border areas with Myanmar and Thailand, as well as India's maritime security interests in the Malacca Strait. Furthermore, India's involvement in the ARF provided opportunities to collaborate with others in the wider region, such as Australia (a founding member of

the ARF), on issues such as counter-terrorism and transnational crime; information and communications technology (ICT) security; disaster relief; maritime security; and non-proliferation and disarmament.

Many have argued that Singapore played a key role in supporting and facilitating India's engagement with ASEAN, acting as a pivot for India's Look East policy (Brewster 2009). In 1991, Singapore was recognized as a key partner by then Indian finance minister, and later prime minister, Dr Manmohan Singh. Singapore was among the first major investors as India was opening up and liberalizing its economy, for instance with a joint bilateral project to establish the International Technology Park (ITPL) in Bangalore (now Bengaluru), the country's IT capital – a highly successful joint venture that flourished over time. In 2005, India and Singapore signed a wide-ranging Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), the first such arrangement India entered into with a developed country. This laid the basis for a much deeper, mutually beneficial and interdependent economic relationship than with most other partners. In 2019, Singapore ranked as the largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India.

India–Singapore defence ties have followed a similar path. From 1994 onwards, a regular naval exercise, later named the Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX), was started and has grown in complexity over the years. India operated Russian submarines for the exercises, allowing the Singapore Navy an opportunity to engage with non-Western hardware. In 1996, the multinational naval exercise MILAN was launched together with Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. In 2003, the two countries signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement, paving the way for Singapore's army and air force to conduct training on Indian soil. This was highly significant for India, given its long-standing position of being opposed to any foreign military bases in Asia.

The next or so-called second phase in India–ASEAN relations occurred in the early to mid-2000s, this time under the leadership of a different leader and party: Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the BJP. Overall, the congruence in economic and foreign policy continued across the two decades and with different governments in place. India's relations with ASEAN were upgraded in 2002 to a summit-level partnership, along with only three others (China, Japan and Korea). In October 2003, India and ASEAN signed two significant commitments – a framework agreement working towards the creation of a Free Trade Area and India's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (India and China were the first countries outside ASEAN to do so in 2003).

In what has been described as a third phase, the Look East policy was ‘upgraded’ into the Act East policy (Bajpae 2017). Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 12th ASEAN–India Summit in November 2014, announcing a more proactive and action-oriented approach towards the region. A separate Indian mission to ASEAN and the EAS was set up in April 2015 with a dedicated ambassador for ASEAN–India relations based in Jakarta. Efforts were made to accelerate connectivity and infrastructure projects, for example through the subregional Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC),⁷ as well as at the level of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), with the establishment of a Transport Connectivity Working Group in 2016.

In 2018, a year commemorating 25 years of India–ASEAN dialogue relations (ASEAN 2018), the government of India made the unprecedented decision of inviting all 10 ASEAN heads of state as chief guests for the annual Republic Day parade. The occasion was used to reiterate India’s support for ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture and to develop the ASEAN–India Strategic Partnership through the range of ASEAN-led mechanisms (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018b).

It has been argued that while the logic has not changed much between a Look East and Act East policy of engagement with Southeast Asia, there have been important consequences in terms of enlarging India’s role as a security actor. This is most evident in terms of India’s role in the Indian Ocean (see Chapter 14 for a discussion of India’s contribution to maritime security) (Saint-Mézard 2016). Furthermore, the rise of China as a global and regional power has provided a further impetus and increased receptiveness to India’s policies of engagement with Southeast Asian countries and ASEAN. At the same time, a renewed effort to consolidate and improve relations with South Asian neighbours has taken on greater salience due to the growing presence and influence of China in the region. This chapter therefore now turns to examine China’s emergence as a key factor in almost all of the South Asian states’ domestic politics and foreign policy, together with implications for India’s *Act East* ambitions.

China’s penetration of South Asia and the Indian response

China’s growing presence and influence in South Asia is well documented.⁸ In Sri Lanka, China has played a major role in the country’s

post-civil war infrastructure development, especially in the coastal Hambantota Development Zone and the Colombo Port City project.⁹ China's investments and management role in Pakistan's deep-sea port, Gwadar, provides a highly strategic location along key oil shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf and Hormuz Straits. In 2017, China opened its first overseas base in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa.

With Bangladesh, China's engagement has also grown over the years. In 2015, China became Bangladesh's top trading partner, displacing India which had held the position for 40 years. As part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Bangladesh was also the recipient of extensive investments and loans, turning China into the biggest source of foreign investments. In addition, arms imports have rapidly increased from China, turning Bangladesh into one of the leading purchasers of Chinese military hardware. The pattern of increasing Chinese political, economic, diplomatic and security influence is repeated in relations with other South Asian countries such as Nepal (Mitra et al. 2020) and the Maldives. China does not have official diplomatic relations with the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan but dynamics framing the context came to the fore in 2017 during the Doklam border standoff between India and China. China's unresolved border with Bhutan and the existence of critical tri-junctions involving India highlight the challenges in maintaining a delicate geopolitical balancing act (Mitra & Thaliyakkattil 2018).

Initially, the government of India's response to the growing presence of China in the region was to take a principled position. For example, in 2017 India turned down an invitation to the inaugural BRI meeting in Beijing, voicing criticism of one of the BRI's flagship projects – the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).¹⁰ India objected because CPEC runs through disputed territory in Kashmir. Concerns over sustainability and transparency in Chinese-funded projects were also raised.

Since then, India's position has evolved into a more assertive form of pushback. Following a violent border standoff with Chinese forces in June 2020, the Indian government held its ground during lengthy de-escalation talks that ensued. At the time of the tensions, and in what was seen as a direct countermove to the border clash, the Indian Navy deployed its frontline warships around the Malacca Strait, a route taken by Chinese vessels to enter the Indian Ocean. Over 80% of Beijing's oil and hydrocarbon imports from West Asia traverse the Malacca Strait, the shortest shipping channel between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, giving rise to what has been called China's 'Malacca Dilemma'. In fact, it is this dilemma that the BRI, at least in part, seeks to overcome, through

investments in old and new transport and economic corridors, connecting China to other countries ‘physically, financially, digitally, and socially’ (Mobley 2019: 52).

That China would seek to secure its access to the Straits and develop alternative energy and trade sea routes linking the Middle East and Persian Gulf with Asia is not surprising. However, the use of economic instruments to attract as well as to pressure smaller countries has altered India’s strategic environment. A paper published in 2018 by a Chinese scholar argued that Beijing’s Indian Ocean strategy rests on the creation of ‘overseas strategic pivots’ which help China sustain its anti-piracy campaign as well as acting as forward stations for the transportation of imported energy and goods. The key to the strategy is that it is relatively low key and does not provoke opposing actions (Huang 2018). Since then, the consensus has grown that China’s strategic aims have extended to ‘open seas protection’ as one of the primary missions of the People’s Liberation Army Navy. This entails the development of a force capable of securing sea control in the Indian Ocean and has been the driver behind China’s more recent naval modernization and acquisition of platforms with experts forecasting an inevitable situation of greater friction between China and the United States but also between China and India.¹¹

The Indian Ocean, an arena for competition and partnerships

As part of India’s natural zone of influence, the Indian Ocean has been viewed through the prism of historical (Markovits 1999) and cultural ties (Ray 2020), as well as sea power (Panikkar 1945). The Indian Navy, which traces its formation back to the arrival of East India Company ships on the west coast of India in 1612, went through various transformations, including as the Royal Indian Navy during World War II. Following the country’s independence in 1947, the navy inherited an ambitious maritime vision. India’s ‘control’ over the Indian Ocean was meant to guarantee leverage over its traditional rival Pakistan. However, over time the ocean receded in India’s strategic horizons and spending plans, with the army and India’s Himalayan/Hindu Kush land borders being emphasized instead.

The budget allocation for the navy was given a boost in the 1980s, rising from 3% of the defense budget during the early 1960s to over 8% by 1971, and finally reaching 12.5% in 1985–6 (Cohen & Dasgupta 2013: 75). In comparison, it was estimated that in China, the army and

navy each received about 20% of total defence funds in 1980 (National Foreign Assessment Center, United States of America 1980). In May 1986, the government purchased HMS *Hermes*, recommissioning her as INS *Viraat* in May 1987 and equipping India for the first time with two aircraft carriers. This gave the country the capacity to carry out simultaneous carrier operations in its western and eastern theatres.

A since-declassified CIA report from 1988 described India's Indian Ocean strategy at the time as one aimed at seeking regional predominance (Central Intelligence Agency 2022). The assessment argued that New Delhi's strategy 'centres on maritime defence and the assertion of its leadership over other regional states. It also includes supporting the internal stability of these states, protecting the interests of local Indian ethnic groups, and limiting – if not supplanting – foreign presences ... India is most involved in the affairs of Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius but also is concerned with island states farther to the southwest and the Indian Ocean littoral countries' (Central Intelligence Agency 2022). India had supported the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace proposal to the United Nations, which irked the Americans; India was heavily involved in the ongoing Sri Lankan civil war; had intervened to calm unrest in the Seychelles; established its first satellite tracking station on Mauritius; and expressed vocal support for Mauritius's claim on Diego Garcia. The report nevertheless concluded that India's efforts to restrict or challenge foreign presence and interference in the region would remain largely diplomatic.

The situation as portrayed above in 1988 stands in marked contrast with recent developments. In 2016, India signed a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the United States. This was followed by a similar agreement with France. New Delhi has comparable agreements with Australia, Singapore, South Korea and Japan, and is in the process of negotiations with the United Kingdom and others. This has considerably advanced India's reach and ability to project power across the Indian Ocean. For example, India's P-81 maritime reconnaissance aircraft have been deployed to France's Réunion, an island in the western Indian Ocean. France (also a one-time colonial power in India) became the first country to hold joint (as opposed to coordinated) patrols with India, using La Réunion as the base for exercises in the southern Indian Ocean. Similarly, under the terms of the LEMOA agreement with the United States, India could potentially gain access to the same US military facilities, Diego Garcia, that had once symbolized the epitome of neocolonialism.

India's engagement with the island states across the Indian Ocean has also intensified after a hiatus during the 1990s and 2000s. Prime

Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka in 2015 was the first by an Indian head of government in over two decades. In 2016, a new division was created within India's Ministry of External Affairs called the Indian Ocean Region Division, bringing under its geographical responsibility the island nations of the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka to better coordinate initiatives and policy.

A major impetus behind India's investments in naval capabilities and naval diplomacy has been the growing presence and influence of China in the near and wider neighbourhood. Since 2008, warnings have been voiced among Indian officials about a Chinese 'string of pearls' strategy (Khurana 2008). Referring to Chinese investment in ports, infrastructure and energy projects across the region, it was argued these could potentially act as valuable strategic assets as well as giving China tremendous influence in their domestic politics. In addition to investing in military capabilities, India has also focused on building and consolidating partnerships with powers in Asia, a key example being the India–Japan relationship.

Since 2010, the two countries have had what is known as a '2+2' dialogue taking place at the level of foreign and defence secretaries (not ministers). Based on this, it was decided in 2018 to upgrade this to ministerial level, making Japan only the second country (after the United States) with which India has such a dialogue format. This comes on top of other institutional mechanisms including the Annual Defense Ministerial Dialogue, the Defence Policy Dialogue and the National Security Adviser's Dialogue. Sharing the objective of preventing the emergence of a unipolar Asia, the two countries have deepened cooperation in several strategic areas. This includes joint military exercises between the armies and air forces of both countries (taking place for the first time in 2018), together with the Malabar naval exercises involving the United States and India, which Japan joined for the first time in 2015.

Aside from military and defence cooperation, there have been efforts to further boost the India–Japan partnership through coordinated investments in third countries. This, it was hoped, would build on each other's complementary strengths and expertise and led to initiatives such as the 'Asia Africa Growth Corridor', which has had a mixed record to date. It is also the logic driving India and Japan to jointly invest in terminals at the strategically located Colombo Port in Sri Lanka. Building on its long record of engagement in Asia through development assistance and foreign investment, Japan has sought to reinvigorate its engagement across Asia as a key financial player and purveyor of what has been billed as 'quality infrastructure'. Positioning

this as an alternative to the BRI, the term ‘quality’ refers to a wide range of factors being considered when making investment decisions, including environmental and social impact, debt sustainability, safety and reliability of the construction, and impact on local employment and technical expertise.

Thanks to India’s eastward orientation, India is considered a key player within the Indo-Pacific, which represents an ambitious extension of India’s foreign policy agenda. While it remains unclear what exactly India’s priorities and interests will be within this vast oceanic expanse, the extended horizon has certainly opened new spaces for diplomacy. Thus, in 2014 Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Australia and Fiji acquired particular significance, while also cultivating a foreign policy interest in the Pacific islands. He became the first prime minister in 28 years to visit Australia and the first Indian PM in 33 years to travel to Fiji, which in fact has a sizeable population of Indian origin. India has been a dialogue partner of the Pacific Island Forum since 2002 but in 2014 a Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) was set up. The FIPIC includes 14 of the island countries, which despite being relatively small in terms of land have massive ‘Exclusive Economic Zones’ to manage. When FIPIC was set up, India offered a special fund for adapting to climate change and clean energy as well as setting up an Institute for Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research. Support has also been offered through the Indian Navy for capacity-building, especially coastal surveillance and hydrographic surveys to enhance maritime domain awareness and maritime security. Several FIPIC members are also part of the Commonwealth, another institutional setting that India shares with them. The changes in India’s relationship with the Commonwealth are also indicative of an effort underway to revisit and rethink the tools and platforms available to Indian policymakers and diplomats (Murthy 2018).

Conclusion: India and the Indo-Pacific – on to the unknown?

The ‘Indo-Pacific’ has been described as a ‘principled vision’ by US diplomats and policymakers, based on the rule of law, fair competition, regional order and values. Chinese officials have viewed the concept with suspicion and scepticism, casting doubt on its coherence, dismissing its substance as being as frothy as ‘sea foam’ and criticizing it as a US-led, military design to contain China (Zhang 2019a).

India's position has been to emphasize that the Indo-Pacific is rooted in its historical associations with this region (linkages that were broken during the colonial era) and thus there is a need to rebuild networks for prosperity and security. Delivering the 2018 keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's premier annual defence summit in Singapore, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech gave what has been described as the first overview of India's priorities in, and conceptualization of, the Indo-Pacific. Highlighting the importance of the Indian Ocean to India and global trade, the boundaries of the Indo-Pacific were delineated as stretching 'from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018a). This places India and South Asia in the middle of the Indo-Pacific.

The 2018 speech also emphasized the importance of India's Act East policy, an effort to further boost India's engagement with ASEAN and the range of other institutional settings in which India has played an increasingly active role. These included the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Furthermore, two subregional initiatives were mentioned, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and the Mekong–Ganga Economic Corridor. In its bid to cast India as a unifying force within the Indo-Pacific, thanks to geography, history and involvement in multilateral security arrangements in the region, the speech also drew attention to specific principles: a commitment to a rules-based order, resting upon the freedom of navigation and connectivity, and respect for the 'sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as equality of all nations' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018a).

The official line has been that: 'Inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity, therefore, lie at the heart of the new Indo-Pacific. India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018a). This position has been described as a form of hedging or as representing continuity in India's tradition of non-alignment or its claim of pursuing 'strategic autonomy' in global geopolitics. The preference certainly has been to focus on describing the Indo-Pacific in terms of the global commons and the collective need to uphold free and equal access to the commons, bolstered by international law. The navy plays a prominent role, showcasing India's contribution and commitment to international order, through humanitarian and

disaster relief operations (HADR) operations and anti-piracy missions. India has even reached out to Russia in a bid to get it to also participate in the Indo-Pacific, in order to strengthen the notion of it being a free, open, transparent and inclusive concept.

India's role within the emerging context of the Indo-Pacific is marked by both significant change as well as constraints. The extent to which India's military and security ties have developed with the United States and other Western powers is unprecedented. Within Asia, India has sought to position itself as a strategic partner, deepening and extending its bilateral relations as well as enhancing its role in multilateral formats. A key test will be if, and when, India is allowed to join the four-member Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP) in which Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand share intelligence and coordinated air (eye-in-the-sky) and sea patrols through the vital straits.

Having maintained a relatively low profile in the past, the Indian Navy today is recognized for its long-standing contribution as a key provider of security for the world's vital international sea lines of communication that pass through the Indian Ocean. From advocating that the Indian Ocean be kept free from external influences and militarization, the Indian Navy now annually hosts one of the largest multilateral naval exercises – MILAN. However, alongside diplomacy, there continues to be a very real need for investments in, and modernization of, the Indian defence forces and in particular the Indian Navy. China's first domestically built aircraft carrier, *Shandong*, entered service in late 2019 while India's, launched in 2013, has been beset by delays and which was inaugurated in September 2022. China has a clear lead over India in submarine technology and in terms of personnel and equipment. To offset this asymmetry, India will continue to deepen and extend its maritime partnerships with major powers and the region's resident navies. By adopting the Indo-Pacific as a core strategic outlook, India's policymakers are signalling a resolve to be part of what is shaping up to be an international and coordinated response to China's massive growth in material capabilities and capacity to influence regional and global politics.

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Notes

1. This is confirmed in part by the fact that the government of India chose the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, a security conference taking place each year in Singapore, as the occasion when Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered the keynote in which he set out, for the first time, India's vision of, and outlook for the Indo-Pacific: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (6-Jan-2018).
2. Launched in 2014 by the Indian Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Ministry of Culture, Government of India (2021).
3. For a discussion of SAGAR, see Schottli (2019).
4. It is worth noting that in Spring 2023, the Indian state does not publish an overarching national security strategy. Using the Indian Navy's doctrine, one can track some of the shifting parameters and changes in outlook, for instance incorporating the Indo-Pacific. See, for example, the following two versions: Indian Maritime Doctrine (2004) and Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy (2007).
5. India's land border with Myanmar was officially closed during the Cold War, although the border itself remained porous throughout.
6. For an assessment in 2019, see Taneja et al. (2019).
7. For an extensive discussion of BIMSTEC and the challenges to cooperation, see Xavier (2018).
8. In terms of investments, see Bhandari and Jindal (2018) and Bhandari et al. (2020). For a recent report on China in South Asia, see United States Institute of Peace (2020).
9. For a good discussion of China's alleged 'debt-trap' diplomacy in the case of Sri Lanka, see Ferchen and Perera (2019).
10. For details on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, see Garlick (2018).
11. See, for example, Lim (2020).

India and global security challenges

This chapter examines India's contribution to combatting global security challenges and its emergence as a provider of security and the constraints that it faces in developing and fulfilling this role. Military and material capabilities are key to a country's ability to deliver and provide security as a public good and these will be examined in the first section. The Indian Navy has become one of the largest in the world and provides security for some of the world's busiest shipping routes. Having continuously operated an aircraft carrier since 1961, discussions are underway today about whether to increase capabilities from two carriers to three, indicating the extent to which India's power projection and security interests and ambitions have developed over time. In addition to investing in hardware, the Indian Navy has engaged heavily in maritime diplomacy, positioning itself as the region's first responder to non-traditional security challenges, especially through its humanitarian and disaster relief operations (HADR). HADR has also been promoted as a bedrock for the recently revived Quadrilateral grouping, also known as the Quad, comprising the maritime nations of India, the United States, Japan and Australia. We conclude this part of the chapter with an analysis of the Quad, exploring its contribution to order at sea.

From the naval capacities and maritime diplomacy of the Indian state, the chapter turns to a key continental security challenge, that of Afghanistan.¹ India's main concern has been and continues to be Pakistan's ability to maintain a strong influence over Afghanistan through its close connections with the Taliban and Afghan guerrilla insurgent groups. Afghanistan's political stability has always had obvious regional ramifications as well as being a global concern. This was the case during the Cold War, since Taliban rule in 1996, the US-led war in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the long-running peace and reconstruction efforts that have taken place amid terror attacks and domestic political

fractionalization. Key regional powers such as Russia and China were involved in the recent Doha peace talks, in part as a counterbalance to the United States' involvement. Furthermore, as countries with significant economic stakes in the wider region, they hold an interest in the stability of Afghanistan, especially in the run-up to and aftermath of the official withdrawal of US troops.

India's ability to navigate such traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the region will be covered in this chapter. Furthermore, we explore the question of whether and to what extent Indian diplomats and policymakers have shaped debates on global security issues. This is significant in view of India not being a permanent member on the United Nations Security Council. In conclusion, we draw attention to the fact that India is and has been a significant contributor to global security, through its UN peacekeeping forces, the role played by the Indian Navy in securing the sea lines of communication and as an active non-permanent United Nations Security Council member.

India as a net security provider

In 2012, a report conducted by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi considered the capability of the Indian state to conduct operations outside its territory. The report highlighted India's energy security vulnerability; the need to provide safety to its large migrant population, particularly in the Gulf region; and the general trend of an increasingly complex security environment as a result of greater globalization and geopolitical competition (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses [IDSA] 2012). Concrete policy recommendations were also made to improve the capacity of the military to conduct 'Out-of-Area-Contingency Operations'. Since then and over the last decade, the term 'net security provider' has taken root and features prominently in the country's 2015 Maritime Security Strategy, which clarifies the term of 'net security' as 'the state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing prevailing threats, inherent risks and rising challenges in the maritime environment, against the ability to monitor, contain and counter all of these' (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), Government of India 2016: 80). Nonetheless, what exactly this means, the extent to which India can perform such a role and the impact and implications of a greater security role for India's relations with other powers and neighbours in the region have remained much debated.²

Becoming a net security provider requires identifying common security concerns and coordinating a response that is welcomed by other countries. For example, India has developed its capabilities to provide humanitarian or disaster relief assistance and to position itself as a ‘first responder’ in the region. The Indian Navy has long provided security to the busy international sea lines of communication that criss-cross the Indian Ocean, dealing with transnational piracy. Specifically, providing or enhancing security has included the following types of activities: capacity-building, military diplomacy, military assistance and direct deployment of forces to aid or stabilize a situation (Mukherjee 2014: 2). An example of India’s ability to deliver security within a region is examined below.

The Indian Ocean and the Indian Navy

In 2009, during his address to the Shangri-La Dialogue, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said: ‘In coming years, we look to India to be a partner and net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond.’ This is usually regarded as a watershed, both in terms of how US officials spoke of and viewed India but also the change in terms of military capabilities and political will of Indian policymakers to be seen as a provider of security. While many highlight change, linking this to growing US–China competition and increased insecurity in the regions surrounding India, others point to the longer history of India’s role in the region (see [Chapter 13](#)).³ The Indian Navy has played a historically important role during colonial times as well as post-independence, providing security for the international waterways of trade and communication and supporting smaller nations in the region.

Box 14.1 The Indian Ocean and global security

A vast oceanic space, the Indian Ocean encompasses the Strait of Malacca and the western coast of Australia in the east to the Mozambique Channel in the west. It includes the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea in the north and stretches down to the southern Indian Ocean. Countries in the broad region have a total population of about 2.7 billion people. The entire region is considered to be highly vulnerable to climate change due to low-lying areas that

will be susceptible to rising sea levels, tropical storms and droughts that are expected to get fiercer and the challenge of providing relief to densely populated areas.

The international sea lines of communication (SLOCs) enable the movement of goods between the Middle East, Southeast Asia, East Asia as well as Europe and the Americas. Littoral countries are resource-rich as well as being energy hubs, key labour markets and manufacturing centres. As a result, the Indian Ocean is a key conduit for global trade as well as being a region that provides critical goods and a source of growth for the global economy.

Indian policymakers have articulated the country's role and ambitions to emerge as a regional security provider. Admiral Suresh Mehta, then Chief of the Indian Navy, wrote in his introduction to the 2007 maritime military strategy that

nations that depend on the waters of the Indian Ocean for their trade and energy supplies have come to expect that the Indian Navy will ensure a measure of stability and tranquillity in the waters around our shores. Ensuring good order at sea is therefore a legitimate duty of the Indian Navy. This task will require enhanced capabilities, cooperation and interoperability with regional and extra-regional navies (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), Government of India 2007: 4).

By 2011, then Defence Minister A. K. Antony, speaking at a conference of Naval Commanders, said the Indian Navy has been 'mandated to be a net security provider to island nations in the Indian Ocean Region ... most of the major international shipping lanes are located along our island territories. This bestows on us the ability to be a potent and stabilising force in the region' (cited in: Khurana 2016: 2–3). In 2013, the Indian prime minister at the time, Manmohan Singh, went further. Laying the foundation stone for the Indian National Defence University on 23 May 2013, Prime Minister Singh asserted that India has 'sought to assume our responsibility for stability in the Indian Ocean Region. We are well positioned, therefore, to become a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond' (Singh 2013). Going even further, PM Narendra Modi, upon launching India's upgraded aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya* in June 2014, pronounced that 'Indian-made arms and equipment should also serve as protectors for small nations across the world', foreseeing a

time when India would become a net exporter of weapons (Modi 2014). The extent to which some of these aspirations hold up in terms of achievements and reception by others in the region will be examined below.

Maritime security

In 2015, 'Ensuring Secure Seas', an updated version of the Indian Maritime Security Strategy, was released. The document was praised for recognizing and clearly stating India's responsibilities and need to act as the region's resident maritime power. This included recognizing the hybrid nature of maritime challenges, the blurring of lines between traditional and non-traditional security threats. The document places the Indian Navy explicitly at the forefront as the country's primary instrument for securing the seas for economic purposes, while asserting the importance of international law and established norms as critical for upholding order and the maintenance of good bilateral relations across the region.

It is widely agreed that key steps and clear articulations have been made to clarify and strengthen India's objectives as a security actor in the region. This outlook and efforts at outreach are also embedded in and enabled by institutions, most notably the navy. However, analysts continue to identify inherent structural impediments (Mukherjee 2014) as well as noting 'the security establishment's inherent conservatism in espousing maritime activism in the wider-Asian littorals' (Singh 2015). The challenge, it is argued, is for policymakers to be more ambitious and strategic in their vision of India's role as net-security provider.

It can be argued that decades of incremental investment in India's naval capabilities have gradually enabled India to take a more prominent and proactive leadership role in the region (Pant 2009).

India's role in security-related regional institutions has also grown, for instance with the initiation in 2008 of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). India and the Indian Navy played a key role in hosting the inaugural IONS and it has since continued as a biennial meeting between littoral states of the Indian Ocean region and their navies, including extra-regional observers. Other examples of India's maritime diplomacy include the provision of military assets to maritime partners. Both 'in-use' and newly constructed military equipment has been provided to friendly foreign countries including the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Mauritius. Capacity-building also includes developing maritime domain awareness, for example through technical assistance and training, together with hydrography survey assistance.

Capacity-building, bilateral exercises and military agreements

The ability to provide security and assistance to others hinges on India's own levels of maritime domain awareness and the relations it has with key players in the region. The 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 (Kolås 2010) exposed weaknesses in India's coastal and offshore security, leading to a concerted effort to improve the readiness of security forces and to integrate information and capabilities from different agencies like the coastguard, customs, ports and fisheries. India has signed a number of white shipping agreements with countries including the United States and Singapore, leading to the exchange of information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels. In 2018, the International Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region was opened in Gurgaon with the objective of further facilitating the exchange of information among partner countries.

In addition, the Indian Navy conducts bilateral naval exercises with 19 countries and participates in about 16 multilateral exercises (Thomas 2020: 14). Within the Bay of Bengal, India has conducted patrols with Indonesia (since 2002), Thailand (since 2005), Myanmar (since 2013) and Bangladesh (since 2018) aimed at targeting human smuggling, trafficking, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, all of which are core maritime security challenges. A number of these initiatives, with the aim of enhancing coordination and interoperability among regional navies, have been based on gradual and cumulative steps. An area where there has been a relatively rapid and marked change is in India's signing of military logistics pacts. To date, India has signed logistics agreements with the United States,⁴ France,⁵ South Korea,⁶ Australia⁷ and Japan.⁸ Seen in terms of the long-term overhang of non-alignment and the reluctance to sign military pacts in the past, the current spate of agreements is significant. Most of them allow militaries to access each other's bases and facilities for repair and replenishment of supplies. Such agreements help to extend and expand the Indian armed forces' presence and operations, all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific region.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and the Quad

HADR has gained a strategic and security dimension, with India equipping its naval ships with the equipment and mandate needed to respond

quickly to a sudden disaster. The Indian government uses the term HADR in cases of natural disasters like cyclones, droughts, earthquakes or floods. India's HADR operations to date have been largely centred on the immediate neighbourhood.⁹ This role is likely set to grow, given the numerous prognoses about the extreme vulnerability of South Asia to climate-induced change and natural disasters.¹⁰

The Indian Navy and Air Forces have been involved in the evacuation of Indian citizens, from Kuwait in 1990, from Lebanon in 2006 and Libya in 2011, and from Ukraine in 2022. However, HADR missions do not include situations where resident civilian populations are impacted by armed conflict, for example as in the case of the 2021 protests and coup in neighbouring Myanmar. Indian policymakers tend to emphasize the need to respect the sovereignty of the affected state and to offer assistance only when requests are made to the government of India.

During the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, India together with the United States, Australia and Japan formed an active coordination group known as the Tsunami Core Group, one of the first such multilateral initiatives that India participated in. It is significant to note that after coming together to address a transnational, non-traditional security crisis, the Tsunami Group members moved towards traditional security cooperation in the form of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. In 2007, the four countries participated in a joint naval exercise called Malabar which, in the face of China's criticism, led to the group disbanding.

The Quad has been resurrected, taking on a more formal shape with meetings at a ministerial level in 2019 and 2020, and at a leadership level in 2021. At the last meeting of leaders, which occurred virtually due to the global pandemic, a joint statement was issued acknowledging the diverse perspectives among the members and yet highlighting unity 'in a shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific ... for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion'. The statement also makes direct reference to the tsunami of 2004, drawing a parallel between then and 'the global devastation wrought by Covid-19, the threat of climate change, and security challenges facing the region' (The White House 2021). Identifying concrete areas for functional cooperation, the March 2021 meeting also promised to work towards a Quad Vaccine Partnership, aimed at promoting health security through vaccine production and distribution, rebuilding and securing supply chains, promoting resilience and transparency in financing and procurement. The priority given to supply chains has been promoted as a way to reduce China's growing influence across the Indian Ocean region. The Quad statement furthermore states the need

for cooperation over critical technologies, another non-military action that hopes to slow down or challenge China's rise as a leader in telecom and biotech industries.

Another example of how development and security needs intersect with global geopolitics is the case of India's Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), launched in 2019 at the UN Climate Change Summit. An international platform involving public and private sectors, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks, and financing mechanisms and knowledge institutions, CDRI aims to 'promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks in support of sustainable development' (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure [CDRI] 2023). CDRI seeks to promote capacity-building, the promotion and dissemination of best practices to build infrastructure that is necessary, sustainable and resilient in the face of disasters, as well as being based on affordable finance and technology. Although not stated anywhere explicitly, this initiative can be regarded as a strategic effort to build an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes massive land and maritime infrastructure projects, particularly within South and Southeast Asia.

Afghanistan: continental security challenges

In Afghanistan, it is said that India has played both a prominent and peripheral role.¹¹ In terms of development aid, India has been the region's top donor to reconstruction in Afghanistan and one of the largest in the world. Financial aid has amounted to over US\$ 3 billion over the past 18 years, and has included large-scale infrastructure projects, technical training programmes and new trade corridors to overcome Afghanistan's landlocked economy. Despite this, India has to a large extent been kept on the sidelines in various rounds and versions of the peace talks. This is in part due to its own reticence over talks with the Taliban and the refusal to consider putting boots on the ground. At the same time, India's peripheral position has also been ensured through the actions of its rivals Pakistan and China, which have sought to minimize India's role.

Following the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, there have been signals that India is preparing to alter its position. On 29 February 2020, the United States and the Taliban signed an agreement in Doha to end the war in Afghanistan, a war that has become the United States' longest-running war. In Kabul, then U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper issued a joint declaration with the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani outlining a four-stage process for a 'comprehensive and

sustainable peace agreement', culminating in a 'permanent and comprehensive ceasefire'. Initiated by Donald Trump, the United States' most recent commitment to a withdrawal had strong bipartisan support.

India's official position on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan has been that it needs to be an 'Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled process' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2020). However, as the latest talks reveal, the process has been propelled by the United States and the agreement would not have come to fruition without support from Pakistan. How India manages its relationship with Afghanistan post the withdrawal of US troops continue to be a crucial test of its diplomacy and foreign policy. Several challenges to India's own security and broader regional interests arise from Afghanistan's politics and geopolitical location. The Haqqani group continues to be the best-armed and trained Taliban faction and has been responsible for a number of attacks against Indian targets in the past, including the Indian embassy in Kabul in 2008. The Haqqani network is known to have close ties to the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and to be a source of patronage and protection for Deobandi jihadi factions operating in parts of Pakistan (Skorka 2019).

Afghanistan's own internal divisions add to the challenges of fostering and maintaining good relations with powerful leaders. It has been India's preference in the past to deal with Afghanistan through its government, which is particularly difficult given the state of animosity between different power factions within the country. By August 2021 the Taliban were back in government, having overrun the capital and taken control over much of the country. Afghan government officials, including the then-President Ghani, were evacuated and India had to launch its own operations to get citizens and diplomats out of the country.

Pakistan and India's rivalry has tended to play out in terms of support for rival factions and groups within Afghanistan. Pakistan shares a long and difficult-to-secure border of 2,670 km with Afghanistan, a British legacy known as the Durand Line and a border which Afghanistan continues to dispute.¹² The mountainous border areas have long served as a safe haven for militant groups. It is projected that Pakistan has supported the Taliban in Afghanistan since the early 1990s, in an attempt to push its regional security interests. Pakistan was one of the few countries, at that time, that established diplomatic relations when the Taliban government came to power in Kabul. However, although Pakistan has been a traditional patron of the Taliban, it is speculated that there are groups within the Taliban that are in favour of reducing the dependency on Pakistan as benefactor (Taneja 2021). This may open opportunities for India in terms of talking with the Taliban.

During the period of Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001, India along with other countries including Iran formerly supported the Northern Alliance, a multiethnic coalition led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, a Tajik politician and military commander who was decidedly anti-Taliban. This past involvement in Afghan politics may constrain India's options in the future. However, there have also been significant efforts to foster and maintain relations with a number of key Afghan figures, including Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum, the former Uzbek warlord who lent support to the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan; former Mujahideen Commander General Atta Mohammed Noor; and the Chief of the High Council for Afghan Reconciliation, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, all of whom have visited New Delhi in recent times. These consultations have continued with India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visiting Kabul in early 2021. All this is regarded as evidence of Delhi's quiet engagement with key stakeholders in Afghanistan.

How India maintains some degree of influence in Afghanistan will be a crucial test of diplomatic skills and foreign policy. Following the chaotic US withdrawal, China stepped up its involvement, having hosted several rounds of talks with Taliban delegations over the years. India continues to have economic interests in the country and region such as efforts to link up with Central Asian energy markets and broader regional connectivity projects. India also maintains a special relationship with Russia, which has sought to engage with Afghanistan (for instance, through the Troika meetings comprising representatives of Russia, China and the United States to discuss the future of Afghanistan). In 2021, India was not invited to attend the Moscow-hosted 'extended Troika' meeting, which included Pakistan. However, the advantages accrued to Pakistan's role as a result of a US withdrawal are also not as clear-cut given that heightened instability in Afghanistan will have serious security implications for Pakistan (Jamal 2022).

In addition, there is Iran, which has played an important role for India as a key source of intelligence on southern and southwestern Afghanistan. This is a relationship India has nurtured over time, leading to special trading and commercial arrangements that were set up to bypass the international sanctions regime (approximately 2006–16) against Iran. More recently Indian investments have been made in developing Iran's deep seaport of Chabahar. However, India also had to scale back relations with Iran to accommodate US policies, most notably under the Trump administration which abrogated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and reintroduced all sanctions against Iran in 2018.

Having supported capacity-building, training programmes, elections and developed strong relations with the prevailing political elite, India has invested heavily in Afghan reconstruction and has much to lose.¹³ The possibility of India engaging in talks with Taliban has been increasingly raised by analysts, suggesting that the option is no longer considered to be off the table.¹⁴ China, as one of the major powers involved in the peace talks, has concerns about the geographical proximity between Afghanistan and its Uighur Muslim-dominated Xinjian region. The potential for instability to spill over has led to reports that China would position itself to send peacekeepers to Afghanistan (Sun 2020). Given the uncertainty surrounding Afghanistan's future, this is a crucial policy challenge to watch as India calibrates its relationship with stakeholders in Afghanistan, carefully observing the moves of other key players and rivals.¹⁵

India and the United Nations Security Council

India has played a consistent role within the United Nations (UN) system, serving eight terms as a non-permanent member on the UN Security Council (UNSC), the premier global body for maintaining international peace and security. India was one of the original founding members of the UN in 1945 and has over time become one of the world's largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces. It remains a long-time aspirant for a permanent seat on the UNSC. In 2010, on his first state visit to India, US President Barack Obama announced in front of the Indian Parliament that he looked forward to the time when India would become a permanent member of a reformed UNSC (The White House 2010). At the time it was widely hailed as a public expression and commitment of US support for India's quest. To date, however, this objective remains unfulfilled, and it is unclear whether the Permanent Five (P5) members truly support an expansion of UNSC membership. Nonetheless, it remains a bipartisan goal in India included in election manifestos of both the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Bharatiya Janata Party 2019) and the opposition Indian National Congress party (Indian National Congress 2019).

As before, reform of the UNSC and, more broadly, the push for 'reformed multilateralism' are key objectives for the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations. The current position on the Security Council comes at a time when the UN's premier decision-making body on peace and security is beset by deep divisions between permanent

members, underscored by the US–China trade rift and a growing strategic rivalry between them.¹⁶ It remains to be seen whether India will be able to act as it claimed it would, as the ‘voice of reason and moderation’ (Roy 2020).

India has previously positioned itself in a leadership role within the UN, advocating presenting the needs and interests of developing countries and promoting international cooperation. During the Cold War, it played a key role in the Non-Aligned Movement and G-77. On 1 January 2021, India took up its elected seat on the UN Security Council for the eighth time, as non-permanent member, emphasizing its credentials as the world’s largest democracy, a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and a strong supporter of the rights of developing countries. Whether India will find itself torn between its compulsions on the one hand as a rising power and on the other as a voice for developing countries remains to be seen. The subject of international terrorism serves well to illustrate the dilemmas that have arisen in the past.

The Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)

In 1996, India proposed a draft Convention on International Terrorism to the UN General Assembly. Negotiations have continued ever since, grid-locked by the failure to find a consensus on the definition of terrorism. Member states have been unable to come to an agreement on the central question of what distinguishes a ‘terrorist organisation’ from a ‘liberation movement’? How to deal with the activities of national armed forces that are perceived to commit acts of terrorism?

While difficulties remain between members, and also across the Permanent Five, it is worth noting how India’s own position has changed over the years. During the 1970s and ’80s, India insisted on drawing a difference between terrorism and the right to self-determination, a post-colonial reaction to the view that colonialism and foreign occupation had acted as causes for armed struggles against their oppressors. In the 1990s, India’s view began to oppose ‘the freedom fighter’ and ‘root causes’ argument on the basis that these were politically motivated (Sasikumar 2010). After many iterations, in 2016 a crystal-clear position was articulated by the Indian representative, who argued that ‘terrorist acts ... are criminal acts; no matter whenever, wherever and by whomsoever, these

are committed ... Terrorists are terrorists; “cause” does not justify terrorist acts’ (as quoted in Chandra 2020: 44).

Another key point of contention and discussion has been the question of how to tackle international, transnational terrorism. In proposing the draft Convention in 1996, India together with others were in favour of a comprehensive counter-terrorism approach while the United States and European states supported sector-specific measures. Regarding sanctions and the use of force as coercive counter-terrorism measures, India has also taken a distinctive approach. Unwilling to support coercive measures that compromise state sovereignty, India has opted to abstain on resolutions that seek to impose sanctions or those that have supported the use of force against another state. At the same time, India has supported the use of force against non-state actors. Thus, for example, although India has refused to put boots on the ground in Afghanistan, it offered ‘overflight, landing, and refuelling, facilities for US air mission and port calls by naval ships as well as intelligence sharing and helping with investigation of the 9/11 incidents’ (Paliwal 2017: 167). Its support for eradicating the terrorist networks in Afghanistan was to a large extent based on the premise that the Taliban regime was not widely internationally recognized as the state’s legitimate authorities.

Supporting the use of sanctions against non-state actors, India has persistently tried to list Masood Azhar, chief of Jaish-e-Mohammad based in Pakistan and allegedly involved in a number of terror attacks on Indian territory. Following the Pulwama terrorist attack in February 2019 (see Chapter 9) that killed 40 Indian soldiers, the UNSC issued a statement condemning the attack and naming Jaish-e-Mohammad, which had claimed responsibility for the attack.

This marked the first time that the UNSC condemned a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir. It also marked a departure in terms of defining as terrorism an act against a country’s security forces. In the past, the UN tended to focus on those attacks against civilians. This change, it was widely agreed, was due to high level, behind-the-scenes negotiations, pressure and diplomacy. China, a long-time supporter of Pakistan, had sought to block, amend and water down the statement (Sirohi 2019).

The UN has shied away from taking a strong position on ‘disputed’ territories where a final status was yet to be determined. Furthermore, the statement directed all UN member states to ‘cooperate actively with the government of India’ to hold the ‘perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice’. This, it was argued by observers, marked an important

step within the UN system towards treating terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir as it would treat, for instance, terrorism in France. On 2 May 2019, the UNSC 1267 sanctions subcommittee approved the listing of the Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.

Conclusion

India is widely recognized for its contributions to global security through the UN's peacekeeping operations. This engagement goes back to the 1950s when India sent a medical unit to support UN troops during the Korean War and provided contributing troops during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Today, India is the fourth largest contributor of UN peacekeeping forces, with over 200,000 Indian soldiers and police personnel working as Blue Helmets since the country's independence in 1947. It has also suffered the most casualties in the process. The vast majority of India's peacekeepers serve in Africa. Most recently, an Indian general was appointed Force Commander of the UN Mission in South Sudan to which India contributes the second largest number of troops.

It has been pointed out by observers that Western powers have disengaged from Blue Helmet operations, broadly since the NATO invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Hille 2022). This, it is argued, puts the onus on regional stakeholders to engage more. Furthermore, it is speculated that the notion of peacekeeping is itself giving way to a more robust form of intervention, undermining and challenging the sovereignty norm in world politics. Given that UN peacekeeping operations require UNSC unanimity, and with the return of great power rivalry to the international system, it is expected that there will be more instances of UNSC paralysis.

How India leverages its expertise and credibility as a contributor to global security will be interesting to follow, especially as the UN system faces calls and pressures for change both from within and as a result of global politics. In 2019, Indian military personnel joined with counterparts from 17 African states to begin the inaugural Africa–India Field Training Exercise 2019, or AFINDEX-19. The aim of the exercise was to practise among participating countries the planning and conduct of Humanitarian Mine Assistance and Peace Keeping Operations under Chapter VII of United Nations Peace Keeping Operations. Calls have been made for India to draw upon its credibility and reputation as a peacekeeper and to broaden its approach to include conflict mediation.¹⁷

India's role within global security arrangements draws out the broader question of how and whether international institutions can

incorporate and integrate rising powers. Within the current discussions about the resilience of and challenges to the existing liberal international order, there continues to be disagreement among scholars on what the transition might look like. While some point towards the inevitability of conflict,¹⁸ others have proposed that incorporating rising powers will socialize them and incentivize them to be ‘conservative’ rather than ‘radical reformers’ (Kahler 2013). India is often regarded as a constructive partner rather than a direct challenge to the existing international order, a diagnosis and prognosis based upon its past record as well as a recognition of the shared values in terms of democracy. However, this has been contested and many analysts and studies offer an alternative interpretation. This a discussion to which we turn to in the book’s concluding chapter.

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Literature: further reading

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Notes

1. Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the Taliban’s return to power, the country has experienced tumultuous change. We have not addressed these rapid recent developments as the focus of the chapter is on the drivers of, and constraints to India’s ability to address global security challenges.
2. For example, see Mukherjee (2014).
3. And see Muni and Chadha (2015).

4. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the United States signed in 2016 gives India refuelling facilities and replenishment access to US bases in Djibouti, Diego Garcia, Guam and Subic Bay.
5. The agreement with France, signed in 2018, gives India access to French bases in the Réunion Islands in the southwestern Indian Ocean region and Djibouti on the Horn of Africa.
6. Signed in 2019 and seen as providing support for India's access to the Pacific.
7. The mutual logistics support arrangement signed with Australia in June 2020 will help Indian warships in the southern Indian Ocean region and the western Pacific Ocean region.
8. The agreement signed with Japan in September 2020 means Indian military planes and warships flying in the Far East can land or dock at any Japanese defence station.
9. Examples include the 2004 tsunami, the 2005 India–Pakistan earthquake, cyclones Nargis and Mora in 2008 and 2017, respectively, the 2014 water crisis in the Maldives, the 2015 earthquake in Nepal and the Rohingya refugee crisis in 2018.
10. See the Brookings India Report Policy Brief 'Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief' by Chakradeo (2020).
11. For a brief discussion, see Paliwal (2018).
12. Afghanistan argues the border is a 'colonial imposition', dividing the ancestral homelands of Pashtun tribes between the two countries. Kabul has also argued that the agreement signed between British officials and then Afghan leader Amir Abdul Rehman in 1893 had a 100-year time limit, which expired in 1993.
13. In the two years since the Taliban stormed back to power, India has maintained a cautious approach. It has kept lines of humanitarian assistance open through a technical office and not officially recognized the Taliban regime.
14. While India has continued to provide wheat to tackle Afghanistan's growing food insecurity, it has remained silent on the Taliban's severe restrictions imposed on girls and women.
15. India's approach towards the Taliban has been described as one driven by pragmatism. See Kaura, Vinay (2023): <https://www.mei.edu/publications/india-taliban-relations-careful-balancing-act-driven-pragmatism>.
16. See the following newspaper article for an overview of key issues during India's previous seven terms as UNSC non-permanent member: Roy (2021).
17. See, for example, the case of India's role in South Sudan: Mohan (2016).
18. One of the most famous examples being Graham Allison's (2017) book, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*

15

Conclusion

Seven decades after independence, where does India stand in terms of the country's global presence and in areas vital to the security and foreign policy of the country? An editorial comment from the Indian media as India took over the presidency of the G20, meeting under the shadow of the war in Ukraine, aptly sums up the challenge and opportunity that await India:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi — whose advice to President Putin in September that 'this is not the era of war' is said to have played a role in hammering out the joint declaration — underlined the challenges India will face during its presidency: 'Geopolitical tensions, economic slowdown, rising food and energy prices, and the long-term ill-effects of the pandemic'. He rightly stressed that peace and development were essential for people to reap the fruit of economic development. Modi has promised that India's leadership of the G20 will be 'inclusive, ambitious, decisive, and action-oriented', hinting that Delhi is planning to push a global campaign for a sustainable lifestyle, LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment). The theme of India's G-20 chairmanship, as announced earlier this month, is 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. For India, this is an opportunity to make a concerted push for the global south. A debt crisis haunts many middle income economies. Climate change, and finding the money to make the 'clean' transition, is another challenge. This is an opportunity for India to make a mark as a global leader.¹

India's global profile has evolved seamlessly over the past seven decades. The shifts in India's foreign policy stance have been gradual rather than abrupt. There is a line of continuous evolution from Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi. Successive generations of leaders

have added their visions and perceptions of national interest to the cumulating fund of Indian diplomacy. The main framework of non-alignment, a Nehruvian legacy, has remained, but its contents have been reshuffled, repacked, enriched and occasionally jettisoned by Nehru's successors. Their strategic moves have been influenced by the simultaneous consideration of choices open to them in the international arena and the advantages that the available options could deliver in domestic politics. Just as the decision of Indira Gandhi to intervene in Pakistan's internal conflict in 1971 – at the risk of international opprobrium, particularly from the United States and its allies – generated great enthusiasm and electoral dividends, so did the move of Atal Bihari Vajpayee to authorize nuclear tests and the subsequent bus diplomacy with Pakistan. There has been overall stability and continuity. Often, regimes have changed but not the high policies of the state. Narendra Modi's foreign policy notion – *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas* (सबकासाथ सबकाविकास सबकाविश्वास) (Everyone's support, everyone's development and now everyone's trust), in the style of Thomas Jefferson's 'friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none' (Yale Law School 2008) – is a continuation of the long-term goals of Indian foreign policy rather than a radical departure from them. The shifts have been subtle but persistent, and over the years have cumulated into a framework which – but for the detailed analysis that we have carried out in the chapters of this book – would scarcely resemble that of the early years of the nascent republic.

Our analysis seeks to respond to several general questions, some of which lie beyond the remit of this book. While deepening our understanding of the Indian case, these questions cast the making of foreign policy in the country in a comparative perspective. The first of these questions concerns the relationship of regime types and the room to manoeuvre of the government with regard to foreign policy. Does democracy constrain foreign policy whereas authoritarian governments feel relatively more at liberty to pursue their chosen track? Secondly, looking back over the past decades, one is led to ask, has Indian foreign policy become relatively less ambivalent regarding the use of force in pursuit of the national interest? Thirdly, how much influence does India command in the South Asian regional arena, and at the international level? How has this changed over time? Finally, what are the major constraints on Indian foreign policy and, as things stand, what might one prognosticate about the course of Indian foreign policy in the foreseeable future? In this concluding chapter we draw out some of the main findings from our explorations and extrapolate from them to comment on these questions and make some projections into the future.

Structure and change in Indian foreign policy

The state of the world today compared to 1947 when India gained freedom after close to two centuries of British colonial rule is radically different. The nature of warfare; threats to security and national interests; the status, capacity and number of stakeholders in global politics; and, most of all, the new technology of terror and the moral impunity with which it is employed by rogue actors are all radically different from the post-war era. At that time, the robust optimism of the Allied winners about global governance led to the foundation of the United Nations.² It is this buoyant spirit of optimism at the time of independence that gave the nascent state of democratic India under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru its enthusiastic recognition, and honorary acceptance into the circle of global leadership, endowing on the country a profile far beyond its actual capacity. As the Cold War set in, India, led by Nehru, and carrying the aura of Gandhian non-violence, built its domestic and foreign policy on this role, seeking to manoeuvre the country into the position of an intermediary between East and West. This stance became the backbone of the doctrine of Panchasheela – a third way of conducting global politics, straddling the capitalist West and socialist East – that got enthusiastic endorsement from the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement. However, the country lost this moral high ground when domestic problems of continued mass poverty, a semi-stagnant economy and fractious democracy became the order of the day. The global environment changed too. China, building up its capacity rapidly, broke away from under the umbrella of the Soviet Union. The United States worked out a deal with its archenemy China, thanks to the mediation of Pakistan. Eventually, with defeat at the hands of a resurgent China in 1962, the end of the hegemony of the Indian National Congress over domestic politics, intensification of internal dissidence and insurgencies, and the steady attrition emerging from the continued strife against Pakistan, India's global standing reached a low in the 1980s.

Over the past three decades, however, the country has regained most of the stature it had lost, thanks to its enhanced capacity, the domestic consensus on the core objectives of foreign policy and the institutional arrangement to translate capacity into power and influence. This book tells the story of India's resurgence, post-liberalization and post-nuclearization, into a position of global prominence, and its active participation in multinational decision-making on issues of global importance such as climate change.

Compared to the state of play when India gained independence and launched into global diplomacy, India's reaction to two recent developments is insightful: the chaotic end of US presence in Afghanistan and the follow-up to AUKUS.³ The latter refers to a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States to share military technology and enhance capabilities, namely nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. Indian reactions reveal the country's heightened profile and measured tone. Under Indian chairmanship, the UNSC gave de facto recognition to the Taliban regime after it regained power in 2021. Alongside this, India maintained its two-track strategy of promoting the national interest through foreign aid, seeking to enhance the welfare of the Afghan people; and working towards Indian security by countervailing Pakistan, and working directly with the Taliban regime to keep a lid on terrorism emerging from that country. Furthermore, the jockeying, shuffling and shifting that go on within the Western establishment has also enhanced India's room to manoeuvre. C. Raja Mohan writes: 'That Delhi today is a part of a difficult conversation between the US, UK, France, Europe, and Australia points to the growing depth and diversity of India's relations with different parts of the West' (Mohan 2021).

The making of foreign policy: the toolbox

We have sought to portray the complex process of foreign policymaking in the form of a 'toolbox' (see [Figure 15.1](#)). Our toolbox acts as a heuristic device, providing an abstraction based on inputs, the processing that occurs in what is a two-level game, and the outputs. The idea of a 'two-level game' (Putnam 1988) draws attention to the fact that government leaders and decision-makers are regularly involved in international negotiations while simultaneously making sure that the decisions made are well-received domestically (in terms of domestic opinion and interest groups).⁴ National decision-makers in this 'two-level game' must find a compromise position that is acceptable to all negotiating parties and, at the domestic level, this must be acceptable to domestic constituents and legislators. Alternative courses of action usually consist of capitulating to the demands being made on the country, the assertion of national interests in international organizations or war against the adversary.

A framework of decision-making allows the makers of foreign policy to incorporate the preferences of national interest groups, opinion-makers and what they perceive as national interests. Furthermore, we consider the symbolic value of issues, which can refer to deeply held

values that are culturally embedded, or which reflect the personal propensity of a leader to take risks or to be risk averse. At the same time, aside from the domestic level of constraints and compulsions, there is the need for decision-makers to weigh up the costs and benefits of action in terms of the international ramifications. These can be determined by treaty membership obligations and the assessment of likely gains and losses. In other words, the national leadership must contend with two sets of constraints – domestic and international. A feedback loop connects the outcome of a given foreign policy decision with future sequences of the game.

The toolbox (Figure 15.1) draws upon the two dominant modes of thinking in international politics, namely, (neo-)realism and (neo-)liberalism (going back to the Kantian notion of perpetual peace) and constructivism. Constructivism seeks to bridge the chasm between the former two. It suggests ‘that the structures of human associations are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and, that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature’ (Wendt 1999: 1) (see also Mitra & Schottli 2007).

Accountability of the government to the people – the democratic core of India’s constitutional design – had built the idea of the connectivity of domestic politics and foreign policy into the structure of India’s governance. However, such was the aura of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru

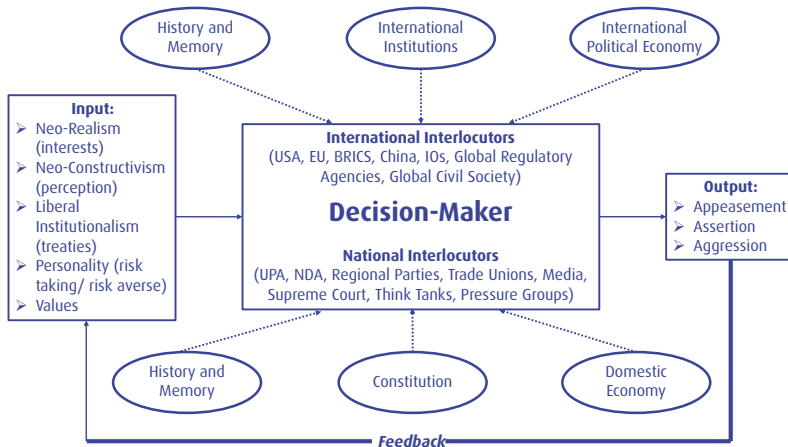


Figure 15.1 Toolbox expanded: domestic and international constraints on foreign policy

Source: author.

and complete dominance of the Indian National Congress, which ruled practically over all the regions of India, that India's watchful media and voices of opposition in the Indian Parliament left the conduct of foreign policy to the prime minister. Nehru, for the long 14 years of his rule, was his own foreign minister (Schottli 2012). In this unique circumstance, the toolbox remained an implicit presence more than an active subject of conversation in the political discourse of the country. In fact, such was the power of this disjunction that the disastrous failure of Indian foreign policy in the India–China war of 1962 invited no sanction on the government as such, except for the curt dismissal of Krishna Menon, then Minister of Defence. However, post-Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri gave a boost to the connectivity of domestic politics and foreign and defence policy with his iconic formulation – ‘*Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*’ (‘victory to the soldier, victory to the peasant’). The fusion of domestic politics and foreign policy went a step further with Indira Gandhi's gambit of sending Indian troops to ‘liberate’ East Pakistan from the Pakistan Army. The connective logic – statecraft and foreign policy, built into the toolbox – finally acquired its full force in the 1971–2 India–Pakistan war, where India's resounding victory led to an electoral bounty for Indira Gandhi in the victorious assembly elections of 1972 that followed.

The fusion of the actor–structure dichotomy and domestic–foreign policy hiatus has found its most recent incarnation in the person of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A dissection of the strategic intent behind his foreign travels, weaving the Indian diaspora and its domestic roots into new linkages of business and politics, and the domestic campaign trail where engagements with regional and global powers surface point to the role of some *newer* domestic interlocutors. Under the new dispensation, the making of foreign policy has come to incorporate a larger set of players and issues, both in the domestic arena as well as at the regional and global levels. The armed forces, intelligence community and civil service and retired personnel from these agencies who have often found a new opportunity to influence policy from think tanks have emerged as major new actors in the domestic arena.⁵

As before, this model considers the inputs and the processing of these in the form of a two-level game where national decision-makers seek to identify an option that would be best placed for domestic opinion and acceptable in the international arena. The alternative courses of action typically consist of capitulation to the demands made on the country, the assertion of national interest in international organizations or war against the adversary. The national leadership considers these alternatives in terms of their implications for domestic and international

politics and chooses an option that is politically saleable at home and acceptable abroad. The choices also seek to balance the costs and benefits deriving out of treaty obligations and the likely gains from the choices made.

Today, the toolbox dominates India's endogenous foreign policy-making and its analysis in think tanks, interest and lobby groups, and in the media. Political bickering over details notwithstanding, a bipartisan consensus has grown over the main contours of the toolbox. One finds an echo of this implicit consensus in the brandishing of Indian air strikes in Pakistan by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in national and regional elections. It is also present in the sharp rhetoric of Rahul Gandhi, reflecting the thinking of the Congress 'High Command' (the Congress Working Committee – CWC), accusing the Modi government of not being vigilant enough in defending India's national territory from China, all as a part of the electoral strategy of the party.

Some observers of the Indian scene have interpreted India's recent policies as indicative of her ambitions for great power status. The attitude, a residual legacy of the past, often lurks behind the moral postures and grandstanding by India's leaders.⁶ How much of this posturing is empty rhetoric and how much of it is real in effective terms as the years unfold is contingent on several factors. Below, we discuss these factors briefly.

Global and regional security regimes

India has shown a great proclivity to engage in multilateral bodies. As one of leading developing countries, India has taken an active role in important multilateral forums for global governance such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the G20 leaders' summit, the East Asia Summit, the BRICS summit of emerging economies, and the Commonwealth of Nations as well as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Apart from these global platforms, India also engaged in many regional groupings like the BASIC (a grouping consisting of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Indian Ocean Rim Association, IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, South Africa), Mekong–Ganga Cooperation and BIMSTEC, among others. Most recently, it has been a proactive member of the informal Quad grouping, bringing together the four major Indo-Pacific actors of Japan, the United States, Australia and India. On the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India has declined invitations twice, in 2017 and 2019, to attend the global forum in

Beijing. Both times the Indian government has referred to the BRI-funded China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project which undermines India’s sovereignty given that it runs through disputed territory.

Under the impact of the new contextual and indigenous developments, India is re-examining its approach to international and regional organizations. Nehru was a great supporter of international peacekeeping and mediation initiatives, and a staunch advocate of Asian regional cooperation. It was he who organized the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947 even before India had formally achieved independence in August the same year.

The need for a South Asian security regime

It can be argued that a regional body like SAARC could perhaps facilitate India’s room to manoeuvre. Yet, Cohen (2001) argues that regional cooperation can work only when either one of two conditions exists. The first is the presence of a benevolent, dominant regional power that can regulate regional behaviour. The second is the existence of a set of regional players with roughly similar resource endowments, or similar threat perceptions from outside the area. Neither condition obtains in South Asia.⁷ A successful solution to the issue of joint management of security threats at the regional level will reduce India’s security burden and increase its support from regional powers in the international arena. The problem is similar in nature, though different in scale, regarding threats to India’s security links with its South Asian neighbours. Although the sources of India’s insecurity often lie within the territories of its neighbours, India has so far refused to have the issues discussed as a common problem of South Asia, preferring instead to take things up at the bilateral level. There is a structural problem here (Mitra 2001) that India needs to solve.

‘Sweet-and-sour’ India–China relations

India–China relations since independence is sometimes wittily summed up as ‘Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai’ of the 1950s to ‘Hindi-Chini-bye-bye’ after the 1962 defeat, and then a ‘Hindi-Chini-buy-buy’ phase that took off after the liberalization of the Indian economy. The relations of the two neighbours have moved from the early attempts at cordial links to abject hostility since the liberalization of the economy of both countries – a period of vigorous bilateral trade. China, one of India’s main trading partners, is also one of the

most important constraints on India's global profile. It has blocked India's chances of obtaining permanent membership of the Security Council, locked India into the prospects of a two-front war, through its support of Pakistan, and sought to undermine the chances of India's manufacturing sector from gaining momentum. The easing of tension in India–China relations would help India free up some of the resources that are tied up in the northeast. From all indications, such efforts are afoot; but the traumatic legacy of India's defeat in 1962 is hard to live down.

India's Arunachal Pradesh, which the Chinese regard as disputed territory, continues to be a bone of contention (Mitra & Thaliyakkattil 2018). The military standoff in 2020, which led to the death of 20 Indian soldiers on the icy heights of Galwan Valley, has become a touchstone against which to measure the nature of India–China relations. Though subsequently both sides withdrew their troops, the unmarked border remains an unsolved problem and holds the potential for local flareups. However, a mechanism has evolved to contain these potential outbreaks of hostility and stop them from spinning out of control, as in 1962.⁸

Public opinion and foreign policy

To what extent does public opinion matter in the making of foreign policy? This undoubtedly varies according to the foreign policy issue at hand – from seemingly small questions to matters of war and peace. Milliff and Staniland (2021: 4) identify three schools of thought: the first finds that the public is ill-informed and its involvement potentially dangerous.⁹ The second insists that the public's attitudes are rather coherent and prudent,¹⁰ characterized by order not chaos and derived from the public itself and not from elites (Kertzer & Zeitzoff 2017). The third views political leadership and elite cues – transmitted though media and group attachments – as the drivers of public foreign policy attitudes.¹¹

Studying India's public attitude towards China over time, Milliff and Staniland (2021: 11–12) find, unsurprisingly, a dramatic change after the 1962 India–China war to highly negative views followed by a long and slow recovery towards neutral views in the late 1970s and 1980s. Given the available survey data from the time that refers mainly to the *urban* Indian public, Milliff and Staniland (2021: 41) conclude that the Indian case supports the bottom-up/'pretty prudent' public foreign policy opinion school of thought: 'While media and political elites obviously are crucial conduits of information and attitudes, we should not assume that they are omniscient spinmasters'. As an exception to this,

the authors see credible evidence of elite-led opinion before the 1962 war (Milliff and Staniland 2021). They also point to regional differences in public perception depending on the geographical exposure to threats from China.

Negative views of China have reached historic heights in many countries in recent years (Silver et al. 2020). Remarkable changes from an overall positive perception of China in the early 2000s to an overwhelmingly negative view in 2020 happened in many countries – especially in advanced economies. In Japan, 86% of people have a negative view of China – up from 42% in the early 2000s. In the UK, there has been a stunning change to 74% having a negative view of China, up from merely 17% in the early 2000s. The list goes on: Australia (81% negative – up from 40%), Canada (73% negative – up from 27%), Germany (71% negative – up from 37%), South Korea (75% negative – up from 31%) and the United States (73% negative – up from 35%) (Silver et al. 2020).

In India, 46% of people have a negative view of China, which is below the average in Asia – in Indonesia, even fewer people (36%) had a negative view of China in 2019 (Silver et al. 2019). It is noteworthy that a negative China view is dominant in Asian, North American and West European countries (except Greece). In contrast, both Russia's and Ukraine's public had an overwhelmingly positive view of China in 2019 (Silver et al. 2019). The view of China by Ukrainians has, most likely, changed substantially since the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, the reluctance of China to condemn it and the speculation about an agreement between President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping to hold off the invasion until after the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing. Regions with generally positive views of China in 2019 are Eastern Europe, South America, the Middle East and Africa.

Interestingly, but maybe not surprisingly given the importance of China as a trading partner, many publics perceive the strengthening of the Chinese economy as a blessing – not only in Africa and South America, but also in North America, the Middle East and Asia (Pew Research 2019). The notable exceptions are Turkey (51% negative versus 31% positive) and China's largest neighbour, India (61% negative versus 20% positive) (Pew Research 2019).¹²

All (surveyed) Asian publics are convinced that investment by China is a bad thing as it gives China too much influence (Pew Research 2019). This is in contrast to the positive public perception of Chinese investment in Africa, South America and the Middle East (ibid.). The perception of Chinese investment in Asia is certainly linked to the negative press perception of China's BRI, formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR). It

has been criticized regarding ecological and human rights issues, and as a neocolonial project in the form of debt-trap diplomacy – the latter criticism seen as a convenient meme, drawing on a negativity bias against China, by Brautigam (2020). Kumar (2018: 353, emphasis added) argues that public opinion in India has ‘limited but *growing* impact on the country’s foreign policy’. Following this argument that public perception matters for foreign policymaking – not least in the context of militarized conflicts based on border disputes or regional dominance – let us have a look at how China’s and India’s image has fared over time.

China has not fared well in the global public perception in recent years. While it was seen as ‘very and mostly favourable’ by around 40–50% of respondents in Gallup surveys around the world in most of the 2000s and 2010s, China has declined to approval rates as low as 20% in the last two years (see Figure 15.2). Although India was – since the start of the Gallup data series for India in 2000 – always seen as ‘very and mostly favourable’ by more people than China, India has now approval rates in the high 70s (see Figure 15.2).

Why should it matter what publics around the world, not least in countries that are entangled in disputes with China (or any other country), think (about that country)? Iyer (2020) maintains that public

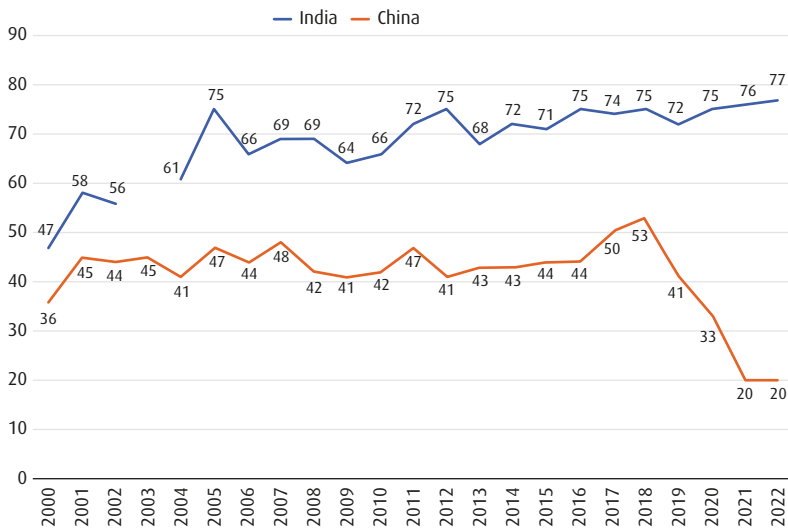


Figure 15.2 Global public perception of India and China over time, ‘very and mostly favourable’, 2000–22 (%)

Source: Graph, author. Data source, Gallup (2022). Note: please note the gap in the data for India in the early 2000s.

perception can have real-world consequences, pointing to the domestic pressure after the Uri attacks in 2016, when four Jaish-e-Mohammed insurgents from Pakistan killed 19 Indian soldiers near the town of Uri in Jammu and Kashmir. He points to analysts who directly link this domestic pressure to the government's response in the form of a widely publicized 'surgical strike'. The author argues convincingly that certain 'foreign policy issues like border disputes or decisions affecting national security, however far removed from the public's daily life, tap into certain innate human vulnerabilities, and seem to gain electoral significance by consuming public consciousness. Bilateral disputes invoke feelings of "us vs them" and defense policies are a metric to assess safety' (Iyer 2020: 12). Reflecting on the logical link between public foreign policy opinion (not least on security matters) and government action, he quotes a polling expert, who insists that narratives and ideologies, such as national security or corruption, determine elections.

India and its South Asian neighbours

One of the main factors that have blighted India's chances of gaining a seat in the Security Council is the lack of support for the idea in its own neighbourhood. India's neighbours have been constantly wary of its intentions, seeing India alternately as a 'regional bully' or a 'vulnerable giant'. Why do the relationships between India and its 'small' neighbouring states not run smoothly and continue to be mired in mutual suspicion? What might be short- and long-term departures from the low-level equilibrium trap into which the relations seem permanently trapped?

The 'small' neighbours, namely Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh, are not so small regarding their populations – with around 21, 30 and nearly 167 million, respectively. The epithet 'small' is indicative of an approach that is part of India's problem in the region. In addition, there are historic and demographic reasons that contribute to the complexity of the problem. Soft borders, illegal immigration, terrorism, smuggling, drugs, water resources and the treatment of minorities are among the factors that create pressures on India to intervene in what India's neighbours perceive strictly as their domestic affairs.

In addition to the complex interplay of domestic politics and issues of binational relations, the South Asian security dilemma and the India–China–Pakistan strategic triangle is a second factor that deeply affects India's relations with its neighbours – particularly Pakistan. The problem arises from the fact that India needs to strike some form of balance with

both Pakistan and China. Even if India were to arrive at a balance of force with Pakistan, since Indian strategists must anticipate the need to engage both countries in action at a given time, India will need to acquire an additional capacity over and above what the India–Pakistan balance of forces minimally requires. From the Pakistani point of view, since there is no guarantee that India would not mobilize the additional units putatively meant to meet the Chinese threat against Pakistan, Pakistan needs to provide for this contingency by acquiring a suitable counterforce. Thus, the probability of long-term stability under a balance of force breaks down, which leads to the competitive, incremental acquisition of additional military capacity (Mitra 2001). The problem, however, is not too great to be overcome. If India's relations with Pakistan, the United States and China could reach some semblance of trust and normality, the rapidly spreading Indian market of goods, services and entertainment could do the rest in terms of creating a South Asian common market.

The Indian Ocean region has gained in salience under the Modi government for a variety of reasons. India has increasingly emerged as a stakeholder in terms of shared governance of the region. The Indian diaspora, important for the Modi government as a source of global networking, attracts the attention of the government to the island states of the Indian Ocean with significant diasporic populations. Furthermore, the Indian Navy, which has acquired significant firepower, has become active in patrolling, anti-piracy missions and joint manoeuvres with other littoral states. That there is an element of the India–China competition spreading to the Indian Ocean cannot be denied.

India and the United States: a delicate balancing act

The adroitness with which Prime Minister Modi reached out to President Biden despite the strong links that India had developed earlier with President Trump is indicative of the sophistication and flexibility that have become the hallmark of current Indian diplomacy. The increasingly visible and politically active Indian American lobby in the United States and accommodation of US interests in the Indian Ocean are two factors that the current government appears to have taken on board regarding the conceptualization and implementation of Indian policy. The decline of the Indian Left and, with it, the habitual anti-Americanism of a section of Indian opposition have given the Indian government more room to manoeuvre. India has sought to promote this in the form of a delicate act of balancing growing proximity to the United States while keeping

its freedom of action in the form of not getting into any binding military treaty. Following the re-emergence of the Taliban and the need to counterbalance, India has emerged as a potential ally – a fact that has led to unprecedented levels of US support for India's nuclearization.

The democrat's dilemma: national power versus civil society

While India takes justifiable pride in the robust vitality of its resilient democracy, an unanticipated outcome of the same process, the existence of a vibrant civil society, also places limits on the pursuit of foreign policy, especially in the immediate to short term. India's active media and contentious democracy provide effective conditions for the media to hold security personnel to account for counter-insurgency measures. Indian security and foreign policy are both firmly in the realm of national political consciousness, a fact that no government in politically contentious India can afford to ignore, particularly when there is an election round the corner. In the relentless cat-and-mouse game between the security services and terrorists – euphemistically referred to as 'militants' in Indian discourse – targeted killings arouse public anger and prompt criticism of the state.¹³

In response to these challenges, the government of India has developed a mixed repertoire. Five core elements have emerged which are entangled with each another: enhancing the Asian profile of India without necessarily courting hostility with China, as evidenced recently through the Covid-vaccine export strategy; reaching out across the Indian Ocean; cultivating 'friendship without alliance' with the United States; developing a cohesive West Asian strategy that balances Israel and the Arab states; and linking up with the Indian diaspora. The first of these is the Act East policy and the Neighbourhood First policy. Initiatives to pitch for a leading role in the Indian Ocean arena for better trade, connectivity, governance and security of sea lanes have increasingly emerged as the Indian response to the Chinese project of Maritime Silk Road (commonly referred to as 'Belt and Road'). Cooperation with the Pacific Islands is yet another strand in this strategy to develop a broad, cohesive project to strengthen India's linkage to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. India has refrained from making any specific remarks on China's attempt to strengthen its territorial claims on the South China Sea and has only emphasized the general principle of freedom of navigation, which also applies to the Indian Ocean

and worldwide. The Indian reference to 'West Asia' in preference to the 'Middle East' builds on a form of Asian solidarity and makes it possible for India to have close relations with countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel, each of which have their own difficulties. This facilitates India's access to the oil fields, job markets for Indian workers whose remittances are a major component of India's growing reserves of foreign currency, and sends a signal to India's Muslim minority that the government is not necessarily opposed to any particular religion. The government has taken a principled and consistent stand against ISIS in the name of its fight against terrorism, without references to Islam as such, thus preventing its own position from being seen as part of a war on Islam.

India – footsteps into the future: a prognosis

Indian diplomacy today presents a sharp contrast in its tone and content to its previous form. The shrill 'third world' rhetoric of earlier years has now been replaced by a new pragmatism. India's foreign policy in the twenty-first century is nuclear, internationally engaged and non-aligned, all at the same time. Rather than standing alone on issues that affect both long-held principles and material interests of the country, India now acts multilaterally. The country now refrains from direct interference or engagement with conflict – in the South Asian neighbourhood or beyond – while still making it clear that it stands by democracy and respect for national sovereignty. Furthermore, the approach to international relations has become more complex. India's policymakers and representatives are capable of conducting diplomatic business despite existing conflicts, as is apparent in the case of flourishing Indo-Chinese trade despite differences over territory, the Chinese reservations about the Indo-US Nuclear Framework Agreement, China's wariness about the potential for India to act as a pivot between the United States and them, and India's growing nuclear arsenal. Furthermore, within the general norms of the five principles of coexistence, Indian diplomats have been busy negotiating the terms of trade in international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, often making alliances with like-minded countries. However, the seemingly anti-Western rhetoric that sometimes characterizes these occasions has not affected the support that India has received from the United States in difficult negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency, or with the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Two significant aspects of recent developments in Indian foreign policy should be mentioned here. In the first place, three key elements – liberalization of the economy and consequent integration with the world economy, nuclearization, and engagement with Pakistan and China in negotiations – have become enduring features of Indian diplomacy. Secondly, there is a strong bipartisan consensus around these initiatives. Once in power, Hindu nationalists took the initiative for the bus diplomacy with Pakistan and invited General Musharraf – for many, the main architect of the failure of Lahore and the betrayal of Kargil – for a dialogue with India.

Once one gets past the familiar litany, one finds a fine balance of national self-interest and idealism in contemporary Indian foreign policy. The idea of Afro-Asian solidarity is pragmatically adapted to the imperatives of our times. The commitment to justice and solidarity is tempered with the imperative of change. The difference in tone and content of the new Panchasheela from the old is remarkable. Whereas its invocation during the earlier phases started, continued and ended with idealistic evocations of Afro-Asian solidarity and abstract goals of peace, an instrumental approach to abstract goals triumphs in the current form. India has come up with a series of specific measures that should be at the top of the international agenda. These measures include the demands to phase out trade-distorting agricultural subsidies in developed countries and to remove barriers to agricultural exports from developing countries; lowering of tariff barriers to other exports; to combine the protection of the environment with the development aspirations of the developing nations; and urgent measures to generate additional financial resources for development, especially for the least developed countries and the highly indebted poor countries. India has effectively couched the country's long-standing goal of a permanent seat in the Security Council of the United Nations with the right to veto, under the rhetoric of the 'democratization' of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

India's policymakers have long nurtured the ambition to play a role in the international arena. Already shortly after independence in 1947, India played an effective role as a founding member in major post-war international institutions such as GATT, subsequently the World Trade Organization, as an active participant within the United Nations, becoming a major contributor to the UN's Forces and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. India continues to seek greater influence, especially in international negotiations, to secure its interests in the realms of climate, trade, agriculture, energy and membership of multilateral organizations. The change in government in India following the parliamentary elections

of May 2014, and its continuation after the resounding victory of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the parliamentary elections of 2019 (Mitra et al. 2022c), has quickened the pace of these developments.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the head of the Union government, India's foreign policy has gained a new look. Five major changes – the centrality given to economic and technological development, the orientation of domestic and foreign policies towards this objective, the emphasis on national power including military power, stress on soft power, and a reduction in self-imposed constraints on actions that other countries may construe as inimical to their interests – have been reported in the press. The tit-for-tat strategy against Pakistan, in contrast to the hesitant approach of predecessors, appears to be firmly in its place. There was a sense of wariness among India's neighbouring countries at the triumph of the Hindu nationalist BJP in the 2014 and, subsequently, 2019 parliamentary elections. However, once in office, the NDA coalition has firmly moved into the making of foreign policy with a certain vision of shared prosperity, security and stable peace with its neighbours. Without any prior experience of foreign policymaking or, for that matter, politics at the Union level, Narendra Modi has developed personal contacts with leaders of countries that do not necessarily see eye-to-eye with one another. India's growing relations with the Arab states while maintaining an effective working relationship with Israel is a very significant development. Leading emergent India, Modi has adroitly reformulated non-alignment as 'friendship with all and alliance with none'. Unlike Nehru whose policy derived from an idealized image of global governance, Modi's stance is pragmatic. Nehru's model of development through import substitution had little need for foreign direct investment or connectivity with the Indian diaspora. Modi's strategy of foreign relations builds on both. A dissection of global politics and the Indian stance during the ongoing war in Ukraine provides evidence of how the conflation of domestic constraints and global opportunity structure – as stipulated in the logic of our toolbox – underpins the course that Indian diplomacy has taken.

The Indian position, suggesting an immediate cessation of hostilities and the start of serious, binding negotiations, has been consistent since the outbreak of war in February 2022. From the outset, the country has reiterated its commitment to global governance, sought to promote the national interest and sought to pursue a delicate balance between the two sides. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message to Russian President Vladimir Putin that 'now is not the era for war' and his call for an immediate cessation of hostilities at the G20 reiterated the Indian position.

Not long ago, such a stance by a country of the Global South would have drawn opprobrium from the West. Today, India is also a valuable ally for the West in the Quad – an Indo-Pacific grouping aimed at China – and a lucrative market. India's position is, thus, accepted grudgingly in Western capitals, perceived more as a cynical pursuit of its narrow self-interest than a serious global policy option.

Prospects of a quick, decisive victory of one side over the other or of a negotiated solution are nowhere in sight. The front in eastern Ukraine has continued to move, with Ukraine succeeding in pushing the Russians back but also facing the opening of new fronts on land, at sea, in the air, in cyberspace and in the random bombardment of targets far away from the actual fighting.

The Security Council, where tit-for-tat resolutions by either side have been stuck in the intricacies of superpower rivalry, has stayed paralysed. The latest evidence of its failure to arrive at any form of concerted action was the Russia-sponsored draft resolution on Ukraine's alleged bioweapons. It failed to be adopted as only two veto-wielding Council members – Russia and China – voted in its favour, while the other permanent members, the United States, the United Kingdom and France, voted against it. The other Council members, including India, abstained. A similar political impasse occurred shortly before this. India was among four countries that abstained on a draft resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemning the referenda organized by Russia in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk. The UNSC resolution, sponsored by the United States and Albania, failed to pass the 15-member Council, despite winning ten supporting votes, after Russia used a veto to block it.

Further dampening the prospects of negotiation, the objectives of the belligerents have been evolving as the war unfolded. The initial proclaimed Russian objectives to make Ukraine a buffer between NATO and its own territory, and to protect the interests of the Russian minorities of Ukraine, morphed into territorial annexation. Ukrainian objectives, relentlessly voiced by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and repeated by the United States and the EU, were a call for the total defeat of Russia, war reparations to be paid by it and regime change in Moscow. The objectives of either side were incompatible, which foreclosed any scope for negotiation.

Two questions that signify the salience of the Indian position, which calls for immediate cessation of hostilities and a restart of negotiations, emerge from this stalemated conflict. Why has the war in Ukraine become protracted? And what will be the price of restoring Ukraine to its

pre-2014 borders – regaining the Crimea peninsula, under Russian occupation since 2014? Long drawn-out wars have been caused by the strategic depth of the belligerents, diffuse targets, moving and incompatible war objectives, and the induction of third parties with a stake in keeping hostilities alive. The additional factor that weighs in to make the conflict even more protracted are the nuclear capabilities of Russia as well as the Western allies of Ukraine.

The Indian position constantly draws attention to one of the implicit issues of the Ukraine crisis: who pays the cost of protracted war? Vast sums of money have been, and are used for the military–industrial complex as countries pledge increases to their defence budgets. The steep rise in prices of essential commodities and inflation have hit populations across the globe but its impact is asymmetric. As Indian diplomacy has pointed out, the poor suffer relatively more. The steep rise in the cost of petroleum, cereals and fertiliser have affected the domestic constituency that the Modi government has increasingly drawn into its own domain, thanks to the slew of welfare-oriented policies it has undertaken since its electoral victory in 2019 (Mitra et al. 2022b). With the campaign for the parliamentary elections of 2024 in the offing, one can imagine the stance taken by the Modi government, which conflates the yearning for global leadership and nursing its emerging domestic constituency as an optimal move for the government.

In the final analysis, the fast-globalizing, contemporary world resembles a kaleidoscopic field where every turn of events creates a new constellation of forces. With rare exceptions, no country is immune from the impact of the shrinking of distances, thanks to the new technologies of communication. Where does India fit in, what profile does it project to the world and, even more critically, how does the world perceive the country? Well into the eighth post-independence decade of largely unbroken democratic rule, and with growing state capacity, where does India stand in global perceptions?

Prediction is a hazardous occupation, particularly when it concerns placing a country like India on the fast-changing scene of global politics. However, based on the evidence currently available, one can risk a prognosis. The long-term stability of India's foreign policy is contingent on normalizing relations with Pakistan and China, alongside strategic management of relations with the United States. At home, there is the need to balance sustainable growth with the management of welfare, structural change and coalition maintenance. This is a tall order. Taking all odds into consideration and in view of its performance in the fields of statecraft and foreign policy that we have discussed in this book, one can

remain optimistic about the capacity of the country to stay the course and face up to the challenges.

Notes

1. Editorial, *The Indian Express*, 17 November 2022: 'For India, leadership of the G20 is an important opportunity to make a concerted push for the global south.'
2. Crime fiction has sometimes been faster on the draw in depicting the nature of terror and fragility of nation-states in the face of terrorism than scholarly treatment of these themes. Readers will find a chilling description of the state of play regarding the unceasing battle between the forces of terrorism and counterterrorism with deep implications for India in Frederick Forsyth's (2013) *The Kill List*, London: Bantam Press.
3. AUKUS is an acronym for the alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The agreement was created in 2020 to share defence technologies between the three countries to answer the possible threat that China poses.
4. For examples of the two-level game applied to foreign policy analysis, see da Conceição-Heldt and Mello (2015).
5. See Subrata Mitra (2021) *Governance by Stealth: The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Making of the Indian State*, Delhi: Oxford University Press for a discussion of how these actors influence policy, particularly through the connectivity to the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, which has the ministers of Home, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Finance as members, with the prime minister presiding.
6. See, in particular: Das (2012), Panagariya (2010) and Chandler et al. (2013).
7. These constraints, pointed out by Cohen (2001: 58), have not changed substantially in the two decades that have followed.
8. Following the most recent standoff between Indian and Chinese troops massed along the unmarked areas along the Line of Actual Control, India's Army Chief General MM Naravane said: 'It is a matter of concern, that the large-scale build-up, which had occurred, continued to be in place and to sustain that kind of build-up, there has been an equal amount of infrastructure development on the Chinese side' (*The Indian Express* 2021). He said, 'It means that they're there to stay, ... But if they're there to stay, we're there to stay too. And the build-up on our side, and the developments on our side, is as good as what PLA has done.' The measured tone of assertion is in great contrast with similar statements on the eve of the 1962 war, which used to alternate between aggressive rhetoric and contrite capitulation, with military infrastructure on the Indian side virtually non-existent.
9. Milliff and Staniland (2021: 4) regard Almond (1950), Lippmann (1955) and Kennan and Mearsheimer (2012) as proponents of this school of thought.
10. The authors see Page and Shapiro (1992), Herrmann et al. (1999), Kertzer (2013) and Rathbun et al. (2016) as more recent scholars in this tradition.
11. Proponents of this school include Zaller (1993), Berinsky (2007, 2009) and Baum and Groeling (2009, 2010).
12. For the Pew Research case selection, see Silver et al. (2019).
13. The recent targeted killing of a schoolteacher in Kashmir elicited the following comment from one of India's leading public intellectuals. 'India's security environment is precarious, its political future fragile, and its human sympathies dead. It will require a great act of statesmanship to overcome these challenges' (Mehta 2021b).

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