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INDIA AND THE EMERGING WORLD ORDER

Editors
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List of Abbreviations

AA	Account Aggregator
ADLIR	Association for Development of Lebanese-Indian Relations
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus
AEP	Act East Policy
AEPS	Aadhaar Enabled Payment System
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APB	Aadhaar Payments Bridge
API	Application Programming Interface
AREI	Africa-India Renewable Energy Initiative
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ATCM	Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
BCGSI	Bilateral Consultative Group on Security Issues
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BVR	Beyond-Visual-Range
C4ISR	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
CARICOM	Caribbean Community

CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CCAMLR	Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CCAS	Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals
CDA	Central Drug Administration
CDRI	Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
CDSCO	Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation
CEP	Cultural Exchange Programme
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CIS	Climate Information Services
CMF-B	Combined Maritime Forces-Bahrain
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPC	Communist Party of China
CSC	Colombo Security Conclave
CSRS	Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CTC	Composite Training Centre
DA	Defence Attachés
DaaS	DPI as a Packaged Solution
DCD	Defence Cooperation Dialogue
DEPA	Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture
DEWG	Digital Economy Working Group
DFI	Development Financial Institutions
DFTP	Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme
DGHS	Directorate General of Health Services
DIVOC	Digital Infrastructure for Verifiable Open Credentialing
DPEPP	Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy
DPI	Digital Public Infrastructure

DRI	Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
DRRWG	Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EAM	External Affairs Minister
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FFC	Friendly Foreign Countries
FIP	Financial Information Provider
FIPIC	Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation
FIU	Financial Information User
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGI-OSOWOG	Green Grids Initiative - One Sun One World One Grid
GIRR	Global Infrastructure Resilience Report
GLOF	Glacial Lake Outburst Flood
GoI	Government of India
GPFI	Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion
GPS	Global Positioning System
GVC	Global Value Chains
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)
HAL	Hindustan Aeronautics Limited
HKH	Hindu Kush Himalaya
HKH-HCOS	Hydrological Cycle Observation System
IADD	India-Africa Defence Dialogue
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICC	Indian Cultural Centre
ICCR	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
ICDRI	International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IFC-IOR	Information Fusion Centre-IOR
ILO	International Liaison Officers
IMEX	IONS Maritime Exercise
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMTRAT	Indian Military Training Team
INMTT	Indian Navy Mobile Training Team
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IoT	Internet of Things
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPMDA	Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
IR	International Relations
IRAF	Infrastructure Resilience Accelerator Fund
IRIS	Infrastructure for the Resilient Island States
ISA	International Solar Alliance
ISC	Indian Sports Centre
ISL	International Shipping Lanes
ISRO	Indian Space Research Organisation
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
JITCO	Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation
JNNSM	Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission

JWG	Joint Working Group
KBP	Koshi Basin Programme
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LAWS	Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems
LCH	Light Combat Helicopters
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LIFPC	Lebanese-Indian Friendship Parliamentary Committee
LLDC	Landlocked Developing Countries
LMIC	Low-and Middle-income Countries
LOC	Line of Credit
MAHASAGAR	Maritime Heads for Active Security and Growth for All in the Region
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
MDAA	Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement
MDB	Multilateral Development Banks
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MNDF	Maldivian National Defence Force
MRIC	Mauritius Research and Innovation Council
MRO	Maintenance Repair and Overhaul
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NDRF	National Disaster Response Force
NFP	Neighbourhood First Policy
NISE	National Institute of Solar Energy
NPCI	National Payments Corporation of India
NSCS	National Security Council Secretariat
NSP	Net Security Provider

OFW	Overseas Filipino Workers
Open RAN	Open Radio Access Network
P2P	Peer-to-Peer
PACE-D	Partnership to Advance Clean Energy-Deployment
PBD	Pravasi Bharatiya Divas
PBSA	Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PKO	Peace Keeping Operations
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSIDS	India-Pacific Islands Developing States
PSP	Preferred Security Partner
PV	Photovoltaic
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RBA	Royal Bhutan Army
RBC	River Basins and Cryosphere
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RCOC	Regional Coordination Operations Centre
REG	Regional Environmental Governance
SACEP	South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme
SACRTF	South Asia Coral Reef Task Force
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SAMOA	SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action
SAR	Search and Rescue
SASAP	South Asian Seas Action Plan
SASP	South Asian Seas Programme
SAWEN	South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network
SCO	Shangai Cooperation Organisation
SCORI	Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research Institute
SCS	South China Sea
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLOC	Sea Lanes of Communication
SPDF	Seychelles People's Defence Forces
SSIFS	Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service
STAR C	Solar Technology Application Resource Centre
SVCC	Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
TITP	Technical Intern Training Program
TPNW	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDOF	UN Disengagement Observer Force
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIFIL	UN Interim Force in Lebanon
UNPKO	United Nations Peacekeeping Operations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNTSO	UN Truce Supervision Organisation
UPI	Unified Payments Interface
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WEF	World Economic Forum
WMO	World Meteorological Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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1

India and The Emerging World Order: An Introduction

Sujan Chinoy

International Relations stand at a crucial juncture. The multilateral order represented by the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system has not met the evolving requirements of changes in the balance of power. The global community today is confronted with the spectacle of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in stasis, with major powers ranged against one another, on trade and technology and in the context of ongoing military conflicts.

The multilateral order's failure to preserve peace, prevent wars or to bring conflicts to an early end has encouraged the trend towards multi-alignment and hedging through strengthened bilateral partnerships and mini-lateral groupings. In Globalisation 2.0, regional and middle powers are gaining greater agency through strategic autonomy, multi-alignment and issue-based partnerships with contending powers. However, the uncertainty associated with the US government's policies on major issues under the new administration has introduced new complexities for all nations in navigating the strategic landscape.

India is not a permanent member of the UNSC despite having all the attributes of a responsible major power. It is the world's most populous democracy. It is recognised for its contributions to peace-keeping operations as well as vaccine support during the Covid pandemic to countries around the world. With the fastest growing economy in the

world, India has emerged as a credible partner for many, including the US, European Union (EU), Japan and Russia.

India's G20 Presidency was a watershed moment in its external engagement. It coincided with a number of major conflicts and contradictions. By 2023, the politics of the origins of the pandemic had been overtaken by a protracted war in Ukraine that threatened to wreck the G20 process. India and China were ranged against one another along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) following the bloody incident in Galwan in 2020. Additionally, the lid had blown off a long-festering conflict in West Asia with the Hamas attacks on Israel in October 2023, and the retribution that followed in Gaza. Against all odds, India successfully concluded its G20 Presidency with a consensus document which brought unlikely players around a common table to commit their energies to economic development and the achievement of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

India succeeded in steering the international community's focus back to core developmental challenges during its G20 Presidency. India has expressed its readiness to share its best practices in healthcare, disaster management, digital public infrastructure and much else with countries of the Global South.

India's vision has frequently been articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Some of the key elements are: (1) focus on rapid and inclusive economic growth and improvement in social indices and gender equality; (2) strengthen India's defence and security capabilities in order to protect sovereignty and territorial integrity, maintain a stable periphery, build border infrastructure and promote development in remote parts of India; and, (3) cooperate with partner countries, especially on critical and emerging technologies, to improve India's productivity and manufacturing capabilities and enable India to integrate itself better in Global Value Chains.

This vision is predicated on developing a consensus at three different levels to facilitate India's high-growth trajectory – internally, regionally and globally. Many attendant aspects of India's foreign policy, such as its use of domestic events to engage the international community, as evident in the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, its Neighbourhood First Policy and global initiatives such as the International Day of Yoga, International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, flow from its civilisational impulse to create synergy, convergence and

harmony. India has recently taken yet another initiative together with France to co-chair the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in France and will host the next meeting.

One can aver that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy is dynamic, driven by his personal energy and vision, and anchored in a distinctly Indian civilisational milieu of *dharma* (duty) and *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is one family). India has emerged as a credible voice of the Global South with the ability to straddle the North-South and East-West divides. Since the start of the Ukraine war, Prime Minister Modi's interactions with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine have underscored the need to resolve differences through peaceful negotiations.

Prime Minister Modi, in effect, has provided the world with a truly *kintsugi* (the art of repairing broken pottery with laquer mixed with gold) moment. If the protracted wars in Ukraine and Gaza can be resolved through dialogue, the geopolitical fractures could heal over time and enable the international community to refocus its energies on the urgent challenges of our times, particularly economic recovery and climate action. India's wisdom is proverbially like the vein of gold that runs through the *kintsugi* of global consensus, making it more resilient.

Yet, there is no gainsaying the fact that no nation can guarantee its sovereignty and territorial integrity without developing its military capabilities. India does not have the luxury of being a neutral country like Switzerland. India's neighbourhood is far more complex and fraught. Whenever India failed in the past to focus adequately on its defences, it has had to pay a price. In the 1950s, defence budgets were neglected, leading to the debacle in the border conflict with China in 1962. The 1965, 1971 and 1999 wars also underscored the importance of defence supply chains, especially heavy weaponry, ammunition and air power.

It is in this vein that the importance of robust military power cannot be overestimated. Quite appreciably, the Government of India is currently pulling out all stops to provide whatever the armed forces need in order to develop just that kind of deterrence capability.

The world in flux is an opportune moment for India to fashion its role and destiny. We are well placed to do so today with visionary leadership and strong fundamental strengths. The lack of reform of the international order, especially the UNSC, is an enduring fact. Major powers are unable to forge consensus on key issues, whether on war and peace or

development and climate action. For the first time since 1945, the transatlantic partnership between the US and the EU appears fractured on the question of European security. For the first time, the world witnessed the US voting at the UN alongside Russia, Belarus, North Korea and a few other States traditionally regarded as unfriendly if not adversaries. This epitomises a world truly in flux.

Today, India has established good relations with the Trump administration. The advent of a fresh Trump presidency has thrown up new possibilities, with a mix of opportunities and challenges. On the plus side, President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have a very good rapport which augurs well for the relationship. Going by the experience of President Trump's first term, there is a convergence between the two countries on key security challenges including terrorism, critical supply chains and disruptions in the Indo-Pacific. This convergence is likely to deepen. On the other hand, India will have to deal with the issue of tariffs on Indian exports and demands for lowering tariffs on US products in a pragmatic manner, maintaining stable and friendly ties with the US. A lot is at stake in this key partnership, including economic and technological cooperation, deemed integral to India's progress.

India has good relations with Russia. The call to put an end to the war in Ukraine is gathering momentum due to President Trump's push. In a sense, it is a vindication of Prime Minister Modi's consistent assertion that now is not the era of war and that disputes should be settled through peaceful negotiations.

Just because multilateralism is not functioning well today does not mean that it should be abandoned. Further, just because India is not part of the UNSC does not mean it cannot play a key global role. India's Presidency of the G20 succeeded in pointing the world to a new direction and a values-based future on the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Despite myriad uncertainties, India is well placed today in a rapidly evolving global order, with a unique identity of its own. It is neither a Western power nor an anti-Western power. Though it is the world's most populous nation and the fifth-largest economy, an active troop contributor in UN peace keeping operations and fully deserving in every respect, it is still not part of the UN Security Council. Yet, it has increasingly carved out a niche for itself especially in recent years by taking the lead in initiatives such as global health, climate action, solar and renewable energy, disaster resilient infrastructure, and artificial intelligence.

Today, India is capable of bridging the political divide between the East and the West as well as the economic chasm between the Global North and the Global South. Its strategic autonomy in foreign policy has facilitated this transition.

India is already exploring the full ambit of strategic autonomy, driven by its national interests, like all other nations. It strongly advocates a multipolar world in which the EU, Japan, India and even Russia are viewed as poles, in addition to the US and China.

India's initiatives in the past decade to build regional cooperation are anchored in its Neighbourhood First policy. India has always been the first to provide timely assistance in the wake of tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural disasters in its neighbourhood. Importantly, India does not seek reciprocity in the implementation of its Neighbourhood First policy, but does expect others to be sensitive to its core concerns.

India has a special friendship with Bhutan and it has always stood by India in multilateral forums. Bangladesh is a key pillar of India's regional engagement with which it has resolved long-pending maritime and boundary issues. There was excellent cooperation until the political churn in 2024. Today, Bangladesh is in turmoil and rapidly backsliding, overwhelmed by radical ideologies. Anti-India rhetoric is being propagated by vested interests. Bangladesh will continue to remain a challenge for India in coming years, especially in the context of illegal migration, smuggling and transborder activity by radical entities.

India shares an open border with Nepal, which demonstrates mutual trust and confidence. However, China's growing footprint in Nepal is an enduring reality that India must contend with.

The situation in Myanmar is unstable. The flow of refugees into India's Northeast, especially Mizoram, has long-term implications. India is cooperating closely with both the Maldives and Sri Lanka to promote maritime security. The changes in government in both these countries have been followed by recent course corrections in their policies towards India. It is important for India to further improve delivery of infrastructure, connectivity and developmental projects in its neighbourhood to match alternative offers.

Each of India's neighbours, however, have their own multi-alignment policies. They can be expected to cultivate closer ties with other powers, especially China.

With China, India seeks a future based on mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interest. Differences over territory and trade dominate the discourse. Recent developments point to a reduction in tensions and resumption of dialogue by multiple stakeholders.

Given Pakistan's frail economic and political fabric, China's stakes in Pakistan are growing by the day. Pakistan continues to use terrorism to destabilise India. India must build robust capabilities and maintain redlines to deter Pakistan.

Today, the rapid advance in technologies is changing the nature of the battlefield. Artificial intelligence (AI) and advances in the space and cyber realms are fusing with sensors, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and beyond-visual-range weapons which are at the heart of the technological changes on the modern battlefield.

Advances in military technologies in the next 10-15 years are expected to be even more dramatic. If Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems are not subject to regulations, they will be widely used to track and target enemy forces or equipment without human intervention in the decision-making chain.

In conclusion, for India, the fundamental goals and objectives in the 21st century are to achieve rapid and economic inclusive growth in a stable and peaceful environment. India's strategic autonomy is better honed today, as it pursues issue-based alignment in national interests. In recent years, India's role in the global arena has been strengthened, aided by the strength of its democratic institutions, economic potential, enhanced military capabilities, and resolute political will. India is poised to play a significant role on the global stage in addressing climate change, green transitions, non-proliferation, and food & energy security.

In this context, three critical inter-related questions need to be addressed. First, what is India's security and geostrategic outlook? How does India view its security environment within the region and beyond and what is India's dominant strategic worldview? Second, as the forthcoming decades are likely to be crucial for India's emergence as a global power, what challenges and opportunities lie ahead for New Delhi? Third, in an era of intense geopolitical competition how is India likely to navigate polarisation, alliance politics and hegemonism and play an effective role in global governance and the restructuring of the international order.

This edited volume aims to assess these questions with the objective of, first, identifying issues of concern and interest for India's decision-makers; second, envision the possible trajectory of Indian foreign policy in a rapidly evolving international situation; and, third, provide recommendations that are useful to policy-makers in shaping India's foreign policy and strategies.

To that end, the first section of the book deals with the *Transformation of India's Security and Foreign Policy Outlook*. The three chapters dealing with India's evolving security landscape, great power competition and nuclear disarmament, provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of India's threat perceptions, strategic culture and security strategies in the backdrop of increasing international volatility, polycrisis, great power competition and emerging conventional and non-conventional threats.

The first chapter by Mayuri Banerjee argues that in the recent times, both India's internal and external security landscape has changed considerably as the world order continues to go through major turmoil. Existing challenges like increased international competition, unstable periphery, China's rise, international terrorism and left-wing insurgency have assumed new dimensions and complexity. Further, the security landscape has become more challenging with the rapid development of disruptive technologies and irreversible climate change. In that context, it has become imperative to forge a national consensus to withstand threats to national security.

The second chapter by R. Vignesh, addresses India's response to great power competition. Tracking the evolution of India's foreign policy since its independence in 1947, the author contends that New Delhi from the onset, followed a flexible foreign policy aimed at both mitigating the pressures arising from great power competition and safeguarding India's national interests. He proffers that in the current age of great power competition, marked by polycrisis, India should, first, focus on balancing the strategic challenges generated by great power competition and second, build a global consensus in formulating inclusive solutions to pressing global issues.

The third chapter in this section by Abhishek Verma, highlights India's approach to nuclear disarmament and proliferation in view of India's evolving security threat perceptions. The chapter analyses how India adapted its normative position on nuclear disarmament with the perceived

security challenges to project a principled stand during global nuclear deliberations. Assessing India's approach to the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, he argues that it is derived from its strategic tradition. New Delhi has always been mindful of the importance of non-proliferation and disarmament to international peace and security.

In the second section, the edited volume shifts to India's engagement with various regions. In a case-study based approach, this section discusses India's threat perception and counter-response strategies in South Asia, challenges and opportunities for India in the face of the demographic crisis in East Asia, New Delhi's soft-power initiatives in West Asia and engagement with Central Asia and the Caucasus. Further, this section delves into India's cooperation with Africa and India's advances to the polar regions. Saman Ayesha Kidwai, in her chapter on the impact of the Pakistan-China-Türkiye nexus on India's security environment, argues that Pakistan remains a major source of land-based and airborne threats. Besides that Islamabad also attempts to destabilise India by fuelling separatism, militancy, cross-border terrorism, narco-terrorism and social media disinformation campaigns. Furthermore, in the recent past, both China and Türkiye have aided Pakistan in different ways to undermine India's security interests. The author argues that India must rapidly build its diplomatic, technological and hard power advantages to manage disruptions created by hostile actors in the neighbourhood. Looking at India-West Asia ties, Abhishek Yadav argues that as New Delhi continues to face considerable strategic constraints in its neighourhood, forging mutually beneficial partnerships with countries in West Asia is imperative. Accordingly, improving soft power initiatives involving cultural diplomacy and engagement with the diaspora could be key strategies in strengthening India's ties with West Asia.

Similarly, shifting the analytical lens towards Central Asia and the Caucasus, Jason Wahlang explores opportunities for New Delhi to engage with the region. He argues that the Ukraine conflict has significantly impacted Central Asia and the Caucasus, given their deep economic, cultural, and political ties with Russia. These nations, seeking to counterbalance Russia's influence, are actively recalibrating their foreign policies to cultivate partnerships with countries outside the region. This presents a unique opportunity for India. New Delhi, with its established historical and cultural connections to Central Asia and the Caucasus, is well-positioned to become a substantial economic and developmental

partner. In his study of India and East Asia, Arnab Dasgupta explores opportunities, challenges and India's response to the demographic crisis in East Asia. For decades, East Asia has been a major focus of India's foreign policy due to the region's significance as a source of trade, investments and technology and also as a means to balance China in the Indo-Pacific. Now, as several East Asian countries like South Korea, Japan and Taiwan are facing a demographic crisis, Indian policy makers should prioritise their understanding of how demographic trends can shape India's relations with the region. The author suggests that India, with its demographic advantage, can emerge as a source of human capital, strengthening India-East Asia ties in the proces.

J. Mohanasakthivel throws lights on India's efforts to proactively engage with Africa amidst a tumultuous global environment shaped by polycrisis. He argues that India's contemporary engagement with Africa is based on a mutually beneficial cooperation model rather than a donor-recipient or patron-client model. He substantiates this argument through the analysis of India's robust support to Africa in addressing the challenges of infrastructure development, healthcare and food security. In the final chapter of this section, Bipandeep Sharma brings to focus, India's policies towards the ecologically sensitive polar regions. The chapter is a comprehensive assessment of the emerging geopolitical dynamics, governance challenges and India's outlook towards the polar regions, covered in two separate sections covering the Arctic and Antarctica, respectively. The plethora of challenges in the polar regions arising from the complex interplay between science and geopolitics has been covered in detail.

Apart from robust regional engagements, India's foreign policy outlook over the last decade has also been shaped by its proactive effort to reorient its image as a strong maritime power. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unveiling of the Security and Growth for All in the Region doctrine on 12 March 2015, encapsulated India's maritime vision for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond. The third section of this book focuses on this aspect of India's foreign policy discourse, which is defined by its proactive diplomatic outreach to its maritime neighbours in the IOR, as well as, nations in the extended neighbourhood across the Indo-Pacific. Shayesta Nishat Ahmed's chapter focuses on India's defence engagements with its maritime neighbours in the IOR. She explores certain theoretical underpinings that have shaped India's defence diplomacy with friendly

nations in its negibourhood. The chapter is an exhaustive analysis of India's defence engagements in the IOR, both at the regional and bilateral levels. Also, the various challenges in further optimising these defence engagements have been highlighted and recommendations made for addressing them. Niranjan Chandrashekhar Oak expands the ambit of this analysis to cover the Indo-Pacific region. He specifically focusses on India's engagement with the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) situated both in the IOR and Indo-Pacific regions. He analyses in detail the distinct developmental and security challenges of the SIDS. Also, the array of initiatives by India for supporting SIDS have been elucidated.

Geography, resources and State power have always been key factors in shaping geopolitics. However, the contemporary era is different, considering there are new factors that not only play a pivotal role in influencing geopolitics, but also give rise to unprecedented global challenges. Some of these factors include environmental degradation, over-exploitation of resources and rapid advancement in technology. While these factors pose serious challenges for global governance, they also provide India with the opportunities to play a leading role in the international arena.

The fourth and final section of this book provides an in-depth analysis of these factors through specific case studies. In the first chapter of this section, Sneha M highlights India's pioneering role in initiating global initiatives like the ISA. The core objective of ISA is to promote solar energy as a sustainable solution for meeting the growing global energy demands and addressing challenges like climate change. She brings into perspective India's leading role in global efforts to harness the potential of solar energy. The various policy measures, diplomatic initiatives and technological capacity building measures undertaken by the Government of India for this purpose, have been brought out. Opangmeren Jamir focuses on climate change and its impact on the ecologically sensitive Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) Region. He points to several scientific studies to illustrate the serious and irreversible negative effects of climate change on the HKH region. These effects include shrinking water resource availability, glacial meltdown and loss of biodiversity. He further argues that the South Asian nations can collectively address these issues through Regional Environmental Governance mechanisms, and India can play a key role in establishing such an initiative. Rohit Kumar Sharma gives a detailed account of India's journey in becoming a global leader in Digital

Public Infrastructure (DPI). He highlights India's pioneering role in promoting DPI through the adoption of initiatives like Aadhaar, UPI and digilocker. The author argues that India can assume a leadership role, particularly in the Global South, by helping other developing nations in creating their DPI ecosystem.

Overall, this book attempts to encapsulate India's pragmatic foreign policy outlook in an international order that is characterised by polycrisis, polarisation and eroding global consensus on pressing issues. The book has great significance for the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), as it is the outcome of MP-IDSA's pilot project,the Director General's Young Scholars' Book Initiative. The core aim of this project is to inculcate in the young scholars at the level of Research Analysts (RAs) the art of conceptualising, drafting, editing and publishing an edited volume in accordance with the high standards of the Institute. Above all, it offers an opportunity to view geopolitics through the eyes of the young scholars who will form the backbone of academia in the future.

SECTION I

Transformation of India's Security and Foreign Policy Outlook

2

India's Evolving Security Landscape in an Emerging International Order

Mayuri Banerjee

Introduction

In November 2023, it was reported that the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) was in the process of stitching together India's first National Security Strategy. Although, the possible contents of the document and the date of its publication is unknown, the process of collating inputs from different ministries for drafting the National Security Strategy is underway.[1] The announcement was welcomed by a large section of the Indian strategic community who opined it to be a positive step towards enhancing accountability, implementing military and security reforms, optimising military resource utilisation and offering comprehensive overview of national security objectives.[2]

The government's decision to frame a national security strategy converges with increasing recognition at the official level about the host of new conventional and non-conventional security challenges India is facing. An exclusive three-day annual security conference held in Jaipur in January 2024, opened with a discussion on the risks posed by unregulated cyber space, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and deep fakes, besides deliberating on the threats emanating at the borders with China and Pakistan and from terrorism, insurgencies and transnational crimes.[3] On another occasion in the same month, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, addressing a press gathering at the inauguration of Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Projects, observed that rapid climate change is not

merely a weather-related phenomenon but a very serious issue related to national security.[4] This evolving threat scenario was also highlighted by the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in a public lecture in 2022 where he noted that while public imagination is prone to associate national security with very limited hard security issues, the era of polycrisis has thrown open new challenges which has led the Government to re-examine national security issues and national vulnerabilities.[5]

The international order since the global pandemic has been subject to considerable uncertainty and volatility. In this regard, the restructuring of the supply chains, labour markets, emergence of disrupting technologies and intensification of major power rivalries have been driving factors in international politics. As India is advancing towards strengthening its major power position in this period, a continuous appreciation and management of the existing and emerging threats is imperative.

The purpose of this chapter is to review India's evolving security landscape in the emerging world order. It will begin with a brief overview of select events that shaped India's national security perception. Thereafter, the chapter will review the external and the internal security concerns which till now have dominated India's national security discourse. Third, the chapter will discuss the emerging threats that are likely to aggravate the adverse impact from the present security concerns. Finally, the chapter will conclude with recommending certain strategies to address the existing and potential challenges.

Background: National Security Perspective

The idea of 'national security' as it evolved in the seventeenth century contains some basic tenets shared by all the states at the international level. They are: prevalence of conditions of physical survival of the state and political and economic well-being of its population, maintenance of its recognition as an independent actor at the international level and territorial integrity and preservation of the desired way of life.[6] Upholding these tenets are considered the ultimate national security objectives. A significant portion of the foreign and defence policy is geared towards fulfilling these objectives. Since its independence, India too has held a familiar view and national resources have been directed towards protecting the physical contours of the state, the population within, socio-cultural and political values and lifestyles from external and internal threats.[7]

Related to national security is the concept of national security perception, which refers to how a nation evaluates issues or situations that may threaten its national security objectives.[8] The perception of national security varies across states and is shaped by a country's historical experience, geostrategic location, regional external environment, economic, military and diplomatic capabilities, domestic institutions and socio-political composition among others. In the case of India's national security perception events like colonialism, partition, the five wars India fought (four with Pakistan and one with China) played a significant role in shaping the country's national security perspective.[9]

Post-independence, military and political interference by major powers which could undermine the decisional autonomy of the elected government was considered a major threat to the country's political survival and economic development. Therefore, early on India steered away from the entangling alliances of the Cold War, adopting a policy of non-alignment and sought strategic partnerships that would allow the political leadership room for manoeuvre. However, in the post-Cold War period India's external security environment changed, driven by developments like disintegration of Soviet Union, China's economic and military rise, rapid spread of globalisation and the emergence of a multi-polar world. This led New Delhi to embrace closer ties with major powers including the US and Russia. Notably, the threat perception of external interference remained and New Delhi adopted the stance of 'strategic autonomy' and 'issue based alignment' whereby foreign policy decisions would be taken on the basis of national interests rather than external influence.[10]

Along with centuries of trauma from colonisation, the instability and violence witnessed during the Partition also shaped the security lenses of Indian leaders. The mass violence conveyed to the leadership that while extreme diversity is a defining factor of India's national character, it could also be a source of socio-political disruption. Post-independence, New Delhi articulated clearly that demands for reorganisation of the state on the basis of religion and demands for secession will not be tolerated. An express affirmation towards upholding the sovereignty and integrity of India was made mandatory for political candidates and elected officials entering office. Further, over the years, the government directed significant political and military resources to supress insurgencies and secessionist movements based on religion, language and ethnicity in various parts of

the country.[11] Similarly, the five wars, made the land borders a source of deep insecurity in the minds of the Indian leaders as both conventional and non-conventional security threats emanated from the un-demarcated borders and transcendental claims. Further, the conflicts also demonstrated to the Indian elites the dangers of lack of military effectiveness in terms of strong decision-making and implementation structures and self-reliance in the defence sector.

Besides these events, the country's geostrategic location and its neighbourhood have also impacted India's national security thinking. South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are considered as immediate neighbourhood where New Delhi has considerable stakes.[12] India's centrality in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region has been considered important by New Delhi to assume a pivotal role in the region. At the same time, its position at the crossroads of South, South East and Central Asia is also seen creating strategic vulnerabilities for the country. Any adverse developments in these regions could impinge on India's politico-economic stability, spilling over into the domestic space. Also, as India would be in the first line of responding counties, instability in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region would strain India's economic resources.

Security Challenges

India's security landscape is constituted of a range of complex and multifaceted challenges that encompass both long-standing as well as emerging issues.

Turbulent International Environment

India's external environment has changed in major ways since the Covid pandemic. While it was in a flux even before the pandemic, the event appeared to accelerate geopolitical fragmentation amongst various countries due to economic and supply chain disruption, financial distress and an overall retreat of globalisation as states closed borders.[13] Particularly de-stabilising has been intensifying geopolitical and economic tensions between Russia-US-EU and US-China.

The rivalry between these powerful actors has reactivated the regional flashpoints including in Ukraine, Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula. Besides, aggravating collective insecurity, major power rivalry has hindered conflict management at the international level and has dampened cooperation on issues of major concern including arms race and climate

change. While amidst the complex international situation India has been able to maintain a robust economic growth and balanced ties with Russia, US, China and the EU through various multilateral arrangements, prolonged tensions among major powers, remain a major concern due to the threats posed to India's global supply chains, trade flows and energy and food security.

Volatile Periphery

India's immediate neighbourhood involving continental South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region features at the top of India's national security calculus. As Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated during the ninth India-Thailand Joint Commission Meeting that developments in the neighbourhood that have a bearing on India's national security is of interest to India and is keenly followed by New Delhi.[14] Since independence India has faced an extremely volatile neighbourhood due to weak and unstable governments, recurring political and economic crises intra-state conflicts, and terrorism.[15] The region has also been a witness to several natural disasters and public health emergencies, fueling political-economic instability. Following the outbreak of the pandemic and the Ukraine conflict, the socio-political and economic situation worsened in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.[16] The pandemic-induced economic slowdown, pushed millions into poverty and unemployment and led to complete collapse of health care systems.[17] Compounding the impact of the pandemic, the Ukraine crisis resulted in inflationary stress and acute food, fertiliser and fuel shortages.[18] The socio-economic distress deepened socio-political instability in these regions due to reduced state capacity. For instance, Sudan and Myanmar witnessed military coups; terrorist outfit Al-Shabaab intensified fight against the Somalian government; [19] governments were toppled in Sri Lanka and Pakistan; human and drug trafficking and maritime piracy increased; and the Taliban returned to Afghanistan, further complicating the security environment of the region. Prolonged turbulence and disruptions create governance challenges. The absence of order and rule of law can be exploited by both state and non-state actors to threaten India's territorial integrity and political stability, investments and assets and constrain New Delhi's diplomatic manoeuvrability, impinging on India's overall security.[20]

China's Rise

Since the late 1950s, China has been considered a security challenge by New Delhi. Although, China has been one of India's top trading partners and the two countries have cooperated on various issues in multilateral organisations, China's rise as a major economic and military power has been concerning for India. One of the primary reasons is the border dispute. Increase in China's military and economic power translated into greater military pressure on the border as Beijing rapidly modernised the PLA and border infrastructure.[21] For Indian policy-makers this not only widened the military asymmetry but also raised the challenge of increased military preparedness. Second is the Sino-Pakistan cooperation. Besides diplomatic collaboration against India, as China strengthened militarily, Beijing has been Pakistan's leading weapons supplier.[22] Further, Beijing transferred nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan and in the last one decade, has armed Pakistan with cutting edge military equipment involving aircrafts, warships, submarines and missile systems. In view of these developments, a two front war is considered by many observers in India a potent reality.[23] Finally, over the years, with China's rise, Beijing also sought greater engagement with Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar and Afghanistan, developing deep military and political contacts and extending millions worth aid in infrastructure, connectivity and defence, thus raising the spectre of encirclement in the minds of Indian policy elites[24]

Following the 2020 Galwan Valley crisis, the alarm bells regarding China's rise have tolled harder. It was opined that the Galwan Valley clash reflected a newfound aggressiveness in China owing to enhancement of its military and economic capabilities.[25] Also, that clash was a wake-up call for Indian military and political establishment regarding threats faced by India from China's increased assertivness.[26]

Terrorism

India has been a victim of cross-border terrorism for over seven decades now and most of these threats have emanated from Pakistan. Since, adoption of the 'thousand cuts' policy against India after the 1971 war, Pakistan facilitated several terrorist attacks like the 1993 Mumbai blasts, 2001 Parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai attack, Uri and Pulwama attacks in 2016 and 2019 respectively. According to India's Ministry of Home Affairs' annual reports, Pakistani ISI has been involved in sheltering, training,

arming and transporting militant groups like LeT, JeM, HuM among others to conduct terrorist activities against India through both land and maritime borders.[27]

Further, through a network of proxy groups and funding operating in India and also in the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bangladesh, the ISI also helped expand the scope of the terrorist attacks from border regions to the Indian hinterland to target civilian spaces, thus creating more pressure for the Indian security apparatus. Apart from Pakistan-based terrorist outfits, India has also been facing security threats from global terrorist organisations like ISIS, Al Qaeda who have occasionally threatened to attack India.[28] Notably, following the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, India faced an increased number of terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir where 257 incidents of terror were registered. Reportedly, local terror recruitment propelled in J&K in 2020.[29] Internal assessments suggested that local recruitment could be as high as 180 in 2020 and long defunct terror groups like Al-Badr were being revived by Pakistan. Also, the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan created further security challenges for India.[30] Not only are there fears that adverse developments in Afghanistan can spill over into Kashmir but also Afghanistan along with Pakistan could be used as a launching pad for terrorist attacks against India.[31]

Left-Wing Extremism and Insurgency

Left-wing extremism and insurgency issues are considered largely as internal security threats. Left-wing extremism is understood as violence inflicted by Maoist groups who see the state as the 'class enemy' and aim towards its absolute annihilation.[32] Insurgency is seen as violence carried out against the state over specific demands like statehood, separation from Indian polity, greater political and economic autonomy. It can also be driven by religious ideology and ethnic nationalism. The origins of left-wing extremism and insurgency movements in India are varied. The Maoist movement, embedded in a socio-economic context rose largely in extremely poor tribal areas where benefits of government's development initiatives did not reach. The Indian state was perceived as indifferent or complicit in perpetration of socio-economic injustice on the tribal and poorer sections of the society. In case of insurgencies, they have been driven by religious ideology or ethnic nationalism. For instance, Kashmir militancy arose from ethnic-nationalism, which however, assumed a

religious character with Pakistan's interference. The other insurgency movements in Punjab, Nagaland, Manipur have largely been driven by ethnic nationalism.[33]

The security threats from left-wing extremism and insurgency have been two-fold. First the activities of these groups undermine the sovereignty of the Government of India and also threaten India's territorial integrity as they intend to coerce the state through violence and challenge the geographical constitution of the state. Second, these groups also hamper social stability and security as they are often involved in intra-group killings, kidnapping, extortion, drug peddling, human trafficking and terrorising local populations.[34] Observers note that although over the years the government has been successful in taming the violence and security threat through a combined approach of negotiation and military tactics there are signs that these challenges persist. Instances like the emergence of secessionist leaders like Amritpal Singh, Maoist attacks and death of security personnel in 2020 and 2021 in Chhattisgarh and terror attacks on army personnel in Rajouri and Poonch in 2023 and 2024 indicate continuing threat from insurgency and left-wing extremism.[35]

Emerging Security Threats

Besides the long-standing threats, cyber information warfare and climate change are two of the primary threats emerging on India's national security landscape.

Cyber-Information Warfare

Cyber and information warfare are known as next generation warfare and are emerging threats in India's national security landscape. Cyber and information warfare is carried out using Internet of Things (IoT) for range of malicious activities like denial of service, identity theft, hacking, cyber stalking, cyber-squatting, cyber-spamming, email-bombing, email spoofing, cyber defamation, web defacement, data doodling, web jacking, spread of false information, morphed videos among others.[36] Over the years, the threat from cyber and information warfare has swiftly evolved from few virus attacks to more sophisticated malware denial of service and Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated audio-visual deepfakes.[37] Since, India operates in a highly digitally integrated environment, hostile cyber misinformation campaigns are major security threats, especially when India lacks both offensive and defensive cyber security capabilities to

counter sophisticated malwares like Stuxnet, Flame and Black Shades and other disruptive AI systems.

Emerging disruptive technologies have the potential to disrupt national communication, transportation, financial, health and defence systems. For instance, in 2017, India's fighter jet Sukhoi Su-30 crashed on the India-China border allegedly due to a cyber-attack when the plane was airborne.[38] Then again in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mumbai faced massive power outage, which was argued to have been caused by hacking of the city's power grids. Furthermore, in 2022, cyber criminals hacked into AIIMS server stealing patient data including that of former prime ministers, bureaucrats and judges.[39] With regard to spread of misinformation and creating disturbances, it is alleged that in September 2013, the communal riots in Muzaffarnagar was fanned by a morphed video on YouTube. As recently as in case of Kuki-Meiti clashes in Manipur, security agencies emphasised that circulation of fake news, rumours and morphed videos triggered and sustained the violence.[40] According to an *Economic Times* news report, India was the top target of cyber-attacks from 2021-2023, with most of these attacks originating from China and North Korea.[41] During New Delhi's presidency of the G20, the official website of the conference witnessed sixteen lakh cyber-attack per minute.[42] Similarly, India also tops the list of countries 'with the highest risk of misinformation and disinformation', according to World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Risk Report.[43] Compounding these concerns is an increasing trend that Pakistan based anti-India terrorist groups such as LeT and JeM have been using the cyber space and social media platforms for radicalisation, propaganda and campaign.[44]

Climate Change

India is the seventh most affected country globally by environmental disasters and it is very recently that climate change is being increasingly acknowledged as a grave security concern. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his speech at the 2021 COP 26 Summit in Glasgow, observed that climate change has become an existential issue for the Global South including India.[45] Similarly, referring to the rising number of environmental disasters in Uttarakhand, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh while inaugurating BRO projects in January 2024, observed that climate change is a very serious issue related to national security.[46] Observers have noted that climate change can act as a 'national security

threat multiplier' in the long-term. First, environmental crises could strain state capacities and aggravate ongoing insurgencies, especially in ecologically vulnerable areas already affected by Left-Wing Extermism and ethnic violence. Extreme weather conditions leading to mass migration, poverty and food and health insecurity create conditions on which terror and insurgent groups thrive. Second, climate change induced public health crises can deepen national security challenges. A trade-off situation between national defence and public health will ultimately keep the country weak either in terms of lack of defence preparedness or robust workforce. Finally, off shoots of climate change in the form of floods, tsunamis, landslides can threaten critical infrastructure like power grids, nuclear plants, border roads and tunnels, which in turn can create vulnerabilities to be exploited by both state and non-state actors.[47]

The Way Forward: Policy Recommendations

With regard to India's evolving national security landscape the first major takeaway is that in the post-pandemic world, the threats posed by traditional security concerns have aggravated. At the systemic level, the uncertainty and the politico-economic stress induced during the pandemic deepened in the face of multiple international crises. International tensions dampened the flow of investments, capital, trade, people-to-people exchanges, affecting India too in the process. Further, India's neighbourhood increasing tensions with China and Pakistan have intensified India's security dilemma.

Second, India's security landscape is also growing increasingly complex as there is rise of 'hybrid threats'. Meaning, increasing use of a combination of diplomatic, economic, technological means of sabotage along with conventional military and proxy groups. In effect while the prospect of a full-blown military conflict has decreased, the rise of hybrid threats indicate that inter-state/intra-state struggles would continue implicitly and outside the conventional battlefield. Further, the internal and external components of a security threat are getting increasingly intertwined, thus complicating state response.

Some of the major factors that need to be considered keeping in view India's evolving security scenario is that, there is an ardent need to form a national consensus regarding the issues that pose a threat to national security to implement a pointed and forceful approach towards managing those threats. Second, in order to shape our external security environment,

we need to continue our efforts to reform multilateral organisations to be more inclusive and be able to promote a rule-based international order. Third as our immediate neighbourhood forms an integral part of our security calculus, New Delhi needs to engage continuously with the immediate and extended neighbourhood to maintain a peaceful periphery. Further, considering the rise of non-traditional security threats in the recent years, cooperation with neighbouring governments will be imperative to manage the cross-border challenges. Fourth, self-reliance in the defence sector remains an important prerequisite for national security. Accordingly, a domestic ecosystem will have to be put in place that enables innovation and indigenisation of defence production. Finally, with regard to emerging threats where, the national discourse is still evolving, India needs to strengthen both its emerging technological capabilities and disaster response.

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3

India: Navigating Great Power Competition

R. Vignesh

In early 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic created global disruptions of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. By early 2022, just when the severity of the pandemic began receding and the world was eagerly anticipating normalcy, another global crisis erupted with the start of the Ukraine War. As 2023 drew to a close, the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on an unprecedented scale and the subsequent Israeli response on the Gaza Strip has once again plummeted West Asia into a state of crisis. The unfolding of these global crises in quick succession gives an impression that the 2020s is bound to become a decade defined by polycrisis.

This assumption is perhaps best substantiated by the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Risks Report 2023. The report underscores that concurrent shocks, deeply interconnected risks and eroding resilience caused by these developments are leading the world to a state of polycrisis.[1] The term polycrisis denotes a series of challenges emerging simultaneously with compounding effects that are interrelated and their overall impact exceeds the sum of each part.[2] For example, the Ukraine War had ramifications beyond Europe due to the disruptions in the global food and energy crisis it created affecting millions of people across various regions of the World.

In this context, it is implied that cooperation among the great powers is the key to solving the multifaceted global challenges arising due to this

polycrisis. But instead, what the world has been witnessing is the resurgence of a Great Power Competition (GPC) that has been affirmed in the 2017 US National Security Strategy. This document describes China and Russia as revisionist powers that have begun to reassert their influence regionally and globally, undermining the US primacy in world affairs.[3]

On one hand, the eroding unipolarity is a welcome change for the global south whose genuine concerns and aspirations have long been sidelined by the Western dominated world order. On the other, this transition from unipolarity to multipolarity has been accompanied by an erosion of geopolitical cooperation at a time when the world needs it the most. The eroding geopolitical cooperation has exacerbated the environmental, geopolitical and socioeconomic challenges of the polycrisis and grossly undermined prospects of collective response to these issues.[4]

While the Ukraine Crisis is the legacy of the Cold War era rivalry between Russia and the West, it is the power competition between the US and China that is bound to have an overarching impact on contemporary geopolitics. China's full-blown arrival on the global stage has inevitably put it at odds with the Western-led global order.[5] As a result, we are witnessing the rebalancing of the global order characterised by regional tensions, economic uncertainties and supply-chain disruptions accompanied by growing nationalism and rejection of globalisation.[6]

For an aspirational power like India its foreign policy in this era of polycrisis would be shaped by two factors. First, is to adroitly navigate through the host of strategic challenges generated by this power competition.[7] Second, to act as a conciliator between the great powers to forge consensus for bringing about inclusive solutions for pressing global issues. In this context, this chapter will analyse the evolution of Indian Foreign policy since independence to draw lessons from the past on how India navigated through such power competitions while preserving its self-interests.

Theoretical Underpinnings

As this chapter delves into understanding the evolution of India's foreign policy outlook over the last seven decades, it is essential to establish a theoretical premise. This is important for comprehending a range of IR terminologies that can be used to encapsulate India's foreign policy transformation in response to paradigm shifts in the international system. In the field of IR, these terminologies have been subjected to extensive

debate and differing opinions among scholars. Hence, conceiving exhaustive theoretical definitions for these terminologies is beyond the ambit of this chapter. Rather the aim is to establish working definitions that could serve as points of reference when attributing these terminologies for illustrating various stages of the Indian foreign policy outlook and describing the nature of changes in the international system since 1947. As the title of this chapter indicates, the transformations undergone by India's Foreign Policy outlook will be examined against the backdrop of an international system that is characterised by GPC. In order to understand the concept of GPC it is important to first define a great power in the international system. On the basis of a widely accepted view, a great power[8] or global hegemon[9] can be broadly described as the following:

> 'Great Powers are nations that possess political will and military capability along with economic and demographic resources to an extent that it has the ability to shape or influence geopolitics at a global level.'

Regional or middle powers are nations that may possess these same characteristics, albeit to a lesser degree that their influence is restricted to its immediate neighbourhood or region and not at the global level. Great powers are also identified by their behaviour in the international system. Typically, a great power may come to be identified with a particular political or ideological leaning that they may represent like Liberal Democracy/Capitalism (USA), Communism (Soviet Union) or Fascism (Axis Powers in World War II). A great power may also be identified by its efforts to establish its spheres of influence across the globe by setting up alliances with smaller powers across various regions of the globe. An example of this is the US establishing its spheres of influence during the Cold War by establishing alliances like NATO, CENTO and SEATO for bulwarking Soviet expansion across Europe, West Asia and South and Southeast Asia. Through these spheres the great powers attempt to maximise their political, military and economic influence across the globe.[10] The formation and consolidation of these spheres might be contested by another great power, which may view it as an infringement of its own area of influence. This may result in the creation of a GPC where nations compete with each other for the pursuit of their respective interests. Jonathan DiCicco and Tudor Onea define the concept of GPC as:[11]

> 'A permanent, compulsory, comprehensive and exclusive contest for supremacy in one or more regions, domains or fields among those states considered to be the major players in the international system at a given time.'

In the international system, India's foreign policy outlook has widely been defined through alignment strategies adopted by successive Indian governments for navigating through the spheres of influence created by great powers. In the international system, the concept of alignment is used to describe a degree of diplomatic collusion between two or more nations for achieving certain military, economic and political goals. Unlike alliances, which are codified by formal treaties, obligations and defined goals, alignments may simply imply mutual expectations and policy coordination between nations for achieving foreign policy objectives.[12] In the decades following India's independence, its foreign policy was defined by the concept of non-alignment. This concept encapsulated India's disdain towards the bipolar spheres of influence created in the international system as a result of rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. But today, India's foreign policy is being commonly described by the concept of multi-alignment rather than non-alignment. The term multi-alignment was first used in an article by C. Raja Mohan and Parag Khanna in 2006 to describe India's emerging multidirectional engagement with all major powers and global institutions for securing its national interests.[13] In other words, the concept of multi-alignment can be described as India's approach of simultaneously engaging with all major powers, groupings and institution for securing its national interests in a multipolar international system.

Apart from this, India's own regional and global aspirations have been defined through concepts such as Preferred Security Partner (PSP), Net Security Partner (NSP) or Voice of Global South. The NSP was used by the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2013 for envisaging India's role as a guarantor of security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).[14] But in 2022, the Former President Ram Nath Kovind in his address at the Presidential Fleet Review instead used the term PSP to denote same.[15] While both terms functionally denote credible military capacity backed by political will for addressing the collective security challenges of the region, the subtle distinction between them is how it may be perceived by other nations in the region.[16] As opposed to the NSP, which may be perceived as India's self-professed role by the neighbouring

countries, PSP may denote a more inclusive and collaborative approach by India towards the regional security issues.[17] At the global level the India has been identifying itself as an voice of global south. The term denotes India representing the needs and aspirations of the global south by collaborating with other developing nations on equitable terms.[18]

Shades of Indian Foreign Policy Since 1947

India's EAM S. Jaishankar in his book *The India Way* categorises the evolution of Indian Foreign policy into six distinct phases, that is, the Optimistic non-alignment stage (1946-1962), Realism and Recovery Stage (1962-1971), Regional Assertion Stage (1971-1991), Reshaping the Basics Stage (1991-1998), Balancing Power Stage (1998-2014) and finally Aspirational Power Stage (2014-Present).[19] India's independence was accompanied by a plethora of internal challenges raging from the partition, poverty and political integration of the princely states. On the one hand, the partition of India was the largest and most rapid migration in human history with the displacement of over 1.7 crore people.[20] On the other, at the time of Independence nearly 80 per cent of India's population was living in poverty.[21] Apart from this, nearly two-thirds of the India territory and 48 per cent of Indians came under the 500 odd princely states that existed at the time of Independence.[22] In the succeeding decade after Independence, much of India's domestic policies were shaped to meet these daunting internal challenges.

Despite these issues, India rose to global prominence mainly due to its high-profile foreign policy activism that championed the cause of anti-colonialism, non-alignment and internationalism. During the 1950s India's stand in the Korean War, Suez Crisis, Arab-Israeli crisis, Cyprus independence and African decolonisation influenced the shaping of the global perspective on these issues. India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru along with other towering statesmen of the time like Gamal Abdel Nasser, Josip Broz Tito and Sukarno strode the international arena advocating for the needs and aspirations of the global south which was then popularly referred to as the Third World. The foreign policy outlook of the Indian Political leadership during this era was characterised by a sense of absolute idealism and not practical geopolitical considerations. Eventually, India's defeat in the 1962 border conflict with China brought an end to this optimistic and idealistic chapter of Indian foreign policy.

The 1962 war heralded the second phase of Indian foreign policy where

idealism took a backseat and addressing realpolitik considerations became the priority for New Delhi.[23] This war resulted in India initiating moderniation and restructuring efforts of its long neglected armed forces. The subsequent war with Pakistan in 1965 further led to identification of key deficiencies in India's security apparatus. The paucity of intelligence that undermined the efficiency of Indian military operations in both wars led to the creation of an external intelligence agency R&AW. The military engagements of 1962 that took place in the inhospitable and high-altitude terrain between the Sino-Indian border resulted in the raising of six mountain divisions for the Indian Army.[24] In the foreign policy domain as the Cold War rivalry intensified, India saw the potential of going beyond non-alignment to limited cooperation with the two superpowers.[25] This led to India forging closer relations with the erstwhile USSR by the signing of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971 to counter the US-Pakistan proximity. On the other hand, the successful test of nuclear weapons by China in 1964 further raised India's wariness towards its hostile northern neighbour. This subsequently influenced India's decision to reject the NPT of 1968 and embark on its very own nuclear weapons programme. These developments were a far cry from the attributes of idealism and disdain for militarism that had shaped the Indian foreign policy discourse a decade earlier. This radical transformation in India's foreign policy outlook eventually led to India's triumphant victory in the 1971 war with Pakistan that permanently altered the regional dynamics of South Asia.

The third phase of Indian foreign policy that began soon after the 1971 war was when India asserted itself as a regional power in South Asia and beyond. The political parity that India and Pakistan had in the region decisively ended with the creation of Bangladesh. In little over two years after the 1971 triumph, India again asserted itself on the world stage by conducting its first nuclear test at Rajasthan's Pokhran test site on 18 May 1974. The test was codenamed Operation Smiling Buddha and a nuclear device with a yield of 12-13 kilotons was successfully detonated. With this test, India became the sixth country in the world to conduct a nuclear test and the first nation outside the five permanent members of the UN.[26] As response to the US's rapprochement with China in 1972 and the emergence of the US-China-Pakistan axis, India adopted a more pro-soviet position on international issues. Consequently, our reliance on Soviet Origin Military Hardware increased exponentially. During this phase, India demonstrated its ability to act as a PSP in the IOR during

times of contingencies. On the invitation of neighbouring countries, India deployed its military on foreign soil for ensuring security and stability in the region. Indian military interventions in thwarting an attempted coup in the Seychelles in 1986 (Operations Flowers Are Blooming)[27] and the Maldives in 1988 (Operation Cactus)[28] played a crucial role in maintaining political stability in the IOR. However Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan Civil War with deployment of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was less successful.[29] This phase of Indian foreign policy ended with the dissolution of Soviet Union in December 1991.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union combined with the effects of the 1991 Indian economic crisis compelled New Delhi to undergo another radical reorientation of its foreign policy and economic outlook. The previous phases of Indian foreign policy were shaped by bipolarity in the international system due to the Cold War. But the fourth phase was different considering that India had to now look again at the basics of both domestic and foreign policy in the backdrop of a new unipolar world order.[30] Domestically, the Soviet Union's disintegration led to the drifting of economic philosophy at the core of many Indian citizens and political parties away from a discredited ideology.[31] This led to India embracing economic liberalisation and open market systems.

As India opened up economically to the world, its effects also reflected in its new diplomatic priorities and approaches to world affairs.[32] This period saw India initiating closer diplomatic engagements with the US without compromising on its strategic priorities and interests. India's 'Look East Policy' was reflective of its ambitions to establish stronger diplomatic bonds beyond its immediate neighborhood. However, despite the changed atmosphere, India continued to assert its uncompromising quest for strategic autonomy with the 1998 Pokhran-II test after which India became a declared nuclear weapons power. Shortly thereafter, India secured a military and political victory against Pakistan in the 1999 Kargil war.

The advent of the new millennium heralded the next phase of Indian foreign policy. In the previous decade Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent fall of the communist regime there enabled Pakistan to use Afghan Jihadists to destabilise Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) through terrorism. While India had repeatedly raised the issue across several global platforms, the West continued its support of Pakistan. But the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 led to the US

declaring a global war on terrorism. Subsequently, the US invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime, which was providing safe heaven to terrorists. Ironically, a decade later the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, Osama Bin Laden was killed by the US Special Forces in Pakistan. This incident hugely dented Pakistan's image as a credible actor on the world stage. This turn of events cemented India's position as the preeminent power in South Asia. The signing of the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement transformed the bilateral relations between the two nations resulting in increased diplomatic engagement, defence cooperation and technology collaboration.[33] Despite the closer relations with the US, India continued to maintain its special relationship with Russia and even collaborate with China on critical issues like climate change and trade. EAM S. Jaishankar describes this phase where India discovered the benefits of working with different powers on different issues.[34]

The sixth and current phase of the Indian Foreign Policy began after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in May 2014. India adopted a foreign policy outlook towards its neighbours, region and the world that was more proactive and robust than in the past. Under Modi's leadership the 'Look East Policy' was rebranded as 'Act East Policy' and SAGAR was unveiled. While the 'Act East Policy' brought a new impetus to India's outreach to Southeast Asia, SAGAR reaffirmed India's commitment towards the security and stability of its smaller maritime neighbours. The presence of the SAARC leaders in Modi's swearing in ceremony and his first foreign visit to Bhutan as Prime Minister emphasised India's adherence to its 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. According to observers, the robustness and attention that Indian Foreign Policy gained after 2014 has been unprecedented.[35] India voices and opinions in various multilateral and minilateral forums have become more amplified.

The year 2014 can not only be regarded as an inflection point for the current stage of Indian foreign policy but also for the contemporary global order that is continuing to be shaped in a flux through a series of independent yet interconnected events. Russian actions in Crimea in 2014 marked the beginning of resurrected rivalry between Moscow and the West. At the same time, China's disruptive global power has generated a great deal of anxiety, particularly among the Western nations. According to the 2017 US NSS, the Western view towards China was rooted in a belief that China's rise would inevitably lead to its liberalisation and

integration into the post-war international order. But contrary to this western belief, China has expanded its power at the expense of the sovereignty of others and through the promotion of its authoritarian and militaristic political system.[36] China's rise as a disruptive global power led to the reshaping of the strategic outlook of every nation in the Indo-Pacific region.[37] Apart from the West, India's own relationship with China plummeted as a result of Beijing's attempt to unilaterally alter the status-quo along the Sino-Indian border in Doklam and Galwan.

According to EAM S. Jaishankar what distinguishes the sixth phase of Indian foreign policy from the previous phases is that India's energetic diplomacy was accompanied by a sense of its capability. Unlike in the past, the Indian Armed Forces' strong response to the 2016 Uri and Pathankot attacks and 2019 Pulwama attack underscored India's 'zero tolerance against terrorism' policy.[38] India's ability to shoulder greater responsibility in the face of pressing global challenges also became evident during this phase. In response to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, India initiated the Vaccine Maitri initiative in which more than 300 million doses of COVID vaccines were delivered to over 100 countries, many of which were from the global south.[39] India's independent stance in both the ongoing Ukraine and Gaza crisis is reflective of its emergence as an independent pole in an increasingly turbulent and polarising world order.

Strategic Autonomy: A Common Thread Then and Now

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the beginning and end of each of the six stages of Indian foreign policy have been shaped by different epoch-making events. In the span of over seven decades India's foreign policy outlook has transformed from non-alignment to multi-alignment. However, this transformation has been underpinned by India's efforts to preserve its strategic autonomy. The European Union (EU) defines the concept of strategic autonomy as the ability to act autonomously without being dependent on other countries in important strategic policy areas like defence, economy and governance values.[40] In the Indian context, this concept can be defined as follows:

> 'The concept of Strategic Autonomy denotes India's ability to engage in the process of Independent Decision Making for the pursuit of its national interests without the interference of any external actors.'

This definition is derived from the speech of the former Indian President

Pratibha Patil made in Lok Sabha on 4 June 2009. In this speech, she reiterated that India would pursue its enlightened national interests, maintaining strategic autonomy and independent decision-making that has been the hallmark of our foreign policy.[41] As was noted by President Patil, strategic autonomy has indeed been the cornerstone of the Indian foreign policy narrative since 1947. In the first stage, India refrained from joining either of the two blocs of the Cold War mainly due to the consideration of its independent national priorities. Had India like many other nations at that time joined either of the two blocs it too would have been entangled in the bipolar power politics and would have been relegated as a junior partner to either of the two superpowers.

Instead, India along with other like-minded nations like Egypt, Yugoslavia and Indonesia showed the world an alternative through the NAM. The impression from the analysis of historical archives of the mass media shows that to a degree Indian statesman like Nehru and Krishnan Menon enjoyed the same global standing as that of Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles.[42] Front page coverage of the Korean Conflict, Suez Crisis and Cyprus issue on leading newspapers like *The New York Times*[43] and magazines like the *Time*[44] affirm the same. The NAM gave India the room to flexibly manoeuvre according to its own interests rather than allowing it to become confined within the limitations of Cold War Alliances.[45] In other words, a newly independent India's Non-Aligned outlook was envisaged with a view to preserving its strategic autonomy in the backdrop of the raging Cold War.

It must be noted that the policy of non-alignment also allowed India to engage with both the superpowers on its own terms when the situation demanded. In 1962 when India was confronted by Chinese aggression in its borders, it received military assistance from the US, which until then had viewed communist China as an adversary. Almost a decade later in 1971, in the face of the US-China-Pakistan axis, India was able to acquire Soviet Union's military and political support through the signing of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty. This was a crucial factor in ensuring India's triumph in the 1971 war with Pakistan. These limited alignments with the superpowers also did not constrain India's ability to pursue its independent nuclear policy. India's rejection of the NPT in 1968, its first nuclear tests in 1974 and the non-accession to the CTBT in 1996 can be alluded to this. Eventually India became the first declared nuclear power apart from the P5 Nations with the 1998 Pokhran II tests. The

announcement of Pokhran II was met with strong condemnations and sanctions particularly from the West including the US, Australia and Japan.

The US-led sanctions on India resulted in suspension of foreign aid (excluding humanitarian aid), sale of military items, transfer of technology and financial loans. However, within just a few months of announcing these sanctions the Clinton administration lifted these sanctions recognising the reality of India being a de facto nuclear power.[46] The 2002 US NSS of the Bush administration acknowledged the necessity for Washington to transform its bilateral relations with India. This was considering the fact that both nations shared common values and national goals for upholding democracy, combating terrorism, promoting free trade and commerce through secure maritime space.[47] This culminated in the Bush administration and Indian government reaching an agreement on a plan for civilian nuclear energy and outer space cooperation. The deal was approved both by the US Congress and the Indian Parliament in 2006 and this agreement paved the way for providing US assistance to India's civilian nuclear energy programme.[48]

India's independent policy was not only restricted to development of nuclear weapons but also to acquisition of conventional weapons even during times when it was heavily reliant on external suppliers. During the 70s and 80s the Soviet Union became the largest arms supplier to India due to the bonhomie between the two nations after the signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty. Even during this time India engaged in diversification of its arms procurement when tactical and strategic necessities demanded. In the late 70s as the IAF required long-range aircrafts for executing deep-penetration strikes in hostile territory.

For this role, India opted to procure the Anglo-French Jaguar aircrafts over the Soviet MiG-23s as the former had greater endurance than the latter.[49] During the early 80s the then Carter Administration in the US announced its decision to supply Pakistan with the advanced F-16 fighter aircrafts. In response, India once again sought to induct equally formidable aircrafts to strengthen its air power capability. In March 1982, a Soviet Delegation led by Defence Minister Ustinov came to India and offered MiG-25s and MiG-27s. Despite this India decided to purchase the Mirage-2000 aircrafts from France, which it viewed as a more technically capable aircrafts for countering the F-16.[50]

These incidents are indicative of India's independent and

uncompromising stance on its tactical and strategic priorities. They underscore the fact that strategic autonomy has been the common thread in India's foreign policy choices since 1947. India's independent stance on nuclear weapons enabled it to see through the double standards of global non-proliferation regimes like NPT and CTBT. After becoming a nuclear power in 1998, India's robust diplomatic engagement with the US enabled it to not only quickly steer clear of the Western led sanction but also bypass the legal hurdles of the NPT and engage in nuclear cooperation with the US. India's decision to opt for British and French fighter aircrafts at a time when its arms import was predominantly from Soviet Union was reflective of its priority to build its own capability as opposed to its alignments with superpowers.

This precedent continues till this day as it is evident from India's recent decisions to procure S-400 Missile Systems from Russia, Rafale fighter jets from France and Apache Combat helicopters from the US. The Modi Government envisages complete self-reliance in Defence procurement through its vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' for further strengthening India's pursuit for strategic autonomy by steering away from import dependency. This was highlighted in Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's speech made on 15 May 2023, where he brought out that import dependence can become a hindrance to strategic autonomy. He highlighted that independent decisions on global issues cannot be taken without self-reliance in defence.[51] Therefore, the Indian Government's ongoing efforts to create a robust domestic defence industrial ecosystem is rooted in its efforts to strengthen its ability to pursue strategic autonomy.

Great Power Competition of the Twenty-first Century

In the current international system, the US can be regarded as the reigning great power due to its pivotal role in the ongoing conflicts in Europe and West Asia along with any potential crisis in the Indo-Pacific Region. At the same time over the past decade the world has witnessed the resurgence of Russia as a direct challenge to the US sphere of influence both in its immediate neighbourhood (Georgia and Ukraine) and also in West Asia (Syria). Some scholars attribute these developments as indicative of the erosion of the US's status as the sole superpower. On the other hand, China has risen to ideologically challenge the American 'democratic liberalism' with its very own 'authoritarian capitalism' model, which has found fascination among various developing nations across the globe.[52]

Through its rapid economic rise and military modernisation drive, China has acquired the capability to project its national power at global level almost at par with the US.

Over the last decade, China has initiated massive economic and infrastructure development programmes like the BRI. Apart from this, China has also established the AIIB to counter US-led global financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. On the other hand, China has been increasingly adopting coercion as a diplomatic tool against its land and maritime neighbors to stake its territorial claims that contradict international law. As articulated in the 2017 US NSS document,[53] China has emerged as a revisionist power that seeks to replace the American-led global order. Overall, the power dynamics in the contemporary GPC is being shaped by the decline of the US as a great power vis-à-vis the rise of revisionist China and the resurgent Russia.

India Navigating the Great Power Competition through Flexible Alignment

During a GPC, alignments between great and middle powers organically emerge for achieving mutual security and diplomatic goals. As brought out earlier, India's foreign policy has been defined by its alignment vis-à-vis the prevailing GPC. While non-alignment became a defining feature of Indian foreign policy during the height of the Cold War, it did not restrict Indian policymakers from bringing about changes whenever the situation demanded. For example, India's wars with China and Pakistan in the 1960s resulted in New Delhi building stronger ties with Moscow despite its continued advocacy for the cause of non-alignment. Sasha Riser Kositsky describes this phase of Indian foreign policy as the 'Era of Quiet Alignment' with the Soviet Union.[54] This was considering the fact that after signing the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971, New Delhi adopted a discreet pro-Soviet stance on global issues. But on the other hand, India never really conspicuously abandoned non-alignment as its official foreign policy outlook. This was reflected in March 1983, when India presided over the seventh NAM summit in New Delhi.

As the chairperson of NAM, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi described the grouping as 'history's biggest peace movement'.[55] In this summit, India's nuanced stance on a range of global issues like the Iran-Iraq War, the deteriorating political situation in Afghanistan and the Cambodian Crisis earned the adulation of the developing world.

Singapore's then Deputy Prime Minister S. Rajaratnam described India's chairmanship of NAM as a breath of fresh air into the grouping and commended New Delhi's impartial stance on the range of issues facing the then developing world.[56] It is because of this, the term 'Quite Alignment' best describes the India's nuanced yet categorical foreign policy outlook during the 70s and the 80s. This substantiates the fact that India's foreign policy outlook is fundamentally characterised by flexibility rather than rigid dogmas.

In the present era where the GPC is being defined by the rivalry between the West and the China-Russia axis, India's alignment strategy can once again be noted for its flexibility. India's ability to successfully straddle the competing great power narratives by being a key player in both the west-led QUAD and the China/Russia-led SCO and BRICS gives a flexible architecture for its diplomacy.[57] Indian alignments in the emerging world order are characteried by flexibility that allows it to be a vital member of competing multilateral forums without fear of recrimination even if it disagrees with other members on certain issues.[58] In an era where global geopolitics is transitioning from unipolarity to multipolarity, flexible alignments presents opportunities for India to win support and cooperation from competing great powers without undermining its strategic autonomy.[59] On the basis of these arguments India's flexible alignment can be defined as:

> 'India's ability to simultaneously engage the competing great powers without antagonising either of them and at the same time not compromising on its long-standing diplomatic stance on key issues.'

In the case of the ongoing Ukraine War, India carefully refrained from joining the Western bandwagon of unequivocally condemning Russia's actions. Rather, since the very onset of the Ukraine War, India has been threading a diplomatic tightrope where it has tactfully expressed its disapproval of Kremlin's actions while at the same time avoided becoming a part of Washington's effort to isolate Russia. This was evident from New Delhi opting to abstain on nearly every UN resolution condemning Moscow's action but at the same time the Indian Prime Minister has directly expressed his criticism to Vladimir Putin by stating that 'Today is not an Era of War'.[60] This presents a case where India has successfully demonstrated flexible alignment by not only wading through western

criticism but also affirming to the American leadership of New Delhi's own strategic priorities and interests. This can be illustrated through the US lawmakers approving a waiver to India against punitive sanctions for its purchase of the S-400 Air Defence systems from Russia in July 2022. This is something that even Turkey was not able to achieve despite being an alliance partner of the US as a NATO member.[61]

India's flexible alignment can not only be seen in the context of great power rivalry but also in its nuanced policy outlook on dealing with complex regional issues. This can be illustrated through the assessment of India's balanced approach towards the Israel-Palestinian issue that has once again gained global attention due to the ongoing war in Gaza. Since the very beginning, India has expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause. In the UN, India voted against the partition of erstwhile Palestine in 1947 and also against Israel's inclusion in the UN in 1949.[62] In fact, India was among the first nations to recognise the State of Palestine in 1988. The MEA describes India's support for the Palestinian cause as an integral part of its foreign policy approach to West Asia.[63] On the other hand, in light of the West imposed sanctions on India due to the Pokhran II tests, Israel was among the nations that supported Indian military operations during the 1999 Kargil War through the supply of arms. On 8 September 2003, the then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for the first time visited India and since then the bilateral relations between the two nations have undergone a paradigm shift.

Today Israel has become one of the key strategic partners of India and political cooperation between the two nations has grown exponentially. Despite this India never really abandoned its support for the Palestinian cause. In 2018, Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to officially visit Palestine. Also, India has been involved in several aid development programmes in Palestine including the building of schools and infrastructure projects. In the aftermath of the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, India stood in solidarity with Israel by supporting its right to retaliate against terrorism. On 26 October 2023, India abstained from voting on a UN resolution seeking truce in Gaza as the resolution lacked explicit condemnation of the terror attack by Hamas on Israel.[64] At the same time, India was among the nations that voted in favour of a UN resolution on 9 November condemning Israeli settlements in Palestine.[65] These voting patterns in the UN regarding the crisis in Gaza illustrate India practicing flexible alignment in the polarising regional

dynamics of West Asia. India through its voting in the UN has simultaneously expressed its support for Israel's fight against terrorism and also reaffirmed its long-standing diplomatic stance of advocating for a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue. Apart from voting on UN resolutions, India's flexible alignment to this crisis can also be illustrated through New Delhi's decision to not join the US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea. While the other QUAD members including Australia and Japan are part of this operation, India has chosen to independently address this security situation in the region keeping in mind its own interests and regional sensitivities.

The Way Ahead

Overall, India's Foreign Policy since the very onset has been characterised by flexibility aimed at enabling India to be aligned to its own national interests. This aspect has not only enabled India to straddle the GPC but also cement its own image as an aspirational power in the era of polycrisis. Observers today view India as a conciliator capable of bridging the divide among the great powers. Derek Grossman opines that India stands the best chance of any country to bring the opposing factions of the Ukraine War to the negotiating table due to its strong diplomatic ties with all the belligerents involved in this conflict.[66] The same can be attributed to the Gaza conflict, as India is among the few nations with strong diplomatic relations all the important stakeholders in West Asia.

Also, strategic choices made by New Delhi in the recent past have shown that they have not been made based only on India's self-interests but also global interests. One such illustration was brought out by EAM S. Jaishankar in London recently where he asserted India's role in stabilising global oil prices. He brought out that India's strategic purchase of discounted oil from Russia amid the Ukraine War prevented a surge in global oil prices and ensured stability in the energy markets.[67] This is considering India being the third largest buyer of crude oil and that it procures predominantly from West Asia. After the start of the Ukraine war, European nations also started to completely rely on West Asia for oil due to their boycott of Russia. Under this circumstance, had India not diversified its energy imports by choosing to buy oil from Russia, it would have resulted in the world facing an acute supply crunch and resulted in raising of prices. This would have most likely affected the developing economies in Asia and Africa. Hence, apart from being a potential

conciliator between great powers, India has also demonstrated its ability to act as a bridge between the varied interests of the developed and the developing world. Despite the paradigm shifts in global geopolitics and India's domestic political discourse since Independence the Indian Foreign Policy has evolved in absolute consonance with the ideals of strategic autonomy. This is a crucial aspect that is going to guide India in navigating the decade of polycrisis that lies ahead and ensure its place on the global stage as a great power in its own right.

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4

India's Approach towards Nuclear Disarmament

Abhishek Verma

Since independence, India has championed the cause of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament internationally. Initiatives such as the standstill agreement, Rajiv Gandhi's plan for nuclear disarmament, among others, are some of India's original contributions to the global deliberation concerning nuclear disarmament. The essence of this normative positioning would better be gazed if analysed in terms of the acute security challenges that India faced in early post war decades from its northern borders.

This chapter analyses how India reconciled its normative stand on nuclear disarmament with its real security challenges to present a principled stand at global nuclear deliberations. The chapter explores the evolution of India's approach towards nuclear disarmament since independence. It also explores India's approach towards more recent initiatives, such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The chapter argues that the Indian approach to nuclear disarmament has been a part of her strategic tradition. However, unlike others, India has always been mindful of the importance of non-proliferation and disarmament in international peace and security. Hence, as far as India's tryst with nuclear weapons is concerned, it has been purely for security/nuclear deterrence considerations, rather than the factor like prestige among others. The chapter segregates India's approach to disarmament into four broad phases based on external security threats and India's threat perception.

Activism, Optimism and Opportunity (1947-early 1960s)

The decades of activism of Mahatma Gandhi, which preceded the independence of India, made it imperative for India to aspire peace and prosperity, both nationally and internationally. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, emulating the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, strongly professed nuclear disarmament at international forums as well as in the Indian Parliament. The fact that PM Nehru kept key ministry portfolios, including External Affairs and Department of Atomic Energy, to himself suggests that the top strategic priority was attached to the nuclear issues. Amidst the nuclear arms race ensuing between Soviet Union and the United States of America, a draft resolution, co-sponsored by India and Ireland, was proposed in the United Nations for a complete ban on nuclear testing. Indian leaders and diplomats further refined and professed the idea of nuclear disarmament at various multilateral forums apart from the UN, such as Asian-African Conference at Bandung where the call for 'universal disarmament and effective international control to ensure it' was made. Nehru's nuclear activism continued even in the Indian parliament when the Prime Minister proposed the 'Standstill Agreement' in 1954.[1] The Agreement sought to completely halt nuclear testing and eventually achieve the goal of nuclear disarmament.

This was also a phase when a sense of optimism engulfed Indian leaders. The power of nuclear energy was well recognised by the mid-1950s and was perceived by the Indian leaders as quite essential for its economic growth. India vehemently opposed the attempts made by the United States to restrict the peaceful use of nuclear materials that could potentially hinder India's economic growth. In December 1953, US President Dwight Eisenhower delivered 'Atoms for Peace' speech in which he proposed the establishment of an international atomic agency.[2] It was further proposed that the countries with nuclear technology were to contribute part of their uranium stockpile and fissile materials to the international agency.

Criticising the agency's mandate, PM Nehru said in Parliament on 10 May 1954, 'The Agency should not be in a position to throttle any developments which any country or group of countries undertakes on its own initiative without aid from the Agency. In other words, the Agency should not be put in the position of operating like a cartel,' and 'the inspection and safeguard provisions should be reasonable and ensure that any aid given by the Agency is not used directly for furthering a

military purpose. The inspection and safeguards should not, however, be so rigorous as to give the Agency a hold on the economic life of the country through control of fissionable material or lead to the development of an unhealthy situation in which States in the world receiving aid from the Agency are put into a different class from those who do not go to the Agency for aid.'[3] It was this continuous and concerted Indian opposition that set the tone for the development of India's principled stand on the international nuclear framework. The notion of 'nuclear apartheid' and later 'universal negative assurances' emerged from this opposition itself.

A reflection of statesmanship can also be traced in Nehru's approach, which was premised on the fact that he explored and embraced a niche in disarmament to put India's authoritative campaign on the global stage. During this phase, he used different platforms both nationally and internationally to campaign for eventual nuclear disarmament staged through various arms control and nuclear test ban initiatives.

Scholars have long debated India's approach towards international nuclear politics in general and India's nuclear program in particular during the early phase of Indian independence. Rajesh Rajagopalan has termed Nehru's approach towards nuclear disarmament as a 'utopian multilateralism.'[4] He stated that 'since 1950s India has proposed "negotiated but time-bound nuclear disarmament", de-legitimisation of nuclear weapons and a nuclear test ban were seen as early steps in this process.'[5] Patil and Vishwanathan have pointed at Nehru's decision as a moral judgment based on the projection of nuclear weapons as 'evil'.[6] The 'evilness' of the nuclear weapons stems from its catastrophic impact in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the places where nuclear weapons were dropped in August 1945.

Constrained Realities and a Pragmatic Approach (1960s-1974 PNE)

The harsh geopolitical realities began striking India towards the end of the 1950s. On the one hand, superpower rivalry inevitably hampered the attainment of the goal of nuclear disarmament, while on the other, the Indian illusion of peaceful coexistence in the neighbourhood was demolished.

The Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENDC) included India as a member of non-aligned nations upon its creation in 1961. The committee was tasked to deliberate on universal and complete nuclear disarmament. As a staunch advocate of nuclear disarmament, India could

have contributed immensely to attaining the declared objective. However, the process and deliberation fell victim to the superpower rivalry between the USA and USSR, and eventually led to the signing of a toned-down treaty called the 'Partial Test Ban Treaty' in August 1963. The Treaty proposed a ban on all types of nuclear tests, including atmospheric, surface and underwater, while leaving the underground test option open. India became one of the first non-nuclear countries to sign the treaty and was one of the milestones in Nehru's conception of complete nuclear disarmament. As the international community in general and nuclear powers in particular braced themselves for deliberations over the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, India again took the lead. In 1964, India proposed two separate resolutions in ENDC, which called for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons or weapons technology, and the cessation of nuclear tests.[7]

There existed a simmering tension at the India-China border towards the end of the 1950s with regard to the status of Tibet, the refugee crisis and Dalai Lama's asylum in India. The India-China War of 1962 further emphasized the need for security enhancement through nuclear weapons. Homi J. Bhabha wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, in August 1963, expressing his concerns regarding the possible nuclear test by China. He wrote, 'I am inclined to the view that the only way that this [countering Psychological-political impact of Chinese nuclear test] can be done at present is for us to show that, should China explode such a device, we are in a position to do so within a few months thereafter.'[8] In the same letter, Bhabha proposed India to have 'minimum nuclear deterrence' to counter any nuclear conflagration in Asia between nuclear China and the United States. '...China would be in a position, as USSR is today, to take up what is known as the "posture of the minimum nuclear deterrent." This can only be countered by the country liable to be so attacked, as for example India, itself possessing a minimum nuclear deterrent.'[9] The letter made it abundantly clear that India's venture into nuclear weapons contestation was premised on the anxieties generated by a potential Chinese nuclear test. Delivering his speech on 'Nuclear Disarmament' on the occasion of United Nations Day 1964, Homi Bhabha expounded that Chinese nuclear test and urgent need for reconcile global unanimous adoption of nuclear and general disarmament, while replacing the law of force by the law of reason in international relations. 'The great power under the aegis of the United Nations must take concrete steps towards nuclear and general

disarmament within the next couple of years in order that they may act more effectively in deterring a spread of nuclear weapons.'[10]

Amidst tremendous pressure from the scientific community and general public (enraged by Chinese nuclear test), Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was not in favour of a militarised nuclear programme and rather sanctioned a programme for research on peaceful uses of nuclear energy that is, Study of Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes (SNEPP).[11] This was also the phase where India, both bilaterally and multilaterally, explored options other than indigenous nuclear weapons technology to safeguard its territorial security. Nuclear security guarantees were sought from the then nuclear powers, while India argued for international negative assurances during the NPT deliberations. Finally, considering the adverse regional security environment and unwillingness of the nuclear powers to salvage Indian security concerns vis-à-vis China, India did not sign the NPT. Referring to India's apprehension regarding the Treaty, the then Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, M.A. Hussain's note brought forth four apprehensions that India had:

(a) "It (the NPT) does not stop vertical proliferation
(b) It does not explicate pathways for general and complete disarmament
(c) It will obstruct the developmental use of nuclear energy
(d) It will impose control, inspection and verification over non-weapon powers."[12]

Regional and global developments (like India-Pakistan war, US nuclear threat in USS Enterprise sailing in Bay of Bengal) further simplified India's geopolitical and security priorities. As explained by K. Subrahmanyam, '...such events (international power politics and unfair use of force) also help to explain the fact that India has neither signed nor ratified the non-proliferation treaty and is not expected to accept it until forceful confrontation are much less likely than they have been in the recent past.'[13] Further, he explained three basic areas of concern for India's reluctance to sign NPT.

First, the inequity between responsibilities of nuclear weapons states and the obligations of non-nuclear-weapon states. On one hand, non-nuclear weapon states were barred from acquiring nuclear weapons forever, on the other hand, nuclear weapon states assumed no responsibility to disarm. Second, the application of inspection procedure

under Article III, which required non-nuclear weapons states to enter into an agreement with the IAEA for application of nuclear safeguards. No such responsibilities were placed on nuclear weapons states and it was completely voluntary on their part to enter into safeguards agreement with IAEA. Last, India was concerned about the discriminatory prohibitions on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Such restrictions could have created hindrances in India's quest for underground excavation or to recover mineral resources.[14]

Predominant Security Consideration with Disarmament Campaign (1974 onwards)

India's moral stand with respect to disarmament came in conflict with the emerging regional nuclear dynamics defined by advancing Chinese nuclear capabilities and the China-Pakistan nexus. Amidst ensuing security challenges from northern borders, India decided to conduct a 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosion' in the deserts of Pokhran, Rajasthan.

One of the major points of consideration in this phase was the role of regional security landscape and India's threat perception. Throughout the phase of NPT negotiation, India not only participated but engaged in genuine negotiations to get its security concerns addressed through the treaty. It was only after unsuccessful NPT negotiations (from India's standpoint) and appearance of nuclear-powered USS Enterprise during the India-Pakistan war in 1971 that India took the ultimate step to demonstrate its capability. Reflecting its responsible and peaceful intentions, New Delhi was firmly opposed to nuclear proliferation and sought to align its policies with emerging international norms.

For a short phase, disarmament optimists grappled with the international nuclear debate in 1980s when nuclear détente and thaw in cold war rivalry became conspicuous between both the superpowers. International developments in the later half of 1980s including the signing of the INF Treaty in 1987, lent a sense of nuclear optimism. In 1988, at the UN Special Session on nuclear disarmament, then PM Rajiv Gandhi proposed a new action plan for a nuclear weapons-free world, aimed at achieving nuclear disarmament in a time bound, universal, non-discriminatory, phased and verifiable manner. True to its nature, nuclear weapons are too powerful to be abandoned due to loss of incredible political leverage that comes with it. Hence, nuclear weapon states appeared least interested in giving any serious consideration to this proposal.

This was also the time when information started flowing in that suggested that Pakistan had made major advancement in its nuclear weapons programme.[15] These factors prompted Rajiv Gandhi to abandon the course of nuclear disarmament and authorise the scientific community to advance towards a nuclear weapons development programme. Parallel to this, India continued its disarmament diplomacy especially at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva where negotiation over CTBT were taking place. However, CTBT and 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, both failed to address India's security concerns. The permanent extension of NPT and the reluctance on the part of nuclear weapons states towards serious disarmament commitment proved the final nail in the coffin for India's restrained approach towards acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Ambassador Arundhati Ghose, while arguing in Conference of Disarmament, said that '...the NPT was indefinitely extended. This single act resulted in the legitimisation, for foreseeable future and beyond, of the possession of nuclear weapons by a few states and their possible use as a currency of power.'[16] She further argued that '...such a perpetually discriminatory environment will be perceived as unstable, provoking countries to unilateralism rather than collective security. Given the possibility of treating the perpetuation of the NPT as providing an indefinite license for possession of nuclear weapons, it becomes even more imperative to have a legally binding commitment to eliminate these weapons in a specific time-frame.'[17]

India again reiterated its position on CTBT in August 1996. The final report submitted by the Conference on Disarmament to the UNGA contained Indian submission to the outcome document, which explicitly pointed out Indian concerns. First, the objective of halt in qualitative development, upgradation and improvement of nuclear weapons (originally proposed) was sacrificed for 'Nuclear Weapons Test Explosion Ban Treaty', still leaving the possibilities of non-explosive testing and restarting the nuclear weapons technology race. Second, India wanted CTBT to be irreversible and a 'time bound process of nuclear disarmament'. Due to absence of these features, India contended that the draft treaty that has emerged is 'shaped more by technological preferences of the nuclear weapon states rather than the imperative of nuclear disarmament'.[18] Further, India invoked national security concerns to oppose the draft treaty text and finally refused to sign it.

Finally, India conducted its nuclear weapons tests in 1998 due to unavoidable security concerns emanating from China-Pakistan nuclear and missile cooperation and the US inability thwart such cooperation. On 27 May 1998, PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee made India's intentions clear in the parliament when he said 'we do not intend to use these weapons for aggression or for mounting threats against any country; these are weapons of self-defense to ensure that India is not subjected to nuclear threats or coercion. We do not intend to engage in an arms race.'[19]

Multilateral Nuclear Engagement (Since 1998)

We see a remarkable similarity in India's approach to nuclear disarmament diplomacy, perhaps the only proactive advocacy among the nuclear weapons wielding states. In his speech in the parliament, PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee had articulated the importance India attaches to nuclear disarmament. While presenting a paper entitled 'Evolution of India's Nuclear Policy' on 27 May 1998, he alluded to India's restrained approach towards nuclear weapons. He said 'the present decision and future actions will continue to reflect a commitment to sensibilities and obligations of an ancient civilisation, a sense of responsibility and restrain, but a restrain born of the assurance of action, not of doubts or apprehension.'[20] The speech succinctly summarised India's approach towards nuclear weapons, non-proliferation and disarmament in post-1998 phase. As discussed earlier it was mainly the security concerns in India's neighbourhood that forced India to demonstrate its nuclear capabilities. Once national security was relatively secured through nuclear deterrence capability, India reverted to its long-standing goal of nuclear disarmament. This time, the approach was to engage in all the non-proliferation as well as disarmament deliberations. This was also reflected in PM Vajpayee's speech in the parliament on 8 June 1998 where he noted that 'Government has indicated willingness to engage in a meaningful dialogue with key interlocutors on the whole range of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues.'[21] Defining Indian disarmament approach as utopian multilateralism, Rajesh Rajagopalan has alluded to a shift from defensive multilateralism to pragmatic multilateralism (in post 1998 nuclear test-phase), and back. Pragmatic multilateralism was defined by India's multilateral engagement with arms control and disarmament initiatives.[22]

India's declaration of indefinite moratorium on nuclear testing, no first use policy, non-use against a non-nuclear country and reaffirmed

commitment to nuclear disarmament, helped India gain its rightful place in the international nuclear order. As a responsible member of the international community, India also demonstrated adherence to the NSG and MTCR. Finally, it was India's unflinching commitment to non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament that led to the path-breaking Indo-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. While addressing the joint session of the US Congress, former PM Manmohan Singh reiterated India's position.

> '...I would like to reiterate that India's track record in nuclear non-proliferation is impeccable. We have adhered scrupulously to every rule and canon in this area. We have done so even though we have witnessed unchecked nuclear proliferation in our neighbourhood which has directly affected our security interests. This is because India, as a responsible nuclear power, is fully conscious of the immense responsibilities that come with the possession of advanced technologies, both civilian and strategic. We have never been and will never be a source of proliferation of sensitive technologies.'[23]

India's image as a successful democracy and a responsible nuclear power helped it secure the NSG waiver in 2008. Meanwhile, conforming to the UNSC 1540, the GoI passed the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act 2005. Since the devastating 9/11 attack, the problem of nuclear terrorism has also engulfed Indian security and strategic establishment. Being in close proximity with the region and states harbouring the most dreaded global terrorists, it is imperative for India to remain engaged in global disarmament in general and regional nuclear disarmament discussions in particular.

Continuing its disarmament activism, India reiterated a UNGA resolution (originally proposed in 1982) on 'convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons' through a working paper (CD/1816) submitted to Conference on Disarmament in 2007.[24] The resolution sought to commence negotiations on international convention prohibiting the use or threat to use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. The paper tried to convince the international community to create a climate of mutual trust and confidence which will help 'conclude universal non-discriminatory and verifiable prohibitions on nuclear weapons leading to their complete elimination.'[25]

India, as a responsible nuclear weapon state, understands the nature and complexities involved in the successful conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear disarmament treaty. Submitting its statement in the thematic debate over nuclear weapons at the first committee of the UNGA in October 2020, India stated that 'India is committed to commence negotiations on all three core issues (credible minimum deterrence, no first use posture, and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states) related to nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament. Furthermore, India also remains committed to maintaining a unilateral and voluntary moratorium on nuclear explosive testing. Without prejudice to the priority that we attach to nuclear disarmament, we also support the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament of a non-discriminatory, multilateral internationally and effectively verifiable FMCT on the basis of CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein.'[26] India believes that multilateral deliberations on the above three core issues related to nuclear disarmament would significantly help in creating a condition for the disarmament negotiations to begin.

India took the initiative of introducing a resolution entitled 'Reducing Nuclear Danger' in 1998, which brought into focus thousands of nuclear weapons maintained in a state of hair-trigger alert, creating unacceptable risks of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons.[27] As an important step towards this objective, the resolution called for a review of nuclear doctrines of nuclear-weapon states. India's solemn resolve to create conditions for deliberations over general and complete disarmament fructified in 2020 when it was adapted by the UN with overwhelming majority. A similar Indian proposal tabled in 1982 entitled 'Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons' was adapted by UNGA First Committee in the same year. This resolution sought to commence a legally binding, universal and multilateral international convention to prohibit the use or threats to use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. Both the resolutions conspicuously brought out India's solemn commitment towards nuclear disarmament.

The NPT, though almost a universal treaty, could not thwart nuclear proliferation comprehensively. The case of Iraq, North Korea and Iran is noticeable in this regard. Apart from non-proliferation, disarmament forms an essential part of maintaining a secure and peaceful international security environment, under the framework of NPT. The inability of the

nuclear-weapon states to reach a consensus on general and complete disarmament treaty under Article VI of NPT, convinced a majority of non-nuclear weapon states to devise an alternative way. This understanding led to the three international conferences organised by governments of Norway, Mexico and Austria in order to delve deep into humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

Reflecting India's traditional strategic culture and its yearning for world without nuclear weapons, India participated in all these humanitarian impact-of-nuclear-weapons conferences. Despite the possession of nuclear weapons, India has explicitly established an unwavering link between Indian strategic and nuclear policy and humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.[28] In 2017, a UN conference was held to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons leading to its total elimination. The treaty was adopted by the conference and entered into force on 22 January 2021.

The treaty called 'The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)' 'includes a comprehensive set of prohibitions on participating in any nuclear weapon activities. These include undertakings not to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons.'[29] India, having denied any obligation under the concerned treaty, has expressed its willingness to work with the member states to achieve the share goal of nuclear disarmament.[30] In its statement released in January 2021, India rejected TPNW as it 'does not constitute or contribute to the development of customary international law; nor does it set any new standards or norms.'[31] India's Ministry of External Affairs advocated for a step-by-step process towards a nuclear-weapon-free world underwritten by universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable commitment.

Going Forward

The chapter discussed the evolution of India approach towards nuclear disarmament since independence through four phases. Since independence till late 1950s constitute the first phase wherein Jawaharlal Nehru found an opportunity to develop niche in nuclear disarmament and conduct his international activism to achieve the same. There was a genuine sense of perceived optimism as India reflected the voice of global majority. The second phase began when clashes between India and China demolished the dominant view in New Delhi that normative values are

far more important than the geopolitical realties. With a sense of existential crisis (especially after Chinese nuclear test), India strategic and scientific community expressed their desire for a hardline approach by India. Changes in political leadership in India as well as meddling of superpowers in regional affairs convinced the Indira Gandhi Government to demonstrate India's nuclear capability through PNE.

The third phase after PNE was largely dominated by political uncertainties and hence, nuclear acquisition or disarmament was relegated to insignificance. There was an attempt made by PM Rajiv Gandhi when he proposed a new action plan for a nuclear weapons-free world, aimed at achieving nuclear disarmament in a time bound, universal, non-discriminatory, phased and verifiable manner. However, nuclear weapon states showed the least interest in the proposal, leading him to authorise the scientific community to intensify their efforts towards India's nuclear weapons programme. The combination of factors such as China-Pakistan nuclear and missile cooperation as well as Washington's inability to address India's security concerns prompted India to make the most fateful decision.

On 11 and 13 May 1998, India conducted five nuclear explosive tests declaring itself as a nuclear weapon state, however, the Indian leadership asserted that India's interest will best be served in a nuclear-weapons free world. India's demonstration of nuclear capability is only to avoid nuclear threats/blackmail emanating from Indian adversaries. Since then, India has followed the policy of multilateral engagement both in the realm of non-proliferation and disarmament. Among others, India's disarmament campaign has also lent further credence to India's image as a responsible nuclear power.

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SECTION II

INDIAN NAVIGATING THROUGH REGIONAL DYNAMICS

5

India's Threat Perception and Counter-Responses: Examining the Pakistan-China-Türkiye Nexus and the Indian Response

Saman Ayesha Kidwai

Security threats linked to Pakistan, in their various manifestations, emerged across critical moments in India's history. Physical infiltration of Pak-backed operatives began soon after independence when India emerged from a devastating subcontinent partition. India was vulnerable to external threats at the time, as it had yet to achieve military and economic modernisation. At that time, in 1954, the US and Pakistan signed the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (MDAA), which assured the latter of military (at least 900 million USD) and economic support to ward off the erstwhile Soviet Union's communist influence in South Asia. However, it could be reasonably assumed that any American assistance inevitably contributed to Pakistan's strategy of bleeding India with a thousand cuts.

Furthermore, the festering Khalistan threat (its origins lying in the British Raj) in the post-independence era was exacerbated between the 1980s and 1990s, when India underwent tumultuous political upheavals at the centre, including Indira and Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and the Bofors Arms Deal scandal under Rajiv Gandhi's government.

Some broad (often overlapping) challenges significant for India's policymakers include Khalistani separatism; Islamist militancy, cross-

border terrorism; narco-terrorism; drones, social media, and encrypted chat forums' weaponisation. The focus of this chapter remains mainly confined to land-based or airborne threats facing India from its Western neighbour, Pakistan. It is crucial to point out that the above-mentioned issues are mere weapons or instruments in Islamabad's hands to undermine New Delhi's geopolitical and security interests. Simultaneously, it is necessary to consider the role of Beijing and Ankara in facilitating Islamabad's hostile efforts.

Indian leadership has flagged these issues across numerous formats. At the same time, it has signed vital agreements and engaged in high-level diplomatic engagement with like-minded partner countries who have supported its counter-terror efforts.

Cross-Border Threats: A Broad Overview

Borders, more so the ones between hostile nuclear states like India and Pakistan, have been liable to incursions, violent extremist propaganda, and action. Porous borders can and have been exploited by actors like Pakistan to inflict horror on India. As explained rightly by Sajjan M. Gohel, 'Borders have traditionally been imagined by states, particularly in the contemporary globalised era, as sites of potential weakness. They are seen as permeable and vulnerable, generators of threat and risk.'[1]

This holds for the acrimonious relationship shared by India and Pakistan and the latter's decades-long foreign policy of exporting, supporting, and abetting infiltration and terrorism into India. The matter becomes more complex with Islamabad colluding with non-state and state actors to facilitate and execute acts of extremist violence or terrorism. It must be recalled that Pakistan perfected the strategies of proxy war in Afghanistan before directing them towards India, beginning with Punjab and, later, Jammu and Kashmir. Cross-border terrorism carried out by Pak-backed actors has targeted India posing considerable threat to India's territorial security.

Pakistan has also relied on its citizens to exploit social media, diplomatic, academic, and journalistic domains to mobilise support for its cause.[2] They remain one of the primary pillars of Pakistan's foreign policymaking to deflect from being held accountable by the people. The fallout of Pakistan's home-grown militancy and multiple domestic crises have frequently compelled leaders at its highest echelons to redirect its populace's grievances towards instigating separatism and militancy in

Kashmir. Reliance on non-conventional methods to cause disruption in India has taken centre stage in Pakistan's foreign policy toolkit, embedded in its military, political, and strategic culture.

Arguably, the Indo-Pak relationship is destined to deteriorate further until the latter reverses its policy of state-sponsored terrorism using terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

Pakistan's Terrorism Toolkit in J&K

Unable to reconcile with Maharaja Hari Singh's decision to sign the Instrument of Accession and maintain Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) status within the Indian fold, Pakistan morphed into a state-sponsor of terrorism over the years. It could be argued at the same time that besides Islamabad's reluctance, its anti-India institutional narrative, with Kashmir as the primary source of friction, and domestic institutional decay have driven Pakistan's foreign policy of exporting narco-arms trafficking and terrorism while struggling to hold the country as a cohesive unit. Initially, it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the fight against *godless communists*, and former President General Zia ul-Haq's Islamisation policy that served as launchpads of foreign fighters' radicalisation, training and influx into J&K and fomenting of militancy that eventually burst onto the scene during the 1980s.

Pakistan-backed terrorists gradually mushroomed within the now-Union Territory, involving several local actors, including the Hurriyat Conference and J&K Liberation Front. Gradually, terrorist organisations such as JeM and LeT, backed by Pakistan's state agencies, have sought to destabilise India's security architecture and cause chaos and violence through terror. Today, they have propped up front organisations, for example, The Resistance Front, to falsely give the militancy a secular colour using social media and encrypted chat forums and represent it as a home-grown phenomenon, with no links to Pakistan. Islamabad intends to deflect the growing criticism against its policy of state-sponsored terrorism by doing this.

For instance, there was a terror attack in Kashmir's Poonch district in April 2023 where a group named People's Anti-Fascist Front (a JeM front organisation) ambushed an army convoy on their way to deliver food for an Eid celebration. Notably, the front organisation's name lacks an Islamist connotation. This incident was presumably an attempt by Pakistan's political-military-intelligence nexus to instigate a provocative Indian

response and to rally the citizenry as one amid a breakdown of trust in leaders, institutions, and values binding the country.

Despite Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's earlier remarks about resolving the contentious issues between India and Pakistan through dialogue, the latter's deep state establishment, hinging its unity on destabilising India, has adopted a contradictory approach. For example, Muneser Hussain, formerly the Division Commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, a proscribed organisation, tried to reignite a full-fledged militancy until his neutralisation by Indian armed forces. Before his death, he was tasked with recruiting additional members into terrorist ranks, reviving, and carrying out terrorism in the now-prosperous area.[3] It has been increasingly noted that terrorist hideouts have shifted from residential dwellings to dense, mountainous areas as covers in a bid to increase logistical challenges for the security forces in eliminating threats. Guerilla-styled terrorism appears to be replacing the more conventional tactics.

Therefore, C. Raja Mohan's remarks made over a decade ago about the major obstacle in the normalisation of India-Pakistan ties holds true even today. He explained that at the root of India's difficulty with Pakistan have been the changing regional balance of power and Rawalpindi's new freedom to promote a low-intensity conflict against Delhi. The shift of the regional balance of power in favour of India following the breakup of Pakistan in 1971 was successfully reversed by Rawalpindi's acquisition of a nuclear deterrent by the late 1980s. Having neutralised India's conventional military superiority, the Pakistan Army has had the impunity to support anti-India terror groups that mounted frequent attacks in India. But Delhi's efforts to negotiate new modus vivendi with Islamabad have been stymied by the multiple centres of power in Pakistan and Rawalpindi's reluctance to end its support to anti-India terror groups.

Drones and Narcotics Trafficking

At the same time, cross-border terrorism in India has gone beyond physical infiltration or the occurrence of terrorist attacks. It has ventured into the technological sphere involving drones delivering arms and narcotics and organised crime. Many drones can be procured commercially and assembled locally, making it cost-effective for non-state and state actors. At the same time, the drones' extensive usage indicates how Pakistan's deep state has transformed the conventional narrative about cross-border

terrorism. It could also be argued that narcotics trafficking has contributed to terror financing in the Kashmir Valley, as has often been pointed out by law enforcement officials working on the ground.

Furthermore, drones' limited travel capacity indicates that they would have to be launched from a proximity to the India-Pakistan border. Such a steady stream of intrusions would have been improbable without the staunch support and facilitation ensured by forces patrolling those areas on Pakistan's territory and top-down leadership. Notably, India's geographical positioning at the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent crossroads complicates the security threats facing the country. As a result, the opium cultivation based in Afghanistan (regardless of the Afghan Taliban's claims) and Pakistan's transportation of manufactured drugs forward has impacted India significantly.

Khalistani Separatism

Furthermore, as per more disturbing reports, ISI has been in the cahoots with Khalistani and Kashmiri ultras to propagate Muslim-Khalistani brotherhood[4] through meetings in countries that have been at the epicentre of a diplomatic tussle with India, including Canada, the UK, and the US. Pakistan's spy agency, criminal organisations based in Punjab, and militants in Kashmir are believed to be involved in the sales of arms and drugs to finance terrorist activities in India. This network involving cross-border stakeholders is called the K2 desk. These Western countries are where widespread Khalistani separatists' activities have been on the upswing. The UK is where many Khalistani sympathizers have reportedly established their base via its asylum programme and carried out anti-India activities, including the security breach at the High Commission in London.

Khalistani separatism is more commonly attributed to Bhindranwale-led militancy that swept Punjab in the beginning of the 1980s and in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star. However, its roots lie in the violent extremist ideas propagated in the days leading up to India's independence from British rule. Provocative activities in the past and in the recent times have ranged from unlawful referendums for a separate Khalistan State in Canada, security breaches of the Indian consulate in the UK, or use of social platforms like X to call for targeted attacks against Indian representatives in these countries or political leaders.

In this context, it is noteworthy, that there have been several incidents of Pakistan's embassy officials holding meetings with Khalistan sympathisers in Canada, and the Pakistani state has provided a haven for many such individuals. Additionally, there are reports of how many Sikh pilgrims travelling to holy sites in Pakistan have been recruited by ISI to join the Khalistan cause. Separatist leader, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun (SJF's leader), recently proclaimed himself as the spokesperson of Kashmir-Khalistan Front.

This highlights how political assassinations, their celebration, and criminal activities are intrinsically tied to the broader violent extremist agenda to aid and abet secession from India. More recently in 2020, the co-option of the farmer's protests by Deep Singh Sidhu (former leader of pro-Khalistan outfit, Waris Punjab De or Heirs of Punjab), attempts to revive Khalistan militancy by Amritpal Singh (now lodged in an Assamese prison along with many of his aides), and SJF's threats to target Air India airplanes underscores the re-emergence of the security threat which was perceived to be dormant.

Media, Disinformation and Misinformation

The role of Pakistan's ISI services and ISPR, the armed forces' media wing, in exploiting social media's potency has become central to its terrorism by proxy strategy. Further, these agencies also tend to use disinformation and misinformation to foment tensions within India. Trolls and disinformation campaigns have also featured as key pillars of Pakistan's policy of cross-border terrorism under the broader domain of influence operations, with attempts to use these facets to re-ignite near-eliminated infiltration of Pakistan-origin terrorists, overground workers or hybrid terrorists and other hostile elements. This has especially been the case following the August 2019 constitutional reforms that revoked J&K's special status and as fast-tracked development and large-scale infrastructural projects have become the norm of the day.

However, the media's exploitative use has taken on a new form recently. For example, between May and August 2023, there have been at least three known instances of the release of body cam footage by terrorists on social media concerning their ambush and targeted attacks on Indian armed officers in Kashmir. This is considered a part of their strategy to disseminate propaganda about the security situation in the Valley and nearby districts.

Furthermore, as the Nordic Monitor reported in October 2022,[5] just as India hosted the UNSC CTC meeting in Mumbai and New Delhi, Türkiye assisted Pakistan in establishing a secret cyber army of trolls to disseminate disinformation campaigns to mould Muslims' opinions against the US and India.

Turkish news outlets, specifically Anadolu Agency and TRT World, have been embedded within the realm of disinformation and fake news intended to malign India's diplomatic clout and standing in the international arena. For instance, regarding the Kashmir issue. Simultaneously, social media accounts on platforms, including X, claiming to represent Mona bint Fahd, the daughter of Oman's Deputy Prime Minister Sayyid Fahd, have been used to rake up false news about Indian Muslims being targeted by their government.[6]

Additionally, disinformation is also actively channelled by pro-Pakistan leaders in the Gulf, including President Erdogan, who perceive themselves as leaders of the global Muslim community or the Ummah. His islamised agenda, the effects of which are evident within Türkiye's domestic landscape, aims to instigate tensions within multicultural societies such as India, where communal harmony has been central to the sustenance of the world's largest democracy.

In this context, it is imperative to reflect on his speech at an event titled *Combatting Hate Speech*,[7] jointly organised with Pakistan in New York, at the UN headquarters in September 2019. One of the key inflammatory statements he raised at the event referred to Kashmir as an open-air prison, and the other was about the alleged lack of freedom granted to Indian Muslims regarding their faith and food practices.

This was widely covered in news outlets like Anadolu Agency, infamous for their participation in the Türkiye-Pakistan disinformation campaign nexus. If one were to examine these statements closely, it would become apparent that they came the month following Article 370's revocation. That period was when unwarranted uproars and words of condemnation were raised in both countries about India's sovereign matters. As their leaders have constantly clamoured about, trying to internationalize the Kashmir issue, simultaneous efforts have been made to indoctrinate the moderate Indian Muslim youth.

For example, the Turkish government has instructed its Director of Religious Affairs, more commonly known as Diyanet, to offer educational

scholarships to Indian Muslim students to study various subjects like political Islam and Human Rights in Turkey.[8] It is noteworthy, that Turkey was one of the primary incubators and facilitators of Salafi-jihadists who travelled to Syria to join ISIS via the Turkish border. Violent extremist preachers, such as Zakir Naik, have been warmly received by President Erdogan on numerous occasions.

The China Angle

Like Pakistan, China is a nuclear state with a profound interest in eroding New Delhi's aspirations to effectively counter terrorism on its various fronts and within the country, as it would contribute to its continued rise as a great power. What makes the matter more complex is that some of the arms and ammunition, including grenades and sometimes drones carrying such packages into India at terrorists' behest, are of Chinese origin. In December 2022, a drone that entered Amritsar unlawfully was captured and destroyed by the BSF. However, what came to light was that its origin was in Shanghai, and its travel itinerary included Pakistan's Punjab province, particularly the Khanewal province.[9]

It needs to be pointed out that these countries' nuclear status does not signal a head-to-head confrontation concerning actions against terrorists or lack thereof. Instead, it only underscores the volatility of the situation, reminding us how such issues exacerbate the parallel challenges of operating in an increasingly polarised global environment, where lines are constantly being redrawn. Beijing has even repeatedly thwarted efforts (India's individual or joint proposals with the United States to designate specific individuals under the 1267 Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee) to designate Pakistani terrorists as global terrorists in the UNSC. For instance as recently as 2023, Beijing blocked India and US' proposal to designate Sajid Mir, a global terrorist.

At the same time, on occasions such as the 2023 G-20 Summit, a consensus was reached among all representatives involved, including those representing China, on the joint communiqué, which included tackling terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. India's credibility and diplomatic clout have ensured that even Pakistan's all-weather friends are sometimes compelled to accommodate changes occurring in this emerging world order and acknowledge relevant security concerns.

Additional Considerations

The security dilemma for India could worsen considering the developments in its regional quarters, mainly Afghanistan, where New Delhi has invested in fostering community ties, projects, and investments for two decades. The humanitarian catastrophe and presence of terrorist organisations with an anti-India focus like JeM or a global orientation like al-Qaeda in Afghanistan have been alarming.

At the same time, reports about continued opium and now meth cultivation in Afghanistan (linked to drug seizures in India) indicate a worrying trend to be considered by Indian policymakers as they re-calibrate their policy regarding the new de facto government in Kabul or, to be more appropriate, Kandahar, given that is where Taliban's elusive Emir is based. In that case, India must assess its Afghan policy with greater caution than before, especially as Afghanistan has re-emerged as an incubator of terrorism. Khalistani separatism is another key security threat facing India. There is slow progress in addressing these issues in the US, UK, and Canada. The threats emanating from India's volatile neighbourhood, nurtured by state-sponsored actors or transnational jihadist organisations have pushed them to the forefront of its security and diplomatic agendas. These matters are crucial to consider because the fate of the country's security architecture hinges on how adeptly its leaders, across various services, respond to ensuing challenges. This is all while global cooperation with countries must occur for India to bolster its non-military ties with those assisting its indigenisation process of creating an impenetrable bulwark against security threats in all their forms and manifestations. Therefore, India must re-calibrate its regional threat perceptions and subsequent counter-responses as the security paradigm continues reconfiguring.

Counter-response

Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, India has adopted a more proactive approach, assured of its hard power superiority in thwarting Pak-sponsored terrorism. The Balakot strikes are a significant example. This change has been accompanied by India's expanding diplomatic clout and warming of relationships with some of Pakistan's erstwhile staunchest supporters, such as Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has been supportive of India's counter-terror campaigns on global platforms. For example, Saudi Arabia has acceded to the extradition requests made by India to extradite 26/11 perpetrators to face justice.

Additionally, India's effectiveness in combatting domestic militancy has contributed to its expanding influence globally. Simultaneously, while media has been used effectively to position its narrative and raise awareness, India has pursued bold measures, including the August 2019 constitutional reforms, revoking Article 370. This has largely stemmed the tide of terrorism in the Kashmir Valley. Further, the 15 Chinar Corps has been diligently working on countering information warfare launched by local terrorist outfits, OGWs, and ISI-backed civil society actors, politicians, and media personalities. These are some initiatives that administrations at various levels can work with and further expand to bolster their counter-narratives.

It is equally vital to promote narratives regarding the widespread development, including hundreds of crores worth of investments made into J&K. It is also necessary to frequently highlight the prosperity its youth have achieved over the last few years, having accessed the resources and benefits, which until the constitutional reforms four years ago, they could not unlock for their use. Women's empowerment is also on the rise, with enterprising leaders leading profitable business chains and those at the grassroots level striving for financial independence and academic excellence.

India's leaders and relevant agencies have rallied like-minded members of the international community to counter the decisive narrative of differentiating terrorism based on religion or any other identity. They have engaged with partners like the United Arab Emirates and learned from its appropriate de-radicalisation programmes like Hedayah. Following years of negotiation, Tahawwur Rana an associate of one of the key masterminds of the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, David Coleman Hedley, has been finally extradited from the US. Additionally, procurement of critical technologies from Israel has bolstered its fight against cross-border terrorism.

India has brought up cross-border terrorism at various levels, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summits, the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNSC CTC) Special Meeting, the BRICS Summit, and various diplomatic engagements. The issue of cross-border terrorism, including through drones, has been frequently taken up by India's Permanent Representatives to the UN, including most recently by Ruchira Kamboj, who has termed this a 'serious challenge' to Indian security. Furthermore, she called on the international community to ensure

that 'certain states with dubious proliferation credentials to be held accountable for their misdeeds.'[10] The Ministry of Civil Aviation has recalibrated India's policy posture through the National Counter Rogue Drone Guidelines, 2019. They underscored the risk factor associated with drones, which can be exploited for reconnaissance and surveillance of sensitive installations, attacks, and trafficking, among other nefarious uses.[11]

Furthermore, it has tabled joint counter-terror proposals with the United States to sanction known Pak-backed terrorists and used its presidency of the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee and its special meeting to unveil the Delhi Declaration.[12] This document, launched after the meeting in October 2022, was a victory for India, having highlighted its terrorism and radicalisation-based concerns instigated by Pakistan. Social media and the use of technological advancements, like the appropriation of drones by violent extremist non-state actors and disallowing a country's soil to be used as a launchpad against others, were some of the essential themes agreed upon by the delegates. These issues have often been highlighted at various regional, multilateral, and international forum briefings and discussions, linking them to the devastating impact of externally originating terrorism in India.

Today, besides China and Pakistan, all major countries within this multipolar world have supported India's counter-terror campaigns. It has been reflected, for example, in the Delhi Declaration, 2022 and G-20's joint statement, 2023, which have highlighted the menace of cross-border terrorism and criticised (without explicitly naming them) countries that have supported such activities. The G-20 statement called on state sponsors of terrorism to 'deny terrorist groups haven, freedom of operations, movement and recruitment, as well as financial, material, or political support.'[13] This signifies that major actors have accommodated India's security concerns. The increased focus on terrorism has ensured that Pakistan cannot carry out subversive activities with the impunity it did before. However, China's overall support to Pakistan at the UNSC has prevented a unified counter-response to eliminate the scourge of terrorism. That is unlikely to reverse in the foreseeable future, especially as the successful completion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a cornerstone of Xi Jinping's legacy, runs through Pakistan in the form of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Going Forward

As concerns surrounding terrorism, radicalisation, and geopolitical rivalries in South Asia are likely to become more prominent in the future, India must rapidly equip itself with diplomatic, technological, and hard power advantages over hostile actors in the neighbourhood. This is because the politicisation of terrorism and counter-strategies by Pakistan and China, means that it is less likely they will acquiesce to cooperating with India soon. Therefore, the Indian apparatus must formulate long-term counter-terror strategies to address threats from its immediate neighbourhood, a great deal of it involving artificial intelligence, social media, and deep fakes, considering the rapid pace of technological advancements.

As automation technology and augmented reality are the prominent themes featuring in debates on global platforms, there must exist a centralised hub with sub-divisions going down to the grassroots levels to accumulate resources and information and meet these challenges. Finally, implementing more extensive counter-terror and anti-arms trafficking legislation and uniform nationwide de-radicalisation and drug rehabilitation strategies (while allowing region-specific programmes to continue) would also be advisable.

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6

The East Asian Demographic Crisis and India's Foreign Policy: Opportunities, Challenges and Responses

Arnab Dasgupta

Introduction

The East Asian region, comprising Japan, both Koreas, Taiwan, China and the territories of Hong Kong and Macau, is currently undergoing a demographic crisis of an extremely severe degree, with low mortality rates coupled with low or very low fertility rates as a prominent feature. Exacerbating the issue is the extremely low rate of intra- and extra-regional migration, which in other regions and societies has had an ameliorative effect on demographic decline. The crisis is already causing significant stresses on the Republic of Korea, Japan and Taiwan, where the repercussions of low population growth is forcing, among other things, a recalibration of social welfare nets, low labour productivity and the introduction of increasingly liberal immigration policies to attract talented human capital from abroad.

The crisis is also generating challenges in China, which has been a demographic superpower for most of modern history. The Xi Jinping administration struggles to balance low internal economic growth and the after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic against achieving his hegemonic foreign policy objectives in the region and beyond. Given the tense relationship between India and China, as well as the geopolitical stakes inhering in India's ties to the ROK and Japan, it is high time Indian

policymakers pay greater attention to the fundamental significance of demography in shaping the course of future engagement with the region. This chapter analyses East Asia's demographic trends in order to identify key policy areas where India could play an instrumental role.

What is a Demographic Transition?

East Asia's fundamental demographic challenge revolves around the fact that it is currently in the throes of what scholars call the 'second demographic transition'. It is necessary to understand the nature of this phenomenon so as to devise policies, that can capitalise on these developments in the region.

Demography is fundamentally concerned by three essential human activities: birth, death and mobility. In pre-modern societies, due to the inadequate advancement of medical and scientific breakthroughs, the only way to maintain a particular population was to produce a high enough number of children so that at least a few would survive into adulthood. At the same time, the prevalence of disease and the primitive nature of medical intervention resulted in a high rate of death among adults, bringing down the overall life expectancy of the population. This was the original state of mankind, a 'high fertility, high mortality' scenario.

The modern state, as it evolved in the seventeenth century, differentiated itself from preceding regime types by deriving its legitimacy on a fixed, immobile population, from which it would not only derive its legitimacy, but also extract labour and taxes. It was thus more concerned than its predecessors about maintaining the 'stock' of people within its territory, which could only be ensured by encouraging births, preventing deaths and strictly controlling mobility. Capitalist processes of wealth accumulation and goods production accelerated these trends. As medical science improved, most human societies underwent what is called the 'first demographic transition'. Here, fertility rates were sought to be kept up, in order to prevent depopulation and national decline. For this, states created disincentives to discourage couples from having fewer children. Mortality was not the primary focus, but declined as an ancillary effect of the emphasis on hygiene and fitness. As a result, a 'high fertility, low mortality' scenario emerged, causing a population explosion in several parts of the world.

Eventually, after the world wars of the twentieth century, modern states began to rebuild on a platform of small but stable populations, which

could sustain government activities without growing so large as to commit again the excesses of the aggressors in those conflicts. Family planning, the mass availability of high-quality medical care and contraception and increasing the standard of living became key focus areas. As a result, adult life expectancies soared, infant mortality rates crashed and the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which denotes the average number of children a woman of childbearing age could be expected to have, has begun its gradual decline. At this stage, a large chunk of humanity entered the 'second demographic transition', a 'low fertility, low mortality' scenario where the elderly live long lives, economically productive adults do not need to concern themselves solely with the care and raising of children, and children themselves enjoy better quality of life as they receive good-quality education and care. East Asia is extremely significant in this regard because it is in effect the harbinger of these trends. [1]

Country-Wise Conditions

It is instructive at this juncture to look at each country in isolation so as to lead the way to solutions where Indian foreign policy can leverage its unique strengths.

Japan

Japan is the logical place to start when we speak of demographic decline. Ever since birth rates began their slow but steady decline in the 1980s, Japan has continued to experience all facets of the second demographic transition as mentioned above: its birth rate is low, its life expectancy rate is among the highest in the world, and its strict immigration laws have prevented mobility from relieving its distress.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Japan, ironically enough, was faced with a problem of overpopulation, one that was only partially relieved through the mass emigration of the Japanese to North and South America. At the end of the seven-year long American occupation of Japan in 1952 after its defeat in World War II, its population indicators still spoke of a country living in excess of its means, as Table 6.1 shows. In other words, as the Americans handed over political power to the Japanese, its population structure resembled that of a developing country, with high TFR, high population density and high mortality in infants and adults, the hallmarks of the first demographic transition.

As Japan's economic growth picked up pace, however, demographic indicators began to show signs of slowing, as more and more women joined workplaces, abortion and other methods of contraception were legalised and the government instituted high-quality social security nets including advanced medical care. As Table 6.1 shows, in 1964, the year Japan hosted its first Olympic Games to show off its transformation into an economic high-achiever, total population had expanded but the TFR stood at 2.03, meaning a full percentage point decrease in the average number of children per woman. Life expectancy at birth similarly shot up and infant mortality went down. Japan was gradually entering the second demographic transition, helped along by a blistering pace of economic progress.

Table 6.1: Key demographic indicators for Japan[3]

Indicator	*1952*	*1964*	*1995*	*2023*
Total population	86,921,764	98,319,344	125,726,223	123,294,513
TFR	3.1	2.03	1.43	1.36
Life expectancy at birth (years)	62.08	69.61	79.86	85.03
Infant mortality (per 1000 births)	50	22.9	4.1	1.6
Migrant stock (1965)	—	712,854	1,381,097	3,223,858 (as of June)
Net rate of migration	—	29,206	38,572	87,584 (2021)

Source: Macrotrends.net.

In the ensuing years, as its years of high growth tapered off into slower but more stable growth post the OPEC oil shocks of the 1970s, Japan's demographic picture started to show signs of stability and maturation. However, as the 1990s dawned in the wake of the United States' imposition of the Plaza Accords and other measure designed to tamp down on Japanese economic growth, and as new generations of Japanese who had known only prosperity came into their own, the population passed its peak. Accelerated by the collapse of its 'bubble economy' in sectors such as real estate and banking between 1991-1995, the entry into the 'lost decades' disincentivized young couples to have children before they had the means to secure their future. [2]

By 2009, Japan's key indicators marked a downward trajectory. At the same time, in an interesting though not unpredictable development,

another set of statistics has trended upward: the stock of migrants residing in Japan, as well as net migration into Japan, underwent a swift though gradual rise since the 1990s as the government in Tokyo began to progressively relax its strict no-immigration policy. From a low base in the 1980s and 1990s, the number of foreign residents residing in the country grew nearly 2.5 times within twenty years to a record 3.2 million by 2023. Rates of net migration, which subtracts the number of emigrants from the number of immigrants to ascertain whether population mobility is net positive or negative, also shows a continuous upward trend, inflected only by border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Republic of Korea (South Korea)

The Korean peninsula, after the defeat of Japanese imperialism, was informally divided into joint spheres of interest between the US and the USSR at the 38th parallel. However, the Korean War turned the 38th parallel into a hard border, sundering one population into two. In 1953, when the Republic of Korea came into being, it was the DPRK that had the higher economic and developmental capital, while the South was saddled with crippling issues of poverty and overpopulation.

Table 6.2: Key demographic indicators for the Republic of Korea[4]

Indicator	*1953*	*1977*	*1997*	*2023*
Total population	20,862,396	36,911,298	45,962,393	51,784,059
TFR	5.65	3.14	1.54	1.08
Life expectancy at birth (years)	41.93	64.62	74.53	83.50
Infant mortality (per 1000 births)	159.1	34.6	7.6	1.8
Migrant stock	—	305,275 (1975)	123,886 (1995)	1,800,000 (2022)
Net rate of migration	—	–125,737	–125,395	43,440 (2021)

Source: Macrotrends.net and OECD.

In the 1970s, as the Park Chung-hee regime consolidated South Korean economic growth under the Five-Year Plans, its demographic profile stabilised and entered its first demographic transition nearly simultaneously. As shown in Table 6.2, 1977, the year South Korea celebrated its first major export goal of ten billion US dollars, showed a healthy rise in the population and life expectancy in addition to lower

(but still high by developed country standards) TFR and infant mortality rates. Again, a leading cause of this improvement was the ROK's conscious adoption on then-leading Japanese models of social welfare. Nevertheless, cultural attitudes towards women and childbearing continued to persist, akin to Japan. The high premium placed on children's material success by a high-achievement society also did not help matters.[5]

The aftereffects of these patriarchal attitudes began to show themselves after the South Korean economy really got going in the late 1970s and 1980s, and even more so when it met its first significant structural challenge in the form of the Asian financial crisis of 1997. By then, as seen in Table 6.2, population growth had become arithmetical, while TFR halved in twenty years. Average life expectancies doubled as a result of better medical care and improvements in diet, while infant mortality rates were slashed by almost five times the number of deaths in 1977, meaning couples were freed from the worry that their offspring would not survive into adulthood. South Korea was thus already at a mature stage of population growth, and was forced into the second demographic transition by economic headwinds.

As the ROK entered the twenty-first century, it was well and truly in the midst of the second demographic transition. Between 1997 and 2023, population grew by a measly six million, while the TFR slumped to a regional low point at 1.08. Life expectancy, meanwhile, grew by almost 10 years, indicating the maturation of social welfare policies toward the elderly, but the low TFR implied fewer workers to pay-in to the social security system. Exactly in line with Japan's situation, this resulted in South Korea gradually opening its doors to migrants, who from a low base of 123,886 people on the eve of the Asian financial crisis boomed to more than 1.8 million in 2022. This phenomenon in turn caused a boost in net migration, which had previously been weighted firmly towards emigration.

China

The case of China is distinctive, in that it is currently at the stage of entering the second demographic transition. However, the Chinese case is a distinctive example in the East Asian demographic context because the non-democratic system had already depressed reproductive rates to a great extent by artificial means, namely the one-child policy between 1980 and 2016. The same system prevented any substantial in-migration from

occurring as a side-effect of preventing citizens from out-migrating (a policy that was liberalised only recently, though with strict safeguards still in place), which means that China, more than any other East Asian state, faces demographic decline without the significant policy expedient of migration available to it.

Table 6.3: Key demographic indicators for China[6]

Indicator	*1950*	*1981*	*2001*	*2023*
Total population	543,979,233	997,359,502	1,272,739,582	1,425,671,352
TFR	6.48	2.72	1.61	1.71
Life expectancy at birth (years)	43.45	66.85	71.59	77.47
Infant mortality (per 1000 births)	127.15	48.79	30.27	8.40
Migrant stock	—	311,194 (1980)	508,034 (2000)	—
Net rate of migration	–0.129	–0.027	–0.204	–0.256

Source: Macrotrends.net.

At the commencement of the People's Republic, the regime led by Mao Zedong had the opposite problem: overpopulation run rampant, exacerbated by years of famine, poverty, war and misrule. In 1950, as the victorious Communist Party of China (CPC) took power in Beijing, life expectancy was a shocking 43.45, while infant mortality was 127.15, leading to a similarly high TFR of 6.48. The parlous state of the economy caused the leadership to take drastic steps to remedy the situation, though its ideological placement in the Marxist-Leninist tradition led Beijing to deploy coercive means to achieve economic progress.

The failure of the regime to achieve demographic decline, which leaders were convinced (not without reason) was the key to economic prosperity, caused it to pursue ever more draconian means of population control. Eventually it settled on the one-child policy, a radical scheme that forcibly removed family planning prerogatives from the family, particularly women, and placed it firmly in the hands of the state. The policy disincentivized couples to have more than one child by denying the second child access to the key social welfare entitlements available to their first, the younger children being restricted to furtive, often poorly-documented lives at the margins of Chinese society.[7] As seen in Table 6.3, TFR dropped by one-third to 2.72, indicating the amount of pressure the state brought to bear on couples. Meanwhile, other indicators such as

infant mortality and life expectancy gradually began improving, as the state achieved some measure of redistribution of economic resources over time.

As the Maoist era ended, China under Deng Xiaoping liberalised and modernised its economy. By 2001, the year it joined the WTO completing its process of integration into the world economy, it had more than a decade of economic growth under its belt, even as its population occupied the largest share of the total world population. In that year, China registered sharp drops in infant mortality and TFR side by side with high life expectancy rates. Its first demographic transition was complete. However, the seeds of its future problems were already laid: due to the overwhelming success (from the regime's perspective) of the one-child policy, entire generations had now emerged that were single children, who had been afforded the best social services China's Communist system could provide. As a result, these generations began to replicate their life patterns in their reproductive behaviour, resulting in newer generations of single children who are keenly aware of their economic privilege, and are cognizant of the headwinds China faces as its rate of growth slows down.[8] The abolition of the one-child policy in 2016 has not significantly changed behaviour. As can be seen from Table 6.3, by 2023, China was well on its way to the second demographic transition, as a result of fiat rather than as a response to economic stimuli.

Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau

The situation in the territories of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau vary only in subtle terms from the situation in the three larger powers in East Asia. Each faced initial situations where overpopulation threatened a run on resources, but as economic development spread throughout the region, governments gradually began to moderate demands for large populations and espoused smaller, stabler family structures instead.

Yet their position within the broader East Asian (that is, Sino-Japanese) cultural world hobbled them in two ways: first, they led to an almost ideological emphasis on the supposed 'purity' of their ethnic stock, preventing them from exploring migration as a policy strategy. Second, they placed pressures on women by viewing women as entirely responsible for childbirth and childrearing, while men were expected to be breadwinners with a minimal role in the care of children.

Of the three territories, perhaps only Hong Kong was able to escape these two drawbacks to some extent, because it was governed until 1997 by the British, who introduced (colonial) migration networks and their gradually progressive legislative and cultural attitudes towards a fairer role for women in economic activity. High rates of education in Taiwan and Hong Kong, introduced by former colonial overlords Japan and Britain respectively, also meant populations were more receptive to advancements in gender equality and family planning when they were introduced.[9] Macau, a former Portuguese colony, was also able to exploit its geographical and economic advantages as a financial and entertainment hub to attract a sizeable migrant population, which fluctuated across time. Further, as a function of their small size and geographical condition (all three are islands of varying size), the second demographic transition also often implies more room for existing citizens, reducing density and preventing excessive overloading of limited resources. Nevertheless, in all three territories, continuous and rapid declines in population indicators have led to increased desire to allow migration, and to improve women's reproductive environment to enable them to strike a better work-life balance.

Recommendations

For India, the situation in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, as well as to a lesser, more limited extent, Macau and Hong Kong, offers an opportunity to make its demographic advantage count. As relatively liberal systems, with liberal democracies inhering in all except Macau and Hong Kong, these countries are the ideal place to have its young people migrate over the short- and medium-term to learn high-value, high-quality skills that they can then exploit in the domestic and international markets competitively. As these countries gradually loosen their strict immigration policies, Indians are best placed to explore new opportunities in them, because Southeast Asia, which has been their traditional reservoir of human resources, is also undergoing its own demographic transition, and would not be able to sustain high rates of emigration much longer. To make the most of this opportunity, it is recommended that India:

1. Adapt the successful test case offered by the 2018 agreement between India and Japan to accept technical trainees under the latter's Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) to other countries, tailoring its policies in accordance with the respective

country's needs and requirements,

2. Set up observation and monitoring systems via embassies and consulates to ensure that legal incidents involving Indian citizens in their host countries are quickly and lastingly resolved, but also that parties in host countries do not take undue advantage of Indian citizens during their stay (a persistent concern given the human rights issues surrounding several East Asian labour importation programmes,[10]
3. Enable the creation of a consortium of stakeholders, both private and public, that can seamlessly handle the skilling and training of Indian workers intending to go to work in East Asian countries, possibly under the auspices of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Such a consortium could be empowered to perform a range of functions such as:
   (i) Monitoring the recruitment of Indian workers headed for East Asian countries, to ensure basic standards of skills and fitness are met,
   (ii) Liaising with national training and labour importation bodies in East Asian countries such as Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation (JITCO) in Japan,
   (iii) Providing certification to agencies and organizations engaged in sending workers abroad,
   (iv) Coordinating language and culture training,
   (v) Supervising the emigration process to ensure international legal norms and guidelines are followed,
   (vi) Providing information and data on workers in East Asian countries through high-quality research,
   (vii) Providing dispute resolution functions,
   (viii) Coordinating evacuation procedures in case of natural disasters and conflict, and
   (ix) Coordinating with relevant ministries to ensure policy bottlenecks are swiftly resolved.
4. Ensure that returnees from East Asian countries assessed and catalogued in a national database of Highly-Skilled Indian Workers available for employment in Indian firms and businesses,
5. If returnees desire to return to the host country to acquire new skills or take over a business in the host country, expedite any legal clearances they may require under Indian law and maintain

preferential ties with the new business owner in order to encourage them to invest in the homeland,

6. Facilitate smooth completion of legal formalities in case an Indian citizen decides to stay in the host country permanently (as is natural to expect will happen in many cases), either by obtaining permanent residency or naturalization, as well as to maintain a long-term 'aftercare' programme for the Overseas Indian and his/her descendants to ensure their ties to the homeland are retained for as long as possible.

In the implementation of these recommendations, Indian policymakers would be best served by learning from the case of the Philippines, which implemented some of the recommendations cited above for its Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) to great success.[11] The recent MoU signed between India and Taiwan in 2024 offers a good test-bed where these recommendations could be implemented.

China is the other side of this coin. It is not implausible that China may choose to liberalise (to a certain extent) its immigration and naturalization policies in order to attract highly-skilled migration from the region in future to offset its growing demographic disadvantages. In the latter scenario, India would be best served by extending several of the recommendations made above to the Chinese case as well, though its supervisory responsibilities would have to be of a higher standard, especially considering Beijing's recent trend of detaining foreign citizens residing in its territory as an instrument of foreign policy or utilising them as bearers of its preferred narrative through the influence of the United Front Work Department and other organizations.[12]

Conclusion and Future Prospects

The crisis in demography currently underway in East Asia offers India a host of opportunities. The states and economies of East Asia comprise some of the most financially stable and politically predictable systems in the world. Their backgrounds in Buddhism and other uniquely Indian cultural ideas provide Indians with a certain level of cultural and civilisational affinity, and certain countries such as Japan and South Korea also share political governance systems familiar to Indians. All of these countries also enjoy a high quality of infrastructure, giving rise to cultures of convenience that make them a model to aspire to for many.

At the same time, India, despite the gradual decline being recorded in TFR over time, continues to enjoy a significant demographic bulge that awaits conversion into a demographic dividend. For various reasons, investment in education and skilling has not been a priority for the Indian state until recently, as a result of which it has continued to struggle to convert its youth into a demographic blessing.[13] Yet as East Asian economies and societies undergo the second demographic transition, India is still going through the first; the latter's population, especially its deep reservoir of the young, make possible a complementarity that is difficult to replicate elsewhere (except perhaps the MENA region and Europe). East Asia and India are thus best conceived as two pieces of a puzzle in demographic terms, meant to be slotted together.

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7

India's Soft Power in West Asia: Approach, Initiatives and Impact

Abhishek Yadav

India's soft power emanates from a rich and vibrant tradition of cultural, political, and societal values, making it a global influencer. The country's film industry, notably Bollywood, captivates audiences worldwide, projecting the vibrance and diversity of Indian culture. Yoga and Ayurveda have transcended borders, becoming global wellness phenomena rooted in India's ancient traditions. India's commitment to political pluralism and its success as the world's largest democracy reinforce its global appeal. The country's religious diversity, marked by a harmonious coexistence of various faiths, exemplifies tolerance and inclusivity. Additionally, India's historical openness to global influences and its ability to integrate foreign ideas contribute to its soft power, positioning it as a cultural and intellectual hub in the global sphere.

Against such a backdrop, this chapter employs a multidimensional-mixed-methods approach to explore India's soft power diplomacy in West Asia, integrating cultural studies and international relations. The analysis focuses on the interplay between culture, identity, and diplomacy, employing discourse analysis, case studies, and diplomatic narratives. Attempts have been made to discern the evolution of India's diplomatic efforts and examine cultural exchange programmes, public diplomacy initiatives, and relevant collaborations to understand India's evolving soft power dimensions in the West Asia region.

Conceptual Framework of Soft Power

Joseph S. Nye, Jr argues that soft power is 'the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion.'[1] He further elaborates that soft power should not be misconstrued as an embodiment of idealism or liberalism; rather, it constitutes a distinct facet of power, serving as a means to achieve sought-after objectives.[2] In the realm of a nation's soft power, its foundation largely axes on three fundamental pillars: its cultural assets, particularly in regions where they resonate with external audiences; its political principles, specifically when these principles are upheld both domestically and internationally; and its foreign policies, especially when these policies are regarded as legitimate and imbued with moral authority by external actors.[3] India has performed well on all three pillars with respect to soft power outreach in West Asia.

India has been a non-aggressor nation, guided by an inclusive vision and a worldview anchored in the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* – viewing the world as a single family. The essence of this philosophy lies in recognising diverse lifestyles coexisting within a shared identity and a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This civilisational thought, deeply ingrained in Indian heritage, emphasises coexistence with Mother Nature rather than conquest. Notably, the practice of soft power is intricately woven into India's foundational identity.[4] Interestingly, India's G20 Presidency in 2023 showcased the aforementioned inclusive vision for people, planet, peace and prosperity through the G20 theme—*One Earth, One Family, One Future*,[5] depicting universal brotherhood. The theme conveyed significant messages from India, embodying Gautam Buddha's call for peace and Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent solutions.[6] It symbolised India's cherished commitment to peaceful resolutions, drawing inspiration from its rich philosophical and historical heritage.

India's soft power can be encapsulated in five key principles: *Samman* (emphasizing dignity), *Samvaad* (highlighting dialogue), *Samriddhi* (focusing on shared prosperity), *Suraksha* (addressing regional and global security), and *Sanskriti evam Sabhyata* (emphasizing cultural and civilisational connection).[7] India's incumbent Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has endeavoured to integrate India's political principles within a broader geopolitical framework, emphasising the concept of India as the '*Vishwa Bandhu*' or world friend. The overarching goal is to foster an Asian Century founded on '*Vikasvaad*' (developmentalism), with the expectation that it will contribute to the establishment of peace and stability.[8]

Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Instituted in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established in India to engage proactively in the development and execution of policies and programmes related to the country's external cultural relations. Its primary goals include enhancing and fortifying cultural ties and shared understanding between India and other nations. ICCR has been undertaking cultural exchanges with different countries and communities and nurturing relations with nations worldwide.

For instance, ICCR's Atal Bihari Vajpayee General Scholarship supports students from 122 countries globally, including West Asian nations like Bahrain, Brunei, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkiye, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), offering opportunities for UG, PG, and PhD courses.[9] The Lata Mangeshkar Dance and Music Scholarship is available globally for fields like Indian dance, music, sculpture, theatre, and cuisine.[10] The Ministry of AYUSH's scholarship scheme covers UG and PG courses in traditional Indian medical systems and Yoga for nationals from 102 countries, administered by ICCR.[11]

In the domain of higher education in academia, ICCR has established Indian Studies Chairs at Qatar University (Qatar), Hindi at Dhofar University (Oman) and Gulf University for Science and Technology (Kuwait), and Indian Studies (Social Science) at the New York University of Abu Dhabi (UAE)[12] to enhance global understanding of India within the international academic community. Faculty in these Chairs teach various aspects of India and engage in academic activities, contributing to disseminating relevant information and developing a deeper understanding of India-related issues.

India's Cultural Diplomacy in West Asia

India has actively pursued cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool to enhance bilateral relations and strengthen people-to-people ties with nations across West Asia. India's multi-layered approach encompasses diverse domains, including the arts, education, heritage preservation, and collaborative initiatives, nurturing mutual understanding and appreciation between cultures.

For instance, bilateral cultural agreements have been instrumental in

facilitating this exchange. India's Cultural Exchange Programme with Bahrain for 2019-2023 covers a wide range of areas, such as music, dance, theatre, exhibitions, seminars, archaeology, libraries, museums, literature, research, and youth programmes.[13] Similarly, India and Israel renewed their Cultural Exchange Programme for 2020-2023, promoting artistic and cultural collaborations, as well as youth interactions.[14] India and Türkiye have longstanding cultural ties, formalised through a Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP). This agreement facilitates cultural cooperation through various activities such as performances, film screenings, exhibitions, seminars, and university outreach initiatives. Furthermore, efforts to promote the teaching and learning of both Turkish and Indian languages are actively encouraged and facilitated in each other's nations.[15]

Cultural centres and educational institutions play a crucial role in bridging the gap between nations. India maintains the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC), established in 2018 in Tehran (Iran), and the Indian Cultural Centre in Tel Aviv (Israel), operational since January 2020, hosting various events celebrating the shared heritage and promoting mutual understanding. Iran maintains two cultural centres situated in Mumbai and New Delhi, which serve as platforms for nurturing cultural exchange and understanding between the two nations through a variety of events, including music, cultural exhibitions, literary discussions, and seminars addressing topics pertinent to the cultural and literary intersections.[16] Additionally, in September 2022, MoU was signed to establish the India-UAE Cultural Council Forum to facilitate deeper cultural cooperation and people-to-people interactions between the two countries.[17]

The Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), operating under the Embassy of India in Doha, serves as an overarching community organisation for Indian socio-cultural associations in Qatar. Additionally, the Indian Sports Centre (ISC), also under the Embassy's umbrella, focuses on promoting sports and games among the Indian and other expatriate communities in Qatar while supporting the country in hosting national and international sporting events. The Embassy engages actively with Qatari organisations such as Katara, Qatar National Tourism Council, and Qatar Museums in arts, culture, and education, often collaborating on significant events. Notably, Qatar permits the practice of complementary medicine, including Ayurveda, within its borders.[18] Moreover, there is considerable interest in Indian art and culture in Jordan. Various organisations, such as the

Jordan-India Friendship Society, Bharatiya Samaj in Jordan, Jordan-India Alumni Association, the Indian Community Association in Aqaba, and the Indian Women Association, actively arrange socio-cultural events throughout Jordanian society.[19]

Indian universities have emerged as preferred destinations for higher education, attracting thousands of students from countries like Iraq and Jordan. For instance, over 10,000 Iraqi students pursued higher education, including PhD, Masters, and undergraduate studies, in India.[20] In August 2015, ten MoUs were signed between institutions and universities to enhance educational cooperation. Approximately 2,500 Jordanian alumni of Indian universities reside in Jordan. The India-Jordan Alumni Association, established in August 2022, serves as a platform for distinguished Jordanian alums who graduated from prominent Indian Universities to connect and collaborate.[21] Collaborative initiatives between India and West Asian nations have facilitated academic and research exchanges, raising intellectual discourse and cross-pollination of ideas.

In Kuwait, there are 26 schools following India's Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum, catering to approximately 60,000 students, primarily comprising Indians with some Arab and South Asian expatriates. The Indian Embassy keenly promotes Indian culture and heritage through diverse programs and initiatives. From 2021-2022, the Embassy commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait through numerous events, including over 200 cultural programmes. Notable cultural events such as 'Splendors of India' and 'Namaste Kuwait' took place in 2022, while a 'Festival of India' was organised in Kuwait in March 2023.[22]

The Lebanese have appreciated Indian music, films, cuisine and Yoga since time immemorial and they enthusiastically participated in public events celebrating the International Day of Yoga since 2015. The ICCR has deputed a dance teacher since 2016, training numerous Lebanese youth in Indian dances through workshops held six days a week at the Embassy premises. Collaborative cultural activities with universities and local partners are highly popular. The Indian Embassy collaborates closely with Lebanese organisations such as the Association for Development of Lebanese-Indian Relations (ADLIR) and the Lebanese-Indian Friendship Parliamentary Committee (LIFPC) to strengthen people-to-people contacts and cooperation. Key agreements include a Cultural Exchange Agreement (signed in 1997), an Educational Exchange Programme MoU (signed in

2013) that is renewed after five years, and a student exchange MoU between the University of Delhi and Lebanese University (signed in 2021).[23]

Indian Diaspora: Ambassadors of Indigenous Values

India proudly possesses the world's largest diaspora, distributed across key destination countries. UAE stands out as the primary host in West Asia, accommodating approximately 3.5 million Indian migrants. Following closely is Saudi Arabia, hosting around 2.4 million Indian migrants,[24] marking it a significant hub for the Indian diaspora. The cumulative population of the Indian diaspora in West Asia is reaching around 10 million, reflecting the substantial presence and influence of the Indian diasporic community in the region.

India's diaspora framework revolves around the principles of the 4 C's—*Care* for the safety and security of the diaspora, fostering *Connections* with India, *Celebrating* their cultural heritage, and encouraging *Contributions* to the development of the homeland.[25] The Indian Government organises Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Conventions biennially as a crucial platform, providing a valuable opportunity for the Indian diaspora to interact and connect with their homeland.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA), the highest honour for overseas Indians, has been conferred by the President of India during PBD Conventions since 2003. PBSA is awarded to Non-Resident Indians, Persons of Indian Origin, or organisations they established, recognising significant contributions in various fields. Till 2024, 53 PBS awards[26] have been given to individuals and institutions from West Asian countries, reflecting the substantial and diverse contributions of the Indian diaspora across various fields, including the business sector, community service, philanthropy, healthcare, social services, agriculture, architecture, education, and training. It underscores the diverse skill set of the Indian diaspora and their commitment to contributing to the development and progress of their host country.

PBSA is an effective instrument of India's soft power diplomacy as it effectively leverages its cultural and people-to-people ties to enhance its diplomatic outreach and cultivate goodwill. The PBSA not only celebrates the success stories of the diaspora but also reinforces a sense of emotional and symbolic connection between these communities and their ancestral homeland. It resonates deeply within West Asian nations, where identity,

heritage, and kinship hold significant cultural currency. Moreover, the award ceremony itself becomes a platform for cultural exchange, fostering cross-fertilisation of ideas and showcasing India's vibrant traditions to a global audience.

UN Peacekeeping Force: India's Contribution

It has been observed that a proficient military can be an attractive asset when it creates international networks through military cooperation and training programmes to establish peace in conflict zones. Conversely, the misapplication of military resources can diminish soft power as neglecting just-war principles jeopardises legitimacy.[27] With regards to Indian contribution, over 200,000 Indian personnel have participated in 49 out of the 71 UN peacekeeping missions globally since 1948. Presently, India has deployed over 6,700 troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions, ranking fourth among contributing nations. Tragically, over 160 Indian peacekeepers have sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of peace while serving under the UN banner.[28]

As of November 2024, 897 Indian troops are stationed at the Israel-Lebanon border as part of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).[29] They are deployed to maintain peace and stability in the region. The situation at the border has become tense due to escalating tensions between Hezbollah and the Israeli army. The troops are at risk, given the recent clashes and fire exchanges between the two parties. The UN peacekeeping force, including Indian soldiers, has been present in the region since 1978, emphasising the long-term nature of their deployment.[30]

Additionally, there exists a contingent of 188 Indian military personnel deployed in Golan Heights, and two Indian personnel are part of UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Jerusalem, Israel. Also, 201 Indian personnel are deployed in Syria under the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).[31] Involvement in the UN peacekeeping operations has allowed India to demonstrate its commitment to global peace and security, enhance its international reputation, and build strong diplomatic and cultural ties with host countries, contributing to India's soft power.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

The concept of HADR involves providing aid and relief in response to natural or man-made disasters. It includes medical support, food, shelter, and other essential services to mitigate the impact of disasters and help affected populations. Showcasing its commitment to global well-being India has served as a first responder and a net security provider with quick HADR response not only for its own citizens and neighbouring regions but also for foreign nationals facing distress.

India's steadfast support for Palestine and Palestinian refugees, particularly through substantial contributions to the UNRWA for Palestine Refugees, features Indian ethics of soft power. By providing USD 36.5 million to UNRWA between 2002 and 2023,[32] India has consistently committed to humanitarian causes and actively contributed to regional stability. The decision to elevate the annual contribution from USD 1.25 million to USD 5 million in 2018[33] and the subsequent pledge to maintain this increased amount for the next two years reflects India's firm belief in humanity. Through such financial support, India signals its commitment to addressing Palestinians' socio-economic challenges, aligning its actions with compassion and international cooperation principles.

In response to the powerful earthquake in Turkiye and Syria on 6 February 2023, India initiated *Operation Dost*, swiftly deploying a comprehensive support effort. India swiftly organised three truckloads of relief materials, including life-saving emergency medicines, critical care equipment and protective items, at the Hindon airbase within twelve hours.[34] India delivered more than six tons of emergency relief assistance with consignment, including medicines, medical equipment, fluids for hydration and protective gear to Syria through C130J IAF aircraft.[35]

Through India's whole-of-government approach, the rapid dispatch of over 250 personnel, specialised equipment, and 135 tons of relief material via 5 C-17 IAF aircraft was ensured for Turkiye. The deployment included three self-sustained National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams for search and rescue, a thirty-bed field hospital with advanced medical facilities, and a team of 99 specially trained personnel.[36] Earlier, during *Operation Rahat* in Yemen in 2015, India successfully rescued and evacuated over 6,710 individuals, including more than 1,962 citizens[37] from over forty countries.

These efforts undertaken by India in various HADR missions have

contributed to the country's positive global image. India is increasingly recognised as a nation that readily assists other countries during crisis. It reflects a commitment to international cooperation and underscores India's role as a responsible and supportive actor on the global stage, supporting the broader mandate of the common good for humanity.

Yoga: Invaluable Gift of India

Yoga is a 5,000-year-old tradition from India, integrating physical, mental, and spiritual practices to attain harmony of the body and mind.[38] On 11 December 2014, the UNGA officially designated 21 June as the International Day of Yoga. This declaration was made in response to the initiative put forth by the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, during his address to the UNGA on 27 September 2014. The draft resolution put forward by India received overwhelming support, gaining endorsement from record 175 member states.

In his speech, Modi emphasised, 'Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and nature.'[39] It is also notable that in 2016, the practice of Yoga was accorded significant recognition when it was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, acknowledging its cultural and historical significance.[40]

The importance of Yoga is increasingly getting due recognition in West Asia. For instance, Nouf Marwaai, Saudi Arabia's first certified yoga instructor, is widely recognised for her efforts to establish Yoga as a sport in the country. A pioneer in introducing Yoga to the West Asia region, she founded the Arab Yoga Foundation and played a crucial role in obtaining official recognition for the practice in Saudi Arabia. Marwaai's influence extends to training over 10,000 individuals and mentoring over 700 yoga instructors in India and Saudi Arabia till 2019. Her remarkable achievements made her the first Saudi recipient of the prestigious Padma Shri in 2018, the fourth-highest civilian award in India.[41] Saudi Arabia approved Yoga as a sport in November 2017, and its potential inclusion in schools is likely due to growing interest of the Saudi Yoga Committee and Saudi School Sports Federation.[42]

The Emirati community actively participates in International Day of Yoga events, with numerous yoga and meditation centres flourishing across the UAE. Organisations like the Abu Dhabi Sports Council and the UAE Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence promote community events, encouraging Indian diaspora involvement in sports, fitness, and cultural activities.[43]

Founded in 2010 in Ramallah, a Palestinian city and run by volunteers, the Farashe Yoga Centre has witnessed a rising demand for its classes, especially from Palestinians experiencing increased stress levels and anxiety. The concerns of this population go beyond post-traumatic stress disorder, acknowledging the chronic exposure to stress in the region. Yoga has served as a therapeutic outlet to address these challenges. Similarly, there is a growing interest in Yoga in Lebanon. Aaed Ghanem, the founder of the Beirut Yoga Center in the capital of Lebanon, actively extends yoga instruction to Palestinian refugee camps.[44]

Yoga enjoys widespread popularity in Israel, featuring a diverse array of styles. *Ashtanga* Yoga is the most favoured choice, boasting around 95 centres nationwide. Following closely are *Vinyasa* and *Vijnana*, each with a substantial presence of over 50 centres nationwide. The *Iyengar* School of Yoga is notable, represented by 30 centres throughout Israel. This broad embrace of Yoga is visible through the presence of more than 1,100 registered yoga teachers, and yoga centres are pervasive, reaching almost every major township in the country.[45] All these examples reflect a broader trend where Yoga, as India's symbol of soft power, is increasingly being embraced as a means of well-being and stress relief in various communities residing in the West Asia region.

India's Deep and Diverse Cultural Footprint

India's cultural footprint is visible across diverse range including cultural and religious monuments, sculpture, diverse cuisine, multi-lingual cinema and Indian associations, among others. For instance, the installation of Mahatma Gandhi statues effectively manifests India's soft power, symbolising the enduring legacy of the man widely recognised as the Father of the Nation. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, rooted in the principles of non-violence and peaceful resistance, resonates globally, making his statues not only representational but also emblematic of India's commitment to these timeless ideals. These statues in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE[46] foster cultural exchanges and

people-to-people connections, reinforcing the shared values of peace and tolerance. In the context of India's soft power diplomacy, the enduring presence of these statues becomes a subtle yet impactful symbol to project India's cultural influence and historical resonance in the region.

Sri Krishna Hindu temple in Manama, built over two hundred years ago, underscores its status as the region's oldest, as evidence of the close historical ties and freedom of belief and religion in Bahrain's history.[47] Similarly, Shiva and Krishna temples, Guru Nanak Darbar (Sikh temple) in UAE and the Motishwar Shiva temple in Oman give a glimpse of the Indic cultural imprints in West Asia. Recently, the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Shri Swaminarayan temple in Abu Dhabi, UAE, was inaugurated by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 14 February 2024, exemplifying shared values of peace, harmony and tolerance.[48]

Indian cuisine is widely appreciated in West Asia. One example to be observed is of Israel's 'Curry Queen', Reena Pushkarna, a celebrated chef and restaurateur who succeeded by making Indian cuisine a favourite in Israel. She played an instrumental role in introducing Indian flavours to Israel in the 1980s. Her restaurant, Tandoori, situated in Tel Aviv, became a cultural hub, attracting notable political leaders like Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu. Notably, her restaurant served as the venue for peace talks between Israel and Palestinians in 1993, facilitated by Norway. She was conferred with PBSA by the President of India in 2023.[49]

The influence of Indian cinema has transcended geographical boundaries, resonating deeply with audiences across West Asia. Decades before Bollywood's global recognition, the region embraced Indian films with fervour, particularly during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Legendary actors such as Raj Kapoor, Amitabh Bachchan, Rajesh Khanna, Hema Malini, and Mithun Chakraborty captivated West Asian audiences with their performances, striking a chord with the region's diverse cultures. Anecdotal accounts, such as that of Bobby Ghosh, an Indian-American journalist who invoked the charisma of Bollywood star Shammi Kapoor to safeguard his life in an Iraqi village near Baghdad in 2003,[50] call attention to the tangible influence of India's cultural and cinematic elements in real-world. It can be said that the enduring appeal of Indian cinema in West Asia has not merely been a cultural phenomenon but has also emerged as a manifestation of India's flourishing soft power.

Moreover, the pervasive impact of Indian cinema is also particularly evident in nations like Oman, the UAE, Lebanon and Jordan. In Oman, Indian films have served as a gateway to introducing Arab culture to Indian viewers, bolstering cultural ties between the two nations. Major cinemas regularly screen Indian blockbusters, catering to significant local demand.[51] Similarly, the UAE has emerged as a hub for disseminating and consuming Indian cinema, television, and radio channels. Major theatres screen films in diverse Indian languages such as Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, and Tamil reflecting the diverse Indian diaspora within the country.[52] Moreover, Bollywood movies and actors are very popular among Lebanon and Jordanian households.

Furthermore, India has actively supported the promotion of cultural heritage in the region. For example, around 40,000 Indian pilgrims visit the sacred sites in Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala, promoting these historical and religious landmarks. Similarly, the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi showcases Indian artefacts, including the Mughal painting 'The Huntress,' originating from a Mughal court in South India, celebrating and symbolising the region's rich cultural fabric.[53]

A large number of Indian associations in West Asia[54] play a crucial role in bridging cultural, economic and social ties between India and the countries in the region. These associations serve as platforms for the Indian diaspora to connect, collaborate, and contribute to the host countries' development. They organise cultural events, festivals, and activities that celebrate the rich diversity of Indian traditions, strengthening cultural bonds. In essence, it can be said that Indian associations in West Asia serve as crucial bridges, nurturing relationships and enhancing the multifaceted engagement between India and the West Asian region.

Indian Leadership and Soft Power

As Joseph S. Nye, Jr notes that in the twenty-first century, where power is transitioning from states to non-state entities, the effectiveness of government endeavours to project soft power hinges on acknowledging the reduced hierarchy of power in the information age and the heightened significance of social networks. Therefore, to thrive in a connected world, leaders must shift their focus from command to attraction and co-option, positioning themselves within a network rather than atop a hierarchy. It necessitates prioritising two-way communication over authoritative directives.[55]

In such a context, through his visionary leadership, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a key proponent in leveraging India's soft power. His adept articulation and embodiment of Indian values, culture, and progressive ideals on the global stage contribute significantly to the nation's soft power influence. Emphasising inclusivity and diversity, Modi has enhanced India's appeal by projecting a powerful Indic narrative that resonates internationally. Modi's oratory skills, personalised connection with leaders and authentic charisma further strengthen India's soft power in West Asia. His leadership skills have shaped positive regional perceptions about India's growing capability and effective foreign policy.

Modi has received several prestigious honours for his diplomatic contributions. On 3 April 2016, he was bestowed with Saudi Arabia's highest civilian honour, the 'King Abdulaziz Sash'[56] for his significant role in fostering diplomatic ties between India and Saudi Arabia. On 10 February 2018, Modi was honoured with the 'Grand Collar of the State of Palestine,' the highest Palestinian award for foreign dignitaries, acknowledging his efforts to strengthen India-Palestine relations.[57] During his visit to the UAE on 24 August 2019, Modi was awarded the country's highest civilian honour, the 'Order of Zayed,' in recognition of his endeavours to enhance bilateral relations.[58] Furthermore, on 25 August 2019, he received 'The King Hamad Order of the Renaissance' from Bahrain, emphasizing deep cultural ties and India's global influence.[59] Notably, the Bahraini Government displayed a humanitarian gesture by pardoning 250 Indians serving sentences in the country.[60] As a testament to the enduring bilateral ties, on 22 December 2024, the Amir of Kuwait conferred 'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer', Kuwait's highest national award, upon Modi.[61] All such distinctions show recognition of India's rising status and Modi's unique leadership, which has generated immense goodwill in West Asian countries.

The Way Ahead

India's soft power encapsulated in Samman, Samvaad, Samriddhi, Suraksha and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata has proved successful in West Asia. Institutions like ICCR and the Ministry of External Affairs have led India's soft power diplomacy. India's diasporic framework of caring, connecting, celebrating, and contributing has demonstrated noteworthy effectiveness as initiatives such as PBD Conventions and PBS awards

celebrate the diaspora's achievements and showcase India's commitment. Active participation in the UN peacekeeping force and commendable HADR efforts emphasise India's dedication to crisis response and regional and global peace. The positive reception of India's culture, cuisine, associations and G-20 presidency has enhanced its soft power. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership also solidified India's impactful role in West Asia's cultural landscape.

However, there is a need for increased funding for cultural initiatives, improved coordination among institutions, capacity building to address the shortage of skilled personnel, and a clearer mandate for the ICCR.[62] These measures can help in leveraging India's soft power and optimise the impact of its cultural diplomacy efforts.

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8

Conceptualising India's Engagement with Central Asia and the Caucasus

Jason Wahlang

As the conflict in Ukraine nears two years and the instability in West Asian continues to take shape, the global order is in a state of flux. These poly crises have impacted geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic calculus of several global players. The impact is not limited to the major powers but is also felt in Central Asia and the Caucasus, given its proximity to the war in Ukraine and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The two regions fall under the former Soviet space, are closely connected to Russia, and are considered part of the Russian neighbourhood and sphere of influence. The countries[1] still have strong linkages to Russia and depend on Russia for its security arrangements. Some countries are part of the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Due to close connections and dependence on Russia, these nations have somehow found themselves in a bind with limited options when it comes to cooperating with other nations across the international arena. Their connections with Russia have limited their outreach to other countries that are opposed to Russia.

This impact of Russian influence has affected the nation's foreign policy initiatives, with some countries taking steps to reform or revamp their foreign policy outlook. These nations seek greater outreach and want to expand their foreign policy outreach beyond the Eurasian region to regional and global powers. The usual suspects, Russia and China, already

dominate the region. With the West trying to revive itself in the region after the Afghanistan debacle, there is scope for the Great Game to return. Turkey's presence is already visible in the region and Iran too is not far behind in establishing its influence. Israel also has its part to play, with regard to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. This current geopolitical situation has further produced options for nations to look outside the regional umbrella and involve themselves more internationally rather than being confined to the erstwhile Soviet space for the strategic and economic need. In this context, one option for the countries could be India, which has recently tried to elevate its presence in the region through various initiatives, diplomatic visits and meetings and its participation in regional organisations.

Conceptualising Post-Soviet Foreign Policy

Post the collapse of Soviet Union; the newly independent republics began to establish their own identity. Apart from installing new political and economic ideas and identities, the nations also began to forge their own foreign policies with an objective to shape their own geopolitical space and leave individualistic characteristics imprint in the international arena. Specific policies used by these newly independent post-Soviet nations were Multi-Vectorism, Complementarity and Neutrality.

Multi-Vectorism

Multi-vectorism is a policy by which a nation develops foreign relations through a framework of pragmatism and a non-ideological foundation solely based on the state's perceived national interests and policy objectives.[2] The crux of this policy is to establish friendly relations with all the countries that are capable of playing a substantial role in the global arena and also fits the interests of the nation concerned. This policy was adopted by most of the Central Asian states in the post-independence period as they sought diversification in their regional engagement to cope with great game-like scenarios between significant powers that were experienced in the past. The only exception is Turkmenistan, which followed a policy of neutrality.

While Kazakhstan has pioneered multi-vectorism in the region, other Central Asian states have been less open about their foreign policy because of various geopolitical and regional constraints. In comparison to other countries Tajikistan given its historical experience follows a cautious

foreign policy. In recent times, Kyrgyzstan has also focused on a more active multi-vector policy.[3] Uzbekistan started with a multi-vector policy. However, its policy was resistant to any external influence in domestic affairs. The main challenge to Uzbekistan comes from Islamists. The country witnessed a number of terror attacks during the reign of Islam Karimov. This changed after the coming of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who revolutionised Uzbek's foreign policy and revived its multi-vector approach.

These nations' foreign policies have become more evident in the current geopolitical scenario, as Russia and the West are at loggerheads again, and China's rise as a potential hegemonic power is inevitable. The Central Asian nation's multi-vectorism is more prominent in the current geopolitical climate, with most countries taking up neutral stances towards the conflict within the Eurasian region. There have also been attempts to diversify their policy, which could, in the long term, translate to being truly multisector as more nations have evinced their interest in the region to further their geopolitical and geo-economic interests.

Armenia's Policy of Complementarity

Like most Central Asian nations' Armenia follows its brand of multi-vectorism, popularly known as policy of complementarity. Armenian foreign policy under complementarianism necessitates pursuing a multi-vector policy, equilibrium-seeking diplomacy and balancing its ties with all regional and international stakeholders.[4] This policy helps Armenia emphasise its partnerships not just with the West but also with Iran and India while maintaining a strong relationship with Russia. This was evident from the Armenian approach to the current conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenia was open to various peace deals across the spectrum, ranging from Western to Russian initiatives to end conflict. The recent shifts in Armenian foreign policy are correlated to this conflict that highlights Armenia focus on its form of multi-vectorism.

Turkmenistan's Neutrality

Unlike the other four Central Asian nations, Turkmenistan foreign policy is based on neutrality. It's neutrality posture makes it one of the few nations which follow such a policy, and the policy is recognised by the United Nations. The significant debate, however, arises on the question of whether Turkmen's neutrality is genuine neutrality or is isolationist in

nature. To understand the difference, one must first define isolationism and neutrality. Isolationism is a strategy where states isolate themselves from an external environment that they believe would benefit their national interests.[5] Neutrality, conversely, is when a state declares non-involvement and chooses to remain neutral to the shifting power politics in the international arena.[6]

The last three regimes of Saparmurat Niyazov, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, and the current president Sedar Berdimuhamedov, Turkmenistan has opted out of major regional organisations, including the CSTO, EAEU and the SCO. It chooses to maintain an observer status at best in these organisations. While it is said that the Niyazov's foreign policy was somewhat isolationist, the Berdimuhamedov's foreign policy under Gurbanguly and Sedar Berdimuhamedov is considered more neutral. It is the same trajectory that shaped Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov rule which Ashgabat continues. The current leadership has even tweaked the idea of neutrality with Turkmenistan planning a transition to assuming full membership of the Organisation of Turkic States.[7] This can be considered as the next evolution in the Turkmen foreign policy.

While Turkmenistan maintains a neutral foreign policy in Central Asia, the same can be said for another Turkic nation in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan. A resource-rich country with a leadership similar to Turkmenistan, the nation attempts to follow a neutrality policy with a slightly strong inclination towards its neighbour, Türkiye. Azerbaijan's neutrality policy can be easily observed in its stance on the Israel-Palestine issue, supporting a two-state solution[8] while also maintaining a robust relationship with Israel,[9] especially after Israel's arms support in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. This neutrality has ensured that it shares good relations with Europe alongside developing a strong relationship with Russia. The same can be seen in its relationship in South Asia, maintaining trade relations with India and also a solid relationship with Pakistan.

Georgia, the third South Caucasus nation, has a foreign policy that differs from its other two South Caucasus neighbours, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgia, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has maintained a more pro-Europe stance. Georgia's attempt to join NATO in 2007 and its recent candidature proves its inclination toward the West. The Russo-Georgia conflict with regard to South Ossetia and Abkhazia further fuelled this decision. This foreign policy behaviour of Georgia is determined by its need to balance Russia; thus, as a result it would ensure

its security.[10] The recent conflict in the region has also kept Georgia alert, but there has been a shift in how Georgia behaves towards its Slavic neighbour, Russia. The Georgian Dream party, the party in power, has been accused of being pro-Russian. These accusations came after the party refused to join the international sanctions brigade, and there is also a visa-free regime, which some have termed it a transactional foreign policy pursued by the country.[11] These changes in foreign policy could hamper Georgia's Eurocentrism and may motivate Georgia to move away from the idea of Eurocentrism and diversify its foreign policy options and look towards other regional powers, including India, in the long term.

How Does India Fit into the Central Asian and Caucasian Space

As the entire international arena is going through turmoil, India has been a vital actor advocating peace and stability. India's agenda of peace and as the voice of the global south has helped build India's image among these nations. India has enjoyed robust connections with these countries historically. India's relationship can be seen in historical, geopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts. Post the collapse of the Soviet Union, Indians saw a gradual growth of the relationship, as both India and these nations themselves were adjusting to the newly emerging post-Cold War order and domestic reforms. Only in recent decades, India began carving its own space within a region with a strong dominance of its 'all-weather friend' Russia.

One main advantage for India is its relationship with Russia; India and Russia share a close relationship based on a strong connection throughout history. This relationship also helps India invest in what can be called the Russian neighbourhood. Russia also shares a strong relationship with the region. Despite the challenges posed by the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, the region is still strongly dependent on Russia for its security. This dependency on Russia and India's close relationship with Russia is an important factor that would help India to spread its influence through economic and trade relationships. One such example is the INSTC, a key Indian project in the region that aims to connect India with Eurasia in hopes of seeking greater geopolitical influence.

Another important factor is the arena of trade relations, which has the long-term potential to improve between India and the two regions.

Table 8.1: India's trade with Central Asia and Caucasus 2023 April-2024 January

Country	*Export (in US Dollars)*	*Import (in US Dollars)*
Armenia	79.87 (in millions)	35.53 (in millions)
Azerbaijan	74.80 (in millions)	0.56 (in millions)
Georgia	170.96 (in millions)	42.08 (in millions)
Kazakhstan	193.52 (in millions)	63.40 (in millions)
Kyrgyzstan	35.28 (in millions)	8.78 (in millions)
Tajikistan	44.16 (in millions)	0.01 (in millions)
Turkmenistan	30.61 (in millions)	74.60 (in millions)
Uzbekistan	304.64 (in millions)	18.21 (in millions)

Note: Data on India's trade with the Caucasus and Central Asia (April 2023- January 2024)

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 'Department of Commerce, Export-Import Data Bank', https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/icntq.asp, Accessed on 2 May 2024.

Overall, India's collaboration in the region can be seen through its relationship with these countries.

Central Asia

Post the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian nations began to establish themselves and connect with the global arena. Looking at its extended neighbourhood, India started courting these nations for further cooperation, especially given that these countries are primarily resource-rich. One example was the announcement of the Look North Policy in the 1990s under the P.V. Narasimha Rao government, the first policy towards Central Asia after the Soviet collapse. This was followed by the Connect Central Asia policy[12] in 2012, highlighting its engagement with the region, which can be traced back to the annals of history dating back to Silk Road, with trade being an essential component of this history.[13] The relationship though was not limited to trade but it also had a cultural and religious component. The Sufis had a stronghold in Central Asia, particularly in the Uzbek cities of Kiba, Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent. This religious connection is still visible in the bilateral relations, with Sufi shrine visits a strong vehicle for promoting tourism and cultural exchanges between India and Central Asia.[14]

India's relationship is not just limited to bilateral relations with Central Asian nations; it is also part of regional organisations, most notably the

SCO. India is a permanent member of the organisation alongside four other Central Asian nations, thereby ensuring long-term cooperation with these nations in the regional format. The grouping provides India with a platform to discuss topics of national interest, including terrorism, with Central Asian nations. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan share a border with Afghanistan; thus, India, shares similar concerns over Afghanistan being used as a platform for any terror group; the issue of Afghanistan and counter-terrorism can be discussed on such platforms.

India cooperates with these nations within the SCO to address some of these issues. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), the only permanent functioning organisation of the SCO, is an essential forum for India to express its concerns about disruptions in regional security across its neighbourhood and beyond. India's presence in the RATS and its recent initiatives towards counter-terrorism, such as the Delhi Declaration, particularly in the field of terror financing, could be pursued as an option to ensure long-term security stability in the SCO countries and particularly in India's neighbourhood. This collaboration could help solve the terror threats emanating from bordering nations, which have plagued both India and Central Asia in the past. Culturally, India has also collaborated with the SCO, with Varanasi becoming the first cultural capital of the SCO in 2022.[15]

India also sees these regions as areas of bilateral cooperation. This is visible from the proactive approach of the current leadership. In 2014, after BJP came into power, PM Narendra Modi visited all five Central Asian nations in a single visit. This proactiveness of the government shows the importance that India accords to its relationship with Central Asia. India has the Ayni Airbase in Tajikistan, which could be used as a platform for transporting goods between the two nations. India has also invested in all the other Central nations, including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan recently stated that it is ready to be a hub for investments for India in the region.[16] These signs show the region welcomes India's attempts to collaborate and cooperate.

India can play an essential role since most Central Asian nations are looking for options to diversify their relations with the two regional powerhouses of China and Russia. India can become the outlet for these nations, since it shares strong ties with many Central Asian countries. The presence of historical, economic, and political connection would further strengthen India's aspirations for increasing its outreach within

the region. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chabahar Port, which connects with Central Asia are some of the major connectivity projects India has been attempting to solidify in the region. If it does meet its expected aim, then India's lack of connectivity with Central Asia will be resolved in the future.

With most countries follow multi-vectorism in one manner or the other, India may gain long-term space in the region. The nations have already shown interest in involving various powers across the spectrum, with the US slowly gaining primacy. India sees the region as part of its extended neighbourhood, therefore any increase in its influence could be a positive development for India. Central Asia is rich in energy and mineral resources, which will provide India enormous opportunities to consider joint venture and collaboration. India, also sees the region from a security point of view. This region borders the South Asian region. Afghanistan remains a major security challenge as spread of radicalism and terrorism could impact India in the long term. India hopes with its presence, particularly in the SCO, it can have checks and balances on the security situation of the region.

Lastly, with the presence of a small Indian population in the region, mostly students focusing on education in the post-Soviet space. Central Asian nations have emerged as alternative options for their academic careers, mainly in medicine. This became more evident after the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are likely options for aspiring students.[17] Apart from the student factor, India and the Central Asian nations have a strong cultural connection, with Indian soap operas and movies being dubbed in the local language for the local populace.[18]

Caucasus

Regarding the Caucasus, India has good ties with all three nations (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) while also keeping in mind Azerbaijan's relationship with India's neighbour, Pakistan. India has a cordial relationship with Armenia, which may be the main focus of India's Caucasus aspirations. India and Armenia have strong historical, cultural, political and economic ties. The pivotal point of the current relationship is the defence ties, with India signing important arms deals with Armenia.[19] Appointment of a military attaché to Armenia[20] further highlights the importance of the relationship.

In the current geopolitical order, Armenia seeks to diversify its foreign policy. This shift in foreign policy is linked to the recent Armenia-Azerbaijan war. The slow and unresponsive reactions from Russia regarding Azerbaijan's aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh and sovereign Armenia disappointed Armenia. These reactions were further fuelled by the fact that Armenia is part of the Russian-dominated security organisation CSTO, which refused to intervene. This foreign policy shift has seen Armenia interacting with the US, Europe (including old ally France), and even regional actors like Iran. When it comes to diversifying partners, India fits the bill as well. Armenia seeks to involve India and other actors like Iran in the region. This is seen in the recent trilateral meetings among the three nations in 2023, with connectivity INSTC balancing the Azerbaijani trilateral (Azerbaijan-Turkey-Pakistan) and economic projects.[21] One example is Armenian scholars supporting using Yerevan as India piloted INSTC route rather than Baku, thereby highlighting the trilateral relationship.[22] Another example is Armenia wanting to join the Chabahar port for access to India, again connecting the three nations through the INSTC, given that the Chabahar port is one of the main focal points of the INSTC project.[23]

India and Armenia could also focus on cooperation on technology. Armenia's tech sector is one of the fastest-growing sectors of its economy, and this has not been impacted by either the pandemic or the war in Nagorno-Karabakh.[24] India's tech industries have been one of the important forces helping propel GDP, employment opportunities and overall economic growth.[25] With both nations doing well in the sector, it could emerge as one of the main sectors for collaboration in the long run. Overall, as Armenia seeks to invest in complementarity in its foreign policy approach, India remains an important country for such initiatives.

India is keen to deepen its engagement with Azerbaijan, an oil- and natural gas-rich nation, India and Azerbaijan share a cordial relationship, with trade of natural resources being a strong base, as Baku is India's leading trading partner in the South Caucasus.[26] Despite a strong base, there has been some hostility in recent times. This is due to the arms deals India signed with Armenia, considered a hostile neighbour of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's Azer News, closely linked to the Azerbaijan state, and has even published a piece calling India a warmonger for its deals with Armenia.[27] Despite minor political hiccups, economic aspects of the relationship have taken centre stage. The 2022 data suggests an increase

of 156.4 per cent in the bilateral trade from $739 to $1.882 billion.[28] In 2022, India also became the fourth largest export country for Azerbaijan.[29]

The agreement between India's ONGC Limited with Azerbaijan's SOCAR and its recent decision to extend the duration of the PSA for the Azeri Chirag Deepwater portion of Gunashli (AGC) oil fields to 2049[30] is testament to the economic relationship between the two nations. In the long term, India's strategic autonomy and Azerbaijan's neutrality foreign policy could ensure that the relationship could function in the main aspects of cooperation despite either nation's strong ties with one another's adversary.

Compared to the other Caucasus nations, Georgia has limited outreach with India. The two nations share a strong historical connection highlighted in recent years, such as the 2017 transfer of Georgian queen relic Queen Ketevan from India to Georgia.[31] Apart from the historical connection, there were discussions on the possibility of signing a FTA in 2017,[32] which could be seen as a step towards economic cooperation. India and Georgia also have direct flight connectivity, which furthers people-to-people connections. There is space for growth in the relationship with areas such as clean energy, technology, infrastructure development, industry and manufacturing.[33]

Similar to Central Asia, Indian students are known to travel to the Caucasus for educational purposes, especially medicine. This is more evident in Georgia and Armenia, with Georgia being a major destination for some students after the war in Ukraine.[34] This adds an extra element to India's growing regional diplomatic escapades.

Limitations

One significant limitation India needs to address in its outreach to these regions is the lack of connectivity. The coming of the Taliban in Afghanistan and lack of its international legitimacy has created a gap for India. The lack of connectivity deeply affects India's aspirations to exert influence in Central Asia—as connectivity drives trade and investment.

India's current projects in the Central Asian region are also affected by the presence of an uncooperative and hostile neighbour, Pakistan with some of the proposed projects would pass through Pakistan to reach India. India's tumultuous relations with Pakistan and the latter's sponsorship of terrorism within the Indian sovereign territory. Projects such as TAPI

and the CASA-1000 are some examples. Without India's participation in these projects, it will be of limited value.

Another factor that could impact India's outreach to the region is the presence of China. Two nations, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, share a border with China, therefore having a direct connection with the country. China is an important economic partner for the majority of Central Asian nations. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are known to have a strong Chinese influence in their economies.[35] This allows the Chinese presence and influence on these nations. Despite Russia's guarantees for security to the region, the Chinese have also started establishing military bases in the region. One such example is establishing a militarised base in the Gorno-Badakhshan region in Tajikistan.[36] China has funded 112 projects in Central Asia under BRI. With Afghanistan planning to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a connection could be seen between Chinese ambitions in both South and Central Asia. This connection could hamper India's attempts to gain influence in the region.

One limitation for India in its attempts to enhance its engagement in the region has been the cooperation between Azerbaijan and Pakistan. The two states share a common stance on Kashmir and support one another on various issues of geopolitical importance. The strong connection between Azerbaijan and Pakistan can act as an obstacle to India's engagement with Baku. Such engagement of these countries with Pakistan, which harbours strong animosity towards New Delhi, could create long-term roadblocks for cooperation between India and Azerbaijan.

With Armenia, the one major limitation is the lack of connectivity, which hampers its cooperation, including people-to-people connections. While there are direct flights between India with Georgia and Azerbaijan, with Armenia, that is not the case. The lack of direct flight connectivity ensures limited contact and, therefore, fewer interactions between the populations of the two nations. India could focus on this aspect of the relationship for the long-term strategy connecting Armenia and the region.

India has an 'Extended Neighbourhood Policy' towards the Eurasian heartland, but this policy is more generic and not region-specific. India could focus on a Caucasus-focused policy similar to its Connect Central Asia and Neighbourhood First policies. Creating a focused Caucasus policy would ensure India could invest and implement its policies with

more vigour and enthusiasm, which is reminiscent of its recent revival in the Central Asian region.

What the Future May Hold

Despite the limitations, India has gained some level of influence in the region. The ever-evolving global scenarios and the rising complexities ensure that India's regional aspirations have some space to grow. The Eurasian countries' attempts at diversifying could be an important factor for India as it seeks to gain influence in the Eurasian region. India's relationship with Russia and China who are present in the region also plays an important role, especially the relationship with Russia who is an important partner for India in the region. In the long run, India's involvement in the region would benefit all parties involved: those seeking to diversify and India seeking to extend its influence.

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9

India-Africa Development Cooperation: Navigating the Age of Polycrisis

J. Mohanasakthivel

> *India's independence was not complete without the independence of Africa, our development was not complete without the development of Africa, and our rise will only be full and firm when we also see the rise of Africa.*
>
> **—External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar**[1]

Africa is presently grappling with a confluence of intricate and interrelated challenges, including poverty, war and environmental catastrophes. As the continent emerges as a power house set to shape the world's demographic and economic landscape by 2050, the necessity for strategic and impactful development cooperation becomes increasingly imperative. Against the backdrop of challenges outlined in the 2023 Global Risks Report from the World Economic Forum, emphasising a looming polycrisis,[2] the partnership between India and Africa takes centre stage, offering a beacon of hope in this complex landscape. The challenge of shortages in vital resources highlight the urgency for comprehensive and collaborative strategies to address multifaceted threats. These threats span environmental challenges, geopolitical conflicts, pandemics and resource scarcities, requiring a nuanced and cooperative approach.

In this context of India's commitment to a Global South-focused model of globalisation, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar has articulated a transformative vision. This vision not only resonates with India's historical dedication to sharing developmental experiences but also outlines three

pivotal shifts crucial for reshaping the dynamics of globalisation. These include transitioning from a self-centred to a human-centred model, re-evaluating the approach to Innovation and Technology, and adopting a transformative perspective on Development Cooperation. While India utilises diverse tools for developmental cooperation in Africa, including capacity building, technical cooperation schemes, grants and lines of credit, adopting a focused approach during periods of polycrisis is a practical and prudent strategy.

Such an approach holds the promise of not only providing immediate relief but also building resilience and fostering long-term self-sufficiency in the face of complex challenges. This chapter delves into the importance of a targeted approach to development cooperation, focusing on three critical pillars: Trade, Health, and Food Security. In the face of a polycrisis characterised by interconnected challenges, a targeted strategy addressing Trade,[3] Health, and Food Security emerges as a comprehensive and sustainable approach to development in Africa. The collaboration between India and Africa should strategically balance immediate relief efforts with initiatives aimed at building resilience and achieving long-term self-sufficiency.

India-Africa Trade as a Vital Element in Development Cooperation

India's development cooperation approach incorporates the encouragement of trade and investment. Rather than adopting a donor-recipient or patron-client dynamic, India's initiatives in developing nations are frequently structured to also facilitate bilateral trade and investment, fostering South-South Cooperation and generating mutual economic advantages.

The intricate web of economic forces shaping African trade reveals a story of potential and pitfalls. While exports have become a vital lifeline, pumping more foreign exchange into the continent than remittances, investments, or foreign aid combined, a closer look reveals a double-edged sword. These exports, often brimming with cutting-edge technologies needed to compete globally, are driving advancements and skills development within local supply chains. Yet, Africa's share of global trade remains stuck at a meagre 2.3 per cent, a stagnant figure for years. This reliance on fuel, minerals, and metals, though economically essential, creates hurdles for job creation and lifting people out of poverty.

Africa's exports hold immense strategic value on the global stage.

The continent dominates the supply chain of crucial resources like petroleum and minerals, fuelling innovative digital and green technologies. Their influence extends to liquefied natural gas, with the potential to become a key provider for Europe after infrastructure upgrades.[4] However, overreliance on these traditional exports hinders diversification, which is vital for long-term development. Africa's trade story goes beyond mere economics, impacting geopolitics. The exchange of resources like fuels and metals for manufactured goods and food creates a complex relationship with the world. To unlock Africa's full potential, it's essential to navigate this intricate landscape by diversifying exports, adding value to products, and achieving a balanced trade dynamic.

With respect to India's development cooperation with Africa, it encompasses four main components: the ITEC programme, grants, lines of credits, and trade and investment. The growing significance of regional trade and investment in South-South cooperation underscores the positive development between these two regions. Trade and investment serve as vital pillars for economic progress between India and Africa, forming the core of their cooperation. India's active participation in the trade and investment sector, as the fourth-largest trading partner and the fifth-largest investor in Africa,[5] reflects a strategic and mutually beneficial partnership. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, India-Africa trade has shown resilience and recovery, with a 9.28 per cent increase in trade volume in 2022-23 to reach US$ 97.84 billion. Imports accounted for 47.68 per cent, reflecting India's demand for African goods, while exports constituted 52.32 per cent, indicating Africa's growing market access and export capabilities.[6]

India's approach to trade and development is exemplified by its Duty-Free Tariff Preference Scheme (DFTP), initiated in 2008 and fully operational since 2012. India has opted to grant substantial duty-free access to its market for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), demonstrating a commitment that goes beyond the obligations set by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The DFTP, unveiled at IAFS-I, underwent significant expansion and simplification in 2014, resulting in 96 per cent of tariff lines being duty-free for LDCs. Despite the inclusion of certain agricultural products without concessions to protect domestic agriculture, India's approach is noteworthy for its unique balance. The scheme, while having limitations, enables LDCs to export nearly all manufactured goods and agricultural products duty-free or under concessional conditions.[7]

India's DFTP Scheme grants significant market access to 33 LDCs

This scheme offers preferential treatment on a vast majority of India's tariff lines, with a reported 98.2 per cent enjoying duty-free status. The WTO confirms this extensive coverage, with a report indicating that 10,991 out of 11,506 tariff lines are offered duty-free under the DFTP Scheme. Notably, this preferential treatment encompasses both agricultural products (1,129 tariff lines) and non-agricultural goods (9,862 tariff lines). By eliminating or significantly reducing import duties, India's DFTP Scheme presents a substantial opportunity for LDCs in Africa to increase their exports and foster economic growth.[8] India distinguishes itself through its trade and investment strategy, marked by an absence of conditions tied to human rights violation sanctions, unlike the approach observed in the United States' African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).[9]

The examination of India's trade collaboration with Africa indicates a latent opportunity for enhanced cooperation through DFTP, with a particular emphasis on LDCs. One significant hurdle lies in the non-participation of certain African LDCs in DFTP initiatives, hindering not only their respective sectors' access to tariff exemptions but also thwarting broader objectives of economic diversification and positive developmental outcomes. A key challenge identified in this regard is the lack of awareness about the DFTP scheme among potential beneficiaries, as highlighted in a survey conducted by the WTO and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), revealing that over 44 per cent of respondents were unaware of the scheme. This underscores the critical necessity for proactive dissemination of information by Indian missions and embassies to bridge this awareness gap.[10]

In addition to that, rectifying the trade imbalance is a pivotal consideration, as emphasised in a joint report by the African Export–Import Bank and the Export–Import Bank of India, which advocates for more robust information dissemination efforts.[11] This recommendation scrutinises the efforts of the Indian government, stressing the potential impact on redressing trade imbalances and fostering a more mutually beneficial trade relationship. By ensuring widespread awareness and accessibility of the benefits conferred by the DFTP, both India and African LDCs stand to benefit from a more equitable and prosperous economic partnership.

The current trade dynamics between Africa and India reveal a limited but existing relationship, with India primarily importing fuel and chemicals from Africa and exporting fuel and pharmaceuticals to select countries in the region. However, there's immense potential for growth, especially in the green and digital sectors, which could yield a global opportunity exceeding $20 trillion by 2040. To fully harness this potential, both regions need to undergo a strategic shift in their trade relations. Prioritising the establishment of a comprehensive free trade agreement and creating dedicated institutions to support trade and investment are essential steps. Addressing obstacles and leveraging Africa's renewable energy resources can further bolster collaboration, ultimately leading to increased growth and prosperity for both regions.

India-Africa Health Cooperation: A Synergistic Endeavour

The healthcare landscape in Africa is grappling with a variety of challenges, including infectious diseases such as malaria, the recurring occurrence of Ebola outbreaks, the rise of non-communicable diseases, and the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19, economic vulnerabilities in numerous African countries have been exposed, with surging inflation rates intensifying out-of-pocket health expenditures and potentially exacerbating poverty levels.

Beyond infectious diseases, the continent faces structural issues that impede healthcare progress. The rapid growth of the African population, predicted to constitute a quarter of the global population by 2050, strains already overwhelmed healthcare systems. Low healthcare funding, with African governments spending significantly less per capita compared to high-income countries, compounds the challenge. Dependence on international funds, though providing crucial support, underscores the need for sustainable funding models to ensure long-term resilience.

Clinical research, essential for understanding and tackling prevalent health issues, is hindered by limited investment and participation in global trials. Additionally, migration and brain drain pose serious threats to healthcare provision, with countries like Nigeria losing substantial resources to medical tourism annually. Solutions necessitate substantial investments in healthcare infrastructure, robust research and innovation support, improved working conditions to retain healthcare professionals, and the development of sustainable funding models that reduce reliance

on international aid. The road ahead requires a collaborative effort from both local and global stakeholders to build a resilient and effective healthcare system in Africa.

India's role in global health goes beyond its borders, especially when it comes to helping African nations. The country plays a crucial role as a supplier of affordable medicines, tackling diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. From 2010 to 2019, India became the third-largest investor in Africa's healthcare sector, only behind the UK and the USA. Interestingly, it contributed almost a fifth (19 per cent) of the total global investment, which reached $1.1 billion during that period. This translates to a specific investment of $210 million from India itself. Most of this Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) went towards general hospitals (82.4 per cent), followed by outpatient clinics and labs (14.7 per cent), with a smaller slice going to nursing and residential care facilities (1.6 per cent).[12]

Moreover, the pharmaceutical sector, witnessing a substantial increase in exports to Africa, plays a crucial role in providing low-cost generic drugs, making a significant impact on the healthcare landscape in developing nations. Almost 20 per cent of India's pharmaceutical exports, valued at US$ 17 billion, are directed to Africa, benefiting diverse regions, especially Southern and Western Africa.[13]

In response to the pressing need for accessible healthcare in remote areas, India has introduced telemedicine programmes in African nations. This initiative has proven especially vital during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing India's commitment to leveraging technology for the betterment of healthcare outcomes globally. A cornerstone of India's healthcare diplomacy is its active involvement in training healthcare professionals in African nations. Through scholarships and educational programmes, India contributes to building a skilled healthcare workforce in the region, fostering sustainable healthcare development.

As the host of the G20 summit, India has played a pivotal role in shaping the G20 declaration on health. The focus on building resilient health systems, pharmaceutical cooperation, and digital health transformation aligns with India's commitment to fostering collaborative efforts in information sharing, technology adoption, and capacity-building on a global scale. India's commitment to digital health transformation is evident in its pledge to launch a repository of scalable digital health

platforms, holding immense promise for enhancing global healthcare systems.

The G20 declaration underscores the importance of a One Health approach, recognising the interconnectedness of ecosystems in disease transmission. India, with its diverse landscapes, comprehends the significance of this approach, particularly in addressing zoonotic diseases. Tackling antimicrobial resistance becomes a shared responsibility, with India's pharmaceutical industry contributing to responsible antimicrobial use and research into novel antibiotics. India's vast pharmaceutical industry is a key player in ensuring the responsible use of antimicrobials globally. In addition to that the declaration, places a strong emphasis on strengthening primary healthcare, health workforce, and essential health services. India's extensive network of primary healthcare centres, community health workers, and telemedicine initiatives serves as a model for other nations, fostering collaboration on workforce training and best practices. The collaboration with UN agencies in procuring vaccines from Indian companies highlights India's role as the largest provider of affordable, high-quality vaccines for developing countries.[14]

In addition to that, India has become a sought-after location for medical tourism, with the percentage of overall tourists visiting India rising from 5.4 per cent in 2010 to 15.4 per cent in 2019. Notably, the number of African citizens seeking medical care in India has almost tripled over the past decade.[15] To expand healthcare access, fostering additional collaborations between African and Indian healthcare providers is crucial. Such partnerships could entail investments in telemedicine, hospital infrastructure and skill development.

Despite India's robust engagement in the health sector, challenges persist. While Indian healthcare companies have garnered a favourable reputation in Africa, recent developments have undermined this hard-won standing. Concerns regarding the safety and quality of pharmaceutical products originating from India have posed significant obstacles to the reputation of Indian healthcare firms in Africa. Incidents involving suspected drug contamination resulting in harm, particularly among children, have attracted international scrutiny and raised concerns among African nations.

Recent apprehensions expressed by Nigeria and Cameroon regarding specific oral medications and cough syrup manufactured in India, which

have been associated with child fatalities, underscore the gravity of the situation. These occurrences have eroded trust in Indian pharmaceutical products in select African regions.[16] The decision by Gambia to impose rigorous quality checks on all pharmaceutical items imported from India before entry into the country highlights the imperative for stricter regulations and enhanced quality assurance protocols within the pharmaceutical sector.[17]

Addressing these concerns and reinstating confidence in Indian pharmaceutical companies' products will necessitate concerted efforts involving Indian authorities, pharmaceutical firms, and regulatory bodies both domestically and internationally. Strengthening quality control mechanisms, promoting transparency in manufacturing processes, and ensuring rigorous adherence to safety standards are indispensable measures toward rebuilding trust and safeguarding public health in Africa and beyond.

Granting statutory backing to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) is paramount. The existing structure, wherein the Drugs Controller General of India occupies a low-ranking position, requires overhaul. The CDSCO lacks an independent statutory framework. It functions as a subordinate office of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This hierarchical arrangement, wherein the CDSCO is accountable to various levels of government officials, undermines its efficacy.

Additionally, the recommendation of the Mashelkar Committee to rename the CDSCO as the Central Drug Administration (CDA) and establish it as an autonomous office under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, akin to regulatory bodies in other nations, warrants serious consideration. This transformation should be accompanied by legislative sanction, empowering the CDSCO to manage its finances, enact regulations, and recruit professionals from the private sector. Such reforms aim to create a more agile regulator capable of addressing evolving challenges in the pharmaceutical industry.[18]

Furthermore, enhancing transparency is imperative. Establishing a regulatory framework that ensures transparency by design is essential. While certain regulatory actions necessitate proactive disclosure under existing laws, many critical documents, such as new drug approvals and inspection reports of manufacturing facilities, are not routinely

disseminated to the public. Unlike regulatory authorities in the United States and the European Union (EU), Indian regulators do not publish internal reviews of new drug applications or inspection reports of manufacturing facilities. Facilitating citizens' ability to conduct a social audit of the regulator's performance through proactive publication of regulatory information is crucial for enhancing public confidence and trust in the regulatory process.[19]

Finally, India's role in healthcare diplomacy with African nations is dynamic and impactful, marked by collaborations, contributions, and a shared vision for global health equity. As the landscape continues to evolve, India's proactive involvement is poised to leave a lasting impact on healthcare outcomes worldwide. The collaborative efforts, economic impact, and future potential emphasise the significance of India-Africa health cooperation in shaping the global healthcare landscape.

The Alarming Hunger Crisis in Africa and India's Potential role

A perfect storm of challenges threatens to engulf Africa's food security, pushing millions deeper into hunger. The war in Ukraine, ongoing conflicts, climate change, economic woes, and the lingering scars of the pandemic have combined to create a dire situation. Women and girls face the brunt of worsening social and gender inequalities. Despite valiant efforts, achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030, let alone the Malabo targets of ending hunger and malnutrition by 2025, seems increasingly distant. 2022 saw a staggering 57 million people added to the already alarming number of undernourished individuals in Africa, bringing the total to nearly 282 million, one-fifth of the population. Moderate or severe food insecurity affects a staggering 868 million people, with 342 million facing its most severe form. This grim reality, coupled with economic headwinds like slow growth, inflation, and rising borrowing costs, demands immediate and intensified action to create a world free from hunger and malnutrition by 2030.[20]

Under this context, India and Africa's collaborative efforts in tackling food security challenges present a strategic response to the paradox of Africa, possessing 60 per cent of the world's uncultivated arable land but being a net food importer. The continent faces substantial economic constraints, with food imports constituting a significant portion of budgets across many nations, accentuated by surging food prices and an appreciating US dollar.[21] Despite these challenges, the success of import-

substitution policies could hold profound implications, especially with several African countries possessing the resources to produce fertilisers crucial for regional and global demand. This expansion could foster a commodity-based industrialisation model, reducing dependence on volatile commodity-price cycles and bolstering resilience to global shocks.

Agriculture and agribusiness, pivotal for Africa's economic transformation, are poised to become growth industries, offering solutions to chronic unemployment. The collaborative focus on enhancing agricultural productivity through India's expertise in seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides underscores a shared commitment.

Amid Africa's projected population growth, initiatives to boost fertiliser production and raise farmers' yields are integral to achieving self-sufficiency. Such policies not only address immediate food security concerns but also hold the potential to close significant gaps in countries' balance of payments, enhancing macroeconomic stability and fiscal health. The grand vision extends beyond mere self-sufficiency; Africa, with its vast land and climate resources, aims to become the world's breadbasket and a geopolitical force.[22]

The collaboration between India and Africa extends into multifaceted dimensions, emphasising the importance of keeping international borders open for agricultural trade. India's significant cereal exports, totalling 85 million tonnes over the last three years, play a pivotal role in contributing to global food security. However, the recent curbs on rice and wheat exports could disproportionately impact African nations, indicating the intricate challenges within the global trade landscape.[23]

Further layers of collaboration unfold in addressing climate change-related challenges, with an emphasis on developed countries committing $100 billion for loss and damage mitigation. The World Bank's role in mobilising funds, including from the private sector, adds a financial dimension to the collaborative efforts, aiming to combat poverty, ensure food and nutritional security, and tackle climate change.

India's G20 presidency marks a symbolic yet significant step, including Africa in the G21 and offering an opportunity for collaborative problem-solving. This inclusion recognises shared challenges arising from rapid population growth, persistent poverty, and widespread undernourishment. The proposed comparative analysis between India and Africa seeks to foster South-South learning and collaboration, particularly in sustainable agriculture and food systems.

In the realm of nutritional security, the collaboration advocates for innovative approaches, such as bio-fortification of staple crops. Initiatives by organisations like Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) propose scaling up nutrient-rich staple food crops in both Indian states and African countries. Simultaneously, the importance of education, particularly for women, is underscored as a key factor in reducing undernutrition. Connecting mothers' higher education to a normal BMI index and decreased undernutrition among children highlights the long-term impact of education. Recommendations for promoting schooling and higher education through liberal scholarships for girls reflect a commitment to holistic and sustainable development.[24]

Last, investments in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) initiatives are recognised as having a multiplier effect on nutritional outcomes. Drawing inspiration from India's successful Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, there's potential for shared learning and collaboration between India and Africa to combat high levels of malnutrition. In summary, the collaboration between India and Africa for food and nutrition security is a comprehensive, interconnected effort, addressing trade policies, climate change, education, bio-fortification, and WASH initiatives. The overarching theme is one of mutual learning and collaboration to effectively navigate the complex challenges posed by climate change and ensure sustainable food security for both regions. However, the persistent statistics on hunger in Africa, with nearly 20 per cent of the population facing hunger, underline the urgency and complexity of the food security issue, emphasising the need for sustained, impactful solutions.

India's deepening agricultural ties with Africa have come under scrutiny due to concerns about 'land grabs'—large-scale land acquisitions for export-oriented crops. The Land Matrix Initiative has documented 63 such deals by Indian companies between 2000 and 2019, encompassing over 1.5 million hectares, primarily in Madagascar and Ghana. However, only a small portion of this land is operational, raising questions about implementation challenges and project abandonment. The impact of these acquisitions depends on their purpose. While some are intended for food crops, others target biofuels, energy, and other non-food sectors, potentially reducing land available for local food production. One-third of food-oriented projects prioritise export, exacerbating food security concerns in some countries. Despite potential regional economic benefits,

individual African nations face risks. They may experience decreased food security and hindered local development, especially when projects prioritise export over domestic needs.[25]

To ensure the African land deals contribute to both economic growth and local well-being, India needs a multipronged approach. Stricter regulations requiring transparency and responsible investment must be balanced with respect for sovereignty. Indian companies should prioritise projects aligned with local food security, poverty reduction, and livelihood creation. Collaborative infrastructure development through joint institutions can showcase India's commitment to agriculture and food security. Finally, continuous monitoring of Indian companies' activities ensures their contribution to a positive social impact on host countries. Only by striking this balance can India forge truly mutually beneficial agricultural partnerships with Africa, fostering shared prosperity while respecting local needs and food security.

The Way Ahead

The collaborative endeavours between India and Africa in trade, agriculture, and health present a transformative path toward shared prosperity. The recent milestones achieved, including the African Union's permanent membership during India's G20 presidency, highlight the momentum for constructive engagement. A robust free trade agreement, coupled with strategic collaboration in agriculture, offers a blueprint for leveraging trade ties and fostering innovation. Addressing bottlenecks, creating dedicated institutions and promoting sustainable practices in agriculture can propel both regions into key players on the global stage. Simultaneously, cooperative efforts in health, crucially underscored by recent challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasise the necessity of shared expertise, resilient health infrastructure, and joint research initiatives. By focusing on these pillars, India and Africa not only have the potential to double their global trade share by 2030 but also to champion a narrative of sustainable development, economic resilience, and improved public health for their combined population of 2.8 billion.

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10

India and the Geopolitics of Polar Regions

Bipandeep Sharma

Introduction

The polar regions that include the Arctic and the Antarctic play an important role in regulating global temperatures. Although the Arctic and the Antarctic are located at opposite poles of the earth, have different geographical terrains and are governed by different sets of international regulations, these two regions resemble one another in some ways. As a result of global warming, the annual ice extent in the Arctic and Antarctic is consistently decreasing. The Arctic region is witnessing the opening up of new spaces, places, routes and resource reserves of immense geostrategic and geo-economic importance. Similarly, the Antarctic, due to its pristine environment, location and landscape remains significant. This includes region's importance from the perspectives of undertaking scientific research in outer space with dual use implications; establishment of critical infrastructure; exploitation of rare fisheries in its polar waters; bio-prospecting research and testing of new critical technologies. This complex emerging interplay of '*Science*' and '*Active Geopolitics*' is leading the global states' focus towards the polar regions. On the one hand, the states call for addressing emerging issues of environment and climate change through the active pursuits of their scientific research in these regions, while on the other, are also aiming for their geostrategic and geo-economic domination.

India, which has a long traditional history of polar research, remains

impacted by these emerging geopolitical contestations and power rivalries. This chapter seeks to highlight all major aspects of the Arctic and Antarctic that bear implications for India's national interests. Also, this chapter explores how India, despite these emerging challenges continues to pursue its national interest in these regions.

Arctic Geopolitics: Past to Present

In the classical works of geopolitical thinker Sir Halford John Mackinder, the strategic and geopolitical importance of the Arctic was confined to its natural defence barrier of frozen ice in the north, that made any intrusion almost impossible to the '*pivot area*'.[1] Mackinder in his paper 'The Geographical Pivot of History' argued that the region contained abundant potential for natural resources and the country that controlled these resources would be able to develop a powerful terrestrial hegemony, which will also channelise the means to develop strong maritime power.[2] Though the Arctic region remained subjugated to many internal effects of colonisation in the past that occurred as a result of search for new territories and resource exploitation, the region remained immune to any significant large scale military conflicts.[3]

During the First and the Second World War periods Arctic's strategic importance increased drastically as the strategic thinkers from both East and West started analysing the region's importance from connectivity and wartime strategic perspectives. As a result, the Arctic region witnessed a significant increase in militarisation and critical infrastructural developments. During the Cold War period, the Arctic region became one of the most militarised regions of the world. The assesmenst of the overall extent of the securitisation of the Arctic during the Cold War could be analysed from US Air Force General Henry H Arnold's remarks where he highlighted that:

> 'If there is a third world war, its strategic center will be the North Pole.'[4]

The Arctic witnessed gradual de-escalation in this securitisation threshold post-1987 onwards, when speaking from the Soviet Polar capital of Murmansk, Mikhail Gorbachev the then Soviet Leader, unilaterally made a call for peace in the Arctic through his famous Murmansk speech.[5] Gorbachev's de-securitisation initiative in the Arctic was equally reciprocated by the West and the Arctic from 1987 onwards witnessed

significant de-escalation in region's securitisation. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought further reductions in hard military posturing in the Arctic, where both sides significantly reduced the forward positioning of their troops from remote Arctic bases, restricted advanced naval military activities and significant reductions were made in limiting the nuclear and conventional weapon systems deployed in the region.

The Arctic region re-started becoming the centre of global attention post 2000 onwards.[6] Scientific and academic discourses regarding the opening up of the Arctic as a result of climate change has reignited regional and global states interest in this region. Since then, Arctic has witnessed both competition and cooperation between these states to harness region's emerging geo-economic and geo-strategic prospects. Arctic Council, which is an intergovernmental forum for region's governance, since its formation in 1996, has served as an important organisation to collaborate on 'nonsecurity' matters in the region.[7] The council consists of eight permanent member states, six indigenous people's organisations and 38 observers. It functions via its six working groups on a consensus basis.

Arctic Geopolitics post-Ukraine

As a result of the Ukraine crisis, the security and the entire geopolitical landscape of the Arctic has drastically changed. Arctic seven states' decision to suspend their participation in the working groups of the Council under Russian chairmanship, post Russia's military action in Ukraine has terminated every form of existing cooperation with Russia in the Arctic.[8] Both, Russia's action on Ukraine and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) expansion with Finland and Sweden's accession to the alliance has altered strategic configurations in the Arctic. Finland joining the alliance has increased NATO's direct land border with Russia by 1,340 km. This has led strategic communities in Moscow to recalculate the strategic threat perception of Russia from the combined NATO alliance. This has not only calibrated Russia's strategic response via deployment of more military infrastructures in the North, but also towards the Baltic Sea region. The Arctic region has re-started witnessing increasing accounts of regular large-scale annual military exercises; emphasis on regional states military infrastructural development; increasing incidents of airspace violence and frequent incidents of Global Positioning System (GPS) jamming, to name a few.[9] It is therefore important to highlighted

that the amount of cooperation that existed between the Arctic states in the region, has been significantly lost and military threat perceptions between East and West has significantly increased in the Arctic.

The issues of climate change, human security and socio-economic context, which pose real challenges of existential nature in the Arctic and require cooperation between states, has currently taken a backseat. Instead, active geopolitics and traditional power rivalry has re-emerged in the region. Western efforts to isolate Russia through the expansion of NATO and imposition of economic sanctions, has in fact further strengthened Russia's engagements with China in the Arctic, which is now further seen as a challenge by Western states to their strategic interests in the region.

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Map 10.1: Map showing new NATO land borders with Russia

India in the Arctic

Indian scholar, Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in his book *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* highlights that India's connection with the Arctic dates back to the Vedic age.[10] Tilak through his works of 1903, argues that the original home of the Aryans during the pre-glacial period was the North Pole (Arctic), which they left due to an ice deluge around 8000 BC. He mentioned that post this ice deluge, these Aryan people migrated southwards and traveled towards Europe and India in search of better land settlements. In his book he justifies these connections and routes by presenting different accounts of vedic calendars, avestic passages, vedic chronology, and various vedic hymns along with their detailed interpretation.[11] However, the arguments presented by Tilak has been refuted by Western scholars, historians and even by some Indian scholars and there is a need to re-research these connections from multiple perspectives.

India's modern engagements with the Arctic were established in 1920 when India as a country under the British overseas dominions became a signatory to the Spitsbergen Treaty.[12] India established its physical foothold in the Arctic in 2008 by setting up its first Arctic scientific research station 'Himadri' at Ny-Ålesund, on Svalbard Island of Norway. Scientific research highlights that the melting of Arctic ice has direct linkages to Indian monsoons, that have implications for India's agriculture, food security and overall economy. Therefore, since the establishment of a Himadri station, India has been actively engaged in undertaking scientific studies and extensive research in climate change and related domains in the Arctic.

As the opening up of the region is also opening up other potential challenges and opportunities, India's approach towards the Arctic region has also gradually evolved over time. In order to highlight the country's near and long-term priorities for the Arctic region, India released its first Arctic policy document in March 2022.[13] This policy document rests on six key pillars that outline India's overall approach towards the region. These six key pillars include: Science and Research; Climate and Environment Protection; Economic and Human Development; Transportation and Connectivity; Governance and International Cooperation, and National Capacity Building.

The Science and Research (S&R) section of India's Arctic Policy emphasises that India seeks to enhance and further strengthen its S&R

activities in the Arctic. This includes enhancing the country's S&R facilities and equipment at Himadri station; strengthening scientific cooperation with the scientific communities of all the Arctic states; enhancing India's participation in the working groups of the Arctic Council; acquiring scientific research vessels and promotion of integrated and interdisciplinary research. This section further highlights that India, through its advanced knowledge and expertise in outer space, can provide effective solutions for satellite technologies for enhanced regional navigation, telecommunications, connectivity, search and rescue (SAR) efforts, hydrographic surveys, environmental monitoring and surveillance, etc. in the Arctic that would contribute to the overall development of the region.[14]

The Climate and Environment Protection section of India's policy document highlights India's concerns regarding the emerging issues of global warming and climate change from the Arctic and its linkages with the melting in Indian Himalayan region. India's Arctic policy calls for abiding to the UN Sustainable Development Goals while pursuing its objectives in the region. On the fundamental issues of methane emissions, black carbon, microplastics and other aspects of permafrost melting, India's policy document calls for India's active cooperation and bilateral partnerships with like minded states. In order to further address the issue of climate change and environmental protection, Indian policy document emphaisies that India would actively participate in the related working groups of the Arctic Council.[15]

The Economic and Human Development section of India's Arctic Policy focuses on the various economic opportunities emerging from the region. The policy document asserts that India seeks to engage and benefit from the emerging economic opportunities of the Arctic in a manner that is sustainable for the people of the Arctic and its indigenous communities. It further highlights that India in due course envisions promoting its public and private companies to undertake investments in the development of ports, railways, information communication technology and mining projects in the Arctic. On the human development aspect, an equal emphasis is laid on the role that India can play in building robust lowcost social networks using digital and innovative techniques. The policy document emphasises that India's knowledge and experience of its own indigenous tribes and communities in the Himalayas can be used in the Arctic to address various social and governance issues of Arctic

communities. India's success in pharmacy and knowledge of traditional medicines (Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani) has also been highlighted and the document suggest that India can offer immense opportunities for Arctic communities to benefit from the Indian experience and vice-versa.[16]

Emerging prospects of Transportation and Connectivity from the Arctic have been equally prioritised in India's policy document. This section emphasises that the opening up of the Arctic offers multiple new economic benefits due to new emerging shipping routes (particularly the Northern Sea Route) from Europe to Asia and vice-versa. The documents highlight that as these routes become ice-free, the shipping activity through these would significantly increase. India's capabilities in terms of providing human capital could address the sea-faring needs of the polar ships by planning their voyages over these routes. In this regard, both India and Russia have already signed a mutual agreement through which Indian seafarers would be trained in the Russian Far East region for various polar seafaring operations. This document further highlights that India's capabilities in terms of shipbuilding need to be further harnessed and India needs to develop the required expertise in the construction of iceclass vessels for polar waters. This could strengthen the cooperation between India and the other Arctic states.[17]

The section on Governance and International Cooperation in India's policy document acknowledges India's commitment to the existing international mechanisms of governance in the Arctic. The document highlights that India respects the existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the states in the region and calls for promoting security and stability in the Arctic as per international treaties and covenants. Lastly, in terms of National Capacity Building, India's Arctic Policy document calls for India's self-reliance in developing polar infrastructure to pursue its interests in the region. It calls for promoting Arctic-related courses in Indian universities and developing a pool of Indian scientific and social science scholars and researchers in different Arctic domains of studies.[18]

An overall assessment of ongoing activities in the Arctic from various aspects suggests that India's approach in the Arctic resonates well with its policy documents. It is equally aligned with the country's set national objectives for these regions. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has further exacerbated the geopolitical rift between the Western and Eastern nations. In this backdrop, India, without taking sides, has remained

successful in maintaining and enhancing its bilateral cooperation with all the Arctic states. India has maintained its consistent position of refraining from joining any geopolitical alignments in the Arctic. India has consistently re-emphasised its position of reviving the lost cooperation between states in the Arctic. Restarting dialogue in the working groups of the Arctic Council as per the fundamental principles of the Ottawa Declarations could be the starting point towards this direction. Norway's efforts under its chairship to resume some level of cooperation in the working groups of the council are some positive signs that need to be further expanded and explored further.

The Antarctic Governance

Geographically, the Antarctic is defined as the polar region south of the Antarctic Circle (66°332 49.43 south of the Equator). The 'Antarctic' comprises of the continent of Antarctica, the Kerguelen Plateau and other island territories located on the Antarctic Plate or south of the Antarctic Convergence. It also includes the ice shelves, waters and all the island territories in the Southern Ocean situated south of the 'Antarctic Convergence'.[19] The Antarctic, unlike the Arctic remains dominated by science. Though seven states have made territorial claims over the Antarctic land mass and continental shelf, none of these claims are recognised by other sovereign states. The Antarctic region is considered as 'global commons' dedicated to scientific research. The Antarctic is governed by some of the most credible established mechanisms of governance, which include the Antarctic Treaty (1959), the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (or Madrid Protocol) 1991 ; the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS), 1972 and the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), 1980. Apart from these, all the Antarctic Treaty consultative parties meet annually to discuss various issues related to Antarctic governance through the framework of Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM). The Antarctic Treaty, through its 14 articles, has remained instrumental in keeping the region peaceful and free of any kind of military activity.[20]

The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (Madrid Protocol), has strengthened Antarctic governance by designating Antarctica as a 'natural reserve, devoted to peace and science' and prohibiting all kinds of resource exploitation activities in the region, except

for scientific research.[21] The protocol has further made the Antarctic Treaty a 'legally binding' mechanism. Similarly, the CCAS aims to promote and achieve the protection, scientific study, and rational use of Antarctic seals, and to maintain a satisfactory balance within the ecological system of Antarctica. It further forbids the killing or capture of Antarctic seals except in specific circumstances.[22] Lastly, the CCAMLR through its 33 articles is a comprehensive mechanism that aims to protect Antarctic marine living resources of the area south of 60° South latitude.[23] The Antarctic Treaty along with all these related agreements that regulate Antarctic governance is collectively known as the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS).

India in the Antarctic

Soon after its independence in 1947, India started focusing on developing the country's S&R institutions. Nehru's firm beliefs and strong will for developing the foundational base for India's strong scientific temperament, led to the establishment of many fundamental research institutions, some of which have the most important assets in India's national security.[24] India's Antarctic engagements date back to 1956 when India raised the 'Question of Antarctic' in the United Nations.[25] Indian scholars have argued that Antarctica, under the leadership of Jawaharlal

Map 10.2: Map showing locations of Indian Research Stations and territorial claims of seven states and in the Antarctic

Nehru, was perceived as India's 'Tryst with Destiny' because of Nehru's normative worldview (his support for global efforts for disarmament and his call for non-alignment) and the complex labyrinth of India's domestic and external geopolitical compulsions that confronted India's leadership from 1950 to 1960.[26]

India sent its first Antarctic expedition in 1981–1982 and in 1983, became a signatory to the Antarctic Treaty. India built its first permanent Antarctic station 'Dakshin Gangotri' in 1984. Since then, Indian scientists have been persistent in their efforts to undertake scientific research in the Antarctic. This includes study and research in Atmospheric and Biological Sciences, Earth Science and Glaciology, Environmental Sciences, and research in Human Physiology and Medicine.[27] India's Dakshin Gangotri was abandoned in 1988–1989. Since then it has been submerged under Antarctic ice and the India currently has two fully functional research stations, 'Bharati' and 'Maitri', in Antarctica. In 2024, India also identified a potential site for the construction of the country's new Antarctic base. This would replace India's ageing infrastructure at its Maitri station and would further enhance country's research activities in the region.

It is important to highlight that India in 2022 also formalised the country's first 'Indian Antarctic Act 2022' to regulate the various activities in the Antarctic. This shows India's firm commitment towards the preservation of the Antarctic ecosystem through its own national measures, in addition to the existing international mechanisms. India's long history and its expertise in conducting successful polar scientific research in the Antarctic, was one of the reason that enabled India in achieving an observer status in the 'Arctic Council'.

Emerging Challenges: Science vs Geopolitics

The ATS has remained a credible mechanism in maintaining Antarctic free from any kind of military activity. However, as a result of rising global geopolitical contestations, arguments regarding the future possibilities and probabilities of changing the existing governance mechanisms of ATS, have also started to emerge. The opening up of the region as a result of climate change, its known/unknown estimates of resource potential, the emerging importance of Antarctica from the perspective of telecommunications and its linkages with outer space, the immense potential of Antarctic fisheries and marine resources are some of the crucial elements that have started gaining the international attention. Pursuits of Antarctic

science though presently remain the key fulcrum of states emerging engagements in the region, the dual nature of some of these research activities could not be ruled out.

This could best be understood from some of China's great leap-style developments in the region. As per Western assessments, China's newly constructed fifth Antarctic research station 'Qinling' on Inexpressible Island near the Ross Sea, could allow China to 'collect signals intelligence from Australia and New Zealand' as well as gather 'telemetry data on rockets launching from newly established space facilities in both countries.'[28] Further critical research assessments points that China's Polar research station plays an important role in strengthening China's command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. These assessments suggest that through these systems China aims to strengthen the navigational capabilities of its own independent GPS 'BeiDou'. This in the future would enable China to prepare for the facilitation or interference in precision missile strikes globally. Further, integration of these Chinese systems with its global space-based satellites would strengthen Chinese own capabilities in launching or shielding space-based attacks.[29] China's has refuted all these allegations and has highlighted that China's new Qinling station on Antarctica would 'provide a platform for China to cooperate with other countries in scientific expeditions and promote peace and sustainable development in the region'.[30]

An assessment of these multiple developments and discourses in/about states' emerging activities in the Antarctic, suggests that there remains a significant level of insecurity and element of doubt regarding rival state's growing activities in the Antarctic. The threshold of these insecurities is gradually increasing as geopolitical contestations in other parts of the world are evolving. The politicisation of discussion of the annual ATCM meetings[31] and member states' increasing disagreements on important Antarctic governance issues are some of the visible signs of future complexities that could emerge in the region. The emerging geoeconomic prospects of Antarctic resources (both living and non-living) could drive states for dominance over the Antarctic in the near future.

A Way Forward

Both the Arctic and Antarctic are emerging as potential areas of competition between states. The geopolitical contestations in the Arctic

are significantly rising, whereas cooperation between states still prevails in the Antarctic and the region remains insulated from direct geopolitical contestations as a result of the Antarctic Treaty System. India's engagements in both the Arctic and Antarctic remain primarily focused on understating these regions from a scientific perspectives. In the Arctic region, despite geopolitical challenges, India has maintained its position of refraining from joining any geopolitical alignments. Instated, India is pursuing its national goals as outlined in its Arctic Policy document by enhancing its independent bilateral engagements with all the eight Arctic States in the region.

Similarly, India's outlook for the Antarctic region remains dominant by the pursuits of its scientific research in the region. India's polar scientific research and the country's responsible position in both Polar Regions remain globally recognised and positively acknowledged. In the backdrop of ongoing and emerging geopolitical challenges, there is a need to make India's research in these regions more independent and autonomous. Taking due note of the ongoing and future activities of other regional and global powers in the polar regions, India needs to invest in developing and acquisition of critical independent polar infrastructures. These would make India's ongoing and future research self-reliant in the polar regions.

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SECTION III

Mapping India's Strategic Engagement in the Maritime Domain

11

Navigating India's Strategic Course: Defence Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean Region

Shayesta Nishat Ahmed

The primary objective of India's external engagement in the immediate neighbourhood has been to promote peace and stability, creating a conducive environment for regional development and economic advancement. This is particularly emphasised in India's foreign policy and diplomatic efforts in the IOR and the extended Indo-Pacific. Through initiatives like the Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP), Act East Policy (AEP) and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), India aims to strengthen defence and security collaboration with the neighbouring states in order to maintain peace, security and stability in the region. The imperative to maintain a free, inclusive and open Indo-Pacific region aligns with India's strategic interests, given the dense network of International Shipping Lanes (ISL) traversing the area, including vital Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) crucial for energy imports and trade. The chapter aims to analyse the role of Indian defence diplomacy towards meeting its foreign policy objectives with the aim of projecting the country as the Preferred Security Partner (PSP) in the IOR and its role as a net security provider in the region.

India's NFP stands as a prominent addition to India's diplomatic agenda, aiming to foster robust relations with its immediate neighbouring countries through a consultative, non-reciprocal and results-driven approach. It was introduced during the swearing-in ceremony of the first

Narendra Modi government on 26 May 2014, with invitations extended to heads of state from all SAARC nations. The subsequent inclusion of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) leaders in the 2019 second term swearing-in ceremony underscored the policy's evolution into a core tenet of India's foreign policy strategy.[1]

The countries which are considered under this policy are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, there has been a transition from the previous 'Look East Policy' to the current 'Act East Policy', aiming to actively engage with the broader neighbourhood, which was previously termed Asia-Pacific and is now referred to as the Indo-Pacific. This shift is motivated by the close ties with bordering states in Eastern India and the imperative to enhance connectivity and infrastructure development in the northeastern region of the country.[2]

Former President Pranab Mukherjee highlighted in 2015 that India's South Asian neighbours hold the highest priority in alignment with its NFP, aiming for shared prosperity and security.[3] The Indian government has expressed a commitment to pursue a policy based on three key principles: enhancing connectivity, fostering closer cooperation, and expanding contacts to bolster ties within the region.[4] While delivering the keynote address at Shangri La Dialogue on 1 June 2018, PM Modi espoused the ideals of engagement which guide India's relations with its neighbours and partners. These ideals are rooted in democracy and are broadly governed by the five 'S'- 'Sammaan (Respect); Samvad (Dialogue); Sahyog (Co-operation); Shanti (Peace) and Samridhi (Prosperity)'.[5] This commitment is reflected in India's SAGAR policy, which emphasises fostering economic ties and development in the IOR through collaborative efforts. This vision was underscored at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, where Prime Minister Modi proposed the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).[6]

With a land border of 15106.7 km, and coastline measuring 7,516.6 kms, it is imperative for India to sustain a strong defence force capable of maintaining stability and facilitating the security and development of the entire subcontinent.[7] To strengthen ties with the Global South and counterbalance China's influence, India's recent G20 summit, held during its Presidency from 2022-2023, embraced the motto 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—One Earth One Family One Future.' This phrase aptly

reflects India's vision and approach during its G20 leadership, symbolising a belief in global interconnectedness.

The Indo-Pacific is an integrated theatre that combines the IOR and the Pacific Ocean, and the land masses that surround them. India's understanding of the Indo-Pacific expanse ranges from the coast of East Africa, across the Indian Ocean, to the Western Pacific, including countries like Japan and Australia. The Indo-Pacific region encompasses crucial sea routes connecting the shores of two oceans, serving as a vital strategic and economic zone. Being predominantly maritime in nature, it is inherently linked with maritime security and collaboration.[8]

Despite Russia being a key strategic defence ally of India, India is striving to uphold a delicate equilibrium between its partnership with its Russian and Western alliances, especially given Russia's ongoing special operation in Ukraine. This balancing act with the US and other QUAD partners aims to mitigate China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, which is further strengthened by the close ties between China and Russia.[9] In response to the evolving security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, several major powers have unveiled their Indo-Pacific strategies, positioning India as a favoured security partner in the region. Additionally, there has also been the emergence of newer regional organisations aimed at different causes to engage with the region, such as the QUAD, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), etc.

Recognising the interconnectedness of maritime security, India aims to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbours, aiding in capacity-building through information exchange and capability enhancement, coastal surveillance, and infrastructure development.[10] The IOR, home to over forty littoral states representing more than 40 per cent of the world's population, serves as a conduit for two-thirds of global oil shipments, one-third of bulk cargo, and half of container traffic. Additionally, 90 per cent of India's trade by volume and energy imports, and 70 per cent by value traverse these waters.[11] Therefore, peace and stability in the Indian Ocean is paramount for the economic prosperity and social stability of numerous nations worldwide, including India. The importance of SAGAR becomes evident when aligned with India's other maritime-focused policies, such as the Act East Policy, its role as a 'Net Security Provider (NSP),' and emphasis on the Blue Economy, all of which reflect India's maritime resurgence. SAGAR

Map 11.1: India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific Region

Source: MP-IDSA GIS Lab.

contributes to the effective implementation of all these policies by acting as an enabler to create a positive environment in the IOR.

India's Defence Diplomacy Characterisations

According to Lech Drab, defence diplomacy operates within the context of regional and global state interactions, employing the 'peaceful deployment of military personnel' to proactively prevent conflicts and establish lasting cooperation while promoting transparency in defence matters.[12] Furthermore, it aims to facilitate the pursuit of common international objectives and to influence partner positions. Through ongoing dialogue with partners, defence diplomacy serves as both an objective of state actions and a means to advance specific interests, thereby directly contributing to the strengthening of trust and understanding in international relations.[13]

Cottey and Foster define defence diplomacy as the peaceful utilisation of armed forces and related resources, particularly defence ministries, as tools of foreign and security strategy, including military cooperation and aid.[14] India's defence diplomacy initiatives encompass various activities such as high-level defence-related visits, discussions on security issues and port calls. This includes defence cooperation agreements for exchanges in training, joint exercises, procurement, development, production, exports of defence equipment, and regular participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO).[15] While the specific goals and objectives of nations engaging in military diplomacy or cooperation may differ, the fundamental aim remains consistent: to cultivate an environment of peace and trust through collaborative efforts.

Indian strategic thought towards defence diplomacy and statecraft is not of merely contemporary times, but goes back in its history. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* entails eight *adhikaranas* (books), out of a total 15, which are dedicated to '*avapa*' or its relations with neighbouring states. These eight books mention four *Upayas* through which the aspiring king can exercise his foreign policy for the *Mandala* (comprising of 12 primary kings)—'*sama* (conciliation), *dana* (concession or gift), *danda* (punishment) and *bheda* (dissension) to realise an objective or aim.'[16] These *upayas* are means to facilitate defence diplomacy for the state.

Over the years, the dynamic defence diplomacy initiatives of the country have enabled India to respond optimally to the changing strategic neighbourhood. Furthermore, India has also worked towards defence

agreements and strategic partnerships with around 31 countries, especially India's diplomatic engagement with crucial Indian Ocean island nations with strategic access to the region.[17] While India isn't formally aligned with any major military blocs, it maintains strong strategic ties with many prominent global powers like the US, UK, France and China through strategic partnership arrangements. This enables India to collaborate with major powers on security and defence issues without compromising on its strategic autonomy.

Defence Cooperation in the Region

In the past decade, India has strengthened its diplomatic reach in the IOR through its multi-faceted strategic cooperative endeavours. In this respect, a number of initiatives including institutionalisation of defence dialogues and regular exchange of visits by national leaders, diplomats and military personnel are contributing to the leaps gained in this respect by India. External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar asserted that India's NFP has advocated for non-transactional relationships with its immediate neighbours. Likewise, India continues to engage with the extended neighbourhood involving islands in the Indian Ocean, West Asian countries and nations in South-East Asia at multiple levels of governance.[18]

Currently, though Russia is the largest supplier of military equipment to India, in addition to which, India also enjoys strong military cooperation with the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Singapore, South Africa, Japan and Italy. The 2023 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on Trends in International Arms Transfer for the 2018-2022 period highlights India as the foremost importer of arms, accounting for 11 per cent of global arms imports.[19] However, this trend has spurred a gradual shift away from traditional arms suppliers and a deliberate push towards bolstering India's domestic arms industry.

India's strained relations with its nuclear-armed neighbours, China and Pakistan, notably contribute to its heightened arms imports. Key suppliers to India include Russia, France, and the United States, with France emerging as the second-largest arms exporter to India after Russia. Against the backdrop of the Ukrainian conflict, the United States has seen a rise in its global arms exports, contrasting with a decline in the Russian share. Challenges such as higher costs due to lack of economies of scale compared to international producers and delays in domestic procurement

due to the need for new technical capabilities also exist. Looking ahead, India aims to enhance its indigenous defence capabilities and decrease reliance on imported weaponry. On these lines, India has 'extended 308 lines of credit aggregating to $32.02 billion to partner countries over the years' under its development assistance programme.[20]

India has worked towards capacity enhancement and capability building in the immediate neighbourhood and the region by extending substantial logistical support to boost India's military strength and global ties, ultimately enhancing its defence stance.[21] This was facilitated through the supply of "...military hardware/infrastructure, Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems (CSRS), etc. The supply of military hardware includes military assets/platforms (land warfare systems, military aircraft, and warships) and military equipment (indigenous weapons and sensors), which are the primary requirements for military capacity building of partner countries."[22]

The '*Make in India*' campaign seeks to attain self-sufficiency in defence manufacturing and diminish reliance on imports. Launched in 2014, it strives to foster domestic production and technological progress within the defence domain.[23] In addition to bolstering its own defence industry, India has expanded its exports of various defence assets and gear to other nations in recent times. This shift marks a significant change in the export dynamics of defence equipment, with India now supplying such equipment to more than 85 countries, showcasing its enhanced prowess in research, design, and development of defence technology to the global community.[24]

In this regard, the Draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) introduced in August 2020 had set a target of INR 35,000 crore (US $5 billion) export in defence goods and services with the INR 1.75 lakh crore (US $25 billion) turnover in defence manufacturing till 2025.[25] India presently exports a diverse array of significant platforms "...including aircraft like the Dornier-228, artillery guns, Brahmos Missiles, PINAKA rockets and launchers, radars, simulators, armoured vehicles, etc. The global demand for India's indigenous products, such as the LCA-Tejas, Light Combat Helicopters (LCH), Aircraft Carriers, and MRO activities."[26]

India's defence cooperation with Friendly Foreign Countries (FFCs) has expanded notably in recent years, marked by high-level visits, joint military exercises, and training initiatives. Moreover, India's arms exports

have become a crucial aspect of this collaboration, aiding FFCs in meeting their defence and security requirements. Noteworthy among these exports are those to Mauritius, accounting for 6.6 per cent of India's arms exports from 2017 to 2021, followed by Mozambique at 5 per cent and Seychelles at 2.3 per cent.[27] The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) recently secured a contract with Mauritius to export the ALH Mark III, joining an array of exports including Dornier aircraft, Chetak helicopters, Offshore Patrol Vessels, Fast Attack Craft, Fast Interceptor Boats, and Coastal Surveillance Systems to various FFCs.[28] Additionally, India has extended a Line of Credit (LOC) worth $14 billion to 42 African Union countries, supporting their defence capacities.

Initiatives like the India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave and joint military exercises underscore India's commitment to strengthening defence ties further.[29] In Southeast Asia, Myanmar stands as a significant recipient of India's arms exports, with major deals including the BrahMos Shore Based Anti-Ship Missile System to the Philippines.[30] These endeavours align with India's broader geopolitical strategies, including countering regional assertiveness, promoting responsible defence exports, and enhancing Indo-Pacific stability. With growing interest from countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the US, India's defence exports are poised for substantial expansion, aligning with its vision of becoming a global defence industry leader under the 'Make in India, Make for the World' initiative.[31]

As India's capabilities and interests expand, Defence Attachés (DAs) have become vital for military interactions abroad and India has increased their numbers to reflect its military and foreign engagement priorities. Expanding the number of military missions globally and broadening the role of attachés beyond procurement functions better aligns with India's evolving interests.[32] Additionally, posting attachés, aiming for a mix of career officers and specialists with regional expertise, could be optimum for their purpose as a symbiotic partnership between the defence industry and diplomacy is crucial for protecting India's interests and enhancing its global influence.[33]

Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh emphasised the pivotal role of DAs as the link between India and friendly foreign countries for fostering mutual defence cooperation. He urged them to actively promote India's defence production capabilities, particularly under the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* initiative, and to familiarise themselves with the technological

advancements occurring in both the public and private sectors of Indian defence production. This would enable them to effectively showcase and advocate for these capabilities in the countries where they are accredited. These remarks were made during the inaugural address at the two-day fourth DAs Conference held in New Delhi on 13 October 2022.[34]

Defence Collaborations with India's Neighbourhood and Friendly Foreign Countries

South Asia

In 2016, India had given four MI-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan and supported the maintenance of the Afghan Air Force in collaboration with Russia, apart from providing training to a large number of personnel in Indian military institutions.[35] In the context of Bangladesh, there has been a consistent expansion of defence collaboration between the two nations, propelled by mutual security concerns, historical connections and economic objectives. This has been evidenced by frequent high-level engagements such as regular meetings and dialogues, including annual discussions at the Defence Secretary and Army Chief levels.[36]

India has also been actively involved in training Bangladeshi military personnel across various domains, encompassing counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism through the Joint Working Group (JWG), cyber security, and peacekeeping operations.[37] Moreover in 2018, India offered a $500 million LoC to Bangladesh for the procurement of defence equipment such as patrol boats, communication systems, and radars, indicating a growing partnership in defence manufacturing as well.[38] The Bangladesh Army has greenlit the acquisition of three items under the LoC scheme. These include five Bridge Layer Tanks (BLT-72) valued at around $10 million, seven portable steel bridges (Bailey) costing approximately $2.2 million, and 11 Mine Protective Vehicles from the Tata Group priced at roughly $2.2 million.[39] Additionally, the Bangladesh Navy has proposed the purchase of a logistics ship, floating dock, oil tanker, and an ocean-going tug.

Indian military institutions provide training and equipment to Nepali Army personnel, improving their skills across different areas. The 'Surya Kiran' exercise, held biennially, enhances coordination and interoperability between the two armies.[40] Additionally, both nations work together in disaster relief efforts, swiftly providing aid during earthquakes, floods,

and other emergencies. The 15th India-Nepal Bilateral Consultative Group on Security Issues (BCGSI) meeting on 5 October 2023 discussed enhancing cooperation in defence supplies, training, and joint exercises.[41]

In the case of Bhutan, an Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) is permanently stationed in Bhutan, with the primary responsibility of training the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and nurturing strong bilateral relations.[42] Indian Army units frequently engage in joint operational deployments with the RBA and exchange intelligence. India extends significant military assistance to Bhutan, encompassing provision of equipment, infrastructure development and maintenance support. The Indian Air Force's Eastern Air Command is responsible for Bhutan's air defence, demonstrating a high level of trust and dependence.[43] Training initiatives for RBA personnel span various areas such as leadership, logistics and communication. In the case of Myanmar, although India provides military support and collaborates on security, it also faces international pressure for arms sales to Myanmar's government.[44] India must navigate this while balancing China's regional influence and supporting democratic ideals within Myanmar. Recent developments suggest continued engagement despite the coup.[45]

In the context of Sri Lanka, there is active engagement at high levels, which includes regular meetings and dialogues such as the Annual Defence Dialogue involving Defence Secretaries, talks at the Army Chief level, and frequent interactions among various military officials. Joint Exercises and Training involve collaborative military exercises like 'Mitra Shakti' (Army) and 'SLINEX' (Navy), focusing on counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and maritime security. India also provides training programmes covering diverse areas such as counter-terrorism, cyber security, and peacekeeping for Sri Lankan personnel. Under the aegis of its NFP, India has extended 'a US$ 150 million Defence LoC to the Government of Sri Lanka' for procuring defence equipment like patrol boats, communication systems, and Dornier surveillance aircraft.[46]

Maritime Security Cooperation involves joint patrols and information sharing crucial for countering piracy, transnational crimes, and illegal migration in the IOR. Sri Lanka participates in initiatives like the Information Fusion Centre-IOR (IFC-IOR) to enhance maritime domain awareness (MDA). The Seventh Annual Defence Dialogue in February 2023[47], where both sides agreed to increase the complexity of joint exercises and enhance training cooperation, and the India-Sri Lanka Defence

Seminar Cum Exhibition in June 2023, where India showcased its defence capabilities in Sri Lanka through exploring potential partnerships, indicate ongoing efforts to deepen cooperation.[48] Additionally, both countries collaborate on disaster management and counter-terrorism through initiatives like trilateral maritime security cooperation with Maldives, which is the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC).

India and the Maldives maintain a strong and enduring strategic partnership, with defence collaboration standing as a cornerstone of their relationship. Since 1988, India has actively engaged in training and capacity building for the Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF).[49] Key areas of defence cooperation include counter-terrorism, maritime security, and disaster management. Indian military academies provide training programmes, and Indian instructors are deployed to the Maldives for onsite training sessions. Regular joint exercises such as Ekuverin, Dosti, Ekatha, and Operation Shield are conducted to enhance interoperability and address mutual security concerns. India has provided patrol boats, communication equipment, and various other military hardware to the MNDF, with ongoing collaboration in coastal surveillance radar systems and defence technology.[50]

In terms of maritime security, joint patrols and information sharing play pivotal roles in combating piracy, drug trafficking, and IUU fishing in the IOR.[51] India extends crucial assistance during natural disasters, including humanitarian aid and rescue operations, while also cooperating in building Maldivian capabilities for disaster preparedness and response. The Fourth Defence Cooperation Dialogue (DCD) in March 2023, reaffirmed the commitment to bolstering cooperation.[52] Additionally, an MoU on disaster management was signed between the two nations in August 2022. India is aiding in the modernisation of the Maldivian Coast Guard by supplying additional patrol boats.

However, challenges exist in delicately balancing Maldivian neutrality with its security requirements and navigating China's growing influence in the region.[53] There was a flare up when immediately after the election of Mohamed Muizzu as the current President of Maldives, he pushed for an 'India Out' campaign by asking 88 defence officials operating the Dornier aircraft gifted by India and other HADR platforms, to withdraw from the country. In response India had removed its military officials from the island country by 10 May 2024.[54] Notwithstanding this, India has allocated INR 600 crore foreign aid for developmental purposes in

the Interim Budget document, which was released on 1 February 2024.[55] Furthermore, India had also exported essential commodities for the 2024-25 financial year, as a sign of upholding its commitment towards the bilateral friendship between the two countries.[56]

India and Seychelles enjoy a close and long-standing partnership in defence cooperation, driven by their shared strategic interests in the IOR. India deploys personnel to assist with training and development of the Seychelles People's Defence Forces (SPDF), and training programmes are offered under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scheme.[57] Additionally, India has provided various military equipment, including patrol vessels, Dornier aircrafts and Chetak helicopters to the SPDF. In 2014, India transferred the INS Tarasa patrol vessel to the Seychelles Coast Guard. Regular joint exercises like '*Coastal Vigilance*' and '*Varuna*' focus on maritime security, search and rescue, and anti-piracy, with India regularly deploying warships and aircraft to patrol the Seychelles' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Additionally, to enhance collaboration in maritime safety and security information sharing, the IFC-IOR entered into an MoU on 21 February 2023 with the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) located in Seychelles.[58]

Southeast Asia

In a bid to counter the presence of China is the South China Sea, India has deepened its relations with its south-east Asian neighbours involving various activities on bilateral and multilateral levels. India has established significant partnerships with several Southeast Asian nations including Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. These partnerships involve a range of activities aimed at enhancing regional security and cooperation. Joint exercises such as Malabar (with the Australia, US and Japan), SIMBEX (with Singapore), and VINBAX (with Vietnam) focus on maritime security, HADR operations and counter-terrorism efforts. Defence dialogues, including high-level talks between defence ministers and strategic dialogues, address regional security concerns. India also exports defence equipment such as warships, missiles, and radars to some Southeast Asian countries.

In terms of multilateral cooperation, India engages with Southeast Asian nations through forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). Furthermore, Prime Minister Modi has maintained that India's

engagement with ASEAN is not merely strategic but also rooted in shared values, mutual respect, and a common vision for regional prosperity and security.[59] There is also collaboration on maritime security through coordinated patrols and information sharing to counter piracy and IUU fishing, as well as cooperation in cyber security through capacity building and information sharing to address cyber threats. The motivations behind these engagements are driven by shared security concerns such as counter-terrorism, maritime security, piracy, and other non-traditional threats, as well as the need to balance China's growing influence in the region and promote economic interests by fostering trade and investment ties.

However, there are challenges to navigate, including varying levels of engagement with each Southeast Asian country, competition with other major powers like the US and China and internal capacity limitations within some Southeast Asian nations that may hinder extensive defence cooperation efforts. Recent developments include the elevation of India-ASEAN ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2022, India's participation in regional defence exhibitions to showcase defence capabilities, and India supplying defence equipment in the region.[60] These developments signify ongoing efforts to strengthen ties and enhance cooperation in the region.

West Asia

In recent years, India and West Asia including the Gulf region, have been forging a substantial defence cooperation framework, driven by shared security concerns such as countering terrorism, ensuring maritime security, and addressing non-state actors. Additionally, economic interests play a pivotal role, with West Asia serving as a crucial energy source for India while India in-turn offers a growing market for West Asian economies. The collaboration between India and West Asia encompasses various key aspects. Regular joint military exercises like 'Al Nagah' with Oman and 'Exercise Cyclone' with Egypt emphasises interoperability, maritime security, and counter-terrorism efforts. India's emergence as a significant arms exporter is evident through major deals with countries like Israel (Barak missiles) and Saudi Arabia (coastal defence systems). Regional variations in cooperation are invariably observed.

India shares strong partnerships with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries focusing on maritime security, defence equipment trade, and joint exercises.[61] Notably, India's robust strategic partnership with Israel

emphasises advanced defence technologies, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism cooperation.[62] While cooperation with Iran remains limited due to contrasting geopolitical positions, dialogue avenues remain open. Challenges and opportunities abound in this evolving landscape. India must navigate complex regional alliances with diplomatic finesse, while balancing concerns related to technology transfer and export controls. Both India and West Asia seek to counter China's growing influence in the region, presenting opportunities for closer cooperation. Recent developments include India's participation in Combined Maritime Forces-Bahrain (CMF-B) in 2022, highlighting its commitment to regional maritime security.[63] The I2U2 grouping (India, Israel, UAE, US) explores potential defence and technology collaborations, while India's expanding defence exports to West Asia are expected to strengthen economic and strategic ties.

Africa

The India-Africa defence cooperation has become a significant element of their broader partnership, propelled by historical connections, mutual security interests, and economic motivations. This collaboration comprises several key components. First, India serves as a major defence exporter to Africa, supplying dependable and cost-effective military equipment such as armoured vehicles, patrol boats, and helicopters with prominent importers including Seychelles, Mauritius, and Mozambique.[64] Second, India provides extensive training programmes for African military personnel, covering areas like counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, and maritime security, with institutions like the Indian Military Academy training African officers. Regular joint exercises like the 'AFINDEX' enhance interoperability and knowledge sharing, while collaborative missions like the trilateral IMT TRILAT with Mozambique and Tanzania showcase combined maritime operations.[65]

Moreover, India aims to empower African nations through knowledge transfer and joint ventures in defence manufacturing, including satellite technology and cybersecurity expertise sharing. The Indian Navy actively partners with African nations to combat piracy, illegal fishing, and other maritime threats through information sharing, joint patrols, and coordinated surveillance missions. Recent developments include the India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) and the regular defence and Aero exhibitions by India, which underscore the importance of strengthening

defence ties and expanding professional military education training slots for African countries. Additionally, India's growing cooperation with France in African waters enhances joint surveillance and anti-piracy operations, with the IOR remaining a key focus area for maritime security cooperation.[66]

Military-to-Military Exercises

The participation in bilateral military exercises by two nations typically reflects a degree of comfort, trust, and confidence both militarily and politically. These exercises usually involve similar components of two or more armed forces and may vary in complexity based on factors such as equipment and procedural similarities, communication protocols, compatibility levels, and duration of engagement. Such bilateral or multilateral exercises play a crucial role in enhancing interoperability between forces, facilitating joint responses to both traditional and non-traditional threats in the future. Bilateral exercises can range from basic activities like formation sailing of ships to more complex manoeuvres involving live weapon firing. Among maritime exercises, the most fundamental are passage exercises (PASSEX), which involves basic manoeuvres at sea with minimal advance planning. At the land component level, basic exercises typically involve platoon-level activities, while for the air force, exercises may include transport and rotary wing heavy lift components at a fundamental level.

Table 11.1: India Bilateral Military Exercises

Country	*Army*	*Air Force*	*Navy*
Bangladesh	Sampriti		Bongo Sagar; IN-BN CORPAT
Sri Lanka	Mitra Shakthi		Slinex
Myanmar	Imbex		Inmex; IMCOR; IN-MB BILAT
Maldives	Ekuverin		Ekatha
Nepal	Surya Kiran		Slinex
Malaysia	Harimau Shakhti		
Seychelles	LA'mitye		
Singapore	Bold Kurukshetra; Agni Warrior	Joint Training; Sindex	Simbex
Thailand	Maitree	SIAM BHarat	Ex-Ayutthaya; Indo-Thai CORPAT

Country	*Army*	*Air Force*	*Navy*
Indonesia	Garuda Shathi		Samudra Shakti; IND-INDO CORPAT; Ind-INDO BILAT
Philippines			Maritime Partnership Exercise
Vietnam	Vinbax		IN-VPN BILAT; Sahyog HOP TAC (Coast Guard)
Japan	Dharma Guardian (Joint Exercise)	Shinyuu Maitri	JIMEX; Sahyog-Kaijin (Coast Guard)
South Korea			Sahyog Hyeobeyog (Coast Guard)
Egypt	Exercise Cyclone		Maritime Partnership Exercise
UAE	Desert Eagle	Desert Eagle	Gulf Star; IN UAE BILAT; Zayed Talwar
Oman	Al Nagah	Eastern Bridge	Naseem Al Bahar
Qatar			Zaire Al Bahr
Saudi Arabia	Sada Tanseeq		Al Mohed Al Hind
Russia	Exercise Vostok; Indra		Indra (Tri Service); Aviaindra Indra
Australia	Austrahind		Ausindex; Kakadu
France	Shakti	Garuda	Varuna
United States	Vajra Prahar; Yudh Abhyas; Cope India	Red Flag (Joint Exercise)	Tiger Triumph (Tri Service)
United Kingdom	Ajeya Warrior	Indradhanush	Konkan Shakti

Source: Media Reports.

Table 11.2: Multilateral/Combined Exercises

Name of Exercise	*Participants*	*Nature of Exercise*
Milan	50 countries	Multinational Naval Exercise
AFINDEX	25 States	Army
Malabar	India, US, Japan, Australia	QUAD
ADMM Plus Exercises	ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners	To strengthen security and defence cooperation
Ex Dosti	India, Maldives, Sri Lanka	Coast Guard
IBSAMAR	India, Brazil, South Africa	Navy
Blue Flag	Air Exercise by Israeli Air Force (IAF)	To Expand international cooperation
COBRA GOLD	Thai-US led	Indo-Pacific military exercises
Samvedna	Multistate	HADR Air exercise
MILEX	BIMSTEC states	Field Training Exercise

Country	*Army*	*Air Force*	*Navy*
SITMEX		Singapore, Thailand, India	
IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX)		IONS 25 member states	To enhance interoperability in HADR operations among member navies
International Maritime Exercise/Cutlass Express 2023 (IMX/CE-23)		India, Bahrain, Japan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and USA	Enhance maritime security and safe sea lanes for maritime commerce
RIMPAC		Hosted by US Navy Indo-Pacific Command	Biennial multilateral Naval Exercises, led by US
Pitch Black		Multistate	Air Force
Ex Desert Flag		Multilateral	Air Exercise
Exercise Bright Star		Egypt+US and 34 States	Biennial combined and joint military exercises
Sea Dragon		India, Australia, Canada, the United States, South Korea, and Japan	Coordinated anti-submarine warfare exercise
Panex-21		BIMSTEC	HADR Exercise

Source: Media Reports

Apart from engaging in military cooperation and aid, India has actively participated in providing HADR support to its neighbouring countries and regional partners. This involvement includes initiatives like Operation Karuna, conducted under Mission SAGAR, where India supplied HADR materials to Myanmar following the devastation caused by Severe Cyclonic Storm Mocha in May 2023. Notably, Indian naval vessels were deployed to Yangon, Myanmar, for the transhipment of these materials. India has demonstrated its reliability as a first responder in the region, exemplified by instances such as Operation Cactus in the Maldives in 1988 and humanitarian assistance efforts after the 2004 tsunami. Recent operations like Operation Rahat in Yemen (2015), Operation Ganga in Ukraine (2022) and Operation Kaveri in South Sudan (2023) further underscore India's commitment to providing aid in times of crisis.[67] Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian armed forces extended support by delivering oxygen, medical equipment and other assistance to various countries, showcasing the role of defence diplomacy in humanitarian efforts.

The Indian Navy, while not specifically tailored for HADR, leverages its inherent strengths such as mobility, adaptability, scalability and interoperability to effectively respond to such crises. However, challenges

like inadequate information sharing and incomplete situational awareness hinder efficient collaboration in HADR operations. In response, the Indian Navy established the IFC-IOR to facilitate better coordination and information exchange.[68] By hosting liaison officers from partner countries, the IFC-IOR aims to improve connectivity and enable swifter analysis of information, ensuring a more cohesive and timely response to HADR situations. Additionally, the Indian military has demonstrated excellence in UN Peacekeeping Missions, having deployed approximately 195,000 troops across 49 missions, making India the largest contributor globally, with 168 peacekeepers sacrificing their lives in various regions, showcasing India's significant role in promoting peace and stability worldwide, currently ranking as the second-largest troop contributor.[69]

The contributions made by the Indian Navy's Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) formulated to provide a forum for the navies of the littoral states to work towards interoperability to meet security and maritime-related challenges is noteworthy.[70] The IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX) seeks to bolster interoperability in HADR operations among member navies and enhance regional cooperation.[71]

The Way Ahead

In conclusion, India's dynamic approach to defence diplomacy underscores its emergence as a pivotal player on the global stage. Through initiatives such as SAGAR, collaborations with FFCs, and the '*Make in India*' campaign, India is not only enhancing its own security but also contributing to regional stability and asserting its influence internationally. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi came back to office for a third term as the leader of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on 4 June 2024, the leaders from seven countries from its neighbourhood and IOR attended the swearing-in ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi on 9 June 2024. The leaders attending the swearing in of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet included Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe; Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu; Seychelles Vice-President Ahmed Afif; Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina; Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay.[72]

The Prime Minister reiterated India's dedication to its Neighbourhood First policy and SAGAR Vision, emphasising that during his third term, India will strive for regional peace, progress, and prosperity in

collaboration with neighbouring countries, while aiming for a Viksit Bharat by 2047. There has been greater emphasis placed on advocating for stronger people-to-people connections and regional connectivity, and also pledged to amplify the Global South's voice on the international stage.[73] This has strengthened long-standing ties with India's immediate neighbours and counterbalanced Chinese strategic investments, which could threaten India's national security and regional interests. Additionally, it reaffirms India's commitment to advancing its projects and investments in the region, particularly with the Maldives and Sri Lanka.[74]

Yet, as India navigates complex geopolitical challenges and strives for self-sufficiency, it must tread carefully, balancing strategic partnerships with the imperative of maintaining autonomy. The journey ahead will demand adept diplomacy, robust defence capabilities and a nuanced understanding of regional dynamics. As India continues to chart its course, its commitment to shaping the global security landscape remains steadfast, promising a future defined by resilience, innovation, and continued strategic foresight.

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12

India's Relations with the Indo-Pacific Islands

Niranjan Chandrashekhar Oak

Introduction

Under India's presidency of G20, New Delhi gave voice to the Global South, including the Indo-Pacific Island Nations. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, 2023, highlighted concerns of small island states vis-à-vis Green Development, Sustainable Development, Health and Disaster Risk Reduction.[1] Before that, in September 2021, India launched the 'Infrastructure for the Resilient Island States' (IRIS) initiative for small islands' infrastructure development at the 26th meeting of the 'Conference of the Parties' (COP26) to the 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change' (UNFCCC) Summit in Glasgow. The IRIS initiative is a part of the 'Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure' (CDRI), launched by Indian Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi at the United Nations (UN) Climate Action Summit 2019 held in New York City, USA, on 23 September 2019. Since 2015, India's policy towards the 'Indian Ocean Region' (IOR) Island States has been guided by the 'Security and Growth for All' (SAGAR) vision. New Delhi also became an observer in the Indian Ocean Commission in 2020. On the Pacific front, India developed an institutional relationship with the Pacific Islands through the 'Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation' (FIPIC), which was constituted in 2014. Moreover, New Delhi is also a part of initiatives directed to help small Island Nations under the rubric of the Quad.

Against this backdrop, this chapter examines how India deals with

the Indo-Pacific Island Nations. The chapter looks at India's initiatives in the multilateral domain under the auspices of the UN in detail. It also analyses initiatives taken by India and other members of the minilateral groupings like the Quad and the G20. On the bilateral front, the chapter examines India's relations with the IOR Islands through the prism of Neighbourhood First and SAGAR policies. As for the Pacific Islands, it probes various initiatives taken under the banner of the FIPIC. Finally, it concludes that India's approach towards the islands in the Indo-Pacific is a blend of the normative and interest-based diplomacy.

Issues Staring at the Indo-Pacific Island Nations

India's Indo-Pacific vision stretches from the African East coast to the American West coast. It is a vast oceanic continuum encompassing countries of the IOR and the Pacific Ocean. There are two clear groups of Island Nations in the Indo-Pacific: the islands in the IOR and the Pacific Islands. The IOR islands include the Maldives and Sri Lanka, the Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros, Madagascar, Reunion and Mayotte and the Pacific Islands include islands that are a part of FIPIC: 'Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.'* Out of these countries, Reunion and Mayotte are administered by France. Cook Island is in free association with New Zealand. The Compacts of Free Association governs the relationship of three Pacific Islands, namely, the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, with the United States (US).

While the non-Island Nations look at the Island States from a geopolitical perspective, the latter perceive threats mainly arising out of non-traditional security challenges. Climate change poses the biggest threat to the very survival of the Island Nations. According to the 'United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States', 'Small Island Developing States' (SIDS) are vulnerable to climate change impact, and the sea-level rise poses an existential threat to some of the islands and its communities.[2] A study of climate change revealed that the temperature of the Indian Ocean is likely to rise 1.7°C-3.8°C per century by 2100 from the current 1.2°C from 1950-2020.

* For this study, we are restricting the islands to the ones which are part of the FIPIC, though the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) has 18 members.

According to the 'National Aeronautics and Space Administration' (NASA) Ocean Warming tracker, the Ocean is where 90 per cent of global warming occurs, ultimately leading to significant sea level rise.[3] Rising sea levels threaten the existence of some of the small islands with the possibility of them being submerged. To drive the point home, Maldivian President Mohammed Nashid, in 2009, convened an underwater cabinet meeting.[4] It highlighted the threat of global warming to the world's lowest-lying island nation. As part of the COP28, a High-Level Event for SIDS also served as a 'reminder of the urgency of climate action' and called for immediate and bold steps to protect SIDS.[5]

Climate change also causes the destruction of biodiversity through the death of coral reefs, which threaten marine ecology. It affects the livelihood activities of the island inhabitants who are mainly dependent on fishing. It also increases the frequency and severity of natural calamities, including droughts, famines, and cyclones, among others. The Mauritian Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, Kavydass Ramano, counted climate change and disasters as one of Mauritius's most pressing environmental issues. He stated that Mauritius has faced 'episodes of prolonged droughts, flash floods and cyclones with high intensities comparable to Category-5 hurricanes' in recent years.[6] The 'Pacific Island Forum' (PIF) has gone a step further in addressing the issue of climate change collectively. It decided to approach the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to provide an advisory opinion on the obligations of states under international law to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse impacts of climate change.[7]

Apart from climate change, the small population and remote geography make life challenging for the small islands. They depend on air or sea transport to move people and goods. The more isolated the island is, the more the transportation expenses.[8] Distance becomes a curse during medical emergencies. The sparse population also limits the islands' ability to effectively govern their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) accords the Island States with an exclusive right to exploit natural resources in the area extending up to 200 nautical miles from the country's land coast. However, the lack of human resources leads to foreign countries indulging in 'illegal, unreported and unregulated' (IUU) fishing activities in the EEZs with the help of their distant water fishing fleets.[9]

Another area where islands covet support from the international community is capacity building. The size of an island limits the industrialisation process in these nations. As a result, most of these countries depend upon primary sector economic activities such as agriculture, fishing and so on. Due to the lack of technical knowledge, limited capability to undertake academic research and lack of access to the latest technology, among others, Island Nations need assistance in capacity building.[10] COVID-19 has added to the problems faced by Island Nations by adversely impacting the tourism sector, thus directly impacting their economies as many depend on tourism to generate revenue. Tourism contributes more than 50 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of countries like Seychelles and the Maldives.[11] Many Pacific Islands face economic challenges due to slowing growth.[12] Thus, the Indo-Pacific Islands face multiple problems, which are of a non-traditional nature. India has tried to resolve these concerns of the Island nations through multilateral and bilateral initiatives. India's actions to provide public goods based on the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) have enabled it to emerge as a credible power.[13]

India's Multilateral Initiatives for Indo-Pacific Islands

Through the United Nations

India launched the International Solar Alliance (ISA) at COP21 to the UNFCCC in Paris in 2015, along with France with the aim of having universal access to sustainable energy through clean, low-carbon and renewable sources, especially for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the SIDS.[14] The ISA strives to get an investment of US $1000 billion in solar energy solutions by 2030, thus installing about 1,000 GW of solar energy capacity with an aim to mitigate emissions equivalent to 1,000 million tonnes of CO_2 every year.[15] The ISA runs demonstrative projects to technically and financially support LDCs and SIDS in areas such as health and agriculture, among others.[16] The ISA has executed such projects in eight countries including Comoros and Kiribati.[17] Apart from that, during the sixth assembly of the ISA in New Delhi in October 2023, Indian Union Minister for Power and New and Renewable Energy R.K. Singh inaugurated four projects bringing solar energy to Fiji, Seychelles, Kiribati and Malawi,[18] out of which the former three are Island Countries. India is planning to expand the ISA Solar Technology Application Resource Centre

(STARC), which is a capacity-building and institutional strengthening initiative in the member nations, to several Pacific Island Countries.[19]

PM Modi launched the CDRI at the UN Secretary General's Climate Action Summit in New York in September 2019. CDRI is a global partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, academic and knowledge institutions[20] with the aim of building a resilient infrastructure in the light of extreme weather events. The Executive Committee, which manages the CDRI, has a mandatory representation from small Island Countries, among others. The CDRI, headquartered in New Delhi, represents India's leadership in climate change and disaster resilience matters.[21] In 2022, the UN recognised CDRI as an international organisation. The World Bank and the Green Climate Fund, under the framework of the UNFCCC, extended support for CDRI. Fiji and Sri Lanka were the only Island Nations among the 12 founding members of CDRI.[22] However, currently, several Island Countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, Madagascar, the Maldives, Nauru, Samoa, and Tonga, have joined the coalition apart from other new members, taking the total strength to 39.[23] The CDRI has resilient programmes in the power, transport, telecommunication, urban resilience, and health sectors to insulate them from the vagaries of climate change.[24] The CDRI has also come up with a US$50 million 'multi-partner trust fund called 'Infrastructure Resilience Accelerator Fund' (IRAF) to support global action on disaster resilient infrastructure, which was launched in November 2022 at the India Pavilion at COP27, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.'[25] These sectors are extremely important for small islands.

The CDRI runs four strategic initiatives—the Global Infrastructure Resilience Report (GIRR), Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (DRI) Connect, the International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (ICDRI) and the IRIS. Out of these initiatives, IRIS exclusively focuses on the small islands. PM Modi launched the IRIS initiative at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow in November 2021, which was witnessed by Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Mauritius, Australia, Jamaica, and Fiji. IRIS aims 'to achieve sustainable development through a systemic approach to promote resilient, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure in SIDS.'[26] The initiative endeavours to give SIDS technical support regarding resilient and sustainable infrastructure. It takes forward objectives set by the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and delivers on the

three outcomes—'improved resilience of SIDS infrastructure to climate change and disaster risks, strengthened knowledge and partnerships for integrating resilience in SIDS infrastructure, and gender equality and disability inclusion promoted through resilient SIDS infrastructure.'[27] Its stakeholders include a wide mix of countries across the globe, including the Caribbean, Pacific, African, and Asian Island Countries and regional organisations such as the 'Caribbean Community' (CARICOM), 'Indian Ocean Rim Association' (IORA), and 'Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat' (PIFS) to name a few.[28]

PM Modi announced at the launch of the IRIS that the 'Indian Space Research Organisation' (ISRO) would 'build a special data window for SIDS which would facilitate them to receive timely information about cyclones, coral-reef monitoring, coast-line monitoring, etc through satellite.'[29] The then Jamaican PM Andrew Holness thanked India and said, "the initiative rightly focuses attention on SIDS as we are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Jamaica sees capital investment as a tool for economic enhancement and also as a tool for climate proofing. It is in this context that we welcome this much needed initiative that reflects our own thinking around the pivotal role played by infrastructure in building resilience."[30] Mauritian PM Pravind Kumar Jugnauth said, "Mauritius is proud to associate itself with the launch of IRIS, a SIDS specific initiative that will undoubtedly help this group of countries to become more resilient, promote inclusive infrastructure and ultimately achieve the UN SDGs."[31] Fijian PM Frank Bainimarama also welcomed and thanked India for the initiative.[32]

Speaking at a session on 'Accelerating Resilient Infrastructure in Small Island Developing States', which was held at the UNFCCC Pavilion on the sidelines of 'COP27' in 2022, Indian Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav said India was trying to bring to life its belief of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) through the IRIS.[33] India also supported an '"Early Warnings for All" Action Plan unveiled at the COP27 by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, building a global early warning system for climate change-induced extreme weather events.'[34] According to the latest CDRI Annual Report 2022-2023, IRIS First Call for Proposals at COP27, 2022, which was launched to empower SIDS government agencies with technical know-how regarding infrastructure resilience, received 50 expressions of interest from 28 SIDS.[35]

India's G20 Presidency

India used its G20 presidency in 2023 to work for the 'Least Developed Countries' (LDC) and SIDS in the area of disaster risk reduction. India formed the 'Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group' (DRRWG) with the mandate of making countries disaster risk resilient through knowledge sharing and taking care of vulnerable sections of society with resilient, sustainable, and inclusive growth and development mechanisms. Its priority issues were "global coverage of early warning systems for all hydro-meteorological disasters, increased commitment towards making infrastructure systems disaster and climate-resilient, stronger national financial frameworks for disaster risk reduction, strengthened national and global disaster response system to address the consequences of increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, and increased application of ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk reduction".[36]

Thus, the DRRWG tried to discuss pressing challenges faced by the Island Countries, such as access to financing, dealing with intense disasters due to climate change, building resilient ecosystems and effective early warning systems to minimise human and material losses. The outcome document and the Chair's summary of G20 DRRWG effectively tried to address the priority issues.[37] The G20 New Delhi Leader's Declaration 2023 also committed to 'integrate the perspectives of developing countries, including LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, into future G20 agenda and strengthen the voice of developing countries in global decision making.'[38] The declaration committed to strengthen global health and 'facilitate equitable access to safe, effective, quality-assured, and affordable vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and other medical countermeasures, especially in Low- and Middle-income Countries (LMICs), LDCs and SIDS.'[39]

Quad

India has used the collective power of the Quad to provide relief to Island Nations in its quest to overcome many challenges. In 2022, the Quad came up with a significant maritime initiative called the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) to provide a near-real-time maritime picture of the vast oceanic continuum of the Indo-Pacific for the benefit of the littorals, including the Island Nations, which would lead them to better monitor their territorial waters.[40] The initiative would be beneficial for Island Countries to keep an eye on dark shipping and IUU fishing in the regional waters and also to respond effectively to climate

events. The Quad leaders decided to build on the Climate Working Group that was inaugurated at the Quad Leaders' Summit in 2021 to promote cooperation on climate mitigation, resilience, and capacity building, among others.

The 2022 Summit meeting decided 'to launch efforts on green shipping, energy supply chains, disaster risk reduction, and the exchange of climate information services.'[41] They also supported the efforts of CDRI to mitigate climate risks. The Quad partners also agreed to continue to provide HADR assistance to the affected countries through the Quad Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Mechanism. During the 2023 Quad Leaders' Summit, the countries decided to leverage Quad's Climate Information Services (CIS) Initiative to benefit the Indo-Pacific nations, including the Island Countries, in the domain of information-sharing and capacity building.[42] The leaders also came up with a plan to deploy 'Open Radio Access Network' (Open RAN) capabilities in Palau with the aim of modernising telecommunication infrastructure in the Pacific region.

India-France Partnership for Indo-Pacific Islands

The India-France bilateral relationship also deals with issues confronting Island Nations since France is a resident power in the Indo-Pacific and has island territories in the IOR and the Pacific Ocean. The 'Horizon 2047' document[43] celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France strategic partnership commits to extending their partnership to the Pacific Islands. Additionally, both countries have recognised that French overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific would play a key role in the bilateral relationship. Both countries have decided to contribute to the Island Countries in the field of health and research. Reunion has been identified for the Indo-French Campus for Health project.[44] India is part of the Indian Ocean Commission, a regional organisation concerned with the Vanilla Islands. In 2019, the leaders of India, France and the Vanilla Islands met in Reunion to explore economic and developmental partnerships.[45]

India's Relations with the Pacific Islands

India has maintained an institutionalised relationship with the Pacific Islands with the formation of the FIPIC in 2014. The FIPIC I and FIPIC II summits took place in Fiji and Jaipur, India, in 2014 and 2015, respectively. During the FIPIC I summit meeting, 'India set up a Special Adaptation Fund of US$ 1 million for technical assistance and capacity building.'[46]

Further, New Delhi had proposed to work in the fields of health, agriculture, Information Technology, telemedicine and tele-education. It increased grants in aid from US$125000 to US$200000 annually. India proposed the possibility of cooperation in data sharing to monitor the effects of climate change and disaster risk reduction.[47]

During FIPIC II, PM Modi counted projects announced during FIPIC I where India had delivered substantially.[48] He assured the island leaders that combating climate change would be India's priority and that New Delhi would work with the Island Countries to achieve a balanced and fair outcome in COP21. To harness the Blue Economy, India has proposed to establish an Institute named Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research Institute (SCORI) in the region along with associated biology research stations on various islands. He assured the Indian Navy's cooperation with the Island Nations for the security of their EEZ. He also announced cooperative initiatives 'in the fields of space technology, IT, pharma, healthcare, and communication through India's national broadcaster Prasar Bharati,' among others.[49]

In May 2017, India organised the 'India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference' in Fiji to discuss "blue economy, adaptation-mitigation practices for climate change, disaster preparedness, health, the International Solar Alliance as well as finding practical solutions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) implementation".[50] In September 2019, PM Modi met with the leaders of Pacific Island States on the sidelines of 74th UNGA. The 'India-Pacific Islands Developing States (PSIDS) Leaders' Meeting' discussed issues such as 'sharing of development experiences for the attainment of SDGs, enhancing cooperation in renewable energy, joining the newly launched CDRI, capacity building, implementation of projects under the India-UN Development Partnership Fund and a roadmap for future India-PSIDS cooperation.'[51] India announced US$ 1 million to each PSIDS for implementing high-impact developmental projects. Additionally, 'a line of credit of US$150 Million was made available for undertaking renewable energy-related projects, including solar and other climate-related projects based on each country's need.'[52] In the health sector, India offered to organise a Jaipur Foot Artificial Limb Fitment Camp in one of the Pacific countries under the 'India for Humanity' programme.[53] PM Modi also undertook several initiatives to build people-to-people relationships.

The FIPIC III meeting was held in May 2023 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG). During the Summit,[54] India largely focused on the healthcare sector, with PM Modi announcing several projects in this regard. India decided to set up a super-speciality cardiac hospital equipped with trained staff and modern infrastructure in Fiji. It also promised a dialysis centre and sea ambulances to all 14 Pacific Islands. Modi also promised to set up a Jaipur Foot Camp in PNG, as India had set up a similar camp in 2022 in Fiji. Further, India decided to set up two such camps every year in the Pacific Island Countries. Modi also declared the goal of bringing affordable medicines to the Pacific Islands through *Jan Aushadhi* and establishing a Yoga centre in the Island Countries.

In the education sector, PM Modi launched the SCORI at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji to share India's sustainable development experience with the Pacific Island Countries.[55] 'The Centre of Excellence for IT in PNG was upgraded to a Regional Information Technology and Cybersecurity Hub.'[56] India announced the 'Sagar Amrut Scholarship', under which it was decided to provide 1000 'Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation' (ITEC) training opportunities to Pacific countries' youth over the next five years. India also committed to working in the energy sector by ensuring solar power for at least one government building in all the Pacific countries, providing desalination units to address water scarcity issues, and developing small and medium enterprise sectors by supplying the requisite machinery and technology.[57] Outside the FIPIC framework, when the COVID-19 was creating havoc in 2021, India provided much-needed vaccine shots to Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands under the *Vaccine Maitri* initiative.

India's Relations with the IOR Islands

India's relations with the IOR Islands are guided by Neighbourhood First and SAGAR policies. India traditionally enjoys good relations with these islands. However, bilateral relations got a boost after the 2014 PM Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government took the reins in New Delhi. In 2015, PM Modi visited Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Mauritius on his first trip abroad in that year. While launching the India-built offshore patrol vessel MCGS Barracuda in Mauritius, Modi spoke about India's SAGAR vision. The characteristics of this vision were 'to safeguard India's mainland and island territories, deepen the economic and security cooperation with maritime neighbours and Island Nations, collective

action and cooperation for peace and security in the region, an integrated and cooperative approach for sustainable development, and collaboration in developing blue economy with the maritime neighbours in the region.'[58] New Delhi has lived up to its SAGAR vision while dealing with the IOR Islands.

Preferred Security Partner and First Responder

India has acted as a preferred security partner and the first responder for the IOR Islands in times of crisis. At the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, India launched 'Mission Sagar' to deliver Covid-19 vaccines to the IOR Island States.[59] India shipped 50,000 and 1 Lakh doses of Covishield vaccine to Seychelles and Mauritius, respectively, in January 2021. The next month, India gifted 1 lakh doses of Covishield to the Maldives. Moreover, India supplied additional doses of Covishield and Covaxin commercially to Mauritius. New Delhi also dispatched an 'Indian Rapid Response Medical Team' to Mauritius to combat Covid-19.[60]

In April 2021, India provided Covaxin doses to Comoros.[61] India has also made a valuable contribution to the healthcare sector, in general, for the Island Nations. India supplies hydroxychloroquine tablets to help the islands combat malaria effectively.[62] At the request of Mauritius, India has provided Ayurvedic medicines as well. India has helped Comoros fight against dengue as well as Tuberculosis (TB) with medical help.[63] India has dispensed anti-TB medicines to the Maldives. During the visit of the Indian Vice-President to Comoros in 2019, New Delhi gave medicines and medical equipment costing US$1 Million.[64] In July 2023, India gifted four methadone vans to Seychelles to assist in the country's drug mitigation efforts.

India has acted as a first responder during difficult times faced by the Indian Ocean Island Nations. During the 2004 tsunami, India was the first country to assist the Maldives and Sri Lanka through the difficult period. India has also helped the Maldives during the Male water crisis of 2014. In August 2020, India rushed specialised teams to Mauritius to rescue people and clean up the oil after a massive oil spill from the cargo ship MV Wakashio.[65] Further, INS Nireekshak was pressed into salvage operation following the accidental sinking of Mauritian Tug 'Sir Gaetan Duval' during the Wakashio episode.[66] To help cyclone-hit Madagascar in January 2020, the Indian Navy launched 'Operation Vanilla' and deployed INS Airavat carrying 'five pallets each of victualing, clothing

and naval stores along with three pallets of medicines.'[67] Additionally, India donated 600 tonnes of rice in March 2020 to help the flood victims. India has also assisted Comoros during the natural calamities. In June 2021, India launched 'Operation Sagar Aaraksha II' to deal with a major fire breakout on board the container vessel MV X-Press Pearl anchored off Colombo.[68] On a different track, New Delhi has bailed out Sri Lanka during its worst financial crisis since independence in 2022 by providing USD 4 billion as financial and humanitarian aid. India became the first creditor nation to support Sri Lanka's debt restructuring by the 'International Monetary Fund' (IMF).[69]

Defence and Security

India maintains close security relations with the IOR Island Nations, as India's security is intertwined with that of the Islands. India has gifted a number of patrol boats, Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft, engines, and spare parts to Seychelles and Mauritius. In 2014, India exported its first warship 'CGS Barracuda' to Mauritius.[70] India enjoys special security ties with Mauritius. Since Mauritius does not have a standing Army or Navy, an Indian Naval Officer commands the 'Mauritius National Coast Guard' (MNCG), and an Indian Air Force officer heads the 'Mauritius Police Helicopter Squadrons' (MPHS).[71] India also has close security ties with Sri Lanka. On 15 August 2022, India gifted a Dornier Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft to Sri Lanka to enhance its maritime security. India is developing facilities on the Assumption Island of Seychelles to strengthen its maritime reach and to better monitor the region. Similarly, in February 2024, the Indian and Mauritian Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated 'an airstrip and St. James Jetty, along with other developmental projects, at the Agalega Island of Mauritius.'[72] The jetty is said to have the capacity to host Indian P-8I maritime surveillance planes, which would boost India's anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare capabilities, in addition to better intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.[73]

During the 2021 visit of Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, India signed an Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) agreement to develop a harbour for the 'Maldivian National Defence Force' (MNDF) and a USD 50 million Line of Credit for the MNDF.[74] In May 2023, the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, along with his Maldivian counterpart, laid the foundation for the harbour at UTF.[75] Singh also gifted the Maldives an additional

Landing Craft and the replacement ship for an ageing ship called Huravee.[76] India has helped the Maldives with the establishment of the 'Composite Training Centre' (CTC) for MNDF, 'Coastal Radar System' (CRS). "The two countries have also instituted the Annual Defence Cooperation Dialogue at the Defence Secretary's level and Annual Joint Staff Talks, since 2016".[77]

India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka have been involved in a trilateral called Colombo Security Conclave (CSC), which came into existence in 2011, decided to enhance intelligence sharing in November 2020 to deal with terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering effectively.[78] Since then, the trilateral has expanded to include Mauritius as a member, with Seychelles and Bangladesh as observers. The five pillars of the CSC are 'Maritime Safety and Security, Countering Terrorism and Radicalisation, Combating Trafficking and Transnational Organised Crime, Cyber Security, Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Technology and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief.'[79] Under the auspices of the CSC, India has taken the lead in hosting the maiden CSC Oceanographers and Hydrographers Conference and the CSC Coastal Security Conference.[80] New Delhi has also organised the third edition of the Maritime Law Workshop.[81] Additionally, India had offered a Line of Credit of USD 50 million to tackle terrorism and enhance intelligence gathering.[82]

India has an MoU with Seychelles and Mauritius for conducting hydrographic surveys in the EEZs of the Island Nations. Between December 2019 and January 2020, 'INS Darshak carried out Hydrographic and Bathymetric surveys of Port Victoria, Praslin and La Digue'[83] and in November 2022, the same ship conducted hydrographic surveys intending to identify potential fishing zones across Agalega and St Brandon in Mauritius.[84] India has also conducted hydrographic surveys off Sri Lanka's coast.[85] India has gifted and installed a CSR system in Seychelles and Mauritius. In 2007, India activated a listening post in Madagascar to intercept maritime communication, facilitating increased surveillance.[86] In February 2023, India-based 'Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region' (IFC-IOR), which hosts 'International Liaison Officers' (ILOs) from partner nations, signed an MoU with Seychelles-based 'Regional Coordination Operations Centre' (RCOC). The IOR Islands are essential for the successful implementation of the Indian Navy's 'mission-based deployment' strategy in the Indian Ocean.

Joint Exercises

Joint Exercises between the maritime forces of India and the IOR Islands exhibit a high degree of trust between them. Such exercises also help enhance a common understanding of the maritime domain. Indian ships often make port calls to the Indian Ocean Island countries. In July 2023, INS Sunayna participated in Operation Southern Readiness under Combined Maritime Forces, while INS Sharda participated in the 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS) Maritime Exercise IMEX-23 during their respective visits to Seychelles. INS Tir participated in Exercise Cutlass Express in February-March 2024 and handed over serviced Dornier Engines and spares to Seychelles. In March 2021, India conducted the first-ever joint patrolling of the Malagasy EEZ and PASSEX with Madagascar. INS Kesari visited Comoros in January 2022 and extended assistance to that country's Coast Guard. INS Tarkash and INS Trishul made port calls to Comoros in October 2022 and May-June 2023, respectively, to carry out different capability enhancement activities for the Comoros Coast Guard.[87]

In March 2024, the Indian Army conducted the Tenth edition of 'Joint Military Exercise "LAMITIYE-2024"' with 'Seychelles Defence Forces' (SDF) in Seychelles.[88] The Seychelles Coast Guard PS Zoroaster took part in the MILAN 2024 multilateral naval exercise at Vizag in February 2024 and later went for its short refit. Likewise, two officers of the Comorian Coast Guard and the Chief of Malagasy Navy, Rear Adm. Tsiriniaina Gabriel participated in MILAN 2024. As an outreach initiative by the Indian Navy, Naval Chiefs of the Indian Ocean Island Countries participated in the maiden high-level virtual interaction entitled 'Maritime Heads for Active Security and Growth for All in the Region' (MAHASAGAR).[89] An officer from the National Office of Risk and Disaster Management of Madagascar participated in the '2023 Annual Joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercise 2023 (CHAKRAVAT)' conducted by the Indian Navy from 9-11 October 2023 in Goa.[90]

The Indian Navy conducts a bilateral naval exercise with Sri Lanka called SLINEX, the tenth edition of which was conducted in April 2023.[91] At Goa Maritime Conclave in November 2021, the then-Indian Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh met with Sri Lankan Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne to discuss maritime security, information sharing and navy and coast guard training, among other important issues.[92] 'Indian Air

Force participated in Sri Lankan Air Force's 70th anniversary celebrations in February 2021.'[93] 'The 16th edition of the 'Dosti' trilateral exercise—between India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives Coast Guard got underway in February 2024 in Male, where Bangladesh joined as an observer.'[94] Apart from Exercise Dosti, India and the Maldives conduct two bilateral exercises, Ekuverin and Ekatha.

Capacity Building

India undertakes several programmes to build capacity for the IOR Island Nations. The 'Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service' (SSIFS), Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, conducted the First Special Course for Diplomats from the IOR in September-October 2021. Thirty-five diplomats from Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka participated in the course.[95] Indian Naval Officers also impart training to the armed forces of the Island Nations. A five-member Indian Navy Mobile Training Team (INMTT) trained 50 officers from the Malagasy special forces in March 2021 as well as in October 2022. In June 2023, naval officers from the INS Trishul conducted a workshop on the maintenance of OBMs for Comorian Coast Guard personnel. INS Trishul also undertook the repair of communication equipment and navigation radar display.[96]

India trains personnel and officers of MNCG and MPHS. India and Mauritius have signed an MoU agreement between the ISRO and Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) to develop a joint small satellite. India has offered a line of credit of USD 20 million for procuring boats and a grant of USD 2 million for interceptor boats to Comoros.[97] Apart from this, India generously helps the IOR Islands build infrastructure in those countries through financial grants and lines of credit. India meets around 70 per cent of the Maldives' training requirements by training MDNF personnel in India. Similarly, India trains a significant number of Sri Lankan military and police officers at the premier defence institutes. In 2024, India will train more than 130 police officers from Sri Lanka.[98] Over the past 10 years, India has trained over 1500 MDNF personnel. New Delhi also makes an important contribution to the medical field by training Maldivian doctors in the premier medical institutes in India.

The Way Ahead

India deals with the Indo-Pacific Islands multilaterally and bilaterally. In the multilateral domain, India has put the Indo-Pacific Islands at the core of its climate diplomacy on the international fora. India's efforts have been acknowledged globally, with the UN Secretary-General praising India's efforts on more than one occasion. Moreover, India has been trying to attain 'human-centric globalisation without creating a climate crisis or debt crisis',[99] which is a major issue for the Island Nations. Since India does not have deep pockets to help the Indo-Pacific islands, it has wisely chosen a multilateral way to achieve its goals. The IRIS initiative under CDRI has a special provision to raise money for developmental projects in the Island Nations. Moreover, India's approach towards the Indo-Pacific Islands is more of a problem-solving nature. As we have seen, apart from climate change; remote locations, lack of healthcare facilities, agriculture, food and economy are some major challenges facing the Island Nations. India tries to address these issues through various minilateral initiatives, which do not fall under the auspices of the UN, like the Quad and G20 meetings.

India also effectively deals with the Indo-Pacific Islands bilaterally. India has established close ties with the Indo-Pacific Islands. India's relations with the IOR islands is guided by its foreign policy outlook of 'Neighbourhood First' and SAGAR. On the other hand, India's relations with the Pacific Islands are overseen by the FIPIC. The difference between India's relations with IOR and the Pacific Islands is that 'security' becomes a major issue while dealing with the former. The distant Pacific Islands have fewer security implications for India. Therefore, India and IOR Islands cooperate closely on security matters, which is not the case with the Pacific Islands. Nevertheless, the common link between India's dealing with the Indo-Pacific Islands is that India keeps the Islands' socio-economic development at the centre of its policy. India swears by the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and lives by the same. The socio-economic initiatives taken by India exhibit India's principled norm-based diplomacy, while, closer home, India does not ignore its security interests while interacting with the IOR islands.

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SECTION IV

Approaches to Sustainability and Development

13

Harnessing Sunshine: India's Solar Mission as a Catalyst for Global Diplomacy

Sneha M.

Introduction

In the wake of the global transition towards sustainable and renewable energy sources, the role of solar power has emerged as a pivotal component in mitigating climate change and achieving carbon neutrality. As nations worldwide grapple with the imperative to decarbonise their economies and transition towards cleaner energy alternatives, India's leadership in harnessing solar power stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration. As the world's most populous nation and one of the fastest-growing economies, India's energy demands are substantial and expected to rise further in the coming decades. However, amidst the challenges posed by rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and energy security concerns. India has recognised the critical importance of embracing sustainable energy solutions, with solar power emerging as a linchpin in its energy transition strategy.

India's ambitious goals with solar power underscore its leadership and commitment to combatting climate change and promoting sustainable development. Through initiatives such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM) and the International Solar Alliance (ISA), India has set targets for solar energy deployment, aiming to significantly increase its solar capacity. By leveraging its vast solar potential,

technological innovation and strategic partnerships, India seeks to not only meet its domestic energy needs but also contribute to global efforts in achieving a cleaner, greener and more sustainable future.

In this context, understanding India's ambitions with solar power is not merely a matter of domestic energy policy but a critical component of the global green transition. As India takes bold strides towards realising its solar energy potential, its leadership and commitment serve as a catalyst for driving innovation, investment, and cooperation in the renewable energy sector worldwide. Through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective action, India's journey towards solar power prominence offers valuable lessons and insights for nations seeking to embrace a sustainable energy future and pave the way for a cleaner and more prosperous world for generations to come.

The Beginning of the Success Story

In the absence of a dedicated global entity fostering solar energy, India conceived the ISA as a coalition of nations abundant in solar resources, aiming to address energy deficits and foster collaboration to bridge identified gaps in solar deployment.[1] Envisioned as a partnership encompassing countries situated between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, the ISA comprised developing nations endowed with substantial solar potential, yet grappling with limited energy access, ample sunlight, significant agrarian populations and deficiencies in solar manufacturing.[2]

On 30 November 2015, during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris, India and France jointly initiated the ISA to bolster solar energy utilisation in developing nations.[3] This brought together a coalition of 120 countries largely from Asia and Africa, united by a shared recognition of the imperative for technology transfer, capacity building and public finance to propel solar energy expansion. Approximately a year following its inception, in 2016, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of the Government of India, unveiled the Framework Agreement on the Establishment of the ISA Framework Agreement for ratification. By 6 December 2017, upon the submission of ratification instruments by 15 nations, the ISA formally entered into force, obtaining the status of a treaty-based international organisation.[4]

During the inaugural assembly of ISA in October 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed the Green Grids Initiative, known as One Sun One World One Grid (GGI-OSOWOG). Further, on the sidelines of 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) in 2021, India and the United Kingdom jointly introduced GGI-OSOWOG with the United States of America (USA), France and Australia as some of the steering group member countries of the initiative. This initiative represents a unique attempt at energy security cooperation, aimed at facilitating a sustainable and equitable transition towards green energy on a global scale. The GGI-OSOWOG initiative seeks to establish a unified grid interconnecting various regional grids, thereby facilitating the efficient transmission of renewable energy, with a particular focus on solar energy. The overarching vision of this initiative is to unleash the full potential of solar power as a renewable energy.

The 'Towards 1000' initiative aims to mobilise $1 trillion in investments in solar energy technologies by 2030, alongside ensuring access to electricity for one billion people through clean energy solutions, which also governs the ISA. This policy entails the installation of 1,000 gigawatts (GW) of solar energy capacity, leading to a projected reduction of one billion tonnes of solar emissions annually. ISA's toil has undeniably contributed in mitigating global warming and in purification of energy sources suggests the likelihood of long-term success in these efforts. The ISA is actively promoting the transition to green energy and enhancing security through solar power by facilitating technology transfer, mobilising finance and conducting capacity building initiatives for low-carbon development in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This is achieved through collaborative partnerships with various Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), Development Financial Institutions (DFIs), international organisations, along with global public and private sector entities.[5]

The latest, sixth assembly of ISA took place in October 2023 in New Delhi. Ministers from more than 20 countries and delegates from across 116 countries participated. They deliberated on ISA initiatives to universalise energy access through solar mini-grids, mobilising finance for accelerated solar deployment and diversifying supply chains and manufacturing for solar power.[6]

India's Solar Revolution: Potential, Policies and Progress

Fortunately, the country enjoys an average of 250 to 300 days of sunshine annually, translating to approximately 2,200–3,000 sunshine hours per year. This abundance of sunlight results in about 5,000 trillion kilowatt-hours of solar energy annually.[7] Recognising this significant potential, the government has implemented a range of policy measures and financial incentives, positioning solar energy as a key driver in India's pursuit of net-zero carbon emissions by 2070. In 2020, India unveiled an ambitious renewable energy objective, aiming for 450 gigawatts by 2030, with solar energy anticipated to contribute 280-300 gigawatts. More recently, during COP-26, India's Prime Minister announced an even more ambitious goal of achieving 500 gigawatts of 'non-fossil-fuel' power by 2030.[8]

With all the above projects, India has made a concerted push towards replacing conventional energy sources with non-conventional ones, particularly solar energy, for several compelling reasons. First, India's growing energy demand necessitates a shift towards cleaner and more sustainable alternatives to meet its burgeoning needs. With rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and population growth, the demand for energy has surged, placing strain on traditional fossil fuel-based energy sources and exacerbating environmental concerns such as air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Second, the abundance of solar resources in India presents a significant opportunity for harnessing solar energy as a reliable and cost-effective alternative. The country receives ample sunlight throughout the year, making it ideal for large-scale solar energy deployment. Leveraging this abundant natural resource not only reduces dependence on fossil fuels but also contributes to energy security by diversifying the energy mix and mitigating risks associated with volatile global oil prices and geopolitical uncertainties. Moreover, India's commitment to addressing climate change and meeting its international climate targets has been a driving force behind solar energy adoption. By transitioning towards renewable energy sources like solar power, India aims to reduce its carbon footprint, mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change and fulfil its commitments under global climate agreements such as the Paris Agreement. Embracing solar energy aligns with India's broader sustainability goals and reinforces its position as a responsible global citizen committed to environmental stewardship.

Additionally, the economic benefits associated with solar energy deployment have played a crucial role in India's push for solar adoption. The declining costs of solar technology, coupled with government incentives and policies promoting renewable energy investment, have made solar energy increasingly competitive with conventional sources. The growth of the solar industry has also created job opportunities, stimulated economic growth and attracted investments in manufacturing, research and development, contributing to India's overall socio-economic development. Furthermore, factors such as energy access and rural electrification have underscored the importance of solar energy in India's energy transition. Solar power offers a decentralised and off-grid solution for remote and underserved areas, where extending traditional electricity infrastructure may be impractical or economically unfeasible. By deploying solar mini-grids, rooftop solar installations and off-grid solar systems, India can improve energy access, empower local communities and bridge the urban-rural divide, fostering inclusive growth and development across the country.

The technology for solar power plants can be broadly classified into two categories. One, Solar Photovoltaic (PV) plants and two, solar thermal power plants. Solar photovoltaic technologies come in different types, including monocrystalline silicon, multi-crystalline silicon and thin-film solar cells. Around 85–90 per cent of the global market is dominated by crystalline silicon cells, while thin-film technologies make up a smaller share and are becoming less common. Each type of solar cell has its own advantages and disadvantages, but photovoltaics are important for reducing carbon emissions from energy production. This is especially important for India, which is the third-largest emitter of CO_2 after US and China. India in the recent past, has developed nine comprehensive programmes, each focusing on a distinct application that could help scale the deployment of solar energy solutions. This includes solar applications for agricultural use, affordable finance, solar mini grids, rooftop solar, solar e-mobility and storage, solar parks, solarising heating and cooling systems, solar PV battery and waste management, and solar power for green hydrogen.[9]

With several notable examples illustrating the country's progress in domestic solar installations, India's installed solar capacity has experienced remarkable growth in recent years. One such example is the Kurnool Ultra Mega Solar Park in Andhra Pradesh, commissioned in 2017 with a capacity

of 1,000 megawatts (MW). Situated in Kurnool district, this solar park stands as one of the largest in the world, showcasing India's commitment to renewable energy adoption. Similarly, the Pavagada Solar Park in Karnataka, spanning over 13,000 acres, boasts an installed capacity of around 2,050 MW, making it one of India's largest solar projects. Another significant achievement is the Rewa Solar Park in Madhya Pradesh, commissioned in 2018 with a capacity of 750 MW. Known for its record-low solar tariff, the Rewa Solar Park underscores the competitiveness of solar energy in India's energy landscape. Furthermore, the Bhadla Solar Park in Rajasthan, with an installed capacity exceeding 2,245 MW, serves as a testament to India's efforts in bolstering its solar capacity and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Alongside utility-scale solar parks, India has witnessed substantial growth in rooftop solar installations across residential and commercial buildings, further contributing to the country's overall installed solar capacity. With continued investments and policy support, India aims to further accelerate the deployment of solar energy and achieve its ambitious renewable energy targets.

While these declarations underscore the urgency of addressing climate change, the emphasis on solar energy is also driven by the imperative to swiftly ramp up capacity installation in India. In the last five years, India has augmented its solar power capacity by tenfold, reaching 32 gigawatts, with plans to triple this capacity in the near future a pace of growth unparalleled in many parts of the world.[10]

India's Solar Diplomacy: Driving Global Renewable Energy Cooperation

India has embarked on a proactive trajectory to integrate solar energy into the energy mix of developing countries, bolstering its long-standing commitment to South-South cooperation. The impact of India's solar diplomacy reverberates across global renewable energy deployment and climate action, epitomising its role as a catalyst for international cooperation and sustainable development. The establishment of the ISA has catalysed a surge in solar energy adoption worldwide, leveraging capacity building, technology transfer and policy support to accelerate the transition towards renewable energy. India's diplomatic efforts have galvanised collaboration among nations, fostering consensus on emissions reduction and sustainable development goals and spurring investments in solar energy projects.

In evaluating the effectiveness of India's solar initiatives, it becomes evident that the nation's proactive engagement and inclusive approach have bolstered its soft power and influence on the global stage for the following reasons. India actively engages in bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote solar energy cooperation on the global stage. One notable example is the Indo-US Solar Energy Initiative, which exemplifies India's collaborative efforts with partner countries. Through this initiative, India and the US have jointly undertaken research projects, technology demonstrations and capacity building activities aimed at accelerating the deployment of solar energy. For instance, the Partnership to Advance Clean Energy-Deployment (PACE-D) programme, established under this initiative, focuses on facilitating the deployment of innovative solar technologies and fostering policy reforms to support clean energy adoption.[11] Similarly, India's collaboration with Germany through the Indo-German Solar Energy Partnership has led to joint research projects, exchange programmes and policy dialogues focused on advancing solar energy technologies and market integration.[12]

Moreover, India's financial support and investment in solar projects abroad underscore its commitment to promoting renewable energy globally. Initiatives such as ISA and bilateral agreements with partner countries enable India to extend lines of credit and concessional loans for implementing solar energy projects. For example, India has provided financial assistance to countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Mauritius for the development of solar energy infrastructure. Additionally, India's participation in initiatives like the Africa-India Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) reflects its dedication to supporting renewable energy development in African nations. Through these financial mechanisms, India facilitates access to capital and technical expertise, contributing to sustainable development and energy access in partner countries.

Furthermore, India's efforts in capacity building and technical assistance for solar energy are evident through programmes such as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program and training initiatives conducted by institutions like the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE). Under the ITEC programme, India offers training courses, workshops and seminars on various aspects of solar energy technology, policy and management to professionals from developing countries. Similarly, NISE conducts specialised training programmes for solar technicians, engineers and policymakers from partner countries. These

programmes focus on providing the stakeholders with hands-on skills and knowledge of solar photovoltaic systems, solar thermal technologies, and grid integration. These capacity building efforts enhance the human resource capabilities and institutional capacities of partner countries, empowering them to effectively harness solar energy resources for sustainable development.

Therefore, India's solar diplomacy has significantly bolstered the nation's image and soft power on the global stage by showcasing its proactive engagement in addressing pressing environmental challenges. By championing solar energy adoption in developing countries and offering technical assistance, capacity building and financial support, India has earned praise for its commitment to sustainable development. Furthermore, India's diplomatic efforts have fostered partnerships with a diverse array of nations, enhancing its influence and credibility as a responsible global actor. The success of India's solar diplomacy in advancing solar capacities and at large renewable energy objectives domestically through ISA underscores how local imperatives, intersect with international, transnational and regional interests, including the attempt to render solar energy accessible to impoverished nations. Finally, participating in international climate negotiations serves as a crucial avenue for India to wield diplomatic influence and advance its foreign policy goals.

Challenges and Way Forward

In January 2024, India's Union Minister R.K. Singh revealed that the renewable energy sector has secured a substantial investment of INR 16.93 lakh crore since 2014.[13] Regardless of increased financial flows into the solar power industry, India could only install 7.5 gigawatts (GW) of solar capacity in the calendar year (CY) 2023, according to a report published by Mercom India Research on Q4 & Annual 2023 India Solar Market Update.[14] This represents a significant 44.1 per cent decrease year-over-year (YoY) from 13.4 GW installed in CY 2022.[15] Therefore, even though India has undoubtedly made progress over the years in the installation of solar power, continuous efforts and sustaining such policies are not without challenges.

First, India is still heavily dependent on fossil fuels for domestic electricity consumption. In 2020, India depended on fossil fuels for 77 per cent of its electricity generation, with coal contributing 72.5 per cent,

natural gas 4.2 per cent and oil 0.3 per cent.[16] As of May 2023, the Ministry of Power reported that fossil fuels, including coal, gas and diesel, accounted for 56.8 per cent of the nation's electricity mix, while renewable energy sources constituted 43 per cent of the total share.[17] India's persistent focus on expanding coal-fired power plants poses a significant obstacle to its leadership in solar energy adoption. While championing solar energy on the international stage, India's concurrent pursuit of coal-based power generation sends conflicting signals about its commitment to sustainable energy practices and climate goals. Addressing this disparity is crucial for India to strengthen its position as a global leader in renewable energy. Manoeuvring through intricate regulatory frameworks, obtaining permits and addressing bureaucratic problems entail significant time and expense resulting in the exacerbation of the sector's challenges.

Second, land acquisition stands out as an unavoidable problem. Securing appropriate land for solar projects proves daunting due to conflicting land-use demands such as agriculture, urban development and conservation efforts. Hence, finding a balance between solar energy expansions and competing land use priorities is crucial. Moreover, solar power generation's inherent intermittency, dictated by weather patterns, presents obstacles to grid integration and stable power provision.

Third, integrating solar energy into existing electricity grids is another challenge. The variability of solar power output can destabilise grid operations, requiring substantial investments in grid infrastructure upgrades and advanced management technologies to balance supply and demand effectively. Inadequate energy storage infrastructure further exacerbates the issue, limiting the capacity to store surplus energy generated during peak sunlight hours for later use.

Finally, while India has made significant strides in the wind energy sector, the manufacturing capacity for solar energy supplies has not seen comparable growth. The domestic solar PV manufacturing industry lacks infrastructure, skilled workforce shortages and high production costs. This disparity underscores the need for targeted efforts to address these obstacles and stimulate the growth of domestic solar manufacturing capabilities. As per Eninrac Consulting, a prominent market research analytics firm, during the first half of fiscal year 2024, China maintained its position as the primary supplier to the Indian market, offering solar panels valued at USD 501.9 million. This figure contrasts with the USD 874.89 million worth of solar panels supplied during the entire fiscal year

2023. Though there is a downward inclination, the constant upgradation in cell efficiencies and cell technology leads to higher manufacturing costs.

Nevertheless, several positive developments and industry responses offer promise for the Indian solar energy sector. Proactive governmental promotion, exemplified by initiatives like the JNNSM, has catalysed investment and expansion in the sector. Significant foreign investment influxes have bolstered funding and innovation. Technological advancements, including enhanced solar panels and energy storage solutions, augment the efficiency and reliability of solar power systems. Collaborative training programmes with educational institutions cultivate a proficient domestic workforce, reducing reliance on foreign expertise. Moreover, progress is underway to enhance grid infrastructure and implement smart grid systems to better accommodate solar power's intermittent nature.

Looking ahead, several pivotal measures should be pursued to further propel the Indian solar energy sector. Foremost among these is investment in energy storage solutions to mitigate intermittency challenges. Developing cost-effective energy storage technologies, such as advanced batteries, can ensure a consistent and dependable energy supply. Simplifying regulations will facilitate increased investment and expedited project execution. Encouraging research and innovation in solar technology will yield more efficient and economical solutions, driving industry advancement. Furthermore, prioritising the adoption of rooftop solar installations in residential and commercial buildings can diversify solar power generation and alleviate strain on centralised grids. Last, continued emphasis on skill development through workforce training and investing in research and development, fostering collaboration between academia, industry and government is needed. Also, incentivising technological advancements is essential for improving efficiency, reducing costs and addressing technical challenges. Despite facing challenges, the ISA presents a significant opportunity for India to elevate its global standing in the energy and environmental sectors. By leveraging collaborative platforms like the ISA, India can champion practical solutions and value-added initiatives to propel solar energy adoption worldwide. Active engagement in the ISA's mission will solidify India's position as a key influencer in shaping the future of renewable energy. To attain solar leadership, India must capitalise on its domestic solar initiatives and contributions to the ISA's objectives. By fostering innovation, driving

policy reforms and fostering international cooperation, India can lead by example in the global transition to solar energy. Strengthening its commitment to renewable energy and effectively addressing challenges will enable India to emerge as a frontrunner in the sustainable energy landscape.

India's Solar Mission serves as a crucial instrument for the nation's diplomatic endeavours on the global stage, blending economic imperatives with environmental stewardship. Recognising the significance of transitioning to renewable energy sources, India views solar energy as a beacon of hope, offering a clean and affordable alternative that aligns with its aspirations for energy security and carbon emission reduction. Furthermore, energy insecurity remains a pressing issue in many developing countries. Solar energy presents socio-economic and environmental solutions to address this energy gap, offering clean, sustainable and accessible energy. By embracing solar energy, countries can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7 of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all by 2030. Finally, with its unwavering commitment to solar energy adoption, India has positioned itself at the forefront, demonstrating the transformative potential of solar power on the global scale.

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14

Climate Change Challenges in Hindu Kush Himalayan: The Role of Regional Environmental Governance

Opangmeren Jamir

Establishing an 'innovative approach to governance' has been a major issue in fostering sustainable relations between humans and the environment.[1] Particularly, in International Relations, assessing the strength and weakness of 'international regimes' has become an entry point to understand international environmental politics.[2] Since the early 1970s, a remarkable growth in an investigation on 'environmental politics' have been carried out, a 'veritable growth industry.'[3] The concept of 'environmental governance' primarily refers to 'the establishment, reaffirmation or change of institutions to resolve conflict over environmental resources.'[4] A governance on environment exists at global as well as in national level, wherein at the global level, under the canopy of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), several multilateral environmental agreements and regional conventions have been initiated over the years.[5]

The setting of environmental governance, however, began to alter notably as regional environmental governance (REG) began to proliferate, along with global environmental governance. One of the foremost reasons for the rise of REG is the stalemate of global authority to enforce rules to change state activities and also a lack of understanding of complex ecosystem and societal dynamics of a particular region.[6] As a result, a perception was created that some transboundary environmental problems,

like pollution and scarcity of water resources, might be addressed efficiently by a small member of states that have similar problems along the geographical location. A renowned British naturalist David Attenborough declared, among all the existing environmental challenges, climate change is the 'biggest threat modern humans have ever faced.'[7] In the Fourth and Final instalment of the Sixth Assessment Report by IPCC in March 2023, it delivered a 'final warning', underlining that 'keeping warming to 1.5 Celsius pre-industrial levels requires deep, rapid and sustained greenhouse gas emissions reductions in all sectors. It further highlighted that emissions should be decreasing by now and will need to be cut almost half by 2030, if warming is to be limited to 1.5 Celsius.'[8]

Every region of the world has been affected by climate change in multiple ways, including changing rainfall patterns. The high-altitude precipitation is likely to increase and cause flooding, increases in sea level affecting coastal areas, and increased ocean acidification, impacting oxygen levels and marine life. Concurrently, it is expected to have social and economic consequences and failure to mitigate or adapt to climate effects will lead to violent conflicts.[9] Several environmental experts have linked climate change to the rise of violent armed conflicts. According to Homer-Dixon, 'environmental changes' will lead to resource scarcity such as clean water and agricultural land and 'would provoke interstate "simple scarcity" conflict or resource wars.'[10]

Amid the alarming reports on the effects of the climate crisis, the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) sits precariously on the front lines. In an assessment report released in 2019 by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which primarily considered as the first ever wide-ranging valuation of the HKH region, it was underlined that 'even if global warming is kept to 1.5 degree Celsius, warming in the HKH region is likely be at least 0.3 degree Celsius higher and in the northwest Himalaya and Karakoram at least 0.7 degrees Celsius higher.'[11] Further, in the follow-up to the first assessment, the ICIMOD released its most comprehensive assessment report in June 2023, indicating that the cryosphere of the HKH region is 'undergoing unprecedented and largely irreversible changes over human timescales, primarily driven by climate change.'[12] Hence, it will drastically impact states, societies and biodiversity in the region.

Due to this unfolding scenario in the HKH, significantly driven by climate change, the Director General of ICIMOD, Pema Gyamtsho urged

the need to shift from 'national perspective to broader thinking that encompasses eco-regions and is transboundary.'[13] Also, Deputy Director General of ICIMOD, Izabella Koziell called upon the 'need of leaders to act now to prevent catastrophe.'[14] Indeed, at the COP28 meeting in Dubai in December 2023, Secretary General of the United Nations brought an attention to the world audience about the growing concern of environmental challenges in the HKH region.[15] This chapter, therefore, primarily examines the growth of REG in the HKH region and how far it has been effectively addressing the environmental crisis. Before attempting this, a review of scientific papers on the effects of climate change, in particular in the HKH, is in order.

Scientific Studies on the Effects of Climate Change in the HKH Region

The HKH region, covers 4.2 million sq.km of eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan). The region is well known for its unique culture, natural resources and biodiversity and source of water to 10 major river basins (Amu Darya, Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Salween, Tarim, Yangtze and Yellow), providing ecosystem services (including water, energy and food) to 240 million people who live in the HKH region.[16] Furthermore, billions of populations habitat in the downstream of the river basin significantly benefit for economic development. Besides, the HKH region hosts four of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots, where biodiversity losses can lead to environmental crises in the region.

Impact on Water Resource Availability

After the two Polar Regions that is, the Antarctic and the Arctic, the Himalayan system is the biggest global mass of ice-covered water in the world. Various scientific research pieces on the climate crisis in the HKH area, however underlined the growing stress of water resource availability. One of the initial scientific study on the effects of climate change on snow and ice reserves on five river basins of the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Yangtze and Yellow. It was highlighted that melt water is 'extremely important' in the Indus basin and 'important' for the Brahmaputra basin, whereas in the case of the Ganges, Yangtze and Yellow Rivers basin, the study indicated that it has only a 'modest' role. Hence, the study concludes that the maximum vulnerability to decreases in water flow will be in the

Brahmaputra and Indus basins, which ultimately will have substantial impact on food security.[17] To understand the future condition of water resources in the High Mountain Asia of the Tibetan Plateau, one of the recent study ascertained that by the end of the twenty-first century, up to 84-97 per cent of the region will experience enormous water storage deficits.[18]

Impact on Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) is a phenomenon of unexpected discharge of enormous amounts of water retained in a glacial lake, triggering huge quantities of water to flow into neighbouring streams and rivers. As a result of sudden release of water, GLOF can devastate downstream lives and infrastructure. The threat of GLOF in the HKH region is very apparent, as the warming rates are noticeably higher than the Northern Hemisphere and global mean. In one study, it was underscored that the population residing in High Mountain Asia are the most unprotected to major impacts from possible GLOFs. Further, it has been confirmed that the most unprotected inhabitants of GLOFs are in China, India, Nepal and Pakistan.[19]

According to the study conducted by ICIMOD, 3624 glacial lakes have been identified in the river basins of China, India and Nepal. Out of these total glacial lakes, 1410 lakes are equal to or larger than 0.02 square kilometre (two hectares), which is in fact will cause enormous destruction in the downstream area if it ruptures. It also underlined 47 glacial lakes, of which 25 glacial lakes located in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China need speedy mitigation action.[20] Meanwhile, in yet another study it was shown that the Eastern Himalayan region is at greatest risk of GLOFs from degenerating glaciers, where the risk is three times higher than in any other Himalayan region.[21] Also, in understanding regional morphodynamics of supraglacial lakes between 2010 and 2019 within Everest Himalaya, it was revealed that out of 2424 lakes only 161 were static.[22]

Loss of biodiversity

Conserving biodiversity is vital as it provide ecosystem services or what is called 'natural capital' such as food, water, medicine, etc. for human prosperity and economy.[23] However, particularly in the last five decades, biodiversity has degraded rapidly, where according to Intergovernmental

Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the five main drivers in the change in nature are: changes in land and sea use; direct exploitation of organisms; climate change; pollution and invasive alien species.[24] Particularly, biodiversity and climate change are intimately tangled as rise in temperature will impact biodiversity such as marine organisms and at the same time, conserving biodiversity or emphasising 'nature-based solutions' can aid in mitigating climate change.[25]

The HKH region hosts four areas of biodiversity in the world that includes the Himalaya hotspot, the Indo-Burma hotspot, the Mountains of Southwest China and the Mountains of Central Asia. Covering 32 per cent of the HKH region, it cradles more than 35,000 species of plants and more than 200 species of animals.[26] This rich biodiversity supports and acts as a lifeline for around 240 million people who reside within the HKH region and 1.65 billion people in the river valleys downstream.[27] Recent findings by a team of ICIMOD scientists declared that 'the decline in nature in this region is so advanced and accelerating so fast, that it poses a threat to the lives of not just animal and plant life but also human societies.'[28]

Impact of Climate Change on Human Health

The correlation between climate change and human health is well documented. Apart from the impact on basic health requirements that is, air, water and food, the risks posed by infectious diseases are becoming critical. The Sixth IPCC Assessment Report 2022 warns about the increasing risk to human health, underlining that, 'Even in the absence of further warming beyond current levels, the proportion of the overall global deaths caused by climate-sensitive diseases and conditions would increase marginally by mid-century.'[29] Hence, increase in global temperature will certainly affect the permanently frozen environment (glaciers permafrost), which are considered as natural reservoirs of vast expanses of microbes, typically inactive, including human pathogens, which could reawaken and infect local wildlife.

For instance, heat wave was the major factor for the outbreak of anthrax in northern Siberia in 2016, which consequently infected reindeer carcass.[30] Also a recent study on the Arctic landscape of Lake Hazen raises concern of the influx of new viruses where glaciers are melting in large amounts, which could make the Arctic a hotspot for emerging pandemic risks.[31] In another recent study, it was shown that over 58 per cent of

pathogenic diseases (218 out of 375) are aggravated by climate change. The study also showed that 1006 transmission pathways, linked with climate change, will further increase the prevalence of pathogenic diseases.[32]

In the case of HKH, scientific evidence indicates a possible epidemic outbreak in near future by the revival and discharge of micro-organisms from glaciers and permafrost. A study by microbiologists in the Tibetan Plateau in China found viruses nearly 15,000 years old in the ice samples. It also ascertained genetic codes for 33 viruses, of which at least 28 are new.[33] Further, in another scientific study on the potential health risks of glaciers melting in Tibetan Plateau, from the sample of 21 glaciers, the investigators identified 968 microbial species and 25 million protein-coding gene clusters. According to the study, almost half (47 per cent) of the virulence factors recognised are not presently well-known as molecules that aid bacteria to infect a host at the cellular level.[34]

REG in HKH Region

REG refers to 'bilateral or multilateral agreements which are signed by at least two countries that share territorial or maritime borders, or that govern a contiguous, transnational region.'[35] In the past, many scientists, policy makers and the media viewed environmental crises and governance, particularly the problems of climate change and biodiversity from the 'global' standpoint. Yet, solutions to the problems made at the global level 'produced poor agreements or no agreement at all and some of the global institutions or agreements generated few results.'[36] Hence, to become more effective in addressing the environmental related concerns, unlike the global environmental governance, the emphasis on the 'region' emerged, where it is expected that transboundary ecological crises may be handled more efficiently by small groups of states with similar features.

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

ICIMOD was founded in September 1983 as an inter-governmental regional institution, which includes all eight HKH countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan). The mission of the ICIMOD is to facilitate 'information and knowledge generation and sharing', solutions to environmental crises among the member states of HKH.[37] Thus, ICIMOD being technically an inter-

governmental organisation, acts as a bridge for the policymakers and experts to exchange ideas among the eight member states of HKH to foster sustainable mountain development.

Over the years, the ICIMOD initiated several projects on river basin and trans-boundary landscape management. One such project is the River Basins and Cryosphere (RBC) regional programme, where it investigates data and knowledge gaps in water and cryosphere science and also assists research and pilot results for policy and planning for HKH member states. The HKH-Hydrological Cycle Observation System (HKH-HCOS) established in 2013 promotes timely sharing of flood data to minimise flood vulnerability in the region.[38] With the support of the Australian Government, the ICIMOD in 2012 initiated the Koshi Basin Programme (KBP) to maximise benefits from water-related developmental projects such as irrigation and hydropower and minimising flood and landslides.

To address the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, the ICIMOD initiated several trans-boundary landscape programmes including: the Hindu Kush Karakoram Pamir Landscape (Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan); Kailash Sacred Landscape (China, India and Nepal); Kanchenjunga Landscape (Bhutan, India and Nepal); Landscape Initiative for the Far-Eastern Himalaya (China, India and Myanmar) and Cherranpunjee-Chittagong Landscape (India and Bangladesh).[39]

South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)

SACEP, which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is the foremost REG in the South Asia region. The genesis of SACEP goes back to when an inter-governmental experts group from South Asia countries, supported by UNEP held meeting from 10-15 March 1980 in Bangalore, India and recommended the establishment of SACEP along with several key environmental issues.[40] Consequently, the first High-level Ministerial meeting of SACEP was formally held from 18-25 February 1981 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.[41]

Over the decades, several important environmental programmes have been implemented under its aegis. On 22 April 1998, at the Seventh Governing Council meeting of SACEP in Male, Maldives, it adopted a landmark declaration called the 'Male Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Trans-boundary Effects for South

Asia.'[42] The objective of the Male Declaration is to combat the trans-boundary air pollution problem in the region in a phase approach, beginning from 1999 onwards.[43] In March 1995, it adopted another momentous initiative called the 'South Asian Seas Action Plan' (SASAP) in March 1995 in collaboration with UNEP and SACEP of South Asian Seas Programme (SASP).[44] The objective of SASAP is to assess and mitigate the impacts of pollution like oil spills, etc. on coastal and marine ecosystems. Further, to enhance cooperation on coastal management, at the tenth Governing Council meeting of SACEP in Kathmandu on 25 January 2007, it adopted the South Asia Coral Reef Task Force (SACRTF) to manage coral reefs and their associated ecosystems.[45] Another landmark was the endorsement of establishing the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) at the Eleventh Governing Council meeting in Jaipur on 22 May 2008.[46] With a Secretariat in Kathmandu, SAWEN was officially opened on 20 April 2011, adding a chapter for regional cooperation in wildlife law enforcement.[47]

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Following the establishment of SAARC in 1985, the member states identified promotion and protection of the environment as one key priority area for regional cooperation. In order to identify measures, immediate regional environmental issues and set up frameworks for implementation, a 'Technical Committee on Environment' was formed in 1992 comprising environment, forestry, climate change and natural disaster.[48] During the Third SAARC Environment Ministers Meeting in October 1997, the member states adopted the 'SAARC Environment Action Plan' and urged the SAARC countries to execute two programme, that is, 'Greenhouse Effects and its impact on the region' and the 'Causes and Consequences of Natural Disaster and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment.'[49] To facilitate capacity building, several regional centres, including SAARC Disaster Management Centre were created. Subsequently, all the established centres were merged in November 2016 and renamed as the SAARC Disaster Management Centre.[50]

Over the years, in numerous declarations, environmental issues, including climate change have been taken into account. For instance, at the Fourteenth SAARC Summit in 2007 in New Delhi, the member states reiterated the deepening of collaboration among the member states in addressing several environmental issues, including pollution of

groundwater, glaciers melting and sharing of information, etc.[51] At the Ministerial Meeting of SAARC in Dhaka on 3 July 2008, the member states adopted the 'SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change', where it identified several key priority actions, like technology transfer, finance and investment.[52] Also, in April 2010 at the Sixteenth meeting of the SAARC in Thimphu, it adopted a declaration, 'to formulate a common SAARC position' at the UNFCCC for addressing several environmental related concerns such as facilitating technologies transfer.[53]

Are REGs in the HKH Region Addressing the Climate Change Challenges Effectively?

The effects of climate change are not confined within national borders but are transboundary in nature. Over the years, several REGs around the HKH have emerged over the years, where it adopted several declarations and initiated many projects. Regional institutions like ICIMOD, with an approach of 'evidence-based solutions', have played a crucial role in documenting knowledge to translate into actions where there are significant knowledge gaps.[54] Yet, the critical question is: are the REGs in the HKH area really addressing the pertinent issues of climate crises? Reviewing literature on the role of REGs in and around HKH reveals that the role of regional organisations in mitigating relevant issues of climate crises is not taken sincerely.

Critics argue that the existing performance of regional cooperation is not motivated by an objective of improving environmental conservation but instead cooperation of the member states of HKH are largely motivated by 'economic interests or political bargaining.'[55] For instance, regional institutions like SAARC and SACEP remain institutions of great potential for multilateral environmental diplomacy, but they have failed effectively to translate their work into real environmental benefits. On the defective institutional design, environmental experts have underlined that the decisions agreed at the meetings or in summits are not legally binding among the member states as 'SAARC has no legal mandate.'[56] As a result, it has failed to address environmental aspects effectively.

Environmental experts like Ashok Swain have also pointed out the absence of 'systematic institutional and financial commitment' to undertake environment-related assignments in the region.[57] In the case of SACEP, where several policy programmes have been adopted, most of the donors of the projects were external, such as UNEP, FAO, etc. As a

result, the issue-based policies were formulated not on regional/ local interest, but by the interest of external financial donors.[58] Also, political issues have been a major stumbling block for regional institutions to display an effective role in environmental governance.[59] Several experts, practitioners and research institutes and NGOs have expressed the view that 'cross-border tensions are holding back progress, in environmental policy and scientific research.'[60] In order to advance environmental cooperation, from 1992 SAARC Environment Ministers have met periodically but since September 2011, it failed to convene an official meeting.[61]

The Way Ahead

The number of international environmental organisations has grown significantly, since 1972 and in that time over 400 environmental agreements have been adopted.[62] With the backdrop of this plethora of international environmental agreements, international relations theorist, Robert Keohane, has termed it a 'regime complex for climate change', where several regulatory bodies have emerged but 'a loosely coupled set of specific regimes' made at different times by different groups of states.[63] Certainly, there has been a remarkable growth of REG in and around the HKH. However, examining the effectiveness of policy implementation, this has failed due to the factors highlighted through this chapter.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 'overall the South Asia region is among the world's most vulnerable to fallout from climate change.'[64] Indeed, the impact of climate crises in the HKH region are already being felt, where destruction from climate crises can be both 'economic loss' and 'non-economic loss.'[65] A World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) report of 2020 concluded that extreme weather and climate change has affected all of Asia both in terms of economic loss and non-economic loss, in which China ($238 billion) India ($87 billion) and Japan ($83 billion) incurred the majority of losses.[66] The report also underscored that some of the highest disaster-related displacements globally in 2020 took place in China, Bangladesh and India.

In the year 2022, when one of the deadliest floods occurred in Pakistan, the World Bank estimated that the total damages would exceed $14.9 billion and total economic loss to reach about $15.2 billion and to rehabilitate and reconstruct, at least $16.3 billion are required.[67] In October 2023, the disaster caused by GLOF at South Lhonak Glacial Lake in Sikkim,

India bought unprecedented infrastructure destruction, including that of the 1200 MW Teesta III hydro power project built at the cost of Rs 13,965 crores.[68] On the impact of South Asian economy from the climate change, the World Bank, underscored that the negative growth will significantly be determined by the agriculture sector in which a potential loss of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2099 is projected: Bhutan 18 per cent, Nepal 13 per cent, India 10 per cent and Pakistan 10 per cent.[69]

While several scientific studies on climate crises, especially on the HKH, only reveal a grim situation, establishing an effective environmental institution has become critical. Failure to address climate crises will only add to the burden to the state exchequer, not to mention the unnecessary human costs. On 15 October 2020 at the Ministerial Mountain Summit in Kathmandu, all eight governments of HKH signed a declaration: 'to constitute a Task Force with high-level representation from the eight HKH countries to assess the feasibility of establishing a regional institutional mechanism' where it should 'assess similar regional collaborative platforms/ institutions from different parts of the world and recommend a feasible configuration for the HKH region.'[70] As stipulated in this declaration, hopefully countries of HKH will earnestly work to enhance deeper cooperation in mitigating the climate crises that are unfolding in the region.

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15

The DPI Revolution: India's Journey and Global Implications

Rohit Kumar Sharma

During India's G20 presidency, there was a surge in interest around the concept of digital public infrastructure (DPI) among policymakers, scholars and technology enthusiasts. While the concept and practical application of DPI have been evolving over the years, India's proactive efforts in maximising the benefits of DPI, coupled with its leadership role in the G20, presented an opportune moment to illustrate this concept and its solutions to the world.

Indian success in leveraging DPIs has been acknowledged and praised globally. For instance, Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, noted that the India Stack, a homegrown DPI, 'is a model for other countries seeking to achieve economic growth and meet sustainable development goals.'[1] He elaborated further that similar DPI systems in Africa can significantly reduce poverty in Africa. The G20 Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPFI) document echoed similar sentiments. It noted how India has 'achieved a remarkable 80 per cent financial inclusion rate—a feat that would have taken nearly five decades without a DPI approach.'[2]

During India's G20 presidency, particular attention was given to DPI by the Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG)[3] and the GPFI. India also hosted the Global DPI Summit in 2023, which was attended by delegates from around 50 countries.[4] Understanding India's journey from conceptualising an idea to implementing scalable solutions based on the idea is crucial. Therefore, this chapter will focus on India's progression

from building a foundational digital identity system like Aadhar to bringing DPI to the global map. However, a brief overview of DPI and its underlying principles will also be explored before moving ahead.

Defining DPI

What is DPI? Is it an approach to digital governance, a fusion of technologies, or something else all together? Also, is there any difference between digital public goods (DPG) and DPI? If so, what sets them apart? Starting with DPI, it refers to 'a set of shared digital building blocks, such as applications, systems, and platforms, powered by *interoperable open standards or specifications*[5] (emphasis added).'[6] With the support of technology and other facilitating elements, DPI aims to provide essential, society-wide, private, and public services. The 'public' in DPI refers to the commitment to promoting public policy goals and ensuring equitable, transparent access to all users in alignment with governance principles. The underlying normative and technical principles of DPI also include modularity, scalability, collaboration, security and privacy. Designers and policymakers must consider all these principles while building and deploying a DPI.

Fundamentally, DPIs are essential facilities replicating physical infrastructure in the digital realm, providing a digital pathway to public services. DPIs, as a foundation, can offer crucial services with applicability across multiple sectors at a societal scale. In the case of India, for instance, Aadhaar, as a foundational DPI, is designed so that it can be utilised to facilitate payments within the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) ecosystem, which is a finance-specific DPI. The cross-sectoral nature of Aadhaar, like DPIs, allows multiple sectors to leverage them, unlocking the potential within each sector without any need to develop their foundational systems from scratch, in this case, a digital identity. DPIs, by design, are interoperable that offer an approach to building digital assets in any country, facilitating the integration of multiple interconnected solutions. They also offer a foundational technology upon which innovative solutions can be developed to meet current requirements in a customised manner. To illustrate, consider the example of UPI in India, which provides a core framework for digital payment infrastructure. UPI provides a core technology over which big technology companies, such as Google's GPay and Walmart's PhonePe, have developed technology solutions to catering consumers, leveraging this core infrastructure.

Observers have categorised DPIs in several different ways. Some argue for *sector-specific* categorisation, as each industry has unique elements that need to be addressed when construing its digital infrastructure. In contrast, others prefer *functional* classifications based on the roles they perform within their deployed sectors.[7] The most common categories are *digital identities, digital payments,* and *data sharing and credentials*. According to the Centre for Digital Public Infrastructure, there are two more foundational categories of DPI—*trust infrastructure* (enabling trust through signatures, consent, and beyond) and *discovery and fulfilment* (accessing goods and services).[8]

Rahul Matthan offers an interesting 'frame of reference if we look to understand how far a country has come in developing its DPI agenda.'[9] Unlike the categories discussed above, which appear to be functional, Matthan introduces a framework for examining a country's DPI based on the stages of maturity. He divides the entire DPI ecosystem into three layers which are as follows:

1. The Access Layer
2. The Engagement Layer
3. The Empowerment Layer

When a DPI is initially introduced, citizens require a way to access it. This is enabled through identity building blocks, which are the necessary and irreplaceable prerequisites for any digital system. The interoperable design of the digital identity system (similar to Aadhar) in this layer thus becomes essential for the seamless functioning of the other two layers at a population scale. Matthan writes, 'once access is enabled, a whole plethora of services can be opened up for digitisation.'[10] This is where the engagement layer begins, where participants can now avail services based on their digital identity and interact with others with similar access. The most popular case of the engagement layer that facilitates greater interactions amongst private entities, individuals, and businesses, is digital payments (UPI in India). Matthan also notes that:

> ...without enough time being spent on the *access* and *engagement* stages of maturity, it is difficult for the country to maximize any *empowerment* infrastructure it might want to put in place.[11]

At this stage, innovations primarily focus on empowering individuals through their data. The concept revolves around enabling individuals to share their data in a manner that gives them greater control over it and

provides avenues through which they can realise increased value from it. In India, it has been manifested in the form of the Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), a consented data-sharing framework that can be applied across sectors. The DEPA architecture or framework is no longer a proof of concept and has been implemented in the Indian financial sector as an Account Aggregator (AA). As the name suggests, AA is the Reserve Bank of India's regulated ecosystem for sharing financial data and aggregating customers' financial information in one place.

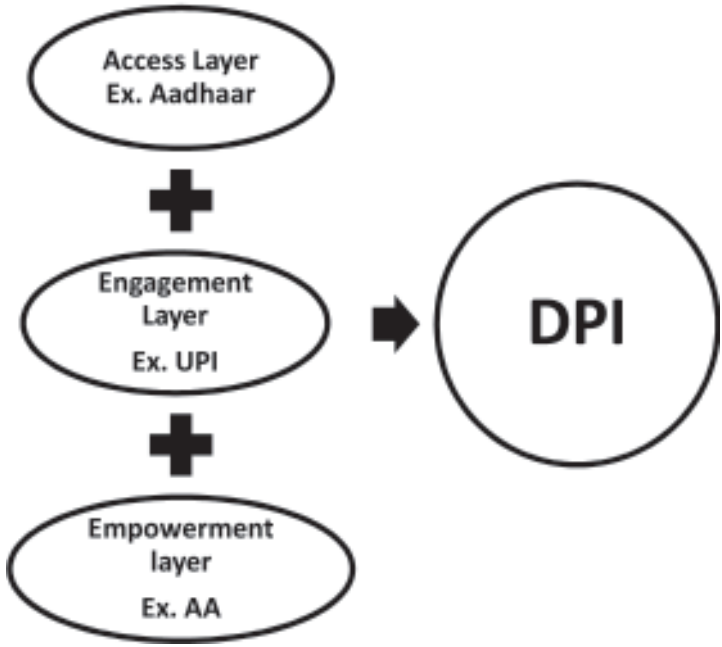

Figure 15.1: Rahul Matthan's Categorisation of DPI

Moving forward, it is equally important to examine what a DPG is and how it differs from DPI, as they are often used interchangeably in many contexts. Conceptually, DPG forms the core for developing a DPI-based solution. Based on this, a DPG refers to 'open-source software, open data, open AI models, open standards, and open content.'[12] DPI and DPG are distinct yet complementary concepts. Since the DPG is open source, it can be used to create or improve a country's DPI. To better understand the technology, multistakeholder platforms such as the Digital Public Goods Alliance have created a DPG standard, offering nine indicators and requirements determining what constitutes the DPG.[13] In India, the

Digital Infrastructure for Verifiable Open Credentialing (DIVOC) and Beckn protocol are some examples of a DPG that underpins and powers larger technology applications, systems, and platforms to run at the population scale. With this conceptual understanding, examining the Indian journey would provide insights into the various use cases of this empowering technology.

India's DPI Odyssey

During India's G20 presidency, DPI emerged as a buzzword, touted as a potential game-changer for nations, particularly those in the global south. There were instances where the foreign delegates visiting India to attend the G20 summit were 'fascinated' after using India's UPI system.[14] India's success story, as fascinating as may seem, has been a long and arduous journey. It all began with Aadhar, which has come to be the foundation of the world's most significant population scale DPI, based on which the entire Indian digital ecosystem for public services was developed. As Shankkar Aiyar notes, 'Aadhaar was conceptualised to enable the last mile of delivery and accountability' to the public.[15] The intrinsic design of Aadhaar enables the allocation of unique numbers to everyone backed by biometrics.

As India gradually embraced digitisation, policymakers sought solutions that could leverage increasing connectivity to enable seamless services. The interoperable design of Aadhaar makes its usage convenient across different systems, platforms, and applications. Likewise, other underlying principles of a DPI, such as scalability and collaboration, also form the cornerstone of the Aadhaar framework. Aadhaar has also facilitated ease of business and ease of living. To understand India's arrival to a leading position in terms of DPI-enabled public services, it is essential to examine the India Stack. The India Stack corresponds to 'a set of open Application Programming Interface (API) and digital public goods that aim to unlock the economic primitives of identity, data, and payments at population scale.'[16] It also sums up the entire India DPI ecosystem comprising identity, payments, and data empowerment (including digitalisation of documentation and verification, a consent layer).[17]

Aadaar, the foundational layer of India Stack, has catalysed India's DPI to enable governance with the least friction. As Aiyar puts it, 'the key was to align innovation and policy' that could sustain these initiatives for a more extended period, in scale as 'innovation would collapse without

mass subscription or adoption.'[18] A recent UNDP report presented at the G20 summit 2023 adds, 'Aadhaar...which is built on open standards, provides a sandbox environment for innovation, enabling public and private service providers to integrate their platforms.'[19] These providers include mobile network providers, financial institutions, and others.

Using these defining features, the launch of Aadhaar was followed by its linking with several other public services, including banking services. In 2011, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) launched the Aadhaar Payments Bridge (APB) and the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS), utilising the Aadhaar number as a central key for electronically channeling government benefits and subsidies to the beneficiaries.[20] Notably, the existing regulatory landscape was leveraged to build innovation on it. For instance, The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which is India's central bank and regulates the Indian banking system, enabled a policy to use Aadhaar authentication to enable banks to open no-frills Jan Dhan accounts.[21] A year before this, the RBI also facilitated the holder of the Aadhaar ID to authorise a bank to obtain electronic verification (eKYC) of identity through the UIDAI.[22] The Aadhaar platform also facilitated the development of another important DPI known as DigiLocker, which also constitutes the identity layer.

With the first identity layer of the stack duly established, the majority of people now have their identity and credential verification systems in place through which they could access services and other governance features. During the same period, internet penetration was on the rise, coupled with affordable data charges. On this, Matthan points out how Jio launched its new mobile telecom services and authenticated user onboarding process with Aadhaar authentication systems, especially the eKYC. Against this backdrop, it is interesting to note that the cost of mobile data in India is one of the cheapest in the world, with 1GB of mobile data costing about $0.04 or about Rs 13.[23]

At the core of the payments layer lies UPI, India's instant real-time payment system, launched in 2016. UPI accomplished the integration of legacy payment systems via an open, interoperable digital infrastructure, providing everyone with a virtual payment address that functioned as a proxy bank account. It integrated 'multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.'[24]

UPI also covered peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions, which made it easier for non-bank fintech providers to add value to users and customers.

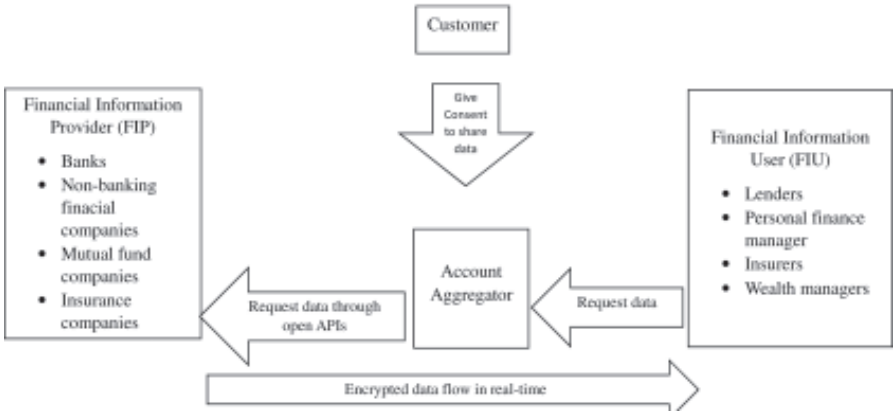

Figure 15.2: The AA Ecosystem

Source: DigiSahamati Foundation, https://sahamati.org.in/what-is-account-aggregator/ Last accessed 31 December 2024

Following the deployment of the identity and payments layer, applications focused on empowering individuals through data come into play. Adhering to the fundamental principles of DPI, solutions at this layer are built to address issues such as the sharing of personal data and individuals' access to it. As discussed above, the AA is one of the most popular use-case or applciation at this layer. The motivation behind this initiative was to bring open banking in India and empower customers to digitally access and share their financial data across institutions in a secure and efficient way.[25] The key to this framework is that the financial data cannot be shared without the consent of the individual, as the AA is developed as a data-blind consent manager. The network helps individuals access and share their financial data from one financial institution they have an account with to another institution. With the assistance of this system, access to loans and money management for individuals can be streamlined and made more efficient.[26]

AA is also RBI-regulated and has a fiduciary duty to consumers, sharing digitally signed and encrypted data. To utilise the AA network, financial institutions must first become members of it. The consent-sharing framework ensures that a financial institution's participation in the

network does not automatically require a consumer to join it. Participation is entirely voluntary for consumers, and an individual can choose not to register on an AA even if the bank they are using has joined the network. An individual can also revoke the consent anytime. The framework is cross-sectoral with potential expansion to the health and telecom sector. With such immense potential, AA is touted as the future of data sharing. The main participants of the ecosystem (Figure 15.2) are the AA, the Financial Information Provider (FIP), and the Financial Information User (FIU), which work together to streamline the process.[27]

Undoubtedly, India has come a long way, beginning with the establishment of foundational digital identity systems for its citizens and progressing towards projects aimed at granting individuals greater control over their data. Supported by a robust IT infrastructure and a massive population, India exemplifies how digitisation can be leveraged to develop solutions at a population scale, utilising an open-source model, software, and standards. This is contingent upon designing inclusive, interoperable, and modular principles, allowing for future reconfiguration according to evolving needs. Table 15.1 lists the DPIs in India along with the number of engagements with the solutions. From the table, readers can also gauge the participation of Indian citizens in the DPI landscape, indicating the trust that these applications bring to the forefront.

Table 15.1: List of DPIs in India[28]

DPI Application	*Description*	*Reach*
Aadhar	World's largest biometric-based unique identity system	1.38 billion Enrolments 103 billion Authentications
DigiLocker	Enabling secured access and sharing of documents	192 million users 6.3 billion issued documents
MyGov	The world's largest citizen engagement platform	33 million MyGov Saathis 5.4 million Comments in Discussions
UMANG	Unified Mobile App for New-Age Governance	55 Million Registered Users 1745 e-Governance Services
Bhashini	Enabling real-time translation in 22 Indian languages	400+ Artificial Intelligence Models 22 Indian Languages Supported
UPI—Unified Payments Interface	The world's leading digital payment DPI	10 Billion transactions per month USD 185 billion is the value of transactions per month

DPI Application	*Description*	*Reach*
Jan Dhan Yojana	World's largest financial inclusion initiative	502 million beneficiaries' account USD 24 billion balance in the beneficiaries' account
eSanjeevani—National Telemedicine Service	Providing quality healthcare anywhere, anytime	155 million patients served 4,00,000 Daily consultation capacity
Co-Win	World's largest vaccination drive against COVID	2.2 Billion Vaccination Doses 1.1 Billion Registered Persons
Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)	Universal Digital Healthcare	451 million Health IDs 305 million ABHA Linked Electronic Health Records (EHR)
DIKSHA	The world's largest e-learning platform available in 30 languages	5.3 billion learning sessions 169 million course enrolments
eNAM—National Agricultural Market	Unified national market for agricultural commodities	18 million farmers reached 248 thousand traders
GSTN (Goods and Service Tax Network)	Enabling One Nation, One Market, One Tax	14.1 Million registered taxpayers USD 745 billion Payments through Portal (excluding IGST on imports)
ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce)	Democratisation of digital commerce platforms for buyers and sellers	80 Network Participants 170,000 Sellers and Service Providers
Startup India	Building a strong and inclusive ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship in India	99,380 recognised startups 661,000 users on the portal
FASTag	Enabling ease in making toll payments digitally while the vehicle is in motion	316 million monthly transactions in volume USD 360 million payments
PM Gati Shakti	GIS-based multimodal connectivity infrastructure that fast-tracks projects of national importance	1400+ GIS Layers24 Central Ministries

Source: https://www.g20.in/ebook/digitalIndia/index.html, Last accessed 31 December 2024

Among the many DPIs, it is essential to highlight a few examples. The Co-Win platform epitomises India's scaleable, inclusive, and open digital infrastructure, serving as the technological backbone of the nation's vaccination drive during the Covid-19 pandemic. Designed to meet the needs of all stakeholders, the platform was rapidly developed with careful attention to scaleability, modularity, and interoperability. To enhance

usability, Co-Win was integrated with other government mobile applications such as Aarogya Setu and UMANG.[29]

Another significant DPI is the ONDC, an infrastructure backed by the Government of India. As a network-centric model, ONDC facilitates transactions between buyers and sellers regardless of the platforms or applications they use as long as these platforms/applications are connected to the open network. The Beckn protocol, which underpins ONDC, is seen by observers as India's response to the overwhelming dominance of large e-commerce platforms, aiming to democratise digital commerce. Any entity with goods or services to offer can become a seller on ONDC, marking a significant departure from the existing platform-centric models of e-commerce, where buyers and sellers can only interact on limited platforms.[30]

India's Global Leadership

With the successful deployment of a DPI ecosystem supported by inclusive principles, design, open-source software, and protocols, India has secured a leadership position on the global DPI map itself. Given the low cost and inherent scaleability, countries are showing an interest in India's success story. The growing enthusiasm was visible during India's G20 presidency. Summarising the first India Stack Developer conference, Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Rajeev Chandrasekhar stated that the objective of the conference is to 'enhance access and adoption of India Stack for countries interested in adopting and integrating it according to their specific requirements.'[31] The conference was also attended by industry leaders and G20 delegates, illustrating the broader interest in adoption. DPI was also prioritised in the G20 DEWG meetings.

India also hosted the Global DPI Summit, in which developing countries showed considerable interest. At the same time, India signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Antigua, and Barbuda on sharing India Stack.[32] Interesting deliberations were held during the summit covering potential use cases such as 'DPI for Judicial Systems and Regulations'. Following the month after the summit, Papua New Guinea also showed interest in India's DPI and signed a MoU on sharing India Stack.[33]

In the following months, India signed a MoU with Trinidad and Tobago, Kenya and Colombia on sharing India Stack.[34] The key moment

in India's G20 presidency was when a global consensus was achieved on the definition, framework, and principles of DPI.[35] It is pertinent to note that, for the first time, a multilateral grouping recognised the importance of DPI by providing a working definition for it.[36] Bringing a consensus on this issue is significant, especially at a time when technologies are at the centre of geopolitical tussle. The outcome under the Indian presidency also illustrates the willingness of countries to cooperate on issues pertaining to developmental goals. This echoed the unanimous adoption of India's proposal to develop DPI as the preferred approach for deploying digital technology among the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states.[37]

On a bilateral front, Japan has shown keen interest in India's UPI system to boost digital collaboration between the two nations.[38] France has become the first European country to accept UPI, starting with the Eiffel Tower, facilitating swift and hassle-free payment transactions by Indian tourists.[39] On the eve of their twenty-fifth year of strategic partnership, India and France agreed to adopt a roadmap called Horizon 2047 to set the course for their bilateral relationship up to 2047. Part of the roadmap is to work jointly on DPI projects, identifying 'potential high-impact initiatives in the areas of mobility, commerce, and culture', ... "to harness the benefits of interconnectedness between platforms accomplished by leveraging open protocols."[40]

In a joint statement issued by the India-EU Trade and Technology Council, both sides recognised the importance of DPI for 'the development of open and inclusive digital economies and digital societies' by leveraging 'technology, markets, and governance to create population scale digital ecosystems' to promote inclusive development.[41] India and the EU also agreed to collaborate to enhance their respective DPIs' interoperability and jointly promote secure and privacy-preserving solutions. The significance of broader cooperation was also emphasised in the India-US joint statement during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official state visit to the US. Recognising the potential of DPI, the joint statement highlighted the intent of India and the US 'to work together to provide global leadership for the implementation of DPI to promote inclusive development, competitive markets, and protect individual rights.'[42] The statement also underlined the importance of developing an India-US Global Digital Development Partnership to pool resources from both countries to 'enable development and deployment of DPIs in developing countries.'[43]

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced the launch of the Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository and a Social Impact Fund aimed at promoting the development of DPI in the Global South.[44] The objective behind the repository is to enable sharing of information and best practices among countries. The repository showcases information in a standardised format from countries' and organisations, featuring 54 DPIs from 16 countries. The creation of a Social Impact Fund is envisioned as a government-led, multistakeholder initiative covering the global South with an aim to accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India has pledged an initial commitment of USD 25 million for the fund, opening it up for other stakeholders to contribute as well. India has also floated the idea of a 'One Future Alliance' as a voluntary initiative with an aim to bring together governments, the private sector, civil society and others to synergise global efforts in the DPI ecosystem.

DPI ecosystem is also seen as an accelerator of the SDGs as it combines the right technology, governance frameworks, and robust innovation.[45] SDGs represent common objectives that reflect countries' aspirations, for which DPI and underlying open-source and interoperable technologies are essential. Undoubtedly, DPI has catalysed cooperation on an unprecedented scale signifying how technology-based solutions can be a point of convergence rather than a source of fragmentation.

Based on the above discussions, one must ask: Is it truly feasible to replicate India's success on a global scale with the available technologies and frameworks in a relatively short amount of time? Some observers point out the challenges of building an ecosystem from scratch, noting that it took years to develop the entire DPI ecosystem in India, starting with Aadhaar. Instead of building from the start, scholars argue, a country must go for 'DPI as a packaged Solution (DaaS)' for rapid DPI deployment.[46] Further reiterating the point, they note that the DaaS approach is better than the traditional custom-build approach because the latter necessitates a strong capacity, institutional foundation, and mature ecosystem to fully leverage its benefits. The DaaS approach is crucial, particularly in smaller countries without any robust mechanisms and structures. With the help of the DaaS model, India and other leading countries can help deploy a DPI building block quickly without the long procurement, building and test cycles.[47]

The Way Ahead

Despite DPI's existence for years, it was in 2023 that the world began to show significant interest in its utility at solving global problems. The G20 consensus on the working definition of DPI underlined the significance of delineating the contours of the concept despite the jurisdictional differences among the member states. The fact that DPIs are built on open networks, allowing configuration according to the needs of the time, was a significant factor in garnering support for the idea from countries. Another significant factor was India's success story in developing applications, platforms, and solutions on these open networks and softwares to provide services at a population scale. To be clear, the concept of technology for inclusive goals has existed for a long time. What is new, however, is the international agreement on a framework that integrates technology, governance and the role of communities for the first time.[48]

India's DPI journey provides an overview of how various layers were built over a period of time, guided by design principles such as inclusivity, interoperability, scaleability, security, privacy and collaboration. Progressing from that point to its current leadership in DPI represents a remarkable journey. India has also signed MoUs with countries in the Global South to share India Stack for deploying DPIs in their respective jurisdictions. Developed nations and regional groups such as Japan, France, the US, and the EU have shown interest in collaborating with India to develop DPI-based solutions. Given this context and India's relentless advocacy for DPI-related discussions on international platforms, it would not be an exaggeration to say that these actions truly embody India's vision of 'one earth, one family.'

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