



Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific

India

Jonah Blank



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Preface

The U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) *National Defense Strategy* highlights the important role that U.S. allies and partners play in U.S.-China strategic competition. America's strong and enduring relationships with our allies and partners offer the United States unique advantages in long-term competition with China—the United States is not competing with China on its own, but can draw from allied and partner resources, capabilities, and strengths that far exceed what China can bring to bear. As DoD focuses on long-term strategic competition with China, understanding how U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region are responding and adjusting their own approaches to China will be crucial to ensuring the success of U.S. strategy.

This report on India is part of a project that aims to understand the perspectives of U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific as they formulate and implement their responses to China's more assertive foreign and security policy behavior in the region and a more competitive U.S.-China relationship. The research also assesses how DoD, particularly the U.S. Air Force, can best deepen and improve its ability to work with allies and partners to maintain U.S. advantage in long-term strategic competition with China. The other reports in this series are available at www.rand.org/US-PRC-influence.

The research reported here was sponsored by Brig Gen Michael P. Winkler (PACAF/A5/8) and conducted within the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND Project AIR FORCE as part of a fiscal year 2019 project titled “Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific” that assists the Air Force in evaluating U.S. and Chinese influence and assessing possible Air Force, joint force, and U.S. government options.

This report should be of value to the national security community and interested members of the general public, especially those with an interest in U.S.-China competition in the Indo-Pacific. Comments are welcome and should be sent to the project leader, Bonny Lin. Research was completed in September 2019.

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Summary

Issue

To manage China's rise as a strategic competitor to the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) 2018 *National Defense Strategy* highlights the importance of working with regional allies and partners. One of the key partners in this effort will be India, which has the world's second-largest active-duty armed forces and is already a peer or near-peer competitor of China across a range of military capabilities. India's self-defined core national security interests, including the preservation of its sovereignty against encroachment by any would-be hegemonic regional power, are in relatively close harmony with those of the United States. But U.S. planners must be keenly aware of the constraints on both India's willingness to forge a partnership based on strategic competition with China and its capacity to do so. These constraints include persistent aversion to any partnership that might be characterized as "alignment" (reduced, but not eliminated, by a serious border clash with China in June 2020); significant distrust of U.S. commitment and intentions; a highly risk-averse structure for the making and implementing of security policy, particularly vis-à-vis China; economic linkages with China, including potential for medical supply chains needed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic; historical and ongoing underfunding of basic military needs; and a lack of military capability and interoperability sufficient for frictionless interaction with U.S. forces. India will remain a key U.S. partner, but these challenges should moderate expectations about the pace for increased engagement.

Approach

The research for this report draws from a range of primary and secondary sources, datasets, and, most importantly, interviews with U.S., allied, and partner government and military officials and academic experts. To understand regional responses to competition, we traveled to and interviewed experts in India, as well as other nations in the region.

Conclusions

The United States and India share a basic assessment of China's place in the Indo-Pacific security order: Both regard China as a nation that seeks dominance over the region and is often willing to violate international norms in pursuit of such dominance—but both India and the United States would prefer a strategy that corrals China into compliance with global norms rather than seeking military confrontation. Despite this harmony of analysis, U.S. planners should be

keenly aware of several key factors that will temper the pace and extent of partnership between the two nations:

- The concept of “non-alignment” did not die with the Cold War. It is more commonly described now in such terms as “strategic autonomy,” but India remains fiercely opposed to any partnership in which it would be seen as the junior partner. This opposition has been softened by the most serious Sino-Indian military clash in decades (near the Galwan Valley, in June 2020), but has by no means melted away.
- India regards China as its most significant long-term competitor, and Indian leaders are particularly concerned about the strategic partnership of China with India’s near-term rival Pakistan. But this does not mean that New Delhi has much appetite for confrontation with Beijing—particularly outside the Indian Ocean Region. New Delhi has little desire for more land engagements like that at Galwan, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed.
- Relations between India and the United States have been consistently warming over the past two decades, but a deep pool of distrust remains. The United States will have to work patiently to overcome this distrust.
- Many items in the U.S. playbook of security engagement will run into institutional barriers in India. These include low levels of military funding, a security policymaking bureaucracy that is not designed for speedy decisions, and a tendency to make security policy on an ad hoc rather than a doctrinal basis.

Recommendations

For DoD and the U.S. Air Force:

- Increase emphasis on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions; this represents perhaps the lowest-cost/highest-yield avenue for engagement.
- Enhance U.S.-India cooperation in the areas of cyber and electronic warfare; this represents a threat for which India—despite its somewhat deceptive reputation as an information technology powerhouse—is not well prepared.
- Encourage India’s growing cooperation and engagement with U.S. allies, such as Australia and Japan, and emerging partners, such as Indonesia and Singapore.
- Increase military education programs.
- Encourage India to increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific region, including participating in multilateral air and maritime activities and conducting operations in the South China Sea—while being aware that such participation may be modest.
- Share satellite and other information with India about China’s problematic behavior in disputed Himalayan areas, such as Galwan and other sites in the western portion, the Doklam Plateau and other sites in the eastern portion, and elsewhere as needed.

For the U.S. government at large:

- Accept India’s deep-seated desire for “strategic autonomy.” Any efforts to make India move more quickly than it wishes will be likely to backfire.
- Consult with India before making decisions affecting its interests.
- Increase engagement on maritime domain awareness.

- Seek opportunities to work with India to prevent Chinese political interference and influence operations, including in the cyber arena.

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

AAD	Army Air Defence (India)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (India)
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative (China)
C4ISR	command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (U.S.)
COIN	counterinsurgency
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DTTI	Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (U.S.-India)
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FDI	foreign direct investment
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FONOPS	Freedom of Navigation Operations
G-2	Group of 2
GDP	gross domestic product
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief
IAF	Indian Air Force
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies (London)
IN	Indian Navy
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JeM	Jaish-e Muhammad
LAC	line of actual control
LOC	line of control
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka militant group)
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air Defense
MDA	maritime domain awareness
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defence (India)

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDRF	National Disaster Response Force (India)
PACAF	Pacific Air Forces
PACOM	U.S. Pacific Command
PAF	RAND Project AIR FORCE
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force (China)
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy (China)
PRC	People's Republic of China
RSAF	Republic of Singapore Air Force
RSN	Republic of Singapore Navy
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations
USAF	United States Air Force
USARPAC	U.S. Army Pacific Command
USD	U.S. dollars
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

1. Introduction: India in the Context of U.S.-China Competition

This report is part of a broader RAND project examining how the United States can work better with Indo-Pacific allies and partners to compete against efforts by China to assert regional domination. This report focuses on four key analytical questions, which will help U.S. planners formulate a successful strategy for maximizing engagement with India in the coming five to ten years within the confines of what is realistically feasible:

- What factors might mitigate expectations about India’s willingness to take sides in U.S.-China competition?
- How do India’s formulators and implementers of security policy view India’s potential relationship with a rising China?
- How does India view its relationships with other key nations in the Indo-Pacific arena, and how might such relationships serve to advance or set back U.S. strategic interests, including competition with China?
- What factors in India’s political arena might have an impact on India’s willingness to take a more robust stance against Chinese attempts to exert regional dominance?

At first glance, few (if any) partners present more suitable opportunities for increased engagement than India. By many metrics, India is the Asian nation best poised to offset China’s regional positioning and assure a more even balance of strategic weight in this vital area. China is the world’s most populous nation—but India is projected by the UN to overtake it in less than a decade (by 2027).¹ India’s active-duty military is the second-largest in the world, after China’s Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA).² Moreover, India has its own geopolitical rivalry with China, dating back to a PLA multifront invasion in 1962.³ China and India have engaged in border skirmishes and standoffs throughout the decades since, most seriously near the Galwan Valley in

¹ United Nations, “Total Population, Both Sexes Combined (Thousands),” UNdata website, 2019.

² An overview of India’s military is provided in Appendix B. China’s PLA encompasses all elements of the military. The air component is referred to as the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), and the naval component as the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

³ Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001a, pp. 131–133.

June 2020,⁴ and the two countries have territorial disputes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the high Himalayas.⁵

India's self-defined core national security interests, including the preservation of its sovereignty against encroachment by any would-be hegemonic regional power, are in relatively close harmony with those of the United States. Unlike firmly established U.S. treaty allies in Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, India has no such relationship with the United States—and that provides considerable room for a deepened partnership. Unlike many other nations in South and Southeast Asia, India has a sufficiently antagonistic relationship with China to make the possibility of alignment with Beijing against U.S. interests seem fairly remote.⁶

But many of the same challenges that have prevented closer partnership between the United States and India in the past remain in effect today. Such significant challenges (discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5) include

- persistent aversion to any partnership that might be characterized as “alignment,” in the interest of preserving the nation's “strategic autonomy”
- significant distrust of U.S. commitment and intentions
- a risk-averse structure for the making and implementing of security policy
- historical and ongoing underfunding of basic military needs
- lack of military capability and interoperability sufficient for frictionless interaction with the U.S. military and close partners such as Australia or Japan.

Such challenges should moderate U.S. expectations about the pace for increased engagement. All parts of the U.S. government should treat India as a valuable partner for the future—but one that should be permitted to increase engagement at a pace of its own choosing.

The barrier to increased cooperation with the United States is *not* a desire to balance engagement with China. India regards China as a strategic competitor, so there is very little substantive cooperation between the two militaries. A variety of factors have served to limit U.S.

⁴ The most serious confrontation in over half a century began in May 2020, along the Line of Actual Control at various sites in both Sikkim and Ladakh. By early June, it appeared to be moving toward a diplomatic resolution, but, for reasons that remain unclear, on June 15 troops on both sides engaged in a physical confrontation near Galwan that resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian troops and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers. India claims that China had been planning the confrontation for weeks, and ended up seizing 23 square miles of previously undisputed Indian territory in order to prevent India from finalizing road construction that would have solidified New Delhi's control over key features. For discussion of the Galwan conflict, see M. Taylor Fravel, “China's Sovereignty Obsession: Beijing's Need to Project Strength Explains the Border Clash with India,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 26, 2020. For discussion of the prior Himalayan standoff on the Doklam Plateau three years earlier, see Jonah Blank, “What Were China's Objectives in the Doklam Dispute?” *Foreign Affairs*, September 7, 2017.

⁵ The LOC is the Line of Control, separating portions of the pre-independence state of Jammu and Kashmir currently administered by India from those currently administered by Pakistan. The LAC is the Line of Actual Control, separating Himalayan territories administered by India from those administered by China. Neither the LOC nor the LAC is an international border. India does have mutually recognized international borders with both Pakistan and China, at places other than the LOC and LAC.

⁶ Nations in South and Southeast Asia that have enough of a security relationship with China to cause U.S. planners to accept a degree of balancing include Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

security engagement with India in the past, and (as discussed later in this report) these factors continue to serve as a brake on such engagement in the future.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is India's traditional, and still powerful, identification with a policy goal variously referred to as "Non-Alignment," "strategic autonomy," or "strategic independence." For most of India's history, Non-Alignment served as shorthand for purported equidistance between the world's superpowers, while in reality describing a barely disguised tilt toward the Soviet Union. (The history of India's concept of Non-Alignment is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.) India has never written its security doctrine in a white paper or any other type of formal document.⁷ It is noteworthy that perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive description of what might be considered India's current semi-official security doctrine is contained in a document entitled *NonAlignment 2.0*.⁸

NonAlignment 2.0 was authored in 2012 by eight of the country's most respected theorists and practitioners in the fields of military science, political science, international relations, and economics. Both the authors and the much wider group of experts with whom the named authors consulted including retired military, diplomatic, and political leaders sympathetic to both of the country's major national parties (the Indian National Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]). The goal was to lay out a broad strategic consensus stretching across the political spectrum—and it has proven remarkably prescient: The positions espoused by *NonAlignment 2.0* have been largely followed both by the Congress Party administration of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (who was in office when the document was released) and by the BJP Administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi (who assumed office in 2014 with an absolute majority sufficient to adopt whatever policy changes he wished—and was returned to office in May 2019 with an even larger majority).

NonAlignment 2.0 was co-published by the government's National Defence College, so even though it does not constitute the formal security doctrine of India, it comes closer to filling that role than any other document. It will be referred to throughout this report as a stand-in for a formal government-articulated doctrine.

With this context as background, it is instructive to quote *NonAlignment 2.0* directly regarding the key issue of how India views strategic competition between the United States and China:

[T]he twenty first century is unlikely to be characterized by a world bifurcated between two dominant powers. While China and the United States will undoubtedly remain superpowers, it is unlikely that they will be able to exercise

⁷ On India's lack of a formal security doctrine, and substitutions for this prior to publication of *NonAlignment 2.0* (Sunil Khilnani, Rajiv Kumar, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Prakash Menon, Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan, Shyam Saran, and Siddharth Varadarajan, *NonAlignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty-First Century*, New Delhi, India: National Defence College and Centre for Policy Research, 2012), see Rollie Lal, *Understanding China and India: Security Implications for the United States and the World*, Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Security International, 2008, pp. 38–44.

⁸ Khilnani et al., 2012; hereafter cited as *NonAlignment 2.0*.

the kind of consistent, full-spectrum global dominance that superpowers exercised during the mid-twentieth century Cold War. Alongside the U.S. and China, there will be several other centres and hubs of power that will be relevant, particularly in regional contexts. This means that NonAlignment will no longer be limited to avoiding becoming a frontline state in a conflict between two powers. It will instead require a very skillful management of complicated coalitions and opportunities—in environments that may be inherently unstable and volatile rather than structurally settled. This also provides India with rich opportunities.⁹

This formulation articulates several important points relevant to U.S.-China competition. First, it makes clear that India simply does not want to be part of any alliance or security cooperation bloc, even informally, without any treaty obligations. Second, India wants to balance its engagements among its list of key partners.¹⁰ Third, India sees the transition from a bipolar Cold War world to a multipolar geopolitical structure not as a reason to abandon Non-Alignment—but as an opportunity to redefine and recommit to it for the 21st century.

Applying the Project Framework to India

This project developed a framework to be applied to each of the country case studies, highlighting major diplomatic, economic, defense, and political factors relevant to understanding the responses of key countries to China’s growing power and influence, and to U.S.-China competition. The methodology of this framework is described in Appendix A.

Table 1.1 lists 14 variables we considered in assessing relative U.S. and Chinese influence. It includes eight indicators of shared interests and six measures of relative capabilities.

⁹ The text further notes the potential utility of India’s parliamentary structure: “If it can leverage into the international domain some of its domestically acquired skills in coalition management and complex negotiation” (*NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 9).

¹⁰ Not stated here, but worth noting, is the fact that India’s preferred partners include many partners and allies of the United States—including Australia, Britain, Singapore, Israel, and France—but they also include U.S. rivals (most importantly, Russia).

Table 1.1. Variables for Assessing Relative U.S.-China Influence

Source of Influence	Type	Description
Diplomatic and political		
Diplomatic and political ties	Shared interest	How diplomatically and politically important the United States or China is to the partner and the extent of diplomatic ties
Support for U.S. versus Chinese vision for the region	Shared interest	How the partner's views of the ideal regional order aligns with the U.S. vision for the region and U.S. values versus assessed Chinese vision and values for the region
Views of U.S. commitment to the region	Shared interest	How confident (or not confident) the partner is about U.S. commitment or staying power in the region
Public opinion	Shared interest	Relative public perceptions of favorability of the United States versus China
Economic		
Economic dependence	Relative capability	The partner's current economic dependence on the United States versus China, measured by aggregating trade, investment, and tourism
Economic opportunity	Relative capability	How much the partner believes the United States versus China can provide future economic benefits
Threat perceptions of the United States versus China (economic)	Relative capability	How much the partner views U.S. or Chinese economic influence as potentially threatening, subversive, or coercive
Willingness to work with the United States versus China based on economic threat perceptions	Shared interest	Whether the partner's economic threat perception encourages it to work more with the United States or China to balance against the other economically
Military and security		
Threat perceptions of the United States versus China (military)	Relative capability	How much the partner views the United States or China as a military or security threat
Willingness to work with the United States versus China based on military threat perceptions	Shared interest	Whether the partner's military threat perception encourages it to work more with the United States or China to balance against the other militarily
Support for major U.S.-led security efforts	Shared interest	How much the partner generally supports the United States on security issues through its participation in or opposition to major U.S.-led international or regional security efforts
Military cooperation	Relative capability	How much the partner is working closely with the United States versus China militarily
U.S. versus Chinese military capability	Relative capability	How the partner views U.S. versus Chinese military capability
Perception of U.S. willingness to aid partner in conflict with China	Shared interest	How confident (or not confident) the partner is about U.S. willingness to come to its military defense in a potential conflict involving China

NOTE: Variables measuring shared interests are displayed in gray, and variables measuring relative capability are displayed in black.

Like the other reports that are part of this broader project, this report examines the evolution of this set of variables over a period of roughly a decade and projects how developments in these areas might unfold over the next five to ten years. The project focused on examining these

variables across these time periods to explore the impact of growing Chinese power and influence and the intensification of U.S.-China competition on the views and policies of U.S. allies and partners as they adjust their approaches to the United States, China, and the region. Figure 1.1 provides our findings and displays these assessments with respect to India in 2018. The assessments depicted are based on the information and analysis in the following sections. Given the mix of qualitative and quantitative variables, the study uses five categories and corresponding colors to capture the broad differences in influence:

- Significantly more U.S. influence (blue): The United States has significantly more influence than China. For the quantitative variables, this is coded as at least a 20 percent U.S. advantage in influence compared with China.
- More U.S. influence (light blue): The United States has moderately more influence than China. For the quantitative variables, this is coded as a 3 percent to 20 percent U.S. advantage.
- Similar U.S. and People's Republic of China (PRC) influence (gray): The United States has similar levels of influence as China. For the quantitative variables, this is coded as the United States has influence within 3 percent of Chinese influence.
- More PRC influence (light red): China has moderately more influence than the United States. For the quantitative variables, this is coded as a 3 percent to 20 percent PRC advantage.
- Significantly more PRC influence (red): China has significantly more influence than the United States. Quantitatively, this is coded as at least a 20 percent PRC advantage.

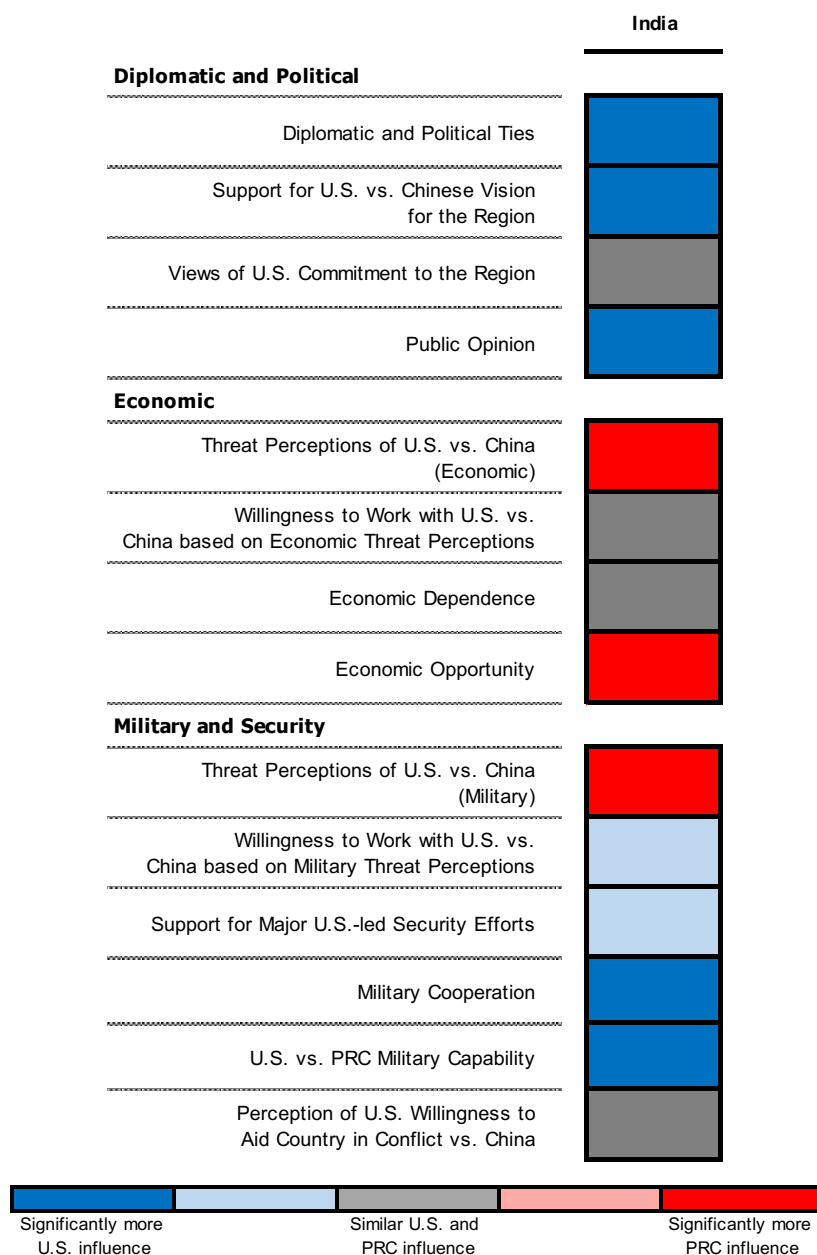
Please see Appendix A for more detailed coding of each variable.

Figure 1.1 presents the coding of relative U.S. versus Chinese influence. The figure highlights the clear advantage enjoyed by the United States in the competition for diplomatic and political influence: India regards the United States as a friend (albeit an imperfect and perhaps unreliable one) rather than an adversary. The analysis in this report shows greater support for the U.S. vision for the region than for the Chinese vision: India sees China as seeking regional dominance, whereas it does not have similar concerns about U.S. goals. On the question of U.S. commitment to the region, however, India remains highly conflicted: It regards the United States as an often-unreliable partner, particularly vis-à-vis its rival Pakistan. Public opinion favors the United States over China, but not to an overwhelming degree.

In the realm of economic influence, Figure 1.1 highlights China's narrow-but-noteworthy advantage over the United States. Unlike many other Indo-Pacific nations, India does not face the prospect of economic dominance by China: All nations in Southeast Asia are sufficiently tied to China economically to make confrontation a risky proposition. India's economic ties are significant, but not nearly as strong as those of its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbors. India regards China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) economic program as a matter of strategic concern—but it also sees significant opportunity in Chinese investment. This has been a central feature of discussions between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and

Chinese President Xi Jinping during their out-of-capital summits in Mamallapuram (October 2019), Gujarat (September 2014), Wuhan (April 2018), and on other occasions.

Figure 1.1. Relative U.S. and Chinese Influence in India (2018)



In military and security terms, Figure 1.1 illustrates the area in which the United States enjoys its most significant advantage. Although India retains significant aversion to any relationship that might be characterized as an alliance (as discussed in Chapter 2, under the rubric of “strategic autonomy”), it views the United States as a security partner and China as its most serious long-term security challenge. This view, however, does not translate into eagerness

to work closely with the United States on security issues, or to join U.S.-led security initiatives, such as Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea. India sees the United States as being far more militarily capable than China (and naturally a preferable partner for military cooperation), but it harbors significant doubts about whether the United States could be relied on in the event of a Sino-Indian conflict.

Organization of This Report

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 describes India's geostrategic importance, its institutional outlook in foreign relations, and its strong desire to maintain "strategic autonomy" in its diplomatic relationships with the United States, China, and the other countries in the region. Chapter 3 outlines China's economic importance to India (which constrains, but does not dominate, Indian decisionmaking), and provides brief country-by-country sketches of India's relationships with its key regional neighbors. Chapter 4 considers India's defense priorities vis-à-vis China itself and vis-à-vis China as the primary strategic patron of India's historical military adversary Pakistan. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the outlook of how the issues discussed in prior chapters—in the diplomatic/political, economic, and security arenas—are likely to play out over the next five to ten years; it assesses the key facts that U.S. policymakers will need to take into account when formulating strategy, including the factors limiting closer engagement between the United States and India, and areas where engagement might be more feasible. Chapter 6 offers options for the U.S. government as well as for DoD and the U.S. Air Force (USAF).

2. India's Geostrategic Importance, Institutional Outlook, and Desire for "Strategic Autonomy" in Diplomatic and Political Relations

India's Geostrategic Importance

Size, Geography, Democracy

For at least a decade and a half, India has been seen by many U.S. policymakers as a prime candidate for drastically increased security engagement. A few data points show why:

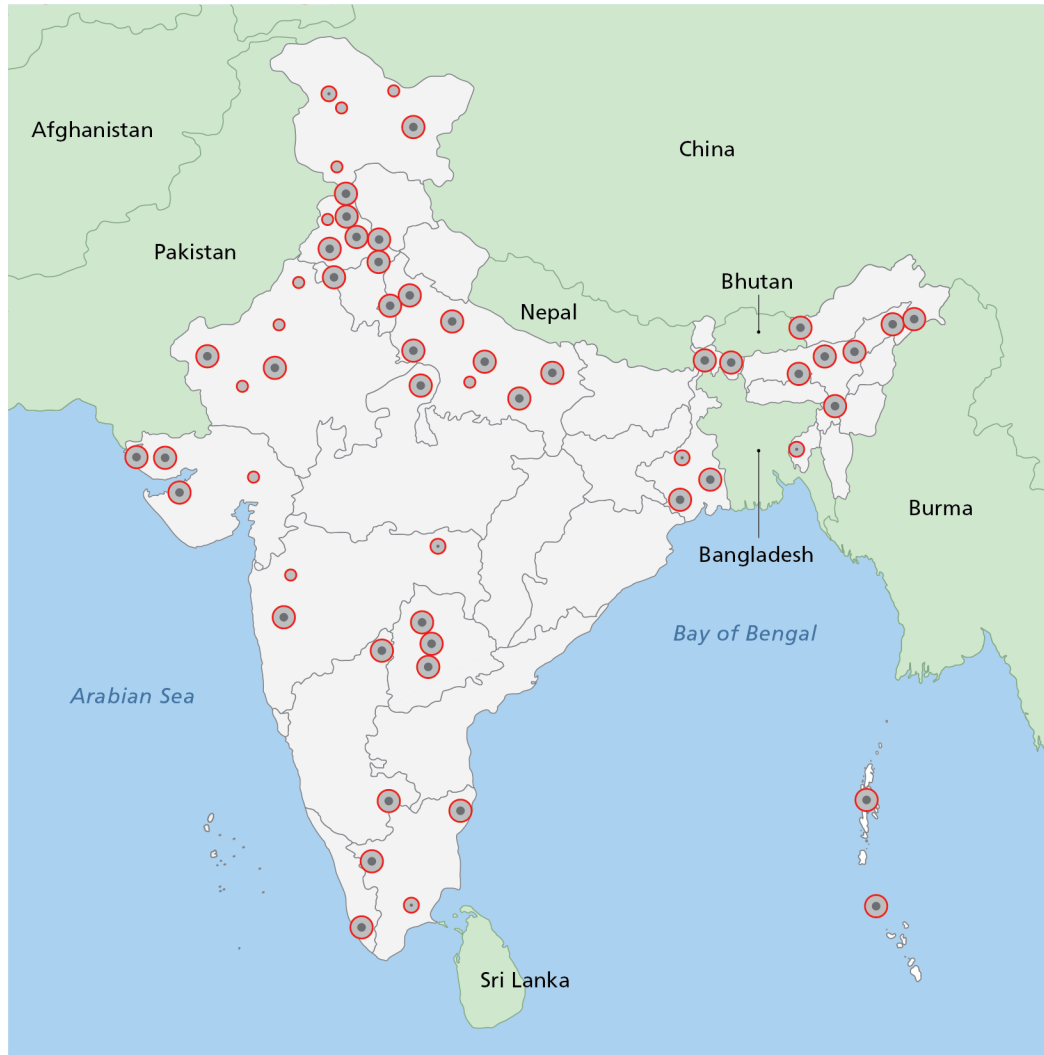
- India, with a population of 1.4 billion, is projected to overtake China as the world's most populous nation by 2027.¹¹
- India's geography is strategically significant for competition with China in the land, sea, and air domains. On land, India is one of only two nations (Vietnam is the other) that has fought a land war with the PRC unsupported by foreign military troops, and the only one (apart from India's de facto protectorate Bhutan) with which Beijing has unresolved territorial land disputes.¹² On sea, India is the only nation with the force capability and political intent to prevent China from extending its "hard power" dominance from the Pacific Ocean into a similar dominance of the Indian Ocean Region. In the air, India has numerous air bases that do not currently provide access to USAF aircraft but could conceivably do so under the right conditions in the future; the most noteworthy of these are Indian Air Force (IAF) stations at Port Blair and Car Nicobar in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and nine IAF stations in the Northeastern states of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh near the Chinese-administered province of Tibet (Figure 2.1).
- India has by far the largest economy in South Asia. Its gross domestic product (GDP) is \$9.47 trillion when measured by purchasing power parity (PPP)—making it the third-largest in the world (behind only the United States and China) by PPP. Because of its enormous population, however, India's GDP per capita is only \$7,200 (in PPP)—156th out of 228 nations ranked.¹³

¹¹ United Nations, 2019.

¹² In the maritime domain, China has unresolved territorial disputes with Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. (Taiwan's maritime claims cannot be classified as territorial disputes per se, since the PRC and Taiwan do not recognize each other as sovereign nations.) Before the creation of the PRC, China was invaded by various modern and pre-modern nations (including Japan in 1937). The PRC's participation in the Korean War (1950–1953) may qualify South Korea as a nation that has fought a land war against modern China (depending on how one defines PRC support for North Korea), but in this conflict South Korea—unlike India and Vietnam in their conflicts with the PRC—was supported by troops from the United States and other nations.

¹³ Central Intelligence Agency, "World Factbook: Country Comparison, GDP—Per Capita (PPP)," website, undated. All figures are from 2017.

Figure 2.1. Indian Air Force Bases and Air Stations



In addition to demographics and geography, India offers a shared commitment to democratic government. Both U.S. and Indian government officials routinely cite the partnership of “the world’s oldest democracy” and “the world’s largest democracy”—indeed, this formulation has been used by both Democratic and Republican U.S. presidents and by both BJP and Congress Party prime ministers.¹⁴ It has been used so often that it has become cliché. And some analysts question the utility of such a distinction: For example, Eric Heginbotham and George Gilboy challenge the conventional wisdom of what is sometimes termed the “democratic peace theory,” arguing that “the practicability and safety of pursuing a foreign policy based on these values is

¹⁴ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President to the Joint Session of the Indian Parliament in New Delhi, India,” November 8, 2010; “Bush Vows Support to India, Says Terror Won’t Have Final Word,” *Economic Times*, November 30, 2008; Government of India, Press Information Bureau, Prime Minister’s Office, “PM’s Address to Joint Session of the US Congress,” July 19, 2005; “Modi-Trump Meet: US President to PM Modi, You Have Done a Great Job; I Would Like to Congratulate You,” *Financial Express*, June 27, 2017.

questionable.” Specifically in the context of a discussion of Indian and Chinese strategic cultures, they contend that “there is no empirical basis at all for claims that democracies fare fundamentally more peaceful than other regimes, or that the security interests of democracies in different regions facing different challenges will tend to converge simply because they share similar domestic political institutions and values.”¹⁵

But most scholars of international relations and security strategy—such as John Mearsheimer,¹⁶ Rudolph Rummel,¹⁷ John M. Owen,¹⁸ and Christian Welzel¹⁹—do tend to view the basic institutions of an open, democratic nation as providing at least some measure of shared interests and guarantors of predictable, transparent policymaking. The core ideas of what has come to be known as “democratic peace theory” go back to the French and German Enlightenment and have been outlined by (among others) Michael Doyle.²⁰ For U.S. policymakers, the importance of working with a mature, firmly rooted democratic political system can hardly be overstated. Democratic government ensures that the makers of security decisions will not be too far out of step with the core sentiments and desires of the populace: In nations without such popular support, any security arrangement struck today might well evaporate tomorrow with a *coup d’état* or sudden shift in regime priorities.

Such sudden swings are not unknown in democratic nations, but any such fluctuations sufficiently important to a critical mass of voters is likely to be reversed in a subsequent election.²¹ Perhaps equally important, since the passage of the Leahy Law in 1998,²² the U.S. government has been legally prohibited from security cooperation with units of foreign militaries that have engaged in unremediated abuse of human rights. Such abuses are not absent in democratic states, but there is a correlation between democratic systems and respect for basic

¹⁵ Eric Heginbotham and George Gilboy, *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behavior*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 263.

¹⁶ John Mearsheimer, “Why Is Europe Peaceful Today?” *European Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2010.

¹⁷ Rudolph J. Rummel, “Libertarianism and International Violence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, 1983.

¹⁸ John M. Owen, “Give Democratic Peace a Chance? How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Autumn 1994.

¹⁹ Christian Welzel, *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²⁰ Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. In this work, as in others published over the preceding decades (Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1983), Doyle emphasizes the historical philosophical routes of this idea.

²¹ As recent fluctuations in the foreign policy of nations including the Philippines, India, and the United States demonstrate, such events are not unknown in democratic nations. The key point here is that *if such policy-shifts are important enough to the voters*, then they are likely to be reversed.

²² The first version of the Leahy Amendment was passed in 1997, but referred only to counternarcotics assistance. This prohibition was extended the following year to all assistance funded by the State Department, which includes such forms of security assistance as Foreign Military Financing and many types of military education and training.

human rights.²³ Moreover, remediation of abuses that do occur (a provision provided by Leahy legislation) is easier in a democratic civilian-run country than one without institutionalized systems of civilian oversight of the military.²⁴

A similarity of political structure does not necessarily lead to a harmony of interests. As Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne note, “the convergence of strategic interests between the world’s two largest democracies has been more limited and slower than many estimated two decades ago and still imagine today.” They note that the bonds of democracy can, in fact, serve merely to camouflage (rather than overcome) the very real differences that “are obscured by often repeated shibboleths like ‘natural allies,’ and ‘defining partnerships of the twenty-first century.’”²⁵

Institutional Outlook

Shared Interest in Maintaining a Rules-Based International Order

The U.S. case for assembling a broad array of partners and allies in its competition with China is not grounded in power politics. Instead, the U.S. argument is typically grounded in defense of a peaceful global order and upholding a system for adjudicating interstate disputes through a rules-based set of international mechanisms rather than through military force. When the United States tries to enlist partners in such ventures as South China Sea Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS), the effort is grounded in a defense of shared interest in free, lawful navigation—not in an effort to assemble a coalition against China as part of a new Cold War.²⁶ (It is important to note, however, that India’s own view on FONOPS is less expansive than that of the United States, largely out of concern that other nations might conduct FONOPS in Indian Ocean waters that New Delhi would prefer remain its own preserve.²⁷)

This is precisely the argument most in harmony with India’s own concept of its strategic interests, and its place in the 21st century world order. Indeed, any effort to enlist India in

²³ Nilanjana Jain, “Human Rights Under Democracy,” *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January–March, 2006; Samantha Besson, “Human Rights and Democracy in a Global Context: Decoupling and Recoupling,” *Ethics & Global Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011.

²⁴ For a more complete discussion of the history, implementation, and effectiveness of the Leahy Law, see Michael J. McNerney, Jonah Blank, Becca Wasser, Jeremy Boback, and Alexander Stephenson, *Improving Implementation of the Department of Defense Leahy Law*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1737-OSD, 2017.

²⁵ Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne, “Great Expectations: Asking Too Much of the US-India Strategic Partnership,” *Washington Quarterly*, Fall 2019, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 42.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Freedom of Navigation Report: Fiscal Year 2017*, Washington, D.C., 2017, p. 3.

²⁷ Iskander Rehman, *India, China and Different Conceptions of the Maritime Order*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2017. Former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon notes, “Freedom of navigation and security in the Indo-Pacific is critical to India’s wellbeing and future prosperity. But it is not the answer to our continental security issues” (Shivshankar Menon, “Security Strategies for India as an Emerging Regional Power with Global Ambitions,” lecture at United Service Institution of India, December 5, 2018).

competition with China that was not based on defense of a global rules-based order would encounter significant opposition in the name of “strategic autonomy.” *NonAlignment 2.0* notes that the nation’s entwined development and national security goals rest on a foundation of international rules-based order, and “India therefore has to strive to maintain an open global order at many different levels.”²⁸

India’s Security Policymaking

India’s armed forces are entirely under civilian control and have been ever since the nation’s independence in 1947; even during India’s sole break from democratic governance (the 1975–1977 “Emergency”), the armed forces made no attempt to challenge the chain-of-command, instead keeping civilian authorities in charge at all levels. This stands in sharp contrast to the political place of the armed forces in India’s rival Pakistan, where the military (specifically, the Army) has governed for much of the nation’s history and dominated its security policymaking process even during times of civilian rule.

India’s military enjoys considerable societal respect, but the firewalled civil-military divide makes the formulation of security policy more complicated. Exceptionally few politicians or career civil servants in India have ever served in the military, and the number of top-level policymakers who have served in uniform is almost negligible. This lack of direct experience among top political leadership and their aides one rung down creates a policy formulation process that frustrates both U.S. and Indian officials, uniformed and civilian alike.

Civilian bureaucrats maintain an iron control over even the smallest decisions: As a U.S. military official in New Delhi noted (with only a mild hyperbole), a U.S. commander of any of the services in the Pacific Command (PACOM) area of responsibility “can do just about anything he wishes short of starting a war.”²⁹ India’s four-star counterparts, by contrast, are not even able to decide where or when to travel without bureaucratic approval.

This lack of authority by uniformed officials to green-light engagements has huge logistical ripple effects.³⁰ Many decisions are refused by civilian authorities for specific policy reasons—but many others are simply delayed so long that they become logistically impossible. An unknowable number of engagement requests are never even submitted by commanders, due to the overly cumbersome nature of the approval process. With a decision matrix so complicated, it is always easier for officials at every level to deny an activity request than to approve one.

Indian uniformed officers (U.S. military officials in New Delhi report) almost always want to expand engagement with the United States: They want more training, more exercises, and to take

²⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 8. Not all observers see this theoretical convergence as leading to a true harmony of interests between the United States and India. For a counterargument, see Dinshaw Mistry, “Aligning Unevenly: India and the United States,” *East West Center Policy Studies*, Vol. 74, 2016.

²⁹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

³⁰ For a historical discussion of India’s civil-military relations, see Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001b, pp. 170–180.

more courses in the United States (particularly in niche specialties and those building technical expertise).³¹ A U.S. military official reported that when he visited the Indian Army's school for Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare in Mizoram, he found that the highest-ranking officer, in his own spare time, "had studied *everything* he could get his hands on about U.S. Special Forces—he knew more about our training and operations than *I* did!"³²

There are institutional roadblocks at several points in the decision tree.³³ The first is at the Ministry of Defence (MoD), which is staffed largely by career bureaucrats from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), rather than by officials with specific military skill sets. If a request successfully passes through the barriers at MoD, it must be vetted for potential diplomatic impact by IAS officials at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). A U.S. official in New Delhi reported that the MEA, rather than MoD, presented a greater obstacle for increased engagement.³⁴ If a proposal manages to make its way through MoD and the MEA, it still may fall prey to the competing priorities in the Prime Minister's Office—the ultimate locus of decisions on truly important matters. *NonAlignment 2.0* implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of getting all stakeholders in the government to work harmoniously in advance of national objectives, both in the security arena and throughout government.³⁵

Even when all the bureaucratic stars are aligned, there is the overarching issue of cost. India's security budget is quite low for a nation dealing with such significant current and future challenges. Few nations are confronted with the sort of existential threats that India regularly faces: a determined and active nuclear-armed rival that regularly launches asymmetric attacks, a militarily superior neighbor with active irredentist claims on its territory, and a full slate of internal insurgencies and serious terrorist campaigns. Even fewer nations, when confronted with such threats, would keep military spending at only 2 percent of GDP—almost exactly the global average, and a benchmark that includes many nations facing virtually no realistic security threat.

As a matter of national pride, India generally refuses to take advantage of training, exchange, and exercise opportunities unless it can pay its own way—which it often cannot. A U.S. military official in New Delhi noted that India refuses to accept Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to fund many training courses for which it would be legitimately eligible: "Their view is that they want to foot the bill for everything—even when they can't afford it. Which means they often stay

³¹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

³² Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

³³ For a discussion of these roadblocks, from the perspective of a U.S. government official who has dealt with them firsthand as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the area including India, see Cara Abercrombie, "Realizing the Potential: Mature Defense Cooperation and the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership," *Asia Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, January 2019.

³⁴ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

³⁵ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 30. For a nondoctrinal Indian analysis of why civilians at MoD are responsible for bringing "jointness" to the nation's military forces—and failing to do so—see Anit Mukherjee, "Fighting Separately: Jointness and Civil-Military Relations in India," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 40, Nos. 1–2, July 2016, pp. 13–16.

home.”³⁶ Another U.S. official noted that India doesn’t even send personnel to conferences and forums such as the U.S. Army Pacific Command’s (USARPAC’s) annual conference, LANDPAC, which brings together key officers from armies all across the Indo-Pacific and provides the opportunity to forge bonds among many potential partners: “We invite them every time, but they don’t come. They miss the chance not only to get to know us better, but to build relationships across the whole region.”³⁷

According to U.S. military officials in New Delhi, the total number of engagements each year is significantly lower than those offered by the United States. “India isn’t even using all of the IMET [International Military Education and Training] slots reserved for them—we increased the number, but the billets are going unfilled.”³⁸ Another U.S. official noted that just about every U.S. officer has some personal experience in training alongside British, Australian, or other partners, but very few have ever trained or exercised with Indian counterparts: “We’re just not touching many people.”³⁹

Some of these bureaucratic roadblocks can be overcome with creative approaches—for example, a more streamlined decision process on both sides. Others, however, will require top-level political leadership—for example, concerns about loss of India’s independence or stature can only be addressed at the highest levels of India’s civilian government.⁴⁰

India’s Desire for “Strategic Autonomy” in Diplomatic and Political Relations

Despite the strong foundation for a deepened security partnership between the United States and India in the context of increasing competition with China, significant challenges remain in place. Perhaps the most significant of these is India’s deep-seated desire to maintain “strategic autonomy”—an ideological predisposition growing out of, and often closely tied to, the idea of Non-Alignment.

In formal terms, the Non-Aligned Movement only came into being at the Belgrade Conference of 1961—by which point the member nations had already begun to migrate away from any coherent bloc of decolonized states providing a third pole to the U.S.–Soviet Union dyad. But in India, the idea of Non-Alignment had roots going back decades earlier—indeed, both of India’s political ideologies (Nehruvian secularism and Hindu nationalism) can be said to have had rival versions of Non-Alignment baked in from their respective inceptions.

³⁶ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

³⁷ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

³⁸ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

³⁹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

⁴⁰ For a more complete discussion of India’s strategic culture, and particularly with how it compares to that of China, see Andrew Scobell, “Himalayan Standoff: Strategic Culture and the China-India Rivalry,” in T. V. Paul, ed., *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2018, pp. 165–186.

The Nehruvians, who governed the nation for its first half-century, reveled in the thought of an India sitting at a serene distance from ideologies of both capitalist West and communist North (as the crow flies from New Delhi); this owed much to the views of Mahatma Gandhi, the moral, spiritual, and—at least in theory—ideological lodestone of the Indian National Congress Party, which was the vehicle for Nehruvian politics. While Jawaharlal Nehru himself was attracted to the economic elements of Soviet-style socialism,⁴¹ Gandhi's main influence from Russia was the decidedly un-Soviet Leo Tolstoy.⁴² On the other side of the coin, both figures had devoted their lives to gaining India's independence from Great Britain and were understandably loathe to substitute a *de jure* colonial relationship with one English-speaking nation for a *de facto* one with another.

The Nehruvians' ideological rivals in the Hindu Nationalist (or Hindutva) movement came to political power through the BJP from 1998 to 2004 under Prime Minister Atul Bihari Vajpayee,⁴³ and again from 2015 to the present under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Hindutva groups out of which the BJP grew—most directly the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and more obliquely the Hindu Mahasabha—were founded during the last decades of colonial rule and espoused a form of proto-Non-Alignment throughout their formative years. In Hindutva ideology, India must stand apart from—and eventually *above*—both the upstart West and the delusionally godless Communists. After Gandhi's assassination by a Hindu nationalist gunman in 1948, both the RSS and the Mahasabha were banned for a time, and neither they nor any other Hindutva group played a major role in politics until the 1980s. But when the BJP eventually came to power, Hindutva's ideological distaste for alliances that it regarded as impinging on India's dignity would translate into a continuation of Nehruvian Non-Alignment regardless of which power was in office.

India put its desire for equidistance into practice almost from the start of its history as an independent nation. At first, Nehru tried to keep his nation genuinely free of alignment with either Cold War bloc. In 1955, he joined with Indonesia's founding president, Sukarno, and other leaders of newly decolonized nations to convene the African-Asian Conference (more commonly called the Bandung Conference, after the Indonesian city where it was held).⁴⁴

In Bandung, more than two dozen new nations assembled to create what would soon be called the Non-Aligned Movement. Although the actual language of the conference communique

⁴¹ Surjit Mansingh, "Indo-Soviet Relations in the Nehru Years: The View from New Delhi," in Surjit Mansingh, Rolad Popp, Anna Locher, and Shana Goldberg, eds., *Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security*, Zurich: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, February 2009.

⁴² Kenneth Rivett, "Gandhi, Tolstoy and Coercion." *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1988.

⁴³ Vajpayee also served as prime minister for 13 days in 1996, but was unable to form a stable coalition.

⁴⁴ For a more complete discussion of India's role at the Bandung Conference, see John Garver, *Protracted Contest*, Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001, pp. 118–120, 188–189. The ideology codified at Bandung is occasionally retroactively referred to as "Non-Alignment 1.0."

was rather vague,⁴⁵ the movement and its putative ideology (equidistance from both Cold War superpowers) remained India's rhetorical touchstone until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In India's narrative, the entire concept of Non-Alignment was due primarily to Nehru, and partly for this reason even many Indians who disown other parts of Nehru's legacy claim implicit ownership of the concept as an element of national pride.⁴⁶

The difficulty of maintaining equidistance was clear from the very beginning: One of the Bandung Conference's key figures was Zhou Enlai, premier of the PRC, which was at that time still a *de facto* ally and ideological partner of the USSR.⁴⁷ Over the subsequent seven years, the relationship between India and China soured. Matters took a serious turn for the worse in 1959 when India gave sanctuary to the Dalai Lama, infuriating China by permitting the establishment of a Tibetan government-in-exile in the Himalayan town of Dharamsala. By 1962, things had grown so toxic that India and China—two of the three linchpins of the original Non-Aligned bloc—fought the only war in their postcolonial history.⁴⁸

As India's relations with China soured in the late 1950s and early 1960s, its relations with the USSR grew warmer.⁴⁹ This owed more to geopolitics rather than ideology. The Communist world split into rival camps in the years following the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953, with Nikita Krushchev denouncing his predecessor in 1956. This was a step that PRC leader Mao Zedong, a wartime comrade and ideological soulmate of Stalin, refused to take. When India began to see China as a foe rather than a comrade, it was only natural that it would be drawn closer to China's new adversary, the USSR.⁵⁰ India bitterly resented the failure of the United States to come to its aid in the 1962 war, even after a landmark visit by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1959 and high hopes for the new President John F. Kennedy (who had his hands more than full at the time with the Cuban Missile Crisis). China's speedy invasion badly

⁴⁵ "The Asian-African Conference considered the problems of common interest and concern to countries of Asia and Africa and discussed ways and means by which their people could achieve fuller economic, cultural and political cooperation" (Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference of Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia, April 24, 1955, p. 2).

⁴⁶ The same is true in Indonesia—with the substitution of Sukarno for Nehru.

⁴⁷ In 1950, the USSR and the PRC signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship (also known as the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance). In 1954, India and China signed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, or Panchsheel Agreement. These principles were mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal matters, equality, and harmonious co-existence.

⁴⁸ Garver, 2001, pp. 48–49.

⁴⁹ For discussion of how India fit into a "triangle" relationship with China and the United States during this period, with particular reference to China's "dual adversary" policy *vis-à-vis* the United States and the U.S.S.R, see Harry Harding, "The Evolution of the Strategic Triangle: China, India and the United States," in Harry Harding and Francine Frankel, eds. *The China-India Relationship: What Every American Needs to Know*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 321–350.

⁵⁰ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 43–45.

damaged India's standing with other members of the Non-Aligned Movement,⁵¹ providing further incentive to edge closer to Moscow.

Throughout the Cold War years, therefore, it is not surprising that Non-Alignment often served as a thinly veiled *de facto* Indian tilt toward the Soviet Union.⁵² But even a quarter-century after the demise of the USSR, Non-Alignment remains very much alive. The United States and other interlocutors based in New Delhi report this as a constant refrain in discussions.⁵³ The quasi-doctrinal document *NonAlignment 2.0* seeks to update the concept and to situate it at the center of the nation's security strategy:

Strategic autonomy has been the defining value and continuous goal of India's international policy ever since the inception of the Republic. Defined initially in the terminology of NonAlignment, that value we believe continues to remain at the core of India's global engagements even today, in a world that has changed drastically since the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁴

The document spells out a modern-day rationale for strategic autonomy: Instead of keeping the nation free of dangerous commitment to either of the Cold War blocs (the argument for NonAlignment 1.0, as it is implicitly called in retrospect), the new version seeks to preserve India's freedom of action largely to advance its *development* goals—which its security strategy both serves and is based on: “The core objective of a strategic approach should be . . . to enhance India's strategic space and capacity for independent agency—which in turn will give it maximum options for its own internal development.”⁵⁵ This line of thought would be championed by the Congress-led government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who had himself served as architect, during an earlier stint as Minister of Finance, of India's first moves toward economic liberalization in the early 1990s. It would be continued under the BJP government of Prime Minister Modi.⁵⁶ As Modi's Minister of External Affairs Subramanyam Jaishankar put it in 2019:

⁵¹ Cohen, 2001a, p. 245.

⁵² For a more complete discussion, see Steven A. Hoffmann, “Perception and China Policy in India,” in Harding and Frankel, 2004, pp. 33–74.

⁵³ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

⁵⁴ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. iv.

⁵⁵ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 8. It continues:

This policy can therefore be described as ‘NONALIGNMENT 2.0’—a re-working for present times of the fundamental principle that has defined India's international engagements since Independence. The core objectives of Non Alignment were to ensure that India did not define its national interest or approach to world politics in terms of ideologies and goals that had been set elsewhere; that India retained maximum strategic autonomy to pursue its own developmental goals; and that India worked to build national power as the foundation for creating a more just and equitable global order.

⁵⁶ Not all observers see Modi as having lived up to the economic side of the equation. Abhijnan Rej and Rahul Sagar say “The picture around a presumed Modi doctrine is that of inertia tempered by a few distinct innovations” (Abhijnan Rej and Rahul Sagar, “The BJP and Indian Grand Strategy,” in Milan Vaisnav, ed., *The BJP in Power*:

The first phase from 1946–62 could be characterized as an era of optimistic non-alignment. Its setting was very much of a bipolar world, with camps led by the United States and the USSR. India's objectives were to resist the constraining of its choices and dilution of its sovereignty as it rebuilt its economy and consolidated its integrity. Its parallel goal, as the first of the decolonized nations, was to lead Asia and Africa in a quest for a more equitable world order.⁵⁷

The authors of *NonAlignment 2.0* see a multipolar world as one that offers many options to India.⁵⁸ This argument for strategic autonomy is, perhaps, a straightforwardly transactional one: India should maintain its independence from any formal or informal alliance in order to extract the best possible set of concessions from all potential suitors: “[I]t is undoubtedly in India's best interests to have a deep and wide engagement with as many powers as are willing to engage with it.”⁵⁹ The argument would appear to rest on the premise that if the United States and any potential rivals are constantly competing for India's favor, they will be forced to offer better terms for engagement than they might grant to an ally whose commitments are permanently locked in. (This runs counter to a complaint sometimes made by Indian interlocutors about excessive transactionalism in U.S. circles—but such a complaint mirrors that of Pakistani interlocutors, often in reference to precisely the same policy points.)

Both the positive case (opportunities in autonomy) and negative one (dangers in alliance) for Non-Alignment are likewise advanced by Indian policymakers across the board. Shivshankar Menon, for example, served as BJP Prime Minister Vajpayee's Ambassador to China and subsequently as Congress Prime Minister Singh's National Security Advisor. He advocated a version of *NonAlignment 2.0* in terms of *realpolitik*:

We are now in a far more dangerous world, where the Westphalian state has collapsed or vanished to our immediate West, but where traditional great power rivalry between strong and rising states is the norm to our East. Alliance seems to me to be exactly the wrong answer. We should retain the initiative with ourselves and not get entangled in other's quarrels, keep our powder dry and ourselves free to pursue India's national interest.⁶⁰

In addition to *realpolitik* arguments, *NonAlignment 2.0* makes an argument based on a foundation of deeply engrained cultural values rather than shallow transactional calculations. India (this argument runs) cannot and should not ally with any nation or group, because India's

Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 4, 2019).

⁵⁷ Subramanyam Jaishankar, “Speech at the Fourth Ramnath Goenka Lecture,” New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, November 14, 2019.

⁵⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 31: “The structures of competition in the global system will present India with a range of partnership choices. For a start, India will be sought after in great power competition. This presents a great historical opportunity for India.”

⁵⁹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 33, further: “This engagement is important for developing our own technology and military capabilities, as well as for spreading economic risks and for benefiting from flows of ideas and innovation distinctive to particular cultural traditions and contexts.”

⁶⁰ Menon, 2018.

political system, culture, and society set it apart from any other country or grouping of countries. In essence, this argument says that this is not a matter of choice—India fundamentally is, and has *no choice but to be*, Non-Aligned: “In terms of constitutional vision, India is the most ‘Western’ and liberal among the non-Western powers. But we are rooted in Asia. . . . India can be a unique bridge between different worlds. Indeed, India’s bridging potential is one we must leverage and turn to our active benefit.”⁶¹

One result of this desire for strategic autonomy is India’s desire to balance its security engagements among a range of partners. This range is not as broad as those of other countries—Indonesia, for example, actively seeks the widest possible array of security partners. India’s desired range of partners does, however, include both allies and rivals of the United States. “The Indian government likes to keep everything as equal as it reasonably can, right across the board,” says a U.S. military source interviewed in New Delhi. “Exercises, training—they like to maintain rough parity between the U.S. to other partners, particularly Russia.”⁶² Another U.S. military official interviewed in New Delhi noted that American policymakers need to factor India’s desire for balance into any requests for cooperation: “Anything we ask India to do,” he said, “we’ve got to be OK with them doing it with Russia too.” He noted, however, that the same dynamic can work in reverse: In at least one instance he was able to remember, the United States succeeded in getting permission for an activity on the rationale that India had granted the same type of engagement to Russia.⁶³

An Indian security analyst described a creative method that one U.S. ally uses to deal with the issue of partner-balancing: stealth engagements. “The British send an innocuous message,” he explained, “something like, ‘Oh, we’ll be transiting the region *en route* to the Pacific—mind if we have a stopover to refuel?’ And while they’re doing that, they have substantive conversations and exchanges with their IAF or IN [Indian Navy] counterparts.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 31. The text between these two statements elaborates further:

As a poor and developing country, we also have an enormous global footprint. We have the potential to become a technological powerhouse yet remain an informal economy. We are committed to democratic practices and are convinced that robust democracies are a surer guarantee of security in our neighbourhood and beyond. Yet we do not ‘promote’ democracy or see it as an ideological concept that serves as a polarizing axis in world politics. It follows that there are few ‘natural’ groupings—whether defined by political vision, economic profile and interests, or geopolitical security challenges—into which India can seamlessly fit. This diverse identity and the multiple interests that it underpins are actually our greatest strategic assets at the global level.

⁶² Interview on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1). The source, a U.S. military official, noted that India’s desire to maintain a wide array of partnerships (whether in the security or diplomatic sphere) extends even to North Korea. The possibility of maintaining overall balance rather than an individual service one—that is, permitting a U.S. imbalance in areas of U.S. advantage such as the naval arena, and countering this with a special effort to give Russia an advantage in (say) land warfare—does not appear particularly attractive to either Indian or U.S. interlocutors.

⁶³ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

⁶⁴ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

In addition to the need for balancing, a desire to maintain “strategic autonomy” means that India’s military hardware remains a mishmash of Western, Russian, and other incompatible kit. “India wants mix-and-match technology,” said one U.S. military official. “They want to put American technology on Russian frames. But that doesn’t work—not just because we don’t permit it, but because the systems aren’t designed to cooperate.”⁶⁵ This will make operational interoperability with the United States (or any other security partner) an ongoing challenge.

Some Indian observers see the desire for Non-Alignment as an anachronism, or even as an intellectual dodge. “Our policy leaders *hate* making difficult decisions,” said one Indian security analyst. “Non-Alignment, strategic autonomy, whatever you want to call it—it’s just a fig-leaf for avoiding tough choices. We want all the trappings of leadership, with none of the responsibility.”⁶⁶

Most Indian policymakers and scholars of security policy, however, do have a genuine, deeply seated view that the nation’s core interests are best served by keeping balancing competing nations against each other.⁶⁷ This applies not only to superpower competition but even to the competition of nations less militarily capable than India itself. *NonAlignment 2.0* urges that “We should try and steer clear of the escalating rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We have major interests in our relationships with both these countries and need to strike a careful balance in our dealings with each.”⁶⁸

This recommendation has been put into action—and it may be part of what is sometimes termed a strategy of “multialignment.”⁶⁹ Traditionally, India has regarded Saudi Arabia with suspicion, due partly to Cold War politics and partly to the Saudis’ extremely close (and extremely opaque) relationship with India’s archrival, Pakistan.⁷⁰ Relations began to warm in 2006,⁷¹ and the full extent of the rapprochement was seen in February 2019 when Saudi Crown Prince (and *de facto* ruler) Muhammad bin Sultan stopped over in India directly after a visit to Pakistan. Whereas Prince Sultan had signed a memorandum of understanding for \$20 billion in support for Pakistan’s faltering economy, in India he made no firm commitments of

⁶⁵ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

⁶⁶ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4).

⁶⁷ C. Raja Mohan, “India: Between ‘Strategic Autonomy’ and ‘Geopolitical Opportunity,’” *Asia Policy*, No. 15, 2013.

⁶⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Ian Hall, *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*, Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2019, pp. 21–40. See also Ian Hall, “Multialignment and the Indian Foreign Policy Under Narendra Modi,” *Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 3, 2016.

⁷⁰ Jonah Blank, “Defining the Relationship: What Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Want from Each Other,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2015; Jonah Blank, Richard Girven, Arzan Tarapore, Julia Thompson and Arthur Chan, *Vector Check: Prospects for U.S. and Pakistan Air Power Engagement*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2107-AF, 2017, pp. 54–58.

⁷¹ In 2006, King Abdullah became the first Saudi ruler to visit India in over half a century. This was followed by a 2010 visit to Saudi Arabia by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and a 2016 visit by Prime Minister Modi.

investment.⁷² When Modi greeted the crown prince at the airport in New Delhi, he greeted him with a hug—providing conspicuous diplomatic support at a particularly critical time.⁷³

India's relations with Iran have traditionally been cordial and go back centuries: Only about one-fifth of India's Muslim population are Shi'a (the dominant denomination in Iran), but the cultural impact of Islam in India has had more of a Persian than Arab cultural influence.⁷⁴ India's investment in Iran's Chabahar port is New Delhi's most significant financial and political commitment to any nation in the Middle East, and one of its most significant such commitments anywhere in the world.⁷⁵ In February 2018, a year before the Saudi crown prince's visit, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani paid his first state visit to India—and inked at least nine substantive documents on concrete elements of cooperation.⁷⁶

In this context—that is, a genuine desire to update strategic independence for a 21st century geopolitical environment—it is useful to note that *NonAlignment 2.0* even posits the possibility of the United States and China forming an alliance hostile to India.⁷⁷ From an American perspective, it might seem far-fetched that the U.S.-China competition might turn into a new “G-2” strategic bloc. From an Indian perspective, however, such a possibility is a matter of history: In 1972—less than a decade after the PLA invaded India, and only two months after India concluded its most significant war with China's security partner Pakistan—U.S. President Richard Nixon shocked the world by traveling to Beijing for a paradigm-shifting summit with China's leader Mao Zedong.⁷⁸

⁷² His statement said only, “We expect the opportunities we are targeting in India in various fields to exceed \$100 billion.” See Sanjeev Miglani, “Saudi Prince Expects Investment Worth More than \$100 Billion in India,” Reuters, February 20, 2019.

⁷³ The visit came four days after the Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e Muhammad launched the deadliest attack on Indian forces in years—and three months after global outcry arose following a CIA assessment that Prince Sultan likely ordered the murder of dissident Jamal Khashoggi at a Saudi consulate in Turkey. See Michael Hirsh, “What Happened to Trump's Khashoggi Report?” *Foreign Policy*, November 20, 2018; Sanjay Kumar, “Greeted with a Hug: Saudi Crown Prince Welcomed to India by PM Modi,” *Arab News*, February 19, 2019.

⁷⁴ Throughout the pre-colonial era, Persian was the language of government and administration in most Muslim polities in India, whether Sunni or Shi'a. Well into the colonial period, a fluency in both Persian language and the more refined elements of Persian culture (including Persian poetry, music, and art) were essential requirements for public officials at most courts—often including individuals practicing Hinduism, Sikhism, or even (in the case of a few British colonial officials) Christianity. See William Darymple, *White Mughals*, New York: Penguin, 2004.

⁷⁵ Geeta Mohan, “India Committed to Chabahar Port Despite Budget Slash from Rs 150 Crore to Rs 45 Crore: Diplomats,” *India Today*, July 9, 2019; Press Trust of India, “US Says Chabahar Project Won't Be Impacted by Iran Sanctions,” *Economic Times*, April 24, 2019b.

⁷⁶ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “India-Iran Joint Statement During Visit of the President of Iran to India,” February 17, 2018.

⁷⁷ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 33: “Given that the future of Sino-U.S. relations is uncertain, and that the likely evolution of China's own foreign policy remains unclear, India must be prepared for a contingency where, for instance, threatening behaviour by one of the major powers could encourage or even force it to be closer to another.”

⁷⁸ Even more galling, perhaps, from an Indian perspective: Nixon's 1972 visit to China was arranged through the channel of archrival Pakistan (Geoffrey Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the *Rapprochement* with China, 1969–1972,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 4, July 2007).

As Harry Harding noted, during a period (2004) of relative harmony in the India-China-U.S. triangle, historically “the linkages among the three [have] changed relatively frequently, without ever leading to enduring alignments of any two against the other.”⁷⁹ Stephen P. Cohen observes, “Changes in the U.S.-China relationship also affected Washington’s perception of India.” He notes that during the administration of President Bill Clinton, attempts at normalization of relations with Beijing “proved hard to define and difficult to maintain in the face of increased Chinese domestic repression. . . . When added to the usual tensions over trade and security issues, these concerns suddenly made India more attractive.”⁸⁰ Since 2017, the United States’ stance toward China has displayed considerable volatility: Even as the two nations were locked in a mutual tariff duel, the U.S. president said that he and China’s leader “love each other” and the two nations’ relationship “has never, ever been better.”⁸¹ While a Washington-Beijing rapprochement might seem unlikely to American (and likely Chinese) observers, it is understandable if Indian policymakers feel obliged to factor this possibility into their calculations.

⁷⁹ Harding, 2004, p. 324.

⁸⁰ Cohen, 2001a, p. 286.

⁸¹ Zhou Xin, “Donald Trump Says He and China’s Xi Jinping ‘Love Each Other,’ Phase Two Trade Talks to Start ‘Very Shortly,’” *South China Morning Post*, January 21, 2020.

3. India's Economic Relationship with China, and Country-by-Country Relationship Sketches

China as Key Trade Partner for India

China is by far India's largest source of imports, making up 16.2 percent of the total: This is triple the amount of the second-ranking importer (the United States, at 5.4 percent) and more than the next three top-ranked importers combined (the United Arab Emirates at 5.2 percent, Saudi Arabia at 4.8 percent, and Switzerland at 4.6 percent).⁸² Moreover, if imports of oil, gas and financial services were stripped out of the equation, China's position as supplier of tangible goods for India's economy would be even more dominant. As India faces the challenge of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it will require continued availability of supply chains from China for medical equipment and other items vital for public health and economic growth.

On the export side of the ledger, China's position as a key market is too large for India to risk alienating. While the PRC on its own ranks fourth as a market for Indian goods and services (with 4.2 percent of the total), when it is combined with Hong Kong (5.1 percent) it is nearly tied with the United Arab Emirates (9.7 percent) for second place;⁸³ the United States (15.6 percent) is by far the largest market for Indian goods and services—but no policymaker in New Delhi could safely ignore the economic impact of a trading partner as large as Beijing.⁸⁴ As a U.S. military official put it, “China has the power to punish India both militarily *and* economically.”⁸⁵

NonAlignment 2.0 treats this economic relationship as a vital part of the security equation, with both positive and negative aspects. “India-China economic relations also present a complex and somewhat ambiguous picture,” the document states.⁸⁶ On the positive side, the authors see it “reasonable to expect that growing economic interdependence might help make the political relationship more manageable and less subject to oscillations.”⁸⁷ Moreover, the document (perhaps counterintuitively) treats India's intense need for infrastructure investment as leverage in favor of India rather than China: “We could respond by trying to limit Chinese penetration of our market, particularly our infrastructure market.”⁸⁸

⁸² World Bank, “India Imports, Tariff by Country and Region 2017,” World Integrated Trade Solution webpage, undated. All figures are for 2017, the latest year for which World Bank data are available.

⁸³ While Hong Kong's trade figures are broken out separately, the former British colony is formally a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

⁸⁴ World Bank, 2017.

⁸⁵ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

⁸⁶ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 14. The text continues:

The authors portray Chinese investment as both a threat and a blessing. On the threat side of the ledger, the authors note “the potential for espionage and intelligence gathering through software means, which was evidenced by the banning of import of Chinese telecom equipment.”⁸⁹ They note that “Chinese banks are often able to offer preferential financing to Chinese companies because of their scale and because they are not driven solely by market forces,” a fact which gives such companies a competitive advantage but “could also be a useful asset in terms of the volume of infrastructure financing we need.”⁹⁰

Close observers of the Sino-Indian relationship have likewise seen economic ties as being both a potential challenge and a possible long-term bond. James Clad, who would later serve as the DoD official responsible for policy involving India and Southeast Asia during the administration of Prime Minister Singh, acknowledged the building commercial tensions between India and China. But globalization and economic interdependence, he wrote in 2004, also suggest “a more optimistic view of future India-China relations based on converging fortunes and steadily widening common interests as both countries engage ever more deeply in the international trading economy.”⁹¹

The same ambivalence toward China’s economic weight is expressed by Indian security analysts in recent interviews. “China’s economic power is state-driven, multipronged, and always serving the interests of the state,” said one analyst. “Part of it is above-board, getting technology transfer by legal means, patiently building up capabilities. Part is below-board—basically, theft. And they *always* play hardball.”⁹² Another Indian scholar, during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore (an annual conference drawing security analysts and policymakers from across the region) expressed a similar sentiment: “China has far more resources than India can hope to match,” he said. “But equally important is how they use them—the state and commercial firms working together. India has no means of replicating that.”⁹³

Or, we could allow access but with various conditions that safeguard and promote Indian interests in other areas. Given the fact that India’s infrastructure market is likely to be in the region of a trillion dollars in the next few years, China would obviously have a keen interest in expanding access to it. We should see this Chinese economic interest as a point of leverage for trade-offs favourable to us in other sectors, including political concessions in areas of interest to India.

NonAlignment 2.0, p. 15. The document highlights the negative impact as well:

The growing trade surplus between India and China has been a cause for concern owing both to its degree and composition. Not only is the degree of dependence of Indian industries on Chinese imports on the rise. But India’s main exports seem to be natural resources, whereas its imports are largely higher end manufactured goods.

⁸⁹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 15.

⁹⁰ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 14.

⁹¹ James Clad, “Convergent Chinese and Indian Perspectives on the Global Order,” in Harry Harding and Francine Frankel, eds. *The China-India Relationship: What Every American Needs to Know*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 268.

⁹² Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

⁹³ Interview with Singapore-based Indian security analyst on June 2, 2019, Singapore (Source 6).

At the same time, Indian analysts expressed a deep admiration for China's legitimate economic successes—and for the state's role in fostering the expertise necessary for long-term growth. One scholar noted that process by which China had developed its own railway system: first hiring Japanese and German firms to do the work, then gaining technology transfer, and only decades later becoming adept enough to start building railways (at considerable profit) for other nations. "China is very generous in the funding of scientists," he said, admiringly. "They send the best students to the U.S. or elsewhere, and then offer them secure, well-paid jobs to persuade them to come back home. In India, we don't do *anything* like that."⁹⁴ Said another: "In China, scientists are treated like national heroes."⁹⁵

This investment, both in yuan and expertise, has enabled China to exert influence over nearly all of the nations in the Indo-Pacific. The clearest expression of this is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has established footholds for Beijing throughout the neighborhood that India sees as its natural domain.

Some of the BRI infrastructure projects, particularly ports, are potentially dual use: India regards port projects in Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Kyauk Pyu (Myanmar), and Hambantota (Sri Lanka) as potential basing or access sites for the PLAN. Indeed, Indian planners have already been taken by surprise when PLAN submarines unexpectedly surfaced in Sri Lanka and Pakistan (Colombo and Karachi, respectively).⁹⁶

The BRI and security cooperation work hand-in-hand: China uses its economic leverage to open the door for both port calls and the sale of military hardware, and it uses the sales of its hardware to make the case that investment in dual-use infrastructure will be a useful investment. China has used infrastructure projects to strengthen its ties to Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives (with some back and forth in the latter two), as well as several African nations on the western littoral of the Indian Ocean. It sold two submarines to Bangladesh and, according to a U.S. military observer, "is really ramping up its security relationship."⁹⁷ China also used its combined economic and security clout with Bangladesh to broker a deal over the settlement of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar—"that was really humiliating to India," another U.S. official noted, "which considers Bangladesh its own junior partner."⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

⁹⁵ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4). Not all analysts, however, see Beijing as being so successful in leveraging U.S. training and technology. For a counterargument, see Andrea Gilli and Mauro Gilli, "Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet: Military-Technological Superiority and the Limits of Imitation, Reverse Engineering, and Cyber Espionage," *International Security*, Winter 2018/2019, Vol. 43, No. 3.

⁹⁶ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 5).

⁹⁷ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

⁹⁸ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

Country-by-Country Sketches of India's Relations with Key Asian Nations

Given the enduring strength of “strategic autonomy” as a guiding principle of India’s unwritten doctrine, India has no formal security alliance with any nation. Even Bhutan—a tiny Himalayan nation that is a *de facto* protectorate of India—is not an ally.⁹⁹ If India is this cagey about a country on whose behalf it deployed troops to prevent a PLA incursion on disputed territory at Doklam in 2017, it is unlikely to forge any alliance (formal or informal) with other nations in the near future. Indeed, this resistance to alignment is regarded by India as a strategic benefit. As *NonAlignment 2.0* puts it:

India’s great advantage is that, barring certain perceptions in our immediate neighbourhood, it is not seen as a threatening power. The overseas projection of Indian power has been very limited; in its external face, India’s nationalism does not appear belligerently to any country, nor as expansionist or threatening in any way. . . . This is an asset that we have rather taken for granted, and it behooves us now to leverage that global consensus as effectively as we can.¹⁰⁰

This assessment may be self-congratulatory, but for nations east of the Strait of Malacca, it would be hard to find much evidence of particular fear of India’s intentions. As one U.S. military official stationed in Indonesia noted, “Policymakers here see India as unthreatening.”¹⁰¹ This is due to a combination of perceived lack of hostile intent—and (at least to some degree) perceived lack of power-projection beyond the Indian Ocean Region. While India has territorial defense and other goals in relation to its immediate neighbors, for countries at even a slight remove the most important mission of security policy is providing the basis for economic growth.¹⁰²

Russia

Russia is by far India’s largest supplier of military hardware over the past decade, with more than 70 percent of the overall budget (\$23.4 billion, out of a total spending on military hardware of \$33.9 billion). This is not merely a distortion due to the winding down of Cold War–era spending patterns: Between 2008 and 2018, India spent more than \$1 billion each year on purchases from Russia—and did not buy \$1 billion in arms from any other nation (except the USSR) in *any* year of its history.

⁹⁹ Bhutan is not even technically a “protectorate”: On the distinction between a “protectorate” and a “protected state,” see Niels van Willigen, *Peacebuilding and International Administration: The Cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, London, UK: Routledge, 2013, p. 16. The 1949 Treaty of Friendship between the two nations permitted India to “guide” Bhutan’s foreign policy, while in a 2007 updating both countries merely commit that they “shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests” (India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, February 8, 2007). For discussion of how Bhutan has factored into the Sino-Indian relationship, see Garver, 2001, pp. 167–170, 175–185.

¹⁰⁰ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Interview with U.S. military official on April 1, 2019, Jakarta (Source 7).

¹⁰² *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 38: “India’s hard power has as its instrumentalities the Armed Forces. . . . Their main political objective and purpose is to ensure the creation of a stable and peaceful environment in order to facilitate maximum economic development concurrent with equitable growth.”

The first year India spent more than \$1 billion (in constant 2018 dollars) on arms purchases was 1968, and its purchases from the USSR remained generally in the \$1–2 billion range annually (with a few dips into the mid-hundred millions and peaks above \$3 billion in some years) until the collapse of the Soviet Union. After that, India picked up with Russia where it left off with the USSR: Its first \$1 billion year was 1995, and its pattern since then has mirrored its pattern with the USSR: purchases of \$1–2 billion most years, with some years dropping to the mid/high hundreds of millions, and some peaking above \$3 billion. The peak years for India’s military spending on Russian/Soviet gear were 2012 and 2013, when it spent \$3.8 billion and \$3.9 billion, respectively.¹⁰³ Moreover, the type of gear transferred includes much of India’s largest and most strategic systems and often involves a significant amount of technology transfer. Such systems include nuclear submarines (*Chakra/Akula II*-class), the aircraft carrier INS *Vikramaditya* (*Kiev*-class), the Indian-built variant of the Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jet, and the BrahMos cruise missiles (based on the P-800 Oniks).¹⁰⁴

There are several reasons that India favors Russian hardware. The first is history: Throughout the Cold War era, India was nominally not aligned with either superpower bloc—but in security matters, it tilted decidedly toward Moscow. Many of the weapon systems in India’s present-day arsenal date back to that time: They are approaching (or have long exceeded) their optimal operational lifetime, but they remain in service. And even now-obsolete pieces of hardware are compatible with slightly more modern pieces of equipment, which in turn are compatible with relatively up-to-date gear. Switching from Russian systems to Western ones would require an enormous shift in compatibility across the entire Indian military, with all of the costs and dislocations that such a massive shift would entail. Simply retraining military personnel on Western hardware would require a significant investment of time and expense.

Second, even setting aside transition costs, Russian gear tends to be less expensive than its Western counterparts. India’s MoD is perpetually strapped for funds and is reluctant to approve any proposal with too high a bottom line. “A lot of Russian gear is rugged and affordable,” said a U.S. military officer in New Delhi. “An M-16 helicopter gets the job done. For India, rugged and cheap is often better than state-of-the-art.”¹⁰⁵

Third, and perhaps most important: Russia is seen as a reliable and flexible partner. The “reliable” part is of key significance: It is a great fear of Indian planners that they might be engaged in a conflict with Pakistan and be unable to keep their equipment operational because of restrictions placed by Western nations, or simply unavailability of gear. “Spare parts are a huge issue,” said the U.S. military observer. “Why buy expensive tanks from the U.S. or Israel when you can buy cheaper ones from Russia with a guaranteed huge backlog of spare parts?”¹⁰⁶ There

¹⁰³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Armstrade” website, undated-a.

¹⁰⁴ The author is grateful to Sameer Lalwani for this observation (personal communication, January 2020).

¹⁰⁵ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

¹⁰⁶ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

are enormous warehouses throughout Russia, fully stocked with every spare part one could wish—and dozens of nations around the world using Russian gear from whom India might purchase such supplies easily on the secondary market.¹⁰⁷

Added to this is Russia’s willingness to let India create indigenous versions of many of its products, both for its own use and to sell to third parties. “They’re really ramping up sales, especially in Africa,” said one U.S. military officer. “They can already do good knock-offs of simple Russian parts. The main thing they can’t yet do is high-tech metallurgy and integrated circuits.”¹⁰⁸ On top of these factors, a lack of any obvious threat from Russia makes India’s preference for Russian hardware seem like a relatively straightforward choice. India is moving in the direction of the United States—but at an Indian pace.

The Quad: India, Japan, Australia, and the United States

One of the most discussed, yet least developed, pieces of strategic architecture in the Indo-Pacific region is known as “The Quad”: a four-way partnership between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. On paper, this should be a mutually beneficial development: All four nations have shared strategic interests, and (perhaps more importantly) all are sufficiently distant from each other to avoid the overlap of territorial interests, which can often turn otherwise-friendly nations into rivals. On a bilateral basis, India has good relationships with all three Quad members. India’s partnership with Japan is characterized as a Special Strategic and Global Partnership, put in place in 2014. The two nations conduct “2+2” talks—that is, formal consultations of both nations’ defense and foreign affairs ministers.

Three of the four are treaty allies: Japan and Australia are not allies themselves, but each is a treaty ally of the United States. This means that three of the four members of the Quad already operate on a compatible range of military equipment and use a compatible and familiar set of procedures for operations. By assembling a “mini-lat” with four highly capable partners, the theory goes, India can be lured into closer cooperation than might otherwise be the case. Instead of a broad coalition that India might construe as “a superpower and a bunch of followers,” the Quad could be portrayed as a power club of Asia.¹⁰⁹

So far, at least, that is not how it has worked.¹¹⁰ All the talk has resulted in relatively little concrete engagement. “So many man-hours,” said a U.S. military official based outside of India, “and still no action.”¹¹¹ Another U.S. military official, also based in Asia and from a different service, noted that any attempt to beef up the Quad “will be driven by political policymakers, not

¹⁰⁷ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 9).

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the difficulties of making the Quad work, see Abhijnan Rej, *Reclaiming the Indo-Pacific: A Political-Military Strategy for Quad 2.0*, Occasional Paper 147, New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, March 2018.

¹¹¹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 9).

by military ones.” He noted that the uniformed officers in all four militaries are eager to engage, but on India’s side any acceleration of pace would be decided “at the policy level—perhaps even at the 2+2 level.”¹¹²

India and Japan have major bilateral ground (Dharma Guardian) and sea (JIMEX) military exercises, and both participate in multilateral exercises for ground (Force 18), air (Pitch Black, Red Flag), and sea (RIMPAC, Malabar, Kakadu, Komodo). In 2015, they signed an Agreement Concerning Security Measures for Protection of Classified Military Information. *NonAlignment 2.0* portrays this relationship as being particularly irksome to Beijing: “China remains suspicious of India’s partnership, and in particular sees improved Indian ties with America and Japan in simple zero-sum terms.”¹¹³

Australia is mentioned only twice in *NonAlignment 2.0*, and both references are in passing rather than substantive discussions. Both lump Australia in with other countries.¹¹⁴ But this understates the strength of the relationship. India and Australia signed a Strategic Partnership in 2009 and expanded it to a Framework for Security Cooperation in 2014. They conduct military exercises together, including ground (AUSTRA HIND) and sea (AUSINDEX),¹¹⁵ as well as multilateral exercises, including those for ground (Force 18), air (Pitch Black, Red Flag), and sea (RIMPAC, Kakadu, Komodo, and Milan). Although Indian interlocutors sometimes seem less than enthusiastic about the notion of the Quad (and Australia as a partner),¹¹⁶ at least according to Australia this is a partnership on the rise.¹¹⁷ After Beijing objected to the inclusion of Australia (along with Japan and Singapore) in the 2007 of the Malabar naval exercise, however, this event was turned from a multilateral to a bilateral U.S.-India exercise for several years; Japan has been reintroduced, but at the time of writing Australia has remained outside the fold.¹¹⁸ Former Ambassador to China Shivshankar Menon (who is familiar with Beijing’s concerns in this role, and also through his service as National Security Advisor) notes, India’s “continental security issues . . . are not shared by any of the other members of the Quad.”¹¹⁹

¹¹² Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 10).

¹¹³ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 32.

¹¹⁴ Australia is mentioned along with Indonesia and Bolivia in a bulleted point on energy and mining; it is mentioned along with Indonesia and Vietnam in reference to maritime equities (*NonAlignment 2.0*, pp. 13, 53).

¹¹⁵ Australian High Commission New Delhi, “Australia’s Largest Defense Force Deployment in India to Further Deepen Defense and Strategic Relationship,” webpage, March 28, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 9).

¹¹⁷ Australian High Commission New Delhi, 2019; Christopher Pyne, “Fullerton Forum Keynote,” January 28, 2019.

¹¹⁸ Rajat Pandit, “India May Invite Australia for Malabar Naval Exercise with US & Japan,” *Times of India*, January 29, 2020.

¹¹⁹ Menon, 2018.

Partners in Southeast Asia¹²⁰

Singapore

Perhaps India's firmest security partnership in Southeast Asia is with Singapore.¹²¹ In 2003, the two countries signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement, under which Defense Policy Dialogues to discuss security cooperation and other matters of mutual concern would be held annually.¹²² The commitments for joint military training made in this agreement were renewed at the Eighth Defense Policy Dialogue in July 2012.

The cooperation is perhaps most noteworthy in the arena of airpower: Singapore is the only nation that India permits to conduct regular exercises of its *own* air force (rather than bilateral or multilateral exercises) in Indian airspace. Under a 2007 agreement, the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) is permitted to train at the IAF's Kalaikunda Air Base and to station RSAF aircraft there. Air-to-air firing exercises are conducted over ground-to-ground artillery ranges, over a 40-kilometer stretch of terrain along the Bay of Bengal coastline and extending an additional 40 kilometers out to sea.¹²³ In addition to these exercises by the RSAF alone, the RSAF and IAF conduct an annual bilateral exercise called SINDEX: For this exercise, the RSFA has in the past flown its F-16 C/D fighter-jets alongside India's MiG-27 multirole aircraft.¹²⁴

The two nations' armies have traditionally held two annual exercises together: Bold Kurukshetra for armor, and Agni Warrior for artillery.¹²⁵ As is the case for its air force, Singapore's small geographic size makes finding space for artillery training a challenge; such ranges are provided by India.¹²⁶ In the naval arena, India and Singapore share a core security

¹²⁰ Much of the information for this section is drawn from Jonah Blank, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Angel Rabasa, and Bonny Lin, *Look East, Cross Black Waters: India's Interest in Southeast Asia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1021-AF, 2015, pp. 82–133. Additional detail and sourcing can be found there: Singapore, pp. 82–88; Vietnam, pp. 88–96; Indonesia, pp. 123–133.

¹²¹ When Prime Minister Modi presented the keynote speech at the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue (a regional security conference held in Singapore annually), he waxed poetic about ties between India and his host country:

For India, though, Singapore means more. It's the spirit that unites a lion nation and a lion city. Singapore is our springboard to ASEAN. It has been, for centuries, a gateway for India to the East. For over two thousand years, the winds of monsoons, the currents of seas and the force of human aspirations have built timeless links between India and this region. It was cast in peace and friendship, religion and culture, art and commerce, language and literature. These human links have lasted, even as the tides of politics and trade saw their ebb and flow. (Narendra Modi, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue," New Delhi, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, June 1, 2018.)

¹²² Government of Singapore, Ministry of Defence, "Permanent Secretary (Defence) Visits India for 8th Defence Policy Dialogue," July 10, 2012.

¹²³ Interview with retired Indian military official on April 10, 2013, New Delhi (Source 16).

¹²⁴ Indian Air Force, 2007.

¹²⁵ "India and Singapore Carry Out Joint Naval Exercises," *DefenceNow*, March 22, 2011.

¹²⁶ Pankaj Jha and Rahul Mishra, "Defence Cooperation: A Case Study of India and Singapore," *Air Power Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 2010.

interest in defending the sea lanes of communication (including the potential choke point of the Strait of Malacca), and in combating threats such as piracy. Since 1994, they have conducted annual naval exercises together under the rubric of the Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise. These exercises alternate in location and have expanded from antisubmarine warfare to complex operations involving major surface vessels. In addition to these bilateral exercises, Singapore participates in India's multilateral MILAN naval exercise. The submarine crews of Singapore's navy receive training from their Indian Navy counterparts.¹²⁷ As one U.S. military official puts it, "The Indian Navy and the RSN [Republic of Singapore Navy] have the most robust bilateral relationship of all the services. The IAF-RSAF relationship is more transactional—the Singaporeans see it as necessary to get a place to fly."¹²⁸

Other observers are doubtful about the potential for deepening the engagement. "It's all talk and no action," said a U.S. military officer based in Singapore. "At the operator level, there's no problem. But how do we get [India's] MEA and MoD to take their foot off the brake? Even four-star officers don't have the juice to make things happen."¹²⁹ In the air power arena, another U.S. officer noted the capabilities gap between the two air forces: "The RSAF doesn't feel it has much to learn from India: It is more capable and uses more advanced equipment than anything their Indian counterparts can bring," he said. "The RSAF doesn't really get anything from India other than airspace, there's not much meat on the bones. They prefer to train with us, or with Japan or Australia."¹³⁰

Moreover, the relationship must be carefully managed to avoid a backlash from China. The same U.S. military observer noted that Singapore pays very close attention to the optics of any engagement with India: In a recent discussion of flying P-8 Orions together, he noted, the exercise was called off out of concern for how Beijing might interpret it. In 2019, India and Singapore signed a deal for logistics linkages, and "so far as expansion goes, that might in the near-term be about as much as we can expect."¹³¹ Two other Singapore-based U.S. officials (one civilian, one military) noted possible intelligence sharing, particularly in the counterterrorism arena: They noted that Singapore may be especially open to such intelligence sharing in the wake of the April 21, 2019, bombings in Sri Lanka: That set of terrorist attacks was carried out by a previously obscure cell of ethnic Tamils linked to ISIS, and, given both India's intelligence expertise on this group (New Delhi flagged the attack to Sri Lanka's government ahead of time) and Singapore's own large Tamil population, stepped-up counterterrorism cooperation seems like a natural next step.¹³²

¹²⁷ Interview with Singapore-based Indian security analyst on June 2, 2019, Singapore (Source 6).

¹²⁸ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 8).

¹²⁹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 10).

¹³⁰ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 8).

¹³¹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 8).

¹³² Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 10); interview with U.S. government official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 11).

Indonesia

India tends to regard itself as a regional near-superpower, balancing the dominance of China with a variety of Southeast Asian nations, including Indonesia.¹³³ This view is not shared by Indonesia, the largest nation in Southeast Asia and an underutilized partner for India. Indonesia's latest formulation of its security doctrine is the *Buku Putih Pertahanan Indonesia 2015* (Bahasa version)¹³⁴/*Defence White Paper 2015* (English version).¹³⁵ In this document, India is not portrayed as being a “strategic partner” (like the United States and China),¹³⁶ an “important partner” (like Russia, South Korea, France, Spain, and Singapore),¹³⁷ or even “a partner” at all. It is simply described as a nation with which Indonesia has “friendly relations”—precisely the same term as that applied to India's rival (and nation not sharing a maritime border with Indonesia), Pakistan.¹³⁸

The Defence White Paper outlines the areas of cooperation set forth in an agreement ratified in 2006:

The cooperation includes increasing the production and field support services, projects related to defense equipment and components; improving cooperation between defense industries, technology transfer, technical assistance, training and joint production, [and] cooperation in defence science and technology through the exchange of personnel and joint projects.¹³⁹

Unsurprisingly, the most robust area of security engagement is maritime. The nations have overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Bay of Bengal and therefore have a strong incentive for cooperation.¹⁴⁰

In 2018, Indonesia was granted the Indian Navy access to the port of Sabang, and Indian sailors have been reportedly seen there.¹⁴¹ According to U.S. observers, Indonesia has no real concern about India's intentions, but “the relationship is surprisingly underdeveloped—lots of rhetoric, but very little substance.”¹⁴² Prime Minister Modi and Indonesian President Jokowi have exchanged official visits, but a fairly light security relationship is bolstered by relatively little bilateral trade.

¹³³ For a more detailed discussion, see Blank, Moroney, Rabasa, and Lin, 2015.

¹³⁴ Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, *Buku Putih Pertahanan Indonesia 2015*, Jakarta, 2015. Hereafter cited as *Buku Putih Pertahanan Indonesia*.

¹³⁵ Government of Indonesia, Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2015* (English version), Jakarta, Indonesia, 2015. Hereafter *Defence White Paper*.

¹³⁶ *Defence White Paper*, p. 89 (United States) and p. 83 (China).

¹³⁷ *Defence White Paper*, p. 92 (Russia), p. 85 (South Korea), p. 90 (France), p. 85 (Spain), and p. 81 (Singapore).

¹³⁸ *Defence White Paper*, pp. 85, 87.

¹³⁹ *Defence White Paper*, pp. 85–86.

¹⁴⁰ The maritime border is between India's southernmost piece of land (the island of Grand Nicobar) and the northernmost piece of Indonesian territory (the island of Rondo, in the province of Aceh).

¹⁴¹ Interview with U.S. military official on April 1, 2019, Jakarta (Source 12).

¹⁴² Interview with Western diplomat on April 4, 2019, Jakarta (Source 13).

Indian interlocutors highlight the partnership of their respective founding leaders Nehru and Sukarno in creating the Non-Aligned Movement at the Bandung Conference of 1955, and frequently remind Indonesian counterparts that their country was perhaps the first to recognize Indonesia's independence. But for most Indonesians, such talk has little modern-day relevance. A noteworthy data point: Prior to the COVID-19 shutdown of regular air travel, Indonesia had direct commercial air linkages to Australia, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Timor Leste, Brunei, and even Russia—but none to any city in India.¹⁴³

When interviewed in Jakarta, Indonesian military officers downplayed the importance of India in their calculations. On the topic of Indian aftercare and upgrades for Russian military hardware (which forms a large part of Indonesia's own arsenal), interlocutors said that this was not a matter of superior quality, merely distance. "The distributor for Sukhoi is in India," one officer said. "If it were located in Malaysia, or East Timor, we'd go there just as easily."¹⁴⁴ Such an assessment may be unduly harsh: It is a bit of an outlier among other sources interviewed. It is worth bearing in mind, however, since it highlights the significant gap between India's perception of its importance to Southeast Asian partners and the perceptions of these partners themselves.¹⁴⁵

Vietnam

Vietnam is one of India's longest-running security partners, and security ties between the two countries remain vibrant.¹⁴⁶ Military engagement between the two nations rests on the foundation of shared Soviet/Russian platforms, and India's future role in the Southeast Asian security structure may rest in part on its unique capabilities in operating, repairing, and upgrading military hardware compatible with Soviet or Russian models.

Cold War politics drew India and Vietnam together: At the 1970s peak of India's Non-Alignment-in-name-only tilt toward the Soviet Union, Vietnam was embroiled in military conflicts with both the United States and China. For both Vietnam and India, the USSR represented both a superpower benefactor and reliable supplier of military hardware. In 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia (then called Democratic Kampuchea) and ousted the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime; this action was opposed by the United States, China, and ASEAN, which continued to recognize the Khmer Rouge shadow representation at the UN and other fora for many years after. India, by contrast, lent its diplomatic support to Vietnam—causing friction with the rest of Southeast Asian states for over a decade.

¹⁴³ There were direct commercial flights linking Jakarta (and other Indonesian cities) to Australia, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Brunei. There were also direct flights from Bali to Russia, Timor Leste, and other nations.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Indonesian military official on April 5, 2019, Jakarta (Source 14).

¹⁴⁵ Blank et al., 2015, p. 212. This was one of the key analytical conclusions of the study.

¹⁴⁶ These ties were specifically highlighted by Prime Minister Modi at the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue (Modi, 2018).

To some degree, India regards Vietnam in the same light that China regards Pakistan: a state neighboring its most powerful regional rival, with its own deeply seated interest in keeping that rival challenged and off-balance.¹⁴⁷ For its own part, Vietnam, lacks major allies and feels relatively isolated in its own competition with China; it remembers that no nation came to its aid when its more powerful neighbor attempted to invade in 1979. It sees considerable value in strengthening its ties to regional powers such as India.¹⁴⁸ One manifestation of this is Vietnam's granting oil and gas stakes in South China Sea territory claimed by Vietnam to India's state-owned firm ONGC Videsh; this provides India with a clear self-interested rationale for involvement in the South China Sea dispute.¹⁴⁹ It is noteworthy, however, that this ONGC stake has not proved sufficient to draw India significantly more deeply into South China Sea issues.

The collapse of the USSR removed a superpower patron for both nations, giving them an additional reason for bilateral cooperation. Vietnam was one of the few countries in the world to support India's 1998 nuclear tests. Vietnam supports India's candidacy for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, advocated for India's inclusion in the East Asia Summit in 2005, and for a time helped block Pakistan's inclusion in the ASEAN Regional Forum (Pakistan joined in 2004). India supported Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization, and helped Vietnam secure a nonpermanent seat in the UN Security Council in 2007.¹⁵⁰

While informal security ties date back at least to the 1970s, a defense cooperation agreement was only negotiated in 1994—and not formally signed until Indian Minister of Defense George Fernandes visited Vietnam in 2000. This agreement institutionalized a framework for regular discussions between the two nations' defense ministries and provided for naval exercises and training of Vietnamese pilots by the Indian Air Force.¹⁵¹

India's role as a provider of aftercare for Soviet and Russian military equipment has led to servicing and maintenance agreements for Vietnam's military hardware, including MiG-21s. India supplies spare parts to submarines and surface vessels for Vietnam's Navy. Since 2011, India has been training Vietnam's crews operating *Kilo*-class submarines—a type of vessel that India has been operating since 1986. In 2013, New Delhi provided a \$100 million credit line to enable Vietnam to purchase military equipment from India, the first of such offers by India to a

¹⁴⁷ Iskander Rehman, "The Indo-Vietnamese Strategic Partnership," *BBC World's Vietnam*, September 16, 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Le Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Strategic Trajectory: From Internal Development to External Engagement," *Strategic Insights* 59, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Rudroneel Ghosh and Sanjay Dutta, "In Tussle with Vietnam, China parks vessels near ONGC Videsh site," *Times of India*, August 22, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ Rehman, 2009. Additionally political developments are outlined in Nhan Dan, "India, Vietnam Pledge Closer Strategic Ties," *Vietnam Communist Government News*, July 7, 2007; Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, "Statement at the Inaugural Session Seminar on 'India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: Future Directions,'" Hanoi, July 17, 2012; "Vietnam-India Strategic Partnership in Spotlight," *VietNamNet*, July 18, 2012.

¹⁵¹ Subhash Kapila, "India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: The Convergence of Interests," South Asia Analysis Group Paper 177, November 2, 2012.

country outside of India's "traditional sphere of influence."¹⁵² Vietnam has agreed to provide berthing facilities to Indian naval ships at Nha Trang.

Partners in South Asia/Indian Ocean Region

A full discussion of India's strategic relationships with the other nations of South Asia would fill a library's worth of books.¹⁵³ As Ashley Tellis noted, shortly after the 2019 electoral victory of Prime Minister Modi's BJP:

If the primary objective of Indian foreign policy within and around its subcontinent has been to translate its familiar dominance into a political hegemony that commands the consent, if not the obedience, of its smaller neighbors, that aim has been frequently frustrated by the simple reality that India does not as yet possess the requisite power to shape their strategic choices.¹⁵⁴

This section briefly outlines a few of the issues most relevant for U.S. competition with China, as it affects the nations of South Asia apart from Pakistan.

NonAlignment 2.0 highlights the central importance of South Asia to India's overall geostrategic strategy: "Within the Asian theatre no region is more vital for India than South Asia. India cannot hope to arrive as a great power if it is unable to manage relationships within South Asia."¹⁵⁵ The document situates the region at the heart of India's competition with China—and points out India's historical lack of follow-through on promises of commitment.¹⁵⁶ It makes an important point about how this might be accomplished: A great deal of success or failure in every region, and certainly in South Asia, is based not on money or high-tech avionics, but on simple demonstrations of respect and patience.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² "Global Insider: India Shows Willingness to Defend Economic Interests in Southeast Asia," *World Politics Review*, August 7, 2013.

¹⁵³ Any such library would have included Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2016; Šumit Ganguly, *India as an Emerging Power*, London, UK: Routledge, 2003; and Cohen, 2001a. Pakistan, of course, would require a separate reading-room in such a library. Since Pakistan falls into the category of adversary rather than partner, its antagonistic relationship with India is addressed separately in Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁴ Ashley J. Tellis, "Troubles Aplenty: Foreign Policy Challenges for the Next Indian Government," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 20, 2019.

¹⁵⁵ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁶ *NonAlignment 2.0*, pp. 16–17:

South Asia is a region where other great powers, particularly China, are trying to expand their influence. . . . [W]e must recognize that strategic advantage is a consequence of what we do, not what we say. The only way to counter Chinese economic engagement is to have a credible engagement plan of our own. But most importantly India has lagged behind because of its inability to follow through—whether on aid, or border infrastructure—on its promises.

¹⁵⁷ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 16:

Since politics in South Asia is as much about self-esteem as interest, political discourse matters a great deal. India is a factor in the domestic politics of most of its neighbours. It will have to live with—and address the fact—that politicians in neighbouring countries will bait India. But we need

Bangladesh

India's state of West Bengal shares cultural, historical, linguistic, and economic ties to Bangladesh. India used its decisive force to defeat Pakistan's military in 1971 and enable the creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation. In June 2015, Prime Minister Modi made a state visit during which 22 bilateral documents were negotiated, including the ratification for the 1974 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement and 2011 Protocol enabling the two nations to exchange enclaved territories along their border.

Security engagement between India and Bangladesh focuses primarily on cooperation along the 2,500-mile border—the longest land border that India shares with any nation. In 2011, the nations signed a Coordinated Border Management Plan enabling more effective control over cross-border illegal activities and violence. In July 2014, a key maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal was settled via UN arbitration.¹⁵⁸ India and Bangladesh also cooperate on counterterrorism and counter-extremism efforts, “sharing information about groups and persons” engaged in terrorism and committing to prevent their respective territories from being “used for any activity inimical to the other.”¹⁵⁹

India and Bangladesh have common terrorist threats, particularly groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, and more localized groups either affiliated with such groups or sharing similar ideology. One area of cooperation in urgent need of increased attention is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In 2017, a severe monsoon season caused at least 1,200 deaths from flooding throughout South Asia, and the worst impact was felt in India and Bangladesh. Climate change is likely to exacerbate the destructive impact (and possibly the frequency) of hurricanes, cyclones, and other types of severe weather events. Every time a natural disaster strikes, New Delhi will have decide how much to offer Bangladesh in the way of immediate relief (often provided by Indian Navy ships, Indian Air Force planes, and Indian Army helicopters and medical personnel)—assets that, in many such emergencies, may be sorely needed to assist India's own citizens.

Relations between India and Bangladesh took a turn for the worse in 2019–2020, following New Delhi's passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and its potential impact on the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The CAA explicitly grants privileged status to non-Muslims with ancestral ties to Bangladesh and other Muslim-majority nations. The act has caused widespread protests in India, based partly on the fear (fueled by explicit statements from figures such as Home Minister Amit Shah¹⁶⁰) that the NRC would be similarly linked to religious

a strategic culture and public discourse that is willing to keep its eye on the long term and not get distracted by the ‘noise’ generated by our democracies.

¹⁵⁸ Haroon Habib, “Bangladesh Wins Maritime Dispute with India,” *The Hindu*, July 9, 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Joint Declaration Between Bangladesh and India During Visit of Prime Minister of India to Bangladesh- ‘Notun Projonmo—Nayi Disha,’” June 7, 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Press Trust of India, “Govt Won’t Budge an Inch on CAA: Amit Shah,” *Economic Times*, January 3, 2020.

identity, and Indian Muslim residents unable to document family residency dating back to 1947 might be stripped of their citizenship. Given the close ties of ethnicity, culture, and history between the Bengali populations of India (approximately 90 million) and Bangladesh (approximately 165 million), the issue has caused tension in the relationship between New Delhi and Dhaka.¹⁶¹

Sri Lanka

Premodern political entities in what are now the nations of India and Sri Lanka have been intertwined for millennia, and in the post-colonial era India has often tried to play the role of security provider for its southern neighbor. Due to domestic politics in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, governments in New Delhi have often had little choice but to be involved in the internal conflict between Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. India's failed 1987 attempt at "peacekeeping" intervention in Sri Lanka's civil war soured relations for years: Between July 1987 and March 1990, Indian troops tried to enforce a ceasefire agreement and disarm the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Some 1,200 Indian troops (and far more Sri Lankans) were killed in the operation, which is often referred to as "India's Vietnam."¹⁶² A year after Indian troops withdrew, an LTTE bomber assassinated former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (who had ordered the initial operation).

During the tenure of President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005–2015), Sri Lanka veered sharply away from India and toward China. In 2015, Rajapaksa was ousted by a former member of his own party, and India saw in President Maithripala Sirisena a chance to put the relationship back on its traditional ground.¹⁶³ In March 2015, Narendra Modi made the first Indian prime ministerial bilateral visit to Sri Lanka since the 1987 intervention. Political instability returned to Sri Lanka in October 2018, however: Sirisena joined forces with his old rival Rajapaksa in a short-lived attempt to oust his own prime minister, the India-friendly Ranil Wickremasinghe.¹⁶⁴

In security terms, Sri Lanka's Indian Ocean location makes it of key strategic importance to India's defense interests. Defense cooperation began to grow (albeit modestly) during the Rajapaksa presidency, and accelerated after his ouster by Sirisena. The 2016 Dialogue included discussions on enhancing cooperation in training, military and defense exchanges, joint exercises, and maritime domain awareness.

¹⁶¹ Saqib Sarker, "Impact of CAA on Bangladesh: Despite Dhaka's Efforts, Anti-India Sentiment on the Rise Among Its Citizens," *FirstPost*, December 18, 2019.

¹⁶² For discussion of why the Indian military intervention failed to accomplish its mission, and particularly of how a lack of "jointness" contributed to this failure, see Mukherjee, 2016, pp. 18–20.

¹⁶³ P. K. Balachandran, "New Dawn for India-Sri Lanka Relations," *New Indian Express*, October 11, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Press Trust of India, "Rajapaksa Resigns as Sri Lanka's PM, Wickremesinghe to Be Reinstated," *Times of India*, December 15, 2018b.

In the view of some Indian security analysts, Sri Lanka can be a key component in an Indian Ocean “security net” to counter Chinese influence across the region.¹⁶⁵ India remains concerned over Sri Lankan relations with China, and its continuing place in China’s “String of Pearls”—a set of ports and other infrastructure projects stretching across the Indo-Pacific.¹⁶⁶ Indian analysts have expressed concerns over Chinese investments in Sri Lankan infrastructure, Chinese arms sales to the Sri Lankan military, and PLAN vessels’ calls at Sri Lankan ports despite Indian objections. After a Chinese submarine and warship docked in Colombo in 2014, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Defense Minister Arun Jaitley reportedly met with Sri Lankan Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa to convey Indian concerns.¹⁶⁷ Only seven weeks prior to this visit, a long-range deployment patrol submarine had called at the same port ahead of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to South Asia.¹⁶⁸ According to an Indian analyst interviewed for this project, “We have no visibility on PLAN subs. They’ve popped up in Karachi and Colombo, without us noticing until they’re already in the port.”¹⁶⁹

The degree to which India might aggressively move to replace China as Sri Lanka’s patron remains unclear: Will the rhetoric and the political desire be matched with the funding and commitment to make it happen? Will India bid to take over the major infrastructure projects left largely abandoned with the political defeat of Rajapaksa and his Chinese patrons? From a security standpoint, the most significant of these are Hambantota Port (which could be used to service PLAN naval vessels, as well as civilian traffic) and the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport 11 miles away (which could provide access to PLAAF aircraft). There may well be no good economic or security rationale to justify the expense: Access to these facilities would be largely duplicative of ports and airfields in India itself, and India may decide that investing in them solely as a blocking move is not worth the cost. But if India is serious about competing with China, it will not be able to cede influence in a nation only 60 miles off its southern coast.

Nepal

The 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship provides for defense and foreign policy cooperation, as well as open borders and freedom of movement. Article 7 of this treaty stipulates that both countries “grant, on reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property,

¹⁶⁵ Suhasini Haidar, “Knitting the India-Sri Lanka Relationship Closer,” *The Hindu*, March 13, 2015.

¹⁶⁶ The term *String of Pearls* has been in wide use among Indian analysts since the first decade of the 21st century. An early example of its use in Indian academic circles is Gurpreet S. Khurana, “China’s ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 32, No. 1, February 2008.

¹⁶⁷ Meera Srinivasan, “India Conveys Concern at Chinese Presence in Sri Lanka,” *The Hindu*, October 25, 2014.

¹⁶⁸ Shihar Aneez and Ranga Sirilal, “Chinese Submarine Docks in Sri Lanka Despite Indian Concerns,” Reuters, November 2, 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 5).

participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.”¹⁷⁰ As of 2015, roughly 6 million Nepalese were living and working in India.¹⁷¹

India tends to regard Nepal as a “little brother” state—a status that many Nepalis bitterly resent. In 2015, following a series of irritations on both sides, Nepal adopted a new constitution to which India objected.¹⁷² In India’s view, the lack of a provision specifying “support a federal, democratic, republican, and inclusive” state could risk disenfranchising ethnic Madhesis—a group extending across the border to the Indian state of Bihar, where they are a significant voting constituency.¹⁷³ India instituted an unofficial blockade on landlocked Nepal, causing shortages of basic supplies including food items and fuel.¹⁷⁴ China used this opportunity to increase its influence over Nepal’s political structure.¹⁷⁵

The August 2016 election of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) served to break the stalemate. Despite Dahal’s background as a committed Maoist insurgent, Dahal (more commonly known by his *nom du guerre* of Prachanda—The Fierce One) is not particularly close to Beijing.¹⁷⁶

In India’s view, its long and open border makes Nepal’s security and stability an Indian “core interest.”¹⁷⁷ India is the lead exporter of arms to Nepal; since 2000, it has supplied nearly half (\$42 million of the total \$91 million) of the nation’s arms transfers.¹⁷⁸ In 2014, the Indian government agreed to help fund a National Police Academy at Panauti to help “develop quality human resources” and “maintain law and order in the country.”¹⁷⁹

In terms of competition with China, Nepal could potentially provide India with a mechanism to force Beijing to play defense rather than offense. China has no interest in direct control of Nepal: Its interests are served by maintaining the Himalayan nation as a buffer state, with its main requirement of Kathmandu being strict prevention of political mobilization by the nation’s indigenous and migrant Tibetan communities. Since India retains more influence over Nepal than China does, however, the potential remains for increased political actions that could require a redeployment of PLA resources.

¹⁷⁰ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, July 31, 1950.

¹⁷¹ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “India-Nepal Relations,” October 2015b.

¹⁷² Sanjoy Majumder, “Why India Is Concerned About Nepal’s Constitution,” BBC.com, September 22, 2015.

¹⁷³ Šumit Ganguly and Brandon Miliate, “India Pushes Nepal into China’s Arms,” *Foreign Policy*, October 23, 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Ganguly and Miliate, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Ganguly and Miliate, 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Rajesh Singh, “Bringing India-Nepal Ties Back on Track,” *IDSIA Comment*, September 5, 2016.

¹⁷⁷ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “Total Trend-Indicator Value (TIV) of Arms Exports to Nepal, 2000–2016,” SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, March 2, 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Embassy of India Kathmandu, “About Development Partnership,” webpage, undated.

Maldives

The relationship between India and the Maldives dates to 1966: India was among the first nations to recognize its independence, and to establish security, economic, and diplomatic ties. The Indian Navy has maintained a presence in the Maldives since 2009.¹⁸⁰ The Maldives has benefited from Indian humanitarian assistance/disaster relief support, most notably after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

The Maldives has been the site of proxy contest between India and China for much of the 21st century. In an ongoing struggle between two dueling Maldives' leaders, India has supported Mohamed Nasheed, while China has supported Abdulla Yameen.¹⁸¹ The India-China competition over the Maldives plays out in the political more than the security arena.

Given the Maldives' strategic importance as a potential part of China's "String of Pearls," the contest for influence goes beyond any specific geographic benefit India might achieve here. If India can retain its traditional place as the Maldives' primary patron, it will gain increased credibility in bidding for influence throughout the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁸² But if China succeeds in supplanting India from this role—or even in forcing New Delhi to accept a status of jointly shared influence over a nation so much closer to India's own shores—India will be hard-pressed to present itself as a genuine competitor to China.

¹⁸⁰ K. Deepalakshmi, "India Maldives Relations at a Glance," *The Hindu*, April 1, 2016.

¹⁸¹ Before Nasheed replaced Yameen in the 2018 election, India Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba said, "Maldives is a challenge at the moment. The present government in Maldives is more inclined towards China. The constitution has been tweaked and some islands have been given to the Chinese for development. There is no news at the moment of any listening post in the Maldives. [But] There is some development that is going on. (Press Trust of India, "Maldives More Inclined Towards China: Navy Chief ADMIRAL Sunil Lanba," *Economic Times*, May 23, 2018)

¹⁸² Lee Jeong-ho, "Why Are China and India So Interested in the Maldives?" *South China Morning Post*, September 25, 2018.

4. India's Defense Calculus vis-à-vis China

For the decade after India won its independence in 1947, its leaders saw themselves as natural partners with the People's Republic in forging a bloc of newly decolonized nations. During this time, the relationship was often short-handed with the Hindi phrase *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*—Indians and Chinese are brothers.¹⁸³ The relationship began to sour in the late 1950s and took a clear turn for the worse after India provided sanctuary to the Dalai Lama when he fled Chinese-administered Tibet in 1959. In 1962, the two nations fought a brief war, in which the PLA invaded Indian-administered territories across several fronts in the Himalayas. Since that time, India has regarded China far more as a threat than a partner. This perception was reinforced in June 2020, when a PLA incursion into Indian-held territory near the Galwan Valley resulted in the first combat casualties between the two armies since 1975, and the first double-digit fatalities since 1967.

Despite this history, however, the People's Republic does not fall neatly into the category of adversary for India. In economic terms, India is—like most other nations in Asia—deeply reliant on China as a trade partner. Moreover, China's considerable military superiority has made Indian planners' risk-averse about taking positions that could provoke full-scale warfare. In India's eyes, China is too threatening to be considered a friend, but too dangerous to be treated as an enemy. These complications should inform U.S. policymaking: India might have good reason to support the United States in any competition with China, but strategic planners should keep expectations modest about New Delhi expressing such support in concrete ways.

China as a Direct Long-Term Security Challenge

While much of India's operational military planning is focused on the challenge from Pakistan (see below), strategists recognize that the neighbor to the west has little likelihood of ever being a peer-competitor in conventional military terms. "They recognize that Pakistan is yesterday's fight, and they're more concerned about their northern neighbor," a U.S. military official said in a recent interview. "This is a change: It used to be Pakistan all the time. But now Pakistan is the known known, while India is still trying to understand the threat from China, and how to respond to it."¹⁸⁴

China enjoys overall strategic (albeit not always tactical) conventional military superiority—and this imbalance is likely to increase rather than decrease over time. In the long term, India sees itself as a natural peer-competitor of China: They are the two most populous nations on

¹⁸³ Claude Arpi, "The Years of Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai," *India Defence Review*, July 3, 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Interview on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

earth, and each has traditionally dominated its surrounding region for much of recorded history. But India's military is not currently on par with that of China and is upgrading its capabilities at a much slower pace than China is upgrading its own.

NonAlignment 2.0 devotes considerable attention to the hard-power threat from Beijing. "China will, for the foreseeable future, remain a significant foreign policy and security challenge for India," the document states. "It is the one major power which impinges directly on India's geopolitical space. As its economic and military capabilities expand, its power differential with India is likely to widen."¹⁸⁵ The proposed strategy for dealing with this anything but passive: India's unofficial doctrine calls for a robust conventional counterstrike in the event of any attempt by China to replay the invasion of 1962:

Given the fact that the combat ratio and logistic networks favour China and that the attacker will always have the advantage of tactical (if not strategic) surprise, we will need a mix of defensive and offensive capabilities that can leverage the advantages that the terrain offers. The better way of responding to limited land-grabs by China is for us to undertake similar action across the LAC: a strategy of *quid pro quo*.¹⁸⁶

The document notes that any conflict with China will "be fought under a nuclear overhang," which "can be expected to impose caution on political decision makers on both sides."¹⁸⁷ Perhaps because of this (and in a paradoxical inversion of India's own asymmetric conventional/nuclear calculus with Pakistan), this is seen to enable a more robust response than might be the case without such a nuclear deterrent to all-out conventional combat. The authors propose actively preparing for guerrilla and paramilitary operations in Tibet.¹⁸⁸ From an air power perspective, it is important to note that Indian planners see the air power portion of any response taking place above land and sea alike: *NonAlignment 2.0* advocates significant

¹⁸⁵ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁶ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 41, the text continues:

There are several areas where the local tactical and operational advantage rests with us. These areas should be identified and earmarked for limited offensive operations on our part. More importantly, such a strategy will need the creation of infrastructure for mobility and housing troops.

For a nondoctrinal analysis of India's conventional land-warfare power projection, see Shashank Joshi, *Indian Power Projection: Ambition, Arms and Influence*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge Journals, 2015, pp. 76–95.

¹⁸⁷ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 41.

¹⁸⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 41, the text continues:

In the event of a major offensive by China, we cannot resort to a strategy of proportionate response. Rather we should look to leverage our asymmetric capabilities to convince the Chinese to back down. . . . First, we must be able immediately to trigger an effective insurgency in the areas occupied by Chinese forces. This would require careful preparation in advance. We need to induct locals into paramilitary and police units, and train them to switch to the guerrilla mode when required . . . we must develop the capability to interdict China's logistics and operational infrastructure in Tibet.

See also Heginbotham and Gilboy, 2012, pp. 56–57, 84–87.

emphasis on maritime operations.¹⁸⁹ Well in advance of any conflict, the document advises, “We should be in a position to dominate the Indian Ocean region.” Doing so “will require the development of our naval bases in the off-shore island chains (especially the Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and of amphibious capabilities.”¹⁹⁰ Such planning has clear implications not only for naval aviation, but for land-based air power in support of maritime objectives.

China represents India’s most powerful direct threat and most significant long-term security challenge (at least by conventional state-to-state criteria), but both nations have been quite careful to avoid serious military conflict in recent decades. In 1967, there were clashes at the passes of Nathu La and Cho La, which connect Tibet with what was then the independent Indian protectorate of the Kingdom of Sikkim, resulting in several hundred casualties.¹⁹¹ A very tense 1987 standoff in Arunachal Pradesh was resolved without bloodshed,¹⁹² and rare casualties since 1967 have been primarily the result of accidents and altitude. All of these land-warfare scenarios have relied on air power support.

The most serious confrontation since 1967 occurred on June 15, 2020. Twenty Indian soldiers and an unknown number of PLA troops were killed in hand-to-hand combat near the Galwan Valley, a site located between India’s territory of Ladakh and China’s Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions. This clash followed five weeks of more-routine skirmishing at various points along the LAC. The motive for what India describes as a PLA seizure of 23 square kilometers of territory, as well as the PLA’s willingness to inflict casualties after decades of restraint, remains unclear. One tactical rationale would be a desire to block military road construction that would have solidified India’s control over strategically important features. A potential strategic rationale might be Beijing’s desire to send the message that its overall goals and power projection would not be impeded by the demands of domestic response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The most recent prior crisis was a three-month standoff on the Doklam Plateau, territory claimed by Bhutan (a *de facto* Indian protectorate) and China. This showdown was sparked by Beijing’s apparent attempt to deploy the South China Sea strategy of building infrastructure on

¹⁸⁹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 38:

[T]he fundamental design that must underpin the shaping of India’s military power should be the leveraging of potential opportunities that flow from peninsular India’s location in the Indian Ocean. . . . The development of military power must therefore attain a significant maritime orientation. Presently, Indian military power has a continental orientation. To emerge as a maritime power should therefore be India’s strategic objective.

¹⁹⁰ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 41.

¹⁹¹ For discussion of Sino-Indian skirmishing over Sikkim, see Garver, 2001, pp. 176–185. Seven years after these clashes, the Kingdom of Sikkim was formally integrated to the Indian Union. According a parliamentary record of the time (which must be taken with extreme caution), the 1967 clashes resulted in 88 Indian deaths and 163 wounded, with 340 PLA troops dead and 450 wounded. Lok Sabha Secretariat, *Lok Sabha Debates, 1967*, New Delhi, India: Government of India, 1967, pp. 51 onward.

¹⁹² The 1987 skirmish took place at the Sumdorong Chu Valley, triggered by India’s decision to integrate Arunachal Pradesh (part of which, centered on the Tawang Valley, is still claimed by China) as a state in the Union.

disputed territory (in this case, a road expansion), with the hope of creating a new set of facts. The crisis was ended through diplomacy, with a return to the *status quo ante*—and a quiet build-up by China, which may set the stage for a future conflict.¹⁹³ For USAF planners, this conflict has been merely paused, not ended.

How such a future conflict might play out is a matter of contention. While China's military is stronger overall, Indian strategists see the tactical advantages of geography at Doklam (and, for the more optimistic of them, across the entire LAC) as favoring their position. "We're pretty strong along the disputed line," said one Indian observer. He admitted, however, that in serious conflict, China was likely to rely on standoff weaponry, cyberwarfare, electronic warfare, ballistic missiles, and other 21st century forms of contactless combat.¹⁹⁴

Another Indian scholar, with an expertise in air power, noted that land warfare along the LAC is very manpower-intensive, and in this sense geography favors the PLA: The high, flat Tibetan plateau permits greater lateral mobility, effectively multiplying the number of Chinese troops available at any point. But in the sphere of air power (this expert said), the same geographical facts favored India: The high altitude of Tibet results in thinner air, so PLAAF aircraft must take off with less fuel and munitions than they would be able to carry at lower-altitude air bases: "There's a reason that Tibet has the longest runways in the world," he said. Indian aircraft, by contrast, can take off fully loaded from IAF bases near sea level. Moreover, the ridge of the Tibetan Plateau provides cover from radar: "We're in the shadow of the Himalayas," he said. "We're not visible until we pop over the mountains. But we can see PLAAF aircraft from the moment they take off." He tempered his observation with a note of caution: "We tend to overplay this advantage—in a shooting war, we cannot be overconfident."¹⁹⁵

Pakistan as India's Most Immediate Near-Term Security Threat

Perhaps more troubling to India, at least in the short term, is China's strong and deepening relationship with Pakistan—particularly in the air power arena. This is a relationship that Heginbotham and Gilboy cite as a nested security dilemma complicating all other security challenges India faces.¹⁹⁶ In theory, India might seek to decouple China from Pakistan, or drive a

¹⁹³ For more detailed discussion of the Doklam dispute, see Šumit Ganguly and Andrew Scobell, "The Himalayan Impasse: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Wake of Doklam," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2018; Joshi, 2017; and Blank, 2017.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4). A U.S. observer backed up the assessment of ease of logistics and communication providing superior lateral mobility—as well as resupply and rapid reinforcement—to the PLA (interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi [Source 2]).

¹⁹⁶ Heginbotham and Gilboy, 2012, pp. 275–277.

wedge between them, but in practice this has historically not proven successful.¹⁹⁷ To understand why this is of particular concern to India, it is necessary to look briefly at the long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan.

In 1947—one day apart—India and Pakistan achieved their independence from Great Britain, and almost immediately went to war in Kashmir.¹⁹⁸ The nations have fought two more wars since then: in 1965 (primarily over the status of Kashmir) and in 1971 (when India supported a rebellion in what was then East Pakistan, leading to that half of the nation attaining independence as the nation of Bangladesh). The countries also fought a limited-but-intense conflict that lasted nearly three months in the summer of 1999 in the Kashmiri district of Kargil; the Kargil Conflict is sometimes referred to as a fourth Indo-Pakistani war, sometimes as a “half-war,” and resulted in nearly 1,000 fatalities on both sides by official count. This conflict had added significance in that it was the first large-scale combat between the two nations since both of them became declared nuclear powers in 1998.¹⁹⁹

In addition to these confrontations, India and Pakistan have engaged in smaller-scale armed engagements on a continual basis throughout their history. They exchange artillery barrages regularly across the LOC, as well as skirmishing in contested high-altitude areas such as Siachen Glacier (at up to 18,000 feet, the highest battlefield in the world). *NonAlignment 2.0* notes the need for a full range of military options available, since the size and shape of the next conflict is impossible to determine in advance.²⁰⁰

As a consequence of its lack of conventional military parity, Pakistan relies on asymmetric warfare (support for terrorist/insurgent forces), under the implicit threat that any escalation from the subconventional to the conventional arena might spiral into nuclear warfare. Indian policymakers tend to portray *all* terrorism and insurgency in Kashmir (as well as in India proper) as proxy warfare directed by Pakistan and often denounced the “hidden hand” of Pakistan in the

¹⁹⁷ For discussion of India’s attempts to separate China from Pakistan on the key issue of Kashmir, see Garver, 2001, pp. 227–234.

¹⁹⁸ When British Colonial India (including some 560 nominally independent princely states) was divided into the modern nations of India and Pakistan, the Maharajah of Jammu & Kashmir tried to turn theoretical independent into the real thing. His territory was invaded by irregular troops from Pakistan, and he had little choice but to join the Indian Union in order to get Indian troops airlifted in. When a ceasefire was agreed upon in 1948, the Maharajah’s domains were effectively divided in two, with India controlling about two-thirds of the territory (integrated to the Indian Union as the state of Jammu and Kashmir), and Pakistan controlling about one-third (technically as the nominally-self-governing states of Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan). The ceasefire line is now known as the Line of Control (LoC) and is not recognized by any party as an international border. Neither party accepts the legitimacy of the other’s administration of its Kashmir territory.

¹⁹⁹ For discussion of how India’s Air Force and Army attempted to achieve jointness at Kargil, see Mukherjee, 2016, pp. 20–22.

²⁰⁰ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 40:

The hard power strategy adopted by us will have to cover the spectrum. . . . The context of the particular situation will determine the range of actions. At the high end of the spectrum of usable military power we will need to review our prevailing operational doctrine and structures. The capability that India should acquire is one that enables us to make shallow thrusts that are defensible in as many areas as feasible along the International Border and the LoC.

insurgencies of the Northeast. Such an attitude overlooks the very real alienation of many citizens in Kashmir,²⁰¹ as well as the homegrown insurgencies in the Northeast and in the Naxalite-dominated districts. But the role of Islamabad in fostering and sponsoring terrorism and insurgency—primarily, but not exclusively, in Kashmir—remains quite real.

Islamabad has supported Punjab-based terrorist groups, such as Jaish-e Muhammad (JeM), and indigenous Kashmiri militant groups, such as Hizbul Mujaheddin.²⁰² The nation's main spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), continues to support and—to a large degree—control the terrorist group Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), which is responsible for the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, among many other terrorist actions. Moreover, most Islamist terrorist actions in India and Indian-administered Kashmir since the late-1990s have been carried out by Pakistani citizens rather than Indian or Kashmiri ones (India's own non-Kashmiri Muslim population—perhaps 140 million strong—has almost never taken part in terrorist actions). *NonAlignment 2.0* argues for an increase in capabilities (and the will to use them) at the lower end of the force continuum, including a willingness to respond to unconventional attacks with air power.²⁰³

This recommendation for punitive use of air power has been discussed in detail by (among other sources) Yogesh Joshi and A. Mukherjee,²⁰⁴ and by Shashank Joshi.²⁰⁵ It has also since been put into practice. On February 26, 2019—in response to a terrorist action in Indian Kashmir launched from Pakistani soil—the Indian Air Force conducted its first strike on uncontested Pakistani territory since 1971: an airstrike on a suspected JeM terrorist camp near Balakot, in

²⁰¹ This alienation was highlighted by the Modi government's August 2019 revocation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, under which Kashmir (at least on paper) had been granted more autonomy than other parts of the Union. Protests resulted in a heavy security clampdown, and restrictions on press and communications.

²⁰² The dividing line between insurgent and terrorist groups is often a hazy one, see Seth G. Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons from the Vietcong to the Islamic State*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016; Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, "Moving Beyond Population-Centric vs. Enemy-Centric Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 27, No. 6, 2016. Some groups, such as JeM and Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), would seem to fall squarely on the terrorism side of the dividing line. Hizbul Mujaheddin is more nebulous: Unlike the other two, its membership is largely Kashmiri, so it can claim to be an indigenous movement rather than one created by a foreign power. In the early and mid-1990s, at least, it had widespread support among the Kashmiri populace—something that further distinguishes it from groups like JeM and LeT. India contends that Hizbul Mujaheddin is effectively a Pakistani proxy movement and has engaged in many acts of terrorism rather than simply insurgency.

²⁰³ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 40:

At the lower end of the options spectrum is the employment of cyber and/or air power in a punitive mode . . . it could be swift, more precise, and certainly more amenable to being coordinated with our diplomatic efforts. . . . The crucial choice here requires a decision to move away from the paradigm focused on capture of territory to a paradigm based on destructive ability. Destructive capability will include air power, missiles and long-range guns as the central vectors.

²⁰⁴ Yogesh Joshi and A. Mukherjee, "From Denial to Punishment: The Security Dilemma and Changes in India's Military Strategy Towards China," *Asian Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2019.

²⁰⁵ Shashank Joshi, *Indian Power Projection: Ambition, Arms and Influence*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge Journals, 2015.

Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The amount of damage inflicted is contested,²⁰⁶ but this breached a significant redline. Until the Balakot strike, India had refrained from any attack on Pakistani territory out of concern over possible nuclear escalation: Even its attacks on disputed territory in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (most notably, the September 2016 “surgical strike”²⁰⁷) were carefully calibrated and highly limited.²⁰⁸ After Balakot, however, the equation changed: Prime Minister Modi has said that he will not be deterred from future punitive actions out of concern over nuclear threats.

China as Indirect Security Challenge via Pakistan

Since the late 1960s, Beijing has been Islamabad's most consistent international patron and “all-weather friend.” In recent decades, both the economic and the military sides of this equation have grown stronger. Both sides of this picture are worrisome to Indian security planners.

On the economic side, one of the most ambitious parts of the BRI is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).²⁰⁹ This set of proposed projects would encompass both infrastructure and economic development zones. It is anchored by the Chinese-built, Chinese-run port of Gwadar, in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. When road (and, at least aspirationally, rail) improvements are completed, China will be able to transport goods from its Western interior straight down to the Arabian Sea for onward shipping to Europe, Africa, and the Americas—thereby cutting thousands of miles off current shipping routes that transit the Strait of Malacca. China's President Xi Jinping has publicly stated that Chinese investment in CPEC could total \$62 billion, although many observers believe that this figure is significantly overstated.²¹⁰

India has separate concerns about the BRI in general and CPEC in particular. The general concerns about the BRI are officially couched in terms of “international norms, good

²⁰⁶ India claimed to have destroyed a significant JeM camp, whereas Pakistan claims that no such camp existed or was destroyed. Neither side has produced conclusive evidence to support its claim. For more discussion of impact, see Ashley Tellis, “A Smoldering Volcano: Pakistan and Terrorism After Balakot,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 14, 2019.

²⁰⁷ For a detailed discussion of how this “surgical strike” may constitute a *de facto* blueprint for Prime Minister Modi's strategic decisionmaking, see Nitin A. Gokhale, *Securing India the Modi Way: Pathankot, Surgical Strikes and More*, New Delhi, Bloomsbury, 2017.

²⁰⁸ On September 29, 2016, in retaliation for an attack on an Army base at Uri in Kashmir 11 days earlier, India launched what it termed a “surgical strike” against terrorist “launch pads.” This attack was carried out by Special Forces rather than aircraft and was limited to an area in the portion of pre-1947 Kashmir that India does not recognize as Pakistani territory. These factors were considered key in limiting the potential for escalation. Sanjeev Miglani and Asad Hashim, “India Says Hits Pakistan-Based Militants, Escalating Tensions,” Reuters, September 29, 2016.

²⁰⁹ For a discussion of the political ramifications of CPEC, see Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 171–178.

²¹⁰ Arif Rafiq, “China's \$62 Billion Bet on Pakistan,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 24, 2017.

governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality.”²¹¹ Such concerns, according to Indian analysts interviewed, overlay a far deeper worry that BRI investment is powerfully advancing China’s strategic rather than purely economic agenda.²¹² The objection to CPEC is more specific and stems from the fact that a key portion of it (the Karakoram Highway expansion) runs through territory disputed by India and Pakistan since 1947: “Regarding the so-called ‘China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,’” India’s Ministry of External Affairs said in 2017, “the international community is well aware of India’s position. No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity.”²¹³

On the security side of the equation, China has been Pakistan’s largest source of military hardware for more than 65 years, supplying 40 percent of the nation’s arms during this period.²¹⁴ Indeed, Pakistan is the only nation to which China has sold arms every single year since 1964—and China is the only nation from which Pakistan has bought arms every single year.²¹⁵ Much of this gear is low-tech, but in the first decade of the 21st century the two nations began joint production of the JF-17 Thunder multirole combat jet (China’s version is called the FC-1 Xiaolong).²¹⁶ Pakistani generals speak openly of China replacing the United States as the high-tech supplier of choice.²¹⁷ Shortly after the JF-17 program was initiated, Pakistan and China in 2009 signed a deal for 36 Chengdu J-10 multirole combat aircraft. Pakistan is reported to be cooperating with Chengdu in the development of a multipurpose fighter based on the MiG-33.²¹⁸ While the JF-17 is used for counterinsurgency, its mission-set includes potential combat with the Indian Air Force. Pakistan deploys JF-17s at Masroor Air Force Base (among other sites)—far from potential counterinsurgency operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, but instead on the eastern border with India.

²¹¹ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Official Spokesperson’s Response to a Query on Participation of India on OBOR/BRI Forum,” New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, May 13, 2017.

²¹² Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3); interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4); interview with Singapore-based Indian security analyst on June 2, 2019, Singapore (Source 6).

²¹³ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2017.

²¹⁴ For discussion of the security relationship between Pakistan and China, and more detailed sourcing of the items referred to here, see Blank et al., 2017, pp. 36–49.

²¹⁵ Jonah Blank, “Thank You for Being a Friend: Pakistan and China’s Almost Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 15, 2015. Analysis of data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “Importer/Exporter TIV Tables,” SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, undated-b.

²¹⁶ The date at which this truly became a joint production is debatable. Much has been written on the JF-17’s capabilities and comparison with other aircraft such as the F-16. For a brief description, see, Farhan Bokhari, “Pakistan Reveals Plans for JF-17 and J-10 Fighters,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, March 10, 2009; and Richard D. Fisher, “Paris Air Show 2015: JF-17 Fighter Flying with Indigenous Chinese Turbofan,” *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly*, June 17, 2015.

²¹⁷ Ehsan-ul Haq, “Jirga on Geo News (General (R) Ehsan ul Haq, Exclusive . . .) 1st June 2015,” interview on Geo TV, June 1, 2015, translated from Urdu by Abdul Tariq, 28:00 mark.

²¹⁸ J-10 deal: Siva Govindasamy, “Pakistan Signs Deal for Chinese J-10 Fighters,” *FlightGlobal.com*, November 13, 2009. Cooperation with Chengdu on MiG-33 variant: Syed Fazl-e-Haider, “Pakistan and China Prove Powerful Combination in Aviation,” *The National* (Dubai), November 25, 2013.

Cooperation between China and Pakistan in the air power arena goes beyond hardware: The two air forces exercise together regularly. The PLAAF typically refrains from exercising with the air forces of most other countries, but conducts an annual multidimensional joint exercise with Pakistan known as Shaheen; various iterations of this exercise have included such platforms as the JF-17, Dassault Mirage III/5, F7/PG (flown by Pakistan), and the Chengu J-10 and J-7 multirole fighters (flown by China).²¹⁹

It is unsurprising, therefore, that Indian planners look on China and Pakistan as presenting an interlocked set of challenges. Each is seen as a potential adversary in its own right, and together they are seen as forming a *de facto* alliance against India. *NonAlignment 2.0* notes, “A China which is raising its regional and global profile will provide a more effective shield to Pakistan. . . . In consequence, we may need to think of Pakistan as a subset of the larger strategic challenges posed by China.”²²⁰ This threat is seen as extending from the subconventional to the conventional right up to the nuclear arena. “The continued growth and modernization of the Chinese and Pakistan nuclear arsenals should be a matter of some concern to India,” the document states, noting that “cooperation between China and Pakistan on nuclear matters further complicates the situation for India.”²²¹ Given the historical role that China has played in helping Pakistan develop its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities,²²² such a concern does not appear to be ill-founded.

²¹⁹ Franz-Stefan Gady, “China and Pakistan Air Forces Launch Joint Training Exercise,” *The Diplomat*, April 12, 2016; Mateen Haider, “Pakistan, China Air Forces Begin Joint Drills ‘Shaheen-III,’” *Dawn*, May 24, 2014.

²²⁰ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 18.

²²¹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 55.

²²² Samina Ahmed, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Spring, 1999; T. V. Paul, “Chinese-Pakistani Nuclear/Missile Ties and Balance of Power Politics,” *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2003.

5. Assessment and Outlook

This chapter presents an assessment of several key factors in the U.S.-India relationship relevant to the issue of U.S.-China competition, and an outlook for the coming five to ten years. The picture it paints is largely a positive one, as long as American expectations of India are in realistic alignment with India's own interests and capabilities.

India Sees the United States as a Partner and China as a Rival—but Limiting Factors Remain

Non-Aligned rhetoric notwithstanding, there is no actual parity of threat perception between the United States and China: India regards the United States as a partner (albeit a sometimes-problematic one) and China as a rival (albeit one too close and too powerful to needlessly alienate). “We need the U.S. to balance China,” an Indian scholar interviewed in New Delhi noted. “There’s simply nobody else to do it.”²²³ Another Indian security analyst emphasized the need for American help even in maintaining awareness and control over Chinese actions in the Indian Ocean.²²⁴ The authors of *NonAlignment 2.0*—as the title suggests, not a group of strategists sold on the idea of close partnering with any nation—write, “It is in our interest that China remains preoccupied with its first-tier, more immediate maritime theatre.” They highlight the desirability of “retention of strong U.S. maritime deployments in the Asia-Pacific theatre.”²²⁵

But this should not lead U.S. planners to overestimate the degree to which India is likely to side with the United States in any competition with China.²²⁶ *NonAlignment 2.0* articulates this caution in very clear terms. A particular area of concern is that U.S.-China competition could be replaced by U.S.-China rapprochement (sometimes referred to as a “G-2” arrangement)—that is, a superpower entente that leaves India out in the cold.²²⁷

²²³ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

²²⁴ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 5).

²²⁵ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 13.

²²⁶ For a U.S. practitioner analysis, see Abercrombie, 2019. For analysis by scholars not associated with either government (one currently based in the United Kingdom, the other a former Indian Army officer currently based in Singapore), see Walter C. Ladwig III and Anit Mukherjee, “India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership,” *Asia Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, January 2019.

²²⁷ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 32:

Nor is it entirely clear how the U.S. might actually respond if China posed a threat to India's interests. The other potential downside is that India could prematurely antagonize China. . . . The U.S. can be too demanding in its friendship and resentful of other attachments India might pursue. The historical record of the United States bears out that powers that form formal alliances with it have tended to see an erosion of their strategic autonomy. Both India and the U.S. may be better served by being friends rather than allies.

Given the fact that India is facing a militarily and economically more powerful rival—one that has invaded Indian territory in the past, continues to stake an actively articulated claim to territory India now administers, and inflicted 20 fatalities on Indian forces in June 2020—how seriously should concerns about Non-Alignment be taken? Quite seriously indeed. India’s fierce attachment to its geopolitical independence goes beyond security considerations, into the realm of national identity.²²⁸ In the view of many Indian planners, the rest of Asia is waiting for India to step into its natural role as the pivot-point of the Indo-Pacific region. *NonAlignment 2.0* states, “Asia is likely to remain a theatre of great power competition . . . [and] many Asian powers are looking to hedge their bets against excessive dependence on a major power.”²²⁹

India’s Distrust of the United States as Potentially Unreliable Partner

In addition to India’s ideological and identity-based reasons for maintaining strategic autonomy, Indian planners have hard-nosed realpolitik rationales for such a policy as well. The most salient of these is a profound distrust of U.S. reliability,²³⁰ as a provider of both protection (whether military or diplomatic) and equipment (whether during a conflict, or at any time in the procurement cycle).

NonAlignment 2.0 highlights the first of these rationales. It questions whether the United States would actually risk a military conflict against a near-peer competitor in the case of a future Sino-Indian war²³¹ and notes that the United States has a long track-record of not coming to India’s aid in the less-threatening (for the United States) case of conflict with Pakistan: “While American, and more generally international, support is welcome in keeping pressure on Pakistan, we cannot depend on this to dissuade Pakistan from pursuing what it regards as a time-tested and successful foreign policy tool.”²³² The document further notes what it describes as an undergoing and inevitable deterioration of U.S. capability of serving as an effective defender of Indian interests, even if U.S. policymakers could be trusted to do so. It notes the decline of the U.S.-led

²²⁸ See Blank et al., 2015, pp. 23–37.

²²⁹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 12. The text continues:

Many countries are also looking to India to assume a more active strategic and economic role in Asia. India has not often fully responded to the opportunities provided by the hedging strategies of various Asian powers.

²³⁰ This distrust has historical roots in India’s disappointment at the lack of U.S. support during the 1962 war with China; perceptions of being aligned in different blocs during the Cold War; and long-standing (albeit highly volatile) U.S. security partnership with Pakistan (Cohen, 2001a, pp. 131–133; Harding, 2004, pp. 321–350; Blank et al., 2017, pp. 11–24).

²³¹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 32.

²³² *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 18. The document situates the likelihood of U.S. support for Pakistan in counterterrorism and Afghanistan policy:

As long as Pakistan is seen as delivering, even if half-heartedly, on U.S. concerns over Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, only lip service will be paid to Pakistan’s obligations to deliver on its promises to prevent cross-border terrorism against India.

system of alliances—a phenomenon that has hardly become less evident since the document was published in 2012.²³³

The Indian perception of the United States as an unreliable partner in security cooperation is equally deep-set and articulated frequently to many U.S. interlocutors. “They bring it up constantly,” said a U.S. military official interviewed in New Delhi. “Between Congress, the White House, and a host of bureaucratic regulations, they see us as a somewhat challenging partner.”²³⁴ Said another, “They can’t understand why we don’t give them the same access that we give to treaty allies, like members of NATO. They don’t accept the fact that, without foundational agreements in place, we legally *can’t*.”²³⁵

Foundational agreements are a key element of the disconnect between Indian and U.S. interlocutors. These complex sets of documents set out the terms under which U.S. military hardware or dual-use technology can be transferred to another nation. Depending on the country in question and the preexisting commercial agreements, they might include the following:

- *End-use monitoring:* The United States, under binding legislation, insists on maintaining control over the ultimate destination for any sensitive item of military hardware sold. Without such monitoring, a trusted U.S. security partner (for example, India) would be free to sell U.S. arms to a dedicated U.S. rival (for example, Iran).
- *Copyright protection:* The U.S. government often cannot “give” military technology to India (or any other reason) for the simple fact that it does not own it. Much of the technology that India desires to purchase for the purpose of developing its own arms industries belongs not to the U.S. government, but to private firms, such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Without an agreement ensuring the enforcement of copyright rules (something India has been loath to grant, in the military arena as in many others), the U.S. government is powerless to deliver on any promise of technology transfer.
- *Operational conditions under which the items might be used:* In many cases, the purchaser of an item of military technology might wish to use it for purposes that run counter to U.S. national interests. For example, the United States might be willing to sell lethal hardware to a nation for the purposes of national defense, but not for the purpose of suppressing internal dissent.
- *Classified technologies, and procedures for maintaining and upgrading hardware:* Sometimes, particularly in cases where there is a significant risk of sensitive or classified

²³³ *NonAlignment 2.0*, pp. 31–32:

[T]he relative decline of the American alliance system is already evident. . . . [T]he world’s rising powers now see greater opportunity in playing the polycentric field. . . . If a strong economy and military and its alliance system were the two basic pillars of U.S. power in the earlier era, America’s ability to ‘call the shots’ in finance and energy were its third and fourth pillars. These pillars too now appear less steady and reliable.

²³⁴ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

²³⁵ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2). Some of these foundational agreements were signed in 2016 (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, or LEMOA), 2018 (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, or COMCASA), and 2020 (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement, or BECA), but at the time of writing their implementation remains a work-in-progress.

technology being transferred to a third party, the United States may outline a very specific set of rules governing the maintenance and aftercare of American technologies.

Most countries selling arms or other sensitive technologies have some sort of arrangements for at least some of the issues contained in foundational agreements—but few have as complex and extensive rules as the United States. This is a sore point with many customers of American military equipment—but few more so than India.

U.S. interlocutors often fail to explain the rationale clearly: Pentagon, White House, and State Department officials (as well as defense industry executives) often shift the blame to Congress; members of Congress and their staff generally have only a vague understanding of the legal technicalities involved, or the role of foundational agreements in this process.²³⁶ This failure to explain the system leaves Indian interlocutors feeling both distrusted and distrustful.

India's Inability to Compete with China Leads to Risk Aversion

Indian planners see China as their most significant long-term security challenge, but they are well aware that they are not yet peer-competitor. Most strategists interviewed see the gap between the two nations increasing. “We don’t have the military-industrial complex that they do,” said one Indian security analyst. “We can offer nothing like BRI. They are ahead of us militarily, economically, in every way—and pulling further ahead all the time. What do we have as the currency of power? We’re scrambling just to stay where we are.”²³⁷ Said another Indian scholar: “We’re planning for today’s war, and we’ll be prepared for it in 20 years. China is preparing for tomorrow’s war, and they’ll be prepared in five.”²³⁸

NonAlignment 2.0, while highlighting the challenges presented by China, is careful to avoid portraying India’s neighbor in overly antagonistic terms. The emphasis of Indian strategy, according to this quasi-doctrinal document, should be to *avoid* goading China into a conflict: “If China perceives India as irrevocably committed to an anti-China containment ring, it may end up adopting overtly hostile and negative policies towards India, rather than making an effort to keep

²³⁶ I spent 12 years as point-person on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for South and Southeast Asia. In this role, I had oversight responsibility for arms transfer to India, as well as all other countries in these regions. I freely confess that I did not fully understand the role of foundational agreements until after leaving government.

²³⁷ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

²³⁸ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4).

India on a more independent path.”²³⁹ India’s primary means of insuring its safety against the possibility of Chinese hostility will be diplomatic rather than military.²⁴⁰

Within such geostrategic constraints, U.S. planners should restrain their expectations about Indian military participation in competition with China outside of the Indian Ocean region. “Sending our navy to the South China Sea or elsewhere in the Pacific?” asked one Indian analyst rhetorically. “That’s unrealistic—we’ve got our hands more than full with China here in our own backyard, we really can’t compete beyond that.”²⁴¹ Said another: “India may wave the flag on FONOPS [Freedom of Navigation Operations]. But that’s about it.”²⁴²

Best Avenues for Partnership Include Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief, Maritime Domain Awareness, and Education

Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief

India’s military, unlike that of many other nations in the Indo-Pacific, is a “fighting military”—that is, it regularly engages in combat, rather than merely trains for it. But given the combination of climate change, rapid spread of pandemics, and environmental overstress due to explosive population growth, untraditional missions are likely to take up an increasing share of the Indian military’s mission set in the near future. Perhaps the most important of these will be an increased emphasis on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). As *NonAlignment 2.0* states, “it could be argued that the biggest challenge for relations in South Asia will be managing the environment and natural resources. Environmental risks pose clear and present threats. But they may also provide opportunities for new strategic alignments. India needs to give these issues strategic priority.”²⁴³

After the April 2015 earthquake that killed 9,000 and caused widespread damage to Nepal, India spearheaded international HA/DR efforts. Indian National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams reached Nepal only six hours after the earthquake.²⁴⁴ Indian assistance included

²³⁹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 14. Shortly before this, the document amplifies:

On the global canvas, China looks upon India not as a threat in itself, but as a “swing state” whose association with potential adversaries could constrain China. The challenge for Indian diplomacy will be to develop a diversified network of relations with several major powers to compel China to exercise restraint in its dealings with India, while simultaneously avoiding relationships that go beyond conveying a certain threat threshold in Chinese perceptions.

²⁴⁰ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 36:

This will require considerable investment in diplomatic and intellectual capacity. For example, India’s ability to engage with and shape international law is still relatively limited by the fact that there are few Indians with expertise or training in international law.

²⁴¹ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

²⁴² Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4).

²⁴³ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 17.

²⁴⁴ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2015.

16 NDRF teams, Indian medical personnel, and approximately 571 tons of relief material, including rescue equipment, medical supplies, food, water, tents, and blankets.²⁴⁵ In June 2015, India pledged \$1 billion in reconstruction assistance, with Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj saying India had “reacted as if a disaster has struck India.”²⁴⁶

Increased U.S. cooperation with India in the HA/DR arena could help India not only better protect its own citizens but accelerate its development into a reliable provider of HA/DR throughout the region (and even further afield). According to U.S. military personnel interviewed in New Delhi, and also U.S. military personnel interviewed in Singapore and Jakarta who had previously served in India and continue to have HA/DR as a key part of their portfolios,²⁴⁷ an increased focus on HA/DR cooperation with India would have a number of clear benefits for the United States itself:

- *Improve interoperability with India across all types of operations.* The skill sets necessary for HA/DR operations overlap significantly with those for combat. As several interviewees noted, the most difficult parts of working with a partner do not typically involve pulling triggers. In combat, as in disaster relief operations, the most difficult elements of coordination with partners often involve logistics, communication, and deconfliction of effort.
- *HA/DR exercises could, and should, be multilateral—just like real HA/DR operations.* The skills necessary to coordinate a variety of partners, with an enormous range of capabilities, is a natural pathway to other types of multilateral engagement.
- *The skills built by HA/DR exercises will definitely be put to use.* Unlike war, the ravages of nature are an absolute certainty. There will be real-life requirements for HA/DR operations in India and surrounding countries in the near future. In all past HA/DR operations (for example, the Nepal earthquake of 2015), the United States, India, and other partners had to create rules of engagement in the moments of crisis. That did not make for seamless interaction.
- *In HA/DR, the United States has a competitive advantage over China.* Throughout Asia, China has a dominant advantage in the economic arena, and at least a peer-competitive status in most conventional military arenas. In HA/DR, however, there is no competition: The United States has capabilities, particularly in air transport and logistics, that Beijing cannot hope to match.

One U.S. military official noted the benefits to interoperability of HA/DR missions. Noting that both India and Singapore use U.S. aircraft such as C-17s and C-130s for HA/DR missions, he suggested looking for opportunities to train and exercise for HA/DR missions on a trilateral

²⁴⁵ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2015.

²⁴⁶ Press Trust of India, “India Pledges USD 1 Billion Aid for Nepal’s Reconstruction Programme,” *Indian Express*, June 25, 2015.

²⁴⁷ Interview with U.S. military official on April 2, 2019, Jakarta (Source 15); interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 9); interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2); interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 8).

basis.²⁴⁸ A U.S. military official interviewed in Singapore, but with prior experience throughout the Indo-Pacific, noted that during the Nepal earthquake, India led coordination of the operation. This was a new experience both for India and for many of the U.S. troops, who were not accustomed to taking a backseat role. “You’ve got to get C2 [command and control] right, search and rescue clicking, figure out refueling of air assets, both fixed-wing and rotary-wing. India needs to learn how to lead, and we need to learn how to follow.”²⁴⁹

Maritime Domain Awareness

An underdeveloped aspect of security engagement between the United States and India is maritime domain awareness (MDA). In the U.S. military, the mission is housed in the Navy, but it has implications for the USAF as well. The most authoritative definition of MDA comes from the UN agency responsible for international shipping, the International Maritime Organization: “The effective understanding of any activity associated with the maritime environment that could impact upon the security, safety, economy or environment.”²⁵⁰

A U.S. official responsible for coordinating MDA efforts throughout much of the Indo-Pacific region noted that this involves the precise mapping of every meter of each nation’s coastline and territorial waters. Neither India nor the United States has a current MDA capability in the Indian Ocean Region that is anywhere close to either country’s ideal. Cooperation on MDA is in harmony with India’s own national security goals as stated in *NonAlignment 2.0*:

Concurrent with the development of our naval capabilities should be a major thrust to exploit the potential of our EEZ in the Indian Ocean. Ocean development would not only include exploitation of the ocean resources but also the development of the infrastructure of our ports, connectivity to the hinterland, shipbuilding and ship repair capability among other things.²⁵¹

In addition to mapping waters, MDA also involves tracking every naval vessel that enters—or, ideally, even approaches—India’s territorial waters. “MDA is central to rule of law and governance—the points that the U.S. makes constantly in competition with China,” the U.S. official says. “Right now, we don’t have a clue what’s actually going on in most parts of the sea. Are there Chinese fishing vessels? Or maybe PLAN? Right now, we usually don’t know.”²⁵² As a U.S. military official based in Southeast Asia noted, strengthening the MDA capabilities in every nation would have clear benefits for U.S. Navy operations in the region—any U.S. vessel

²⁴⁸ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 8).

²⁴⁹ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 9).

²⁵⁰ International Maritime Organization, *Amendments to the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual*, London, UK, May 24, 2010.

²⁵¹ *NonAlignment 2.0*, pp. 41–42.

²⁵² Interview with U.S. government official on April 2, 2019, Jakarta (Source 17).

transiting a particular stretch of ocean would have access to vital information about its surroundings and any potential threats.²⁵³

MDA is primarily a maritime mission, but much of it is carried out by air assets—and has a complementary air counterpart. As a civilian U.S. official based in Southeast Asia noted, of a common term used in the region, “‘Maritime Fulcrum’ really should be called the ‘*Air and Maritime Fulcrum*.’” He noted that Indo-Pacific nations had little more knowledge of the aircraft transiting their airspace than the vessels transiting their territorial waters.²⁵⁴ In reference to both aspects of domain awareness, the U.S. expert responsible for MDA throughout the region noted, “This is one area in which we can offer a range of assistance programs that China cannot. In MDA, there is no competition.”²⁵⁵

Military Education

Another low-cost high-value area for increased engagement would be education and professional military training. The authors of *NonAlignment 2.0* highlight the need for greater attention to this gap as a necessity for India’s advancement in a variety of fields related to national security:

The existing infrastructure of security-related knowledge (especially on matters pertaining to hard power) is deeply deficient. The gap between the government and the wider community of security studies remains large. Bridging this gap will require action along two lines. First, we need to foster more study and research in these areas. Institutions that were designed for these purposes have been unable to make much of an impact on our knowledge base. Reorienting them will also require addressing the quality of higher education in the areas of International Relations and Security Studies.²⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that the document does not limit the knowledge gap to military education and technical training per se but extends it to areas *relevant* to security issues. The lack of educational opportunities is particularly severe (from a national security standpoint) in a number of scientific fields related to technological innovation.²⁵⁷ The report notes that both national security and the economic growth on which it rests rely on bringing India’s educational system, especially in scientific and technical areas, up to an international standard.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Interview with U.S. military official on April 1, 2019, Jakarta (Source 12).

²⁵⁴ Interview with U.S. government official on April 4, 2019, Jakarta (Source 18).

²⁵⁵ Interview with U.S. government official on April 2, 2019, Jakarta (Source 17).

²⁵⁶ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 58.

²⁵⁷ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 8:

[O]ne factor is even more fundamental than access to resources. This is our ability to compete in the field that is vital to defining national power in the twenty-first century: knowledge and knowledge production, especially the capacity to innovate and to generate new forms of knowledge.

²⁵⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, pp. 8–9. Innovation in both the military and civilian realms

This gap is noted in interviews conducted for this study as well. A recurrent theme was the lack of a pipeline from universities to military-related research to private industry—essentially, the system in place in both China and the United States. “India doesn’t value scientists, we value hierarchy,” said one Indian analyst, with a specialization in air power issues. “We don’t have a ‘revolving door,’ whereby the best scientists can spend some time working for the government, and some time making money on Silicon Valley or Wall Street. Instead, the ‘reward’ is just seniority, and maybe a larger office.”²⁵⁹

This structure of incentivization in the fields of science and technology related to military issues—rewarding seniority over innovation—leads to hidebound thinking. “We’re too traditional in our planning,” another Indian analyst noted. “We think about how to replace a hundred soon-to-be obsolete planes with another hundred planes. We should be thinking about how to accomplish the same mission *without* a hundred planes.”²⁶⁰

This lack of indigenous capacity leads to unrealistic expectations of the United States and other partners. A third Indian analyst cited aircraft engine technology—a field of cooperation included in the U.S.-India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) as an example. “We should know that no country will give up its most advanced engine technology,” he noted. “That’s the crown jewel! China would give its left arm and left leg for U.S. engine technology that they could reverse-engineer. And we think that the U.S. would just give it to *us*?”²⁶¹

The Indian air-power expert described India’s reputation for capability in the high-tech sector as greatly overstated: “India fetishes low-cost—just look at how we bragged about how inexpensive our Mars mission was. But you get what you pay for: Our scientists are poorly paid, and you can’t expect the best people to work for free.” He noted that this same phenomenon carries over to the aerospace industry, and all areas of air power: “The IAF is great at taking junk, and making it work just good enough.”²⁶²

A U.S. military official interviewed in New Delhi made much the same point: “India needs to decide whether it wants to have a 21st-century net-centric military, or a 20th-century old-fashioned one.”²⁶³ To help India improve its capabilities, an Indian analyst noted, the United States could send more American subject-matter experts on exchanges to India. It could also step up training and information exchanges in Singapore or another third country.²⁶⁴

will depend ever more completely on scientific and technological progress, on developing human capital, and on disseminating skills and expertise across the working citizenry. This will necessitate the revitalization and expansion of India’s research and educational infrastructure, right from the apex pure research institutes down to the access points for effectively imparting primary education and vocational skills to wider citizenry.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4).

²⁶⁰ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 5).

²⁶¹ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

²⁶² Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 4).

²⁶³ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

²⁶⁴ Interview with Indian security analyst on May 16, 2019, New Delhi (Source 3).

Indian planners are aware of this shortcoming. *NonAlignment 2.0* recommends the establishment of an offensive and defensive Cyber Command.²⁶⁵ It notes that high-tech capabilities are particularly necessary for air power but are at the heart of improved military capability in every service: “Software is at the heart of almost everything—aircraft, ships, vehicles, logistics, signals, command and control, and even the gear of the future soldier.”²⁶⁶ According to U.S. military personnel in New Delhi, the specific areas in which Indian counterparts have requested increased training and education include artificial intelligence, C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), and any next-generation technologies that might help India compete directly or asymmetrically with China.²⁶⁷

Increased Indian capability in a wide range of technical fields could have a multiplier effect for other U.S. security partners. India seeks to be a teacher rather than just a student, and if its own capabilities were increased it could shoulder an increased load of military education for nations throughout the Indo-Pacific.²⁶⁸

Outlook for Overall U.S.-India Relations

For reasons discussed throughout this report, the outlook for relations between the United States and India appears good in the five-to-ten-year timeframe. This is likely to carry over both to the realm of U.S. competition with China and to the more general U.S.-India security partnership—so long as American expectations are moderated by the factors discussed above.

On the Indian side of the equation, variables for the U.S. relationship—despite considerable domestic volatility in India itself—seem likely to remain stable for the next five years. Prime Minister Modi’s BJP began a new term in May 2019 and has a sufficient parliamentary majority to make a change of government before May 2024 highly unlikely. The second-term Modi government is off to a rocky start: In August 2019, it withdrew the special status of Kashmir accorded by the Indian constitution, and in December 2019 it passed the controversial

²⁶⁵ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 61:

India should set up a Cyber Command with offensive and defensive capabilities. This body should also be responsible for setting domestic procedures to respond to such attacks, as well as developing capacity in the various CIIIs [Critical Information Technology Infrastructure Institutions] so that there is better system-wide knowledge of our capabilities and shortcomings.

²⁶⁶ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 61.

²⁶⁷ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 2).

²⁶⁸ *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 59:

We also need to increase the capacities of our training institutions to attract foreigners from friendly countries especially in our strategic neighbourhood. Presently, for example we are unable to meet the demand from foreign countries for vacancies in institutions like National Defence College (NDC) and the Defence Services Staff College. Conversely, we need to meet the demand especially from countries from our strategic neighbourhood and establish training teams in these countries.

Citizenship Amendment Act that sparked fears of plans to strip unknown numbers of Indian Muslims of their citizenship. In February 2020, the Modi government declined to send security forces to stop rioting in New Delhi before dozens were killed (disproportionately Muslim) and hundreds wounded.²⁶⁹

This domestic disorder, however, does not necessarily translate to a likelihood of disruption to the relationship between India and the United States. Although the New Delhi riots took place during a visit to the city by the U.S. president, this has not (as of mid-2020) affected relations between the two nations. Regardless of whether the BJP, Congress, or a Third Front coalition controls the central government after the 2024 elections, the general direction of India's security and foreign policy is likely to remain on its current trajectory: gradual easing (rather than sudden abandonment) of the long-standing attachment to Non-Alignment/strategic autonomy, constant tension (rising and ebbing, perhaps sometimes spilling over into large- or small-scale combat) with Pakistan, and a cautious rivalry with China that policymakers in New Delhi will try hard to prevent from turning into outright conflict.²⁷⁰ The difference between the various parties and leaders will likely be one of pace and emphasis rather than overall orientation.

This is not necessarily the case, however, on the American side of the equation. The greatest potential for disruption of the trajectory of U.S.-Indian relations lies in actions that might be taken by a U.S. administration—whether directed at India or (more likely) at other nations and affecting India indirectly.

Actions that the United States might take that could result in a significant disruption to the U.S.-India relationship include the following:

- *Levying tariffs on Indian products, as part of a hard-edged trade negotiation.* In March 2019, the Trump administration announced that it would terminate India's designation as a "beneficiary developing country" under the Generalized System of Preferences.²⁷¹ Such a move might clear the way for a new array of tariffs, either to force concessions or to remain in place in order to protect U.S. industries. Apart from any impact on the Indian economy, such tariffs would be likely to provoke an anti-American reaction and make security partnerships politically awkward for any government in New Delhi.

²⁶⁹ As of mid-2020, the names of only 26 victims (out of 42 killed) have been made public. Of these, 12 are Muslim names, 12 are Hindu names, and two are names used by members of both communities. If the unknown victims divide on the same ratio as those whose names are known, Muslims will comprise half of those killed, but only 14 percent of the population of India and 13 percent of the population of New Delhi. Even if all unknown victims are Hindu, the percentage of Muslims killed (29 percent) would be double that of the Muslim population in New Delhi or nationwide. (Tally by the author; names reported in "List of Those Killed in Delhi Communal Riots," *The Print*, February 27, 2020.) Population percentages are from India's most recent census, in 2011: 80 percent Hindu and 14.2 percent Muslim nationwide, 82 percent and 13 percent in Delhi: Government of India, *2011 Census: Religion Census 2011*, 2011b; Government of India, *2011 Census: Delhi City Census Data*, 2011a.

²⁷⁰ C. Raja Mohan, "Manifestos of BJP, Congress Indicate That When It Comes to Foreign Policy, Ambiguity Is Better Than Clarity," *Carnegie India/Indian Express*, April 9, 2019.

²⁷¹ Office of the United States Trade Representative, "United States Will Terminate GSP Designation of India and Turkey," March 4, 2019.

- *Imposing sanctions on India for dealing with Iran, Russia, or any other nation.* India maintains warm and friendly relations with both Iran and Russia and would feel highly aggrieved if sanctions (as of mid-2020, not waived but not yet re-imposed²⁷²) were put into effect. India relies on Iran for a significant portion of its oil and gas imports and has made an \$85 million capital investment in Iran's Chabahar Port.²⁷³ Russia remains India's largest source of arms imports, and India relies on Russia for spare parts and upgrades to most of its legacy Russian and Soviet weapon systems. Sanctioning India for dealing with either of these countries would strike Indian policymakers as unfair.
- *Taking actions toward Pakistan or Kashmir that India views as hostile.* While the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been historically fraught, it is also historically volatile: Periods of intense tension alternate with periods of deep cooperation.²⁷⁴ Given the U.S. strategic reliance on Pakistan for any withdrawal from Afghanistan, whether a brokered deal with the Taliban (as of mid-2020, in the process of being negotiated) or simply the use of ground lines of communication and air lines of communication for any large-scale movement of military equipment, it is not inconceivable that the United States might make concessions to Pakistan in the next five years which run counter to perceived Indian interests. Moreover, India would bitterly reject any U.S. attempt to interfere in the Kashmir conflict, which could be a Pakistani request: When Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited the White House on July 22, 2019, the U.S. president promised to "mediate" a deal over Kashmir.²⁷⁵ Such foreign mediation is a long-standing Indian redline.
- *Demanding that India make an awkward choice in a military confrontation with China.* While India is keen to defend its own core interests from Chinese encroachment, it is not at all eager to join a coalition against China for broader goals. It is possible that India might be persuaded to participate in FONOPS or other relatively benign operations in the South China Sea or elsewhere—but New Delhi would react very badly at the prospect of a demand rather than an invitation. "You're with us or you're against us" rhetoric, even if phrased more diplomatically, is likely to be counterproductive. If such an attitude were the sustained policy of the United States rather than a once-off comment, the result could be drastic.
- *Launching an all-out trade war with China.* There are mixed opinions in India about the current (as of mid-2020) trade dispute between the United States and China. Many commentators see it as bad for India's economy, and therefore for its national security. Some see it as an opportunity—a chance for India to step into the void created by a slow-down of U.S.-China trade.²⁷⁶ If such a trade war resulted in a serious adverse impact on

²⁷² Matthew Lee, "US Renews Iran Sanctions Waivers for Civilian Nuclear Reactor Work," Associated Press, May 3, 2019.

²⁷³ Press Trust of India, "India Takes Over Operations of Part of Chabahar Port in Iran," *Economic Times*, January 7, 2019. In February 2018 Iran's president made the first head of state visit to India in ten years, and signed a dozen agreements on topics ranging from tariffs to extradition and Chabahar Port. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2018.

²⁷⁴ Blank et al., 2018, pp. 11–21.

²⁷⁵ Sanjeev Miglani, "Trump Touches Off Storm in India with Kashmir Mediation Offer," Reuters, July 23, 2019.

²⁷⁶ C. Raja Mohan, "Raja Mandala: In His Second Term, Modi Must Deal with Turbulence Unleashed by Trump's Challenge to Global Trading Order," *Carnegie India/Indian Express*, May 25, 2019.

India's economy, however, and the United States was seen to be responsible, relations with India would likely suffer considerably.

6. Options for the United States, U.S. Department of Defense, and U.S. Air Force

Options for the United States

The U.S. government should consider the following options with respect to strengthening defense and security cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific region.

Accept India's deeply seated desire for "strategic autonomy." India is not going to become an ally with the United States any time soon—not a formal treaty ally, and not a *de facto* ally-without-a-treaty like Singapore or Sweden. Trying to force India into such a role will likely produce a reaction exactly contrary to the one desired: a reassertion of India's strategic independence from any and all nations. It is vital to keep expectations of partnership within the bounds of what is realistic for Indian policymakers.²⁷⁷

Instead of looking for rhetorical *assertions* of partnership, U.S. policymakers should focus on unheralded *actions*. Instead of actions that India regards as overly confrontational toward China, U.S. policymakers should seek actions within India's comfort zone (or if beyond it, be willing to accept a recalibration).

Consult with India before making decisions affecting its interests. The United States and India will not agree on all policy issues—particularly those involving Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. But the U.S.-India relationship could benefit from greater transparency. Indian planners regard their country as a global near-superpower and expect it to be treated as such. The lack of a permanent Indian seat on the UN Security Council is a continual point of irritation with the United States and the other four permanent members of the council. Any time that the United States is perceived to be treating India as a second-tier nation will likely be remembered and repaid in kind.

Many recent U.S. decisions in the Indo-Pacific region have had an effect on India, whether directly or indirectly: the trade war with China; the threat of military confrontation with North Korea, and the subsequent 180-degree turn to summit diplomacy; Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions imposed on countries (including India) purchasing arms from Russia; and second-degree sanctions imposed on countries (including India) trading with Iran. In each of these cases, Indian authorities felt left out of the decisionmaking process. Even if the United States ultimately decides on a course of action of which India disapproves, treating New Delhi as a partner rather than a bystander would go a long way.

²⁷⁷ For cautions from scholars and practitioners based in both nations on the need for realistic expectations of what is achievable, see Lalwani and Byrne, 2019; Mistry, 2016; Harding, 2004; Abercrombie, 2019.

A related issue is the security-heavy U.S. approach to the Indo-Pacific. At the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, India (like most nations in the region) was hoping for the articulation of a new vision of U.S. strategy that relied less on military power and more on economic outreach to match China's BRI program. "Please do *not* talk about competition with China!" said one U.S. military official who attended the conference. "They want to hear what we're doing to prevent conflict—not how we aim to win it."²⁷⁸ This attitude has softened, but by no means been eliminated, since the June 2020 clash at Galwan.

Increase engagement on maritime domain awareness. MDA cuts across many branches of government, both civilian and military. Only an all-of-government approach can address this issue properly, bringing in not only the military (especially the Navy and Coast Guard), but also civilian organizations, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Creating conditions for seamless cooperation is very difficult—both among U.S. government agencies and among foreign partners such as India. But the position of the United States as a world leader provides an advantage in helping India chart, govern, and police its territorial waters and airspace. "China can't compete with us on Maritime Domain Awareness," says one American official.²⁷⁹ Moreover, improved MDA would enable India to know exactly when Chinese vessels enter its territorial waters—or those of a near-neighbor such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan (thereby avoiding embarrassments, such as PLAN submarines surfacing near Colombo and Karachi without being detected by India). The drastic drop in price of low-earth satellites ("tube-sats") and other emerging technologies has made MDA a more attractive proposition than in the past, and one on which India would welcome engagement.

Seek opportunities to work with India to prevent Chinese political interference and influence operations, including in the cyber arena. The challenge presented by Russian interference to the political systems of the United States and other democracies is well documented.²⁸⁰ In recent years, there is evidence of increased efforts by the People's Republic to apply similar techniques to the U.S. political system.²⁸¹ In both the United States and India, China has employed sophisticated cyber-infiltration as a tool for espionage—and may do so as a future tool of cyberwarfare.

Expanding cooperation in this area could consist of enhanced information sharing, as well as increased intelligence, cyber security, and law enforcement exchanges with other partners in the region and globally. In addition, working more closely with government agencies with relevant

²⁷⁸ Interview with U.S. military official on May 9, 2019, Singapore (Source 9).

²⁷⁹ Interview with U.S. government official on April 2, 2019, Jakarta (Source 17).

²⁸⁰ Manvi Singh and Joan E. Greve, "Mueller Warns of Russian Meddling in 2020: 'They're Doing It as We Sit Here,'" *The Guardian*, July 25, 2019; Matt Apuzzo and Adam Satariano, "Russia and Far Right Spreading Disinformation Ahead of EU Elections, Investigators Say," *The Independent*, May 12, 2019.

²⁸¹ Ellen Cranley, "Pompeo Suggests Woman Arrested at Trump's Mar-a-Lago Resort May Have Been Spying for China," *Business Insider*, April 6, 2019.

intelligence, cybersecurity, and law enforcement responsibilities in India to help them counter Chinese espionage and influence operations is an important area for greater cooperation given the potential for Chinese cyber-interference in a democracy such as India.

Options for the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Air Force²⁸²

DoD and the USAF should consider the following options to deepen their relationship with the Indian government.

Encourage India's growing cooperation and engagement with U.S. allies such as Australia and Japan, and emerging partners such as Indonesia and Singapore. While Indian policymakers who are particularly sensitive about the need for strategic autonomy may have qualms about increased engagement with the United States, some of these concerns may be alleviated by facilitation of India's engagement with U.S. allies and partners instead. The Quad (the United States, Japan, Australia, and India) remains an underdeveloped and underutilized grouping. India's bilateral security relationship with Singapore is strong and can be an increasingly useful avenue for encouraging India's engagement with U.S. strategic architecture and interoperability with U.S. equipment and procedures. India's relationships with emerging U.S. partners, such as Indonesia (but also perhaps including Malaysia, Vietnam, and other Indo-Pacific nations), could be further encouraged and facilitated by the United States.

Engagements with U.S. partners should be seen as force multipliers for the United States, rather than rivals for a limited pool of India's available activities. The U.S. military should work more closely with mutual partners of India to expand awareness of each other's engagement activities in the region and, where possible and appropriate, coordinate and deconflict their regional outreach and cooperation initiatives. Doing so would help to ensure they will be able to focus on key objectives and maximize the effectiveness of this growing web of activities. From a USAF perspective in particular, the IAF has conducted exercises with Singapore, the United

²⁸² *NonAlignment 2.0*, p. 39: When considering options for the USAF, it is useful to bear in mind the way in which India itself sees its air power role. The description in *NonAlignment 2.0* is worth quoting in its entirety:

Air power application in any war will first seek to neutralize the air assets of the adversary. It is aimed to achieve as much freedom for one's own aircraft to operate without interference, as also to minimize the adversary's ability to apply air power against one's own assets. This process cannot be confined to a limited geographical area and could encompass airfields, aircrafts and air defence systems, among other targets. The geographical spread of the conflict is therefore difficult to contain. Escalation can also be inadvertent due to political signals and military actions being misinterpreted in the fog of war. Dual use assets complicate the danger of escalation as it is not possible to distinguish a conventional armed aircraft or missile from a nuclear one. Consequently, nuclear weapons constrict the traditional utility of military force and call for a redefinition of our notions of 'victory'. The challenge for the military establishment is to shape our hard power capabilities in tandem with India's political objectives, while remaining within the ambit of the political and strategic logic imposed by nuclear weapons.

Kingdom, France, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Israel, Australia, and Indonesia.²⁸³

Enhance U.S.-India cooperation in the areas of cyber and electronic warfare. The growing challenges presented by China's development of increasingly sophisticated cyber and electronic warfare capabilities will make this an important area for enhanced cooperation between the United States and key allies and partners.

Increase military education programs. Military education is an area where the United States has an enormous advantage over China: Officers from many nations eagerly compete for slots at U.S. institutions but view military education assignments in China as a hardship post where they learn almost nothing of value.

Getting more Indian students in U.S. military education programs may be a short-term challenge: According to U.S. officials, currently available billets are not always filled.²⁸⁴ DoD and the USAF should explore creative ways of increasing educational exchanges. These might include increased visits by American subject-matter experts to India, military exchanges held in sites (such as Singapore) closer to India and therefore easier for Indian authorities to fund, and distance-learning efforts through videoconferencing and other methods.

Place more emphasis on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). HA/DR represents one of the most accessible and high-value areas of potential engagement with the Indian military. From the USAF perspective, it would be challenging to integrate an HA/DR element to fighter-focused exercises with the IAF, such as Red Flag and Cope India. It may, however, be possible either to reconfigure an existing exercise as an HA/DR one, or to add an HA/DR exercise to the existing set of activities.

Encourage India to increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific region, including participating in multilateral air and maritime activities and conducting operations in the South China Sea. The United States should encourage the IAF and the Indian Navy to consider expanding operations in the region, as well as Indian participation in bilateral and multilateral maritime exercises. U.S. planners should be aware that India is not eager to conduct U.S.-led FONOPS, which they feel might expose them to multiple types of Chinese retaliation.

Share satellite and other information with India about China's problematic behavior in disputed Himalayan areas, including Ladakh, the Doklam Plateau, and elsewhere as needed. During the Doklam Plateau standoff, there was little coordination or exchange of information between U.S. and Indian military or civilian authorities; exchanges preceding the Galwan clash remain publicly vague. To the degree that the United States refrained from providing information that might have helped India avoid casualties and better prepare itself to

²⁸³ Past exercises with Singapore have included Sindex I, II, III, IV, and V; with the United Kingdom, Indradhanush I, II, III, and IV; with France, Garuda I, II, III, IV, and V; with the United Arab Emirates, Desert Eagle I and II; with Oman, Eastern Bridge I, II, III, and IV; with Thailand, Siam Bharat I and II; with Israel, Blue Flag; and with Australia, Pitch Black.

²⁸⁴ Interview with U.S. military official on May 14, 2019, New Delhi (Source 1).

repel military incursion by the PLA, this represents a missed opportunity: The complexities of terrain and real-time data about respective PLA and Indian forces caused considerable confusion to the public at large, which caused confusion about China's actions and intentions. How much of this confusion extended to the military and civilian authorities in India itself is a question that cannot be answered in an unclassified format.

The U.S. military has satellite and other information-gathering capabilities far exceeding those of India. In the next standoff with China, the U.S. military should make some of these resources available to India, both for the situational awareness of the Indian military and civilian authorities and potentially for public distribution as well.

Appendix A. Methodology for Project Framework

Table A.1. Color Coding of Framework Variables

Variable	Coding
Diplomatic and political	
Diplomatic and political ties	• Blue: Partner has significantly closer diplomatic ties with the United States than China and prioritizes its relationship with the United States. • Light blue: Partner has slightly closer diplomatic ties with the United States than China and places relatively more priority on ties with the United States. • Gray: Partner has similar diplomatic ties with the United States and China and attaches similar weight to relations with the United States and China. • Light red: Partner has slightly closer diplomatic ties with China than the United States and places relatively more priority on ties with China. • Red: Partner has significantly closer diplomatic ties with China than the United States and prioritizes its relationship with China.
Support for U.S. versus Chinese vision for the region	• Blue: Partner views the U.S. vision for the region as highly aligned with its own interests and is concerned that China's vision undermines its interests. • Light blue: Partner views the U.S. vision for the region as generally more aligned with its own interests than China's visions. • Gray: Partner views both visions as similarly aligned with its interests, or the partner views neither vision as aligned with its interests. • Light red: Partner views the Chinese vision for the region as generally more aligned with its own interests than the U.S. vision. • Red: Partner views the Chinese vision for the region as highly aligned with its own interests and is concerned that the U.S. vision undermines its interests.
Views of U.S. commitment to the region	• Blue: Partner is very confident that the United States will remain committed to the region and will at least maintain its current level of attention to the region, and partner can rely on the United States. • Light blue: Partner is cautiously optimistic that the United States will remain committed to the region and will likely maintain its current level of attention to the region; and partner can rely on the United States. • Gray: Partner is uncertain whether the United States will remain committed to the region, is uncertain that the United States will maintain its current level of attention to the region, and is uncertain that it can rely on the United States. • Light red: Partner is relatively pessimistic that the United States will remain committed to the region, believes that the United States will have difficulty maintaining attention toward the region, and does not believe that it can rely on the United States. • Red: Partner does not believe that the United States is committed to the region, believes that the United States is likely to decrease its attention to the region, and does not believe that it can rely on the United States.
Public opinion	• Blue: Partner public opinion significantly favors the United States over China by more than 20 percent. • Light blue: Partner public opinion slightly favors the United States over China by 3 percent to 20 percent. • Gray: Partner public opinion has similar favorability views of the United States and China. • Light red: Partner public opinion slightly favors China over the United States by 3 percent to 20 percent. • Red: Partner public opinion significantly favors China over the United States by more than 20 percent.

Variable	Coding
Economic	
<i>Economic dependence</i>	• Blue: Partner is significantly dependent on trade, investment, and (to a lesser extent) tourism from the United States, compared with China (more than 20 percent). • Light blue: Partner is moderately more dependent on trade, investment, and (to a lesser extent) tourism from the United States, compared with China (3 percent to 20 percent). • Gray: Partner is similarly dependent on trade, investment, and (to a lesser extent) tourism from the United States, compared with China. • Light red: Partner is moderately more dependent on trade, investment, and (to a lesser extent) tourism from China, compared to the United States (3 percent to 20 percent). • Red: Partner is significantly dependent on trade, investment, and (to a lesser extent) tourism from China, compared with the United States (more than 20 percent).
<i>Economic opportunity</i>	• Blue: Partner strongly believes that it will depend more on trade and investment from the United States than China in the next 10–15 years. • Light blue: Partner believes that it is likely to depend more on trade and investment from the United States than China in the next 10–15 years. • Gray: Partner believes that it is likely to depend as much on the United States as on China for trade and investment in the next 10–15 years. • Light red: Partner believes that it is likely to depend more on trade and investment from China than the United States in the next 10–15 years. • Red: Partner strongly believes that it will depend more on trade and investment from China than the United States in the next 10–15 years.
<i>Threat perceptions of the United States versus China (economic)</i>	• Blue: Partner has significant concerns regarding U.S. economic influence and views U.S. economic strength as threatening, subversive, or coercive. • Light blue: Partner has some, but limited, concerns regarding U.S. economic influence and views U.S. economic strength as threatening, subversive, or coercive. • Gray: Partner does not view the United States and China as economic threats or has equal concerns about negative U.S. and Chinese economic influence. • Light red: Partner has some, but limited, concerns regarding Chinese economic influence and views Chinese economic strength as threatening, subversive, or coercive. • Red: Partner has significant concerns regarding Chinese economic influence and views Chinese economic strength as threatening, subversive, or coercive.
<i>Willingness to work with the United States versus China based on economic threat perceptions</i>	• Blue: Partner seeks to work with the United States to counter or mitigate assessed Chinese economic threats and has taken significant measures to reduce economic dependency on China. • Light blue: Partner seeks greater economic cooperation with the United States and has taken some measures to limit or reduce Chinese economic influence in key economic sectors. • Gray: Partner seeks greater economic cooperation with the United States and China and seeks economic diversification to avoid overdependence on either country. • Light red: Partner seeks greater economic cooperation with China and has taken some measures to limit or reduce U.S. economic influence in key economic sectors. • Red: Partner seeks to work with China to counter or balance against assessed U.S. economic threat and has taken significant measures to reduce economic dependency on the United States.

Variable	Coding
Military and security	
<i>Threat perceptions of the United States versus China (military)</i>	• Blue: Partner views the United States as a significant military or security threat. • Light blue: Partner views the United States as a limited military or security threat. • Gray: Partner does not view the United States and China as military or security threats <i>or</i> has equal concerns about both countries. • Light red: Partner views China as a limited military or security threat. • Red: Partner views China as a significant military or security threat.
Willingness to work with the United States versus China based on military threat perceptions	• Blue: Partner seeks increased cooperation with the United States to balance against assessed Chinese military or security threat and has taken actions to directly or indirectly balance against China's military strength. • Light blue: Partner seeks increased cooperation with the United States to strengthen its own military capabilities, has taken some measures to address perceived Chinese military threat, and is cautious of directly balancing against China. • Gray: Partner seeks more military cooperation with the United States and China <i>or</i> partner's willingness to militarily cooperate with the United States <i>or</i> China is not driven by U.S. <i>or</i> China military threat perceptions. • Light red: Partner seeks increased cooperation with China to strengthen its own military capabilities; has taken some measures to address perceived U.S. military threat and is cautious of directly balancing against the United States. • Red: Partner seeks increased cooperation with China to balance against assessed U.S. military or security threat and has taken actions to directly <i>or</i> indirectly balance against U.S. military strength.
Support for major U.S.-led security efforts	• Blue: Partner has participated or supported many key U.S.-led international and regional security efforts. • Light blue: Partner has participated or supported some U.S.-led international and regional security efforts. • Gray: Partner has shown limited or no support to U.S.-led international and regional security efforts. • Light red: Partner has opposed some U.S.-led international and regional security efforts. • Red: Partner has opposed many U.S.-led international <i>or</i> regional security efforts.
<i>Military cooperation</i>	• Blue: Partner has significantly closer military ties with the United States than China and engages in significantly more military activities and cooperation with the United States. • Light blue: Partner has slightly closer military ties with the United States than China and engages in moderately more military activities and cooperation with the United States. • Gray: Partner has similar military ties with the United States and China and attaches similar weight to defense and security cooperation with the United States and China. • Light red: Partner has slightly closer military ties with China than the United States and engages in moderately more military activities and cooperation with China. • Red: Partner has significantly closer military ties with China than the United States and engages in significantly more military activities and cooperation with China.
<i>U.S. versus Chinese military capability</i>	• Blue: Partner believes that the United States currently has a significant military advantage over China in terms of military capabilities. • Light blue: Partner believes that the United States currently has a modest military advantage over China in terms of military capabilities. • Gray: Partner believes that the United States and China have similar military capabilities.

Variable	Coding
Perception of U.S. willingness to aid country in conflict with China	• Light red: Partner believes that China currently has a modest military advantage over the United States in terms of military capabilities. • Red: Partner believes that China currently has a significant military advantage over the United States in terms of military capabilities. • Blue: Partner is confident that the United States will provide military support or aid if partner becomes involved in a potential military conflict with China. • Light blue: Partner is cautiously optimistic that the United States will provide military support or aid if partner becomes involved in a potential military conflict with China. • Gray: Partner is uncertain whether the United States will provide military support or aid if partner becomes involved in a potential military conflict with China. • Light red: Partner is pessimistic that the United States will provide military support or aid if partner becomes involved in a potential military conflict with China. • Red: Partner does not believe that the United States will provide military support or aid if partner becomes involved in a potential military conflict with China.

NOTE: Variables measuring shared interests are roman, and variables measuring relative capability are italicized.

Variable: Diplomatic and Political Ties

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews and analysis.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** U.S. Embassy, “Websites of U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Diplomatic Missions,” webpage, undated; U.S. Department of State, undated-a, undated-b, undated-c; SIPRI, undated-d.
- **Notes:** The report does not use UN voting as an indicator of diplomatic interests. U.S. interests go beyond issues voted on at the UN. Countries vote on a variety of issues in the UN that are not of equal strategic importance to the United States. Among the subset of UN votes that the U.S. Department of State categorizes as important for the United States, a good proportion relates to Israel and Palestine, and the majority of the issues relate to general development or foreign policy concerns that are not specific to security issues in the Indo-Pacific. In 2017, for example, among the State Department–identified important UN votes, there was only one vote—the situation of human rights in Burma—out of 27 votes that was specific to the Indo-Pacific.²⁸⁵

Variable: Support for U.S. Versus Chinese Vision in the Region

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews and data from various polling sources.
- **Data source in addition to interviews:** Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019.

²⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Voting Practices in the United Nations 2017: Report to Congress*, Washington, D.C., March 2018; and Sarah Rose, “Linking US Foreign Aid to UN Votes: What Are the Implications?” Center for Global Development, May 4, 2018.

Variable: Views of U.S. Commitment to the Region

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews and data from various polling sources.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019.

Variable: Public Opinion

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews and polling data on whether the country has favorable views of the United States or China. Calculated as U.S. favorability (percentage) minus PRC favorability (percentage).
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Pew Research Center, “Global Indicators Database: Opinion of the United States,” webpage, undated-b; Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019; Yun-han Chu, Yu-tzung Chang, and Min-hua Huang, “How East Asians View the Influence of United States vs. a Rising China,” Hu Fu Center for East Asia Democratic Studies, National Taiwan University, 2016; Boo Su-Lyn, “Malaysians More Positive About China Now, Studies Show,” *Malay Mail*, April 1, 2017; Johannes Herlijanto, *Public Perceptions of China in Indonesia: The Indonesia National Survey*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, December 4, 2017a, No. 89, December 4, 2017; Bruce Stokes, Dorothy Manevich, and Hanyu Chwe, “India and the World,” Pew Research Center, November 15, 2017; Johannes Herlijanto, “Public Perceptions of China in Indonesia: The Indonesia National Survey,” *Belt and Road*, December 5, 2017b; Globe Scan, “Sharp Drop in World Views of US, UK: Global Poll,” July 4, 2017.

Variable: Economic Dependence²⁸⁶

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on 65 percent trade (difference in the country’s trade with U.S. versus China), 20 percent inward foreign direct investment (FDI; difference in U.S. versus PRC FDI into the country), 10 percent outward FDI (difference in country’s FDI in the U.S. versus the country’s FDI in China), and 5 percent tourism (difference in U.S. tourism to the country versus Chinese tourism to the country). Five percent is reflective of the economic importance of tourism to regional countries.²⁸⁷
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Researchers used the most recent year data available (2017 or 2018) and partner reporting for trade. We used U.S. sources for U.S. FDI and partner FDI in the United States and Chinese sources for Chinese FDI and

²⁸⁶ The study also examined trade imbalance, including dependency of particular import or export products. As indicated in the main text, the study also explored placing more weight on partner exports compared to imports.

²⁸⁷ Yuwa Hedrick-Wong, “Asia’s Economic Ties Strengthen Amid Gathering Global Storm,” *Forbes*, September 30, 2018.

partner FDI in China. United Nations, “UN Comtrade Database,” webpage, undated; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report 2018: Investment and New Industrial Policies*, Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Publications, 2018; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Direct Investment by Country and Industry,” webpage, undated-a; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Foreign Direct Investment in the U.S.: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position Data,” webpage, undated-b; Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, *2017 Statistical Bulletin of China’s Outward Foreign Direct Investment*, Beijing, October 2018.

Variable: Economic Opportunity

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on projected U.S. and Chinese economic growth rates as well as researcher interviews.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, undated-a, undated-b; American Enterprise Institute, “China Global Investment Tracker,” website, undated; International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook Reports,” multiple years; Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2018,” website, 2018; Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, 2018; PricewaterhouseCoopers, *The Long View: How Will the Global Economic Order Change by 2050?* London, February 2017; Lowy Institute, *Asia Power Index 2019*, Sydney, Australia, 2019; “The World’s Economic Powerhouses Are Going to Look Very Different in Another Decade,” news.au.com, January 20, 2019; Martin, 2019; Janet Henry, “The World in 2030,” HSBC, September 28, 2019.

Variable: Threat Perceptions of U.S. Versus China (Economic)

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews, literature review, and polling data.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019; Natasha Kassam, “Lowy Institute Poll 2019,” Lowy Institute, June 26, 2019.

Variable: Willingness to Work with the United States Versus China Based on Economic Threat Perceptions

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews and literature review.
- **Data sources:** Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019; Natasha Kassam, “Lowy Institute Poll 2019,” Lowy Institute, June 26, 2019.

Variable: Threat Perceptions of the United States Versus China (Military)

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews, literature review, and polling data.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019; Natasha Kassam, “Lowy Institute Poll 2019,” Lowy Institute, June 26, 2019.

Variable: Willingness to Work with the United States Versus China Based on Military Threat Perceptions

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on interviews and literature review.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpanupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019; Natasha Kassam, “Lowy Institute Poll 2019,” Lowy Institute, June 26, 2019.

Variable: Support for Major U.S.-Led Security Efforts

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded an aggregate of data collected on how regional countries support or participate in U.S.-led international or regional initiatives: if countries supported major U.S. North Korea–related efforts, including efforts to disrupt North Korean ship-to-ship transfers; participated in South China Sea (SCS) patrols, operations, or major exercises with the U.S. in SCS international waters; engaged in Taiwan Strait Transits; support U.S. FONOPS; participated in major U.S.-led military operations (Operation Enduring Freedom, International Security Assistance Force, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Inherent Resolve); and participated in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Various articles from the Council on Foreign Relations, *The Diplomat*, *Reuters*, *The Guardian*, BBC, the *Japan Times*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and foreign ministry websites.

Variable: Military Cooperation

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded an aggregate of six measures: if the United States or China has a major military base or facility in the country; relative U.S. versus Chinese arms sales to the country; whether the country has acquisition and cross-servicing agreements with the United States versus a similar agreement with China; whether the country has defense co-production and co-development agreements with the United States compared to similar agreements with China; whether the country has an information sharing agreement with the United States compared to a similar agreement with China; and the quantity and quality of the country’s military training and exercises with the United States compared with China.

- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Various articles in the *China Daily* and *People's Daily*; relevant Chinese embassy websites; Kenneth W. Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017; Defense Intelligence Agency, *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, Washington, D.C., 2019; U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Military Training and DoD Engagement Activities of Interest,” webpage, undated-a; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, undated-d; U.S. Army Pacific, homepage, undated; Pacific Air Forces, homepage, undated; Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, homepage, undated; State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces*, Beijing, 2013; State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Military Strategy*, Beijing, 2015; State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*, Beijing, 2017; State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Foreign Aid*, Beijing, 2014.

Variable: U.S. Versus Chinese Military Capability

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on comparisons of current U.S. versus PRC military capability and regional interviews.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Lowy Institute, *Asia Power Index 2019*, Sydney, Australia, 2019; International Institute for Strategic Studies, “Chapter Six: Asia,” in *The Military Balance 2019*, London, 2019, pp. 222–319.

Variable: Perception of U.S. Willingness to Aid Country in Conflict with China

- **Coding method:** Researchers coded based on researcher interviews, literature review, and polling data.
- **Data sources in addition to interviews:** Stafford Nichols and Zacc Ritter, “U.S. Defense Promise Still Credible in Asia-Pacific,” Gallup, July 17, 2018; Tang Siew Mun, Moe Thuzar, Hoang Thi Ha, Termsak Chalermpananupap, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Anuthida Saelaow Qian, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019.

Appendix B. Overview of India's Military

India's military is nearly 3 million strong when active and reserve elements are both included (each represents about 1.5 million troops). It is committed to missions and goals largely in concert with U.S. interests, and thus represents a tantalizing potential partner for U.S. engagement. Of all current U.S. security partners,²⁸⁸ only India has engaged in warfare against China directly and without the assistance of the United States or other allies.²⁸⁹ India's Air Force and Army have been at the forefront of these confrontations: While the militaries of several maritime nations of Southeast Asia are configured for potential naval combat as the first line of defense, India's standoffs with China have occurred primarily on and above land. India's military, therefore, offers a rare partner with experience, motivation, and a declared mission of competing with China in the domains of air and land, as well as sea.

Table B.1 shows, according to publicly available figures (e.g., from Jane's and the International Institute for Strategic Studies), the numbers by service. Table B.2 summarizes India's defense capabilities.

Table B.1. Active and Reserve Service Numbers

	Army	Air Force	Navy	Total Military
Active	1,237,000	140,597	67,2278	1,444,825
Reserve	1,500,000	0	0	1,500,000

Indian Air Force

The IAF flies a variety of aircraft (many of them near the end of their life-cycles), including a combat fleet of MiG-21 "Bisons," MiG-29 "Fulcrums," SU-30MKIs, Jaguars, and the more capable Mirage 2000Hs. The IAF's transport aircraft include both U.S. and Russian assets: C-130Js, C-17s, and a lot of Il-76MDs, An-32s, and Do-228s. For intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), India flies Israel's A-50EI Phalcons and other craft. The IAF's helicopters include Mi-25s, Mi-35s, indigenous Druvs (all combat), and various configurations of Russian Mi-17s for utility missions. Its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) include the Heron, Search, and

²⁸⁸ Vietnam engaged in land warfare against China in 1979, but the degree to which Vietnam can be considered a present, rather than potential, "security partner" of the United States is a topic explored in other parts of this project.

²⁸⁹ South Korea engaged in warfare against China in 1950–1953, but only in conjunction with the United States and other United Nations forces in 1950–1953. India, however, fought one full-scale, multifront, multidomain war against China in 1962, followed by a second significant multifront, multidomain conflict in 1967 and smaller-scale skirmishes throughout the decades since; in none of these conflicts has India been militarily assisted by other nations.

Harop. The Indian military has announced plans to retire most of its MiGs and Su-30s by 2024, but has not yet figured out what will replace them. After an eight-year public search for 126 Medium Multirole Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) was officially ended in 2015, India signed a controversial deal for 36 Rafale fighter jets; it is simultaneously attempting to co-develop a 5th Generation fighter with Russia (based on the T-50 PAK-FA), and to create a number of indigenous aircraft. Given India's agonizing procurement process, all of these should be considered notional until they are actually flying.

Indian Navy

The force-strength of the Indian Navy (IN) includes a 10,000-strong Coast Guard and a small (2,000-strong) component of marine commandos. It is one of only six nations (the United States, China, Russia, Britain, and France are the others) to operate a "true" aircraft carrier of more than 40,000 tons. India bought the 45,400-ton *Kiev*-class *Admiral Gorshkov* from Russia and recommissioned it as the *Vikramaditya* in 2013. It is developing a second carrier, the nominally indigenous 40,000-ton *Vikrant*. The IN's submarine fleet includes nuclear-powered *Akula*-class attack craft purchased from Russia, diesel Russian-adapted *Sindhughosh* (*Kilo*-class), and the indigenous nuclear-powered *Arihant*-class ballistic missile submarine. It has purchased six *Scorpene* attack submarines from France and commissioned the first of them in 2017. The IN also operates a wide variety of destroyers, frigates, corvettes, and other craft, many of them indigenously built or adapted from Russian/Soviet craft. Air assets of the IN include carrier-borne MiG-29K fighters, P-8I Poseidon reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft, and Sea King helicopters. The IN's UAV assets include Israeli Searcher IIs and Heron 2s.

Indian Army

India's Army is its dominant service, although not to the extent that it is in rival Pakistan or some other regional states. In Pakistan, the Chief of Army Staff is the most powerful person in the military and the most powerful individual in the country; other service chiefs are completely subordinate to him. In India, this is not the case: The Army is first among equals, rather than an unchallenged predominant branch.

The regular Army's role is focused on external threats emanating from Pakistan and China, but specialized units have an internal role in counterinsurgency. In the restive state of Jammu and Kashmir (which India considers an integral part of the nation, and hence an internal defense challenge), security operations are conducted by Army, police, and paramilitary forces in tandem. The Army unit responsible for this mission is the Rashtriya Rifles, which was created in 1990 to deal with the unrest in Kashmir. It has 65 battalions and works alongside the Jammu and Kashmir Police (operating under the direction of the civilian government of that state) and the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (operating under the Ministry of Home Affairs—it contains 239 battalions with an authorized troop strength of more than 300,000). The Rashtriya

Rifles serve in a part of the country which has seen combat with China decades before the unit was created, and theoretically they could be called upon for service to repel a Chinese invasion via Ladakh, but such a contingency is not currently part of their core mission.

In addition to the fully military Rashtriya Rifles, India has several paramilitary units involved in internal security missions that are commanded by Army officers: The Assam Rifles (approximately 60,000 strong, responsible for counterinsurgency operations in India's seven Northeastern states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya) and the Special Frontier Force (10,000 strong, working at the direction of India's intelligence agencies). These units serve in parts of the nation at most risk of engaging in combat with China.

In addition to these Army-led units and the Central Reserve Police Force, India's paramilitary units reporting to Home Ministry include the Border Security Force (approximately 250,000 troops), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (approximately 90,000—very active in sectors most susceptible to Chinese incursion), the Central Industrial Security Force (approximately 75,000), and the Sashtra Seema Bal (also approximately 75,000—primarily tasked to perform missions for India's external intelligence agency, RAW [Research and Analysis Wing], which has a mission comparable to that of the CIA). These paramilitary units deploy internally against conventional insurgents and terrorist threats in Kashmir and/or the Northeast, and also (in some cases) against the Maoist Naxalite insurgency active in parts of eight states (West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra).

India's ground forces include

- 18 regular infantry divisions (each containing an organic artillery brigade)
- 13 mountain divisions, largely for action along the LOC and LAC
- 8 independent infantry brigades
- 3 armored divisions (each containing organic artillery brigade)
- 4 RAPID divisions (Re-organized Army Plains Infantry Division). These are highly mechanized divisions, tasked not with fighting on the LOC/LAC, but responding to potential cross-border action against Pakistan on the flatter ground of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and (theoretically, at least) Gujarat.
- 9 Special Forces battalions
- 4 division-equivalent COIN force
- 3 artillery divisions (mostly deployed along the LOC).

The main battle tanks used are the indigenously produced Arjun Mk I, old Russian T-72s, and T-90s (aka "Bishma"). Most of these assets are reaching or past the end of their life cycles.

Artillery includes 105mm light field guns, 122mm D-30 towed howitzers, 130mm M-46 field guns, 155mm FH 77 and self-propelled howitzers. Because of the Bofors scandal during the prime ministership of Rajiv Gandhi (during which kickbacks were given in exchange for the purchase of Swedish artillery pieces), India has refrained from significant artillery purchases since 1986. As a result, much of India's artillery assets are badly out of date.

India's battlefield missile systems include the BrahMos cruise missile, the Shaurya tactical surface-to-surface missile, and the Prithvi/Prahaar short-range ballistic missile.

India's Air Defense is under the control of the Army, as the Corps of the Army Air Defence (AAD). This includes a variety of surface-to-air missiles (S-300VM, indigenous "Akash" systems, and 9K38 Igla/SA-18 MANPADS) and anti-aircraft artillery, such as 40mm L/70s and ZSU-23s.

India's Army operates UAVs including the Harpy (for combat) and Heron, Rustom, and Nishant (for C4ISR).

The helicopters operated by the Indian Army include the AH-64E Apache and the indigenously produced Dhruv (combat) and Cheetah/Cheetal (utility); most other rotary-wing aircraft in the Indian military are operated by the Indian Air Force. The Indian military's lack of attack helicopters is a significant shortcoming.

Table B.2. India Defense Capabilities (2012 versus 2018)

	2012	2018
Military size	Army (1,129,000), Air Force (127,200), Navy (58,350)	Army (1,237,000), Air Force (127,200), Navy (67,700)
Military spending as percentage of GDP	2.54% of GDP	2.49% of GDP (2017)
Submarines	15	16
Principal surface combatants	21	28
Patrol and coastal combatants	59	106
Combat-capable aircraft	904 (including 34 naval aviation)	899 (Including 75 naval aviation)
Alliances and key partnerships	United States, Japan, Singapore, Australia, China	
Major priorities and threats (including territorial disputes)	Major territorial dispute and military rivalry with Pakistan (especially over the territory of Kashmir); unresolved territorial disputes with China, which sometimes result in military standoffs.	

SOURCES: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, London, UK: Routledge, 2012 and 2018; SIPRI, "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database," webpage, undated-c.

Defense Budget/Spending, Trends

India spends a bit over 2 percent of its GDP (the global average) on national defense, and this percentage is expected to drop slightly in the five years ending in 2023. Despite Prime Minister Modi's bellicose rhetoric, defense spending has been declining as a percentage of GDP since at least 2016 (when it was 2.3 percent). Given India's relatively healthy GDP growth, however, this still translates to projected increases in real-dollar terms every year except 2019 (when it totaled \$44 billion). India now has the fifth-largest defense budget in the world, after the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, and Russia.

Manpower is by far the military's largest line item: The 2020 budget allocates about half of its spending to personnel, with operations/maintenance and procurement each receiving slightly less than one-quarter, and a relatively small slice going to research and development.

The Army receives the lion's share of India's defense spending (46 percent of the total), but most of this is devoted to personnel costs; in 2017–2018, only 17 percent of the Army's spending went to capital expenditures (compared with 51 percent for the IN and 58 percent for the IAF).

Russia is by far India's largest supplier of military hardware over the past decade, with more than 70 percent of the overall budget (\$23.4 billion, out of a total spending on military hardware of \$33.9 billion). Far behind Russia for the decade 2008–2018 are the United States (\$3.1 billion), Israel (\$2.7 billion), Britain (\$1.4 billion), and France (\$1.2 billion). Total arms spending was \$33.9 billion for this decade, with no significant purchases from China reported in SIPRI.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ SIPRI, "Armstrade" website, undated-a.

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In long-term strategic competition with China, how effectively the United States works with allies and partners will be critical to determining U.S. success. This report examines the potential benefits of, and potential impediments to, partnering more closely with India. India is already a peer or near-peer competitor of China across a range of military capabilities, and India's self-defined core national security interests are in relatively close harmony with those of the United States. However, U.S. planners must be keenly aware of the constraints on both India's willingness and capacity to forge a partnership based on strategic competition with China. These include persistent aversion to any partnership that might be characterized as "alignment," even after a major 2020 border clash with China; significant distrust of U.S. commitment and intentions; a highly risk-averse structure for the making and implementing of security policy, particularly vis-à-vis China; economic linkages with China; underfunding of basic military needs; and a lack of military capability and interoperability sufficient for frictionless interaction with U.S. forces. India will likely remain a key U.S. partner, but such challenges should moderate expectations about the pace for increased engagement.

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