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The following discussion seeks to evaluate India's military capabilities and stimulate thought about how this instrument of national power can serve India to counterbalance Chinese geopolitical assertiveness; and how the United States can generally reinforce that end. Across the Indo-Asia Pacific, China's growth appears to be following a long-term, grand strategic agenda that advances its global influence while displacing that of neighboring India and the United States. China's geopolitical actions pose threats to global stability and the national security interests of India and the United States. But what is the status of India's military? Is it growing or fading? How is it postured to meet violent provocations from China and rival Pakistan? Can India garner multi-national support to leverage against China, and in what ways can the United States contribute to that effort?

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: INDIA: The Counterbalance to China's Grand Strategy in the Indo-Asia Pacific

Author: William W. Goetz, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Through steadfast diplomatic and military support from the United States, India can leverage its military instrument of national power to counterbalance China in the Indo-Asia Pacific.

Discussion: The following discussion seeks to evaluate India's military capabilities and stimulate thought about how this instrument of national power can serve India to counterbalance Chinese geopolitical assertiveness; and how the United States can generally reinforce that end. Across the Indo-Asia Pacific, China's growth appears to be following a long-term, grand strategic agenda that advances its global influence while displacing that of neighboring India and the United States. China's geopolitical actions pose threats to global stability and the national security interests of India and the United States. But what is the status of India's military? Is it growing or fading? How is it postured to meet violent provocations from China and rival Pakistan? Can India garner multi-national support to leverage against China, and in what ways can the United States contribute to that effort?

Conclusion: Widely felt throughout most of the Indo-Asia Pacific region, rebalance is required to contest an increasingly assertive China. Having said that, in an era of great power competition, India and its growing military present an offset to China, albeit with general reinforcement from the United States. Complementing its land, air, sea, space, and nuclear power, India can also project power through its geostrategic location and position of dominance to ensure China remains a status quo power in the Indo-Asia Pacific. Likewise, with strengthened Indo-American unity of effort, both democracies can facilitate global stability and further exert strategic pressure on China. After two decades of war, the United States' challenge is to provide strategic reassurance to India and other friends or regional powers without provoking a hostile response from China.¹ Although India and the United States may not enter an official alliance, both share common interests to stymie Chinese aggression. To arrive at such ends, India and the United States can complement and reinforce one other through military support and strategic diplomacy that extends beyond South Asia. Furthermore, Indo-American unwavering approaches to groups such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations reinforces constructive relations through a wider sphere of influence to moderate China's contentious behavior. Doing so enforces accountability, serves as a deterrent, and limits China's hegemonic ambitions to dominate worldly affairs. This is a matter of global importance, emphasis, and priority.

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Preface

The United States of America has always demanded its military professionals apply education and critical thought to negotiate tough problems; today is no different. Underscored by the proliferation of technology and contested environments across all military domains, the Twenty-First Century has stressed the need for a broader outlook from American service members. In the Indo-Asia Pacific region, Chinese provocations have challenged this notion. Now, arguably more so than any other period in history, American warriors must think and act like soldiers and statesmen. Yet, this task does not come easy nor free of mentorship, example, and deep discussion. It requires leadership, encouragement, and personal commitment. In strengthening each other, American military professionals will rise to the occasion, garner partners' support, and reduce Chinese imposed uncertainty for the American people and our way of life.

In this regard, I am grateful to Commander Cameron Rountree, United States Navy, and Lieutenant Colonel David Baas, United States Marine Corps, for pushing me to higher-level education and sharpening my strategic perspective. These two incredible military professionals and forward-thinking leaders have inspired the following research, thoughts, and opinions. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my mentor through this research process, Dr. Amin Tarzi, Director of Middle East Studies at Marine Corps University. Dr. Tarzi's international relations experience and foreign policy knowledge have been invaluable. A scholar and a gentleman, Dr. Tarzi's strategic-level discussions with me have improved my mindset for the challenges that lay ahead. I am also appreciative of my elementary school friends who have become family and regularly engage in geopolitical and foreign policy debate yet respect one another's opinions at the end of the day. Lastly, I cannot thank my immediate and extended family enough for all their love, support, and patience during this assignment's demanding personal investment.

Introduction

Rich in diversity, culture, spectacular geography, and unique architecture, India is a world treasure and nation of beauty. The world's seventh-largest state, India is the second-most populous country with roughly one-sixth of the world's total population.² India is bounded to the northwest by Pakistan, China, Nepal, and Bhutan to the north; and to the east by Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma).³ With a vast coastline, the Indian Ocean surrounds India's western, southern, and eastern shores (see Figure 1). The former homeland of renowned world leaders Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, India also incorporates a portion of the Himalayan Mountain Range and houses the Taj Mahal. Beyond its heritage and captivating attractions, however, twenty-first-century geopolitics have made this vibrant land strategically important to current regional and global stability.

In the Indo-Asia Pacific (see Figure 2), geostrategic and geopolitical jockeying for power from the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased Indo-Sino tensions. Friction between India and China centers around several security-related issues, which have pushed to the surface a deep and wide-ranging strategic rivalry.⁴ Similarly, China's rapid expansion in South Asia, particularly across the Indian Ocean, has caused concern to smaller neighboring countries and the United States. Over the last two decades, China has emerged as a world superpower through its economic and military growth. Consequently, China has closed the power gap with the United States and presented new challenges to neighboring India. By rapid advancement across the Indo-Asia Pacific region, Chinese ambitions have called into question its larger, strategic intentions. Are the Red Dragon's maneuvers merely economic, or are they part of a larger, protracted hegemonic ambition? Likewise, in its development, has China acted responsibly and under international law? Or, are Chinese motivations focused on diminishing Indian and

American global influence? With that in mind, India's expanding capabilities, particularly its military, counteract questionable Chinese assertiveness. Also, albeit below the threshold of a full-scale alliance, both India and the United States can complement and leverage one other's respective instruments of national power to offset China. Doing so serves as a deterrent and limits Chinese geopolitical ambitions. Utilizing joint influence, India and the United States can ensure China is held accountable to international laws, thereby assuaging Chinese provocations. Through steadfast diplomatic and military support from the United States, India can leverage its military instrument of national power to counterbalance China in the Indo-Asia Pacific.

Two of the world's oldest and living civilizations, India-China relations have undergone dramatic fluctuations. In the modern era, existing hostilities trace back to deep-seated border disputes initiated during the 1960s and 1970s. Despite trade collaboration between the two states in the 1950s, undefined border differences in China's autonomously governed Tibet disrupted cordial relations. Likewise, China regarded the Aksai China area as part of its Sinkiang province; yet India vehemently disputed such claims (see Figure 3).⁵ Nevertheless, border disagreements and clashes sparked the 1962 Sino-Indian War. After China dealt India a crushing defeat, Sino-Indian relations remained tense, with trade frozen between 1962 and 1969; it was not until 1992 that formalized trade relations were restored.⁶ To avoid similar miscalculations that led to war in 1962, the neighboring nations reached bilateral consensus in 1993 and 1996 over their respective boundaries, but these agreements have failed in practice.⁷ Behind a dark cloud in March 1998, attempts at Sino-Indian bilateral accord took a turn for the worse after India conducted five nuclear tests.⁸

What's more, despite efforts at cooperative partnership over the past several decades, Indian and Chinese internal conditions remain in a continuous state of fluctuation, especially

regarding undemarcated border differences on land and at sea. In December 2009, Indian officials acknowledged that Chinese incursions across India's borders had resulted in the "substantial" loss of Indian land along the Himalayan frontier over a twenty-to-twenty-five-year period.⁹ Further, in August 2010, China presented India with another sovereignty challenge in its western sector through a strategic partnership with adversary Pakistan. China-Pakistan cooperation enabled "between 7,000 and 11,000 Chinese troops to enter Pakistan-administered Azad (Free) Kashmir, referred to by India as Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, or PoK, and the disputed Gilgit-Baltistan region" to construct a high-speed rail and road link from eastern China to the Chinese-built naval port of Gwadar, east of the Persian Gulf.¹⁰ Part of a broader geopolitical and global logistics initiative, the Gwadar port facility is a component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that transfers natural resources and other goods to China's land-locked southwest corner (see Figure 6).¹¹ Consequently, as China-Pakistan affairs have strengthened, Sino-Indian relations have further declined.

Today, India's increasingly competitive rivalry with China over Pakistani support and unresolved border issues continues. For example, as recently as August 2020, Chinese troops killed twenty Indian soldiers following a skirmish along the Himalayan border.¹² With relationships remaining fragile, China views India as limiting its influence in South and Southeast Asia; and thus, detracting from China's ability to project power into the Indian Ocean.¹³ Conversely, New Delhi's outlook of Chinese policies, including border manipulation and strategic affronts in the Indian Ocean, are calculated aims at Indian encirclement and to displace its influence in Asia.¹⁴ Chinese expansion and geopolitical aims extend beyond Indian borders and are a matter of global importance that requires balance.

The China Dilemma

For India to counterbalance China, one must first clearly understand China's motivations, geopolitical roots and methods, and the current strategic situation arrayed across the Indo-Asia Pacific. Having not forgotten its "Century of Humiliation," China has rebounded on the world stage by rebuilding its economy and military to facilitate its strategic quest for global prominence. In this long-term effort, fittingly, China's grand strategy harkens back to its most famous military strategist, Sun Tzu. In his still celebrated work, *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu claimed that effective strategy "lies not in winning every battle, but in defeating the enemy without ever fighting."¹⁵ Through questionable practices, Chinese economic output has soared exponentially while drastically decreasing India and the United States' shares in the global economy.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that in 1980 China's trade amounted to less than \$40 billion; yet, by 2015, it had increased one hundred-fold to \$4 trillion. By market exchange rates, China is the world's second-largest economy and is poised to overtake the United States in the coming decade.¹⁷

Additionally, to shape prosperous economic conditions in aspiring to be the world's leading superpower, China has employed classic geopolitical methods akin to Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Halford Mackinder. First analyzing the geopolitical outlook of American naval officer and strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, one can conclude that China has used Mahanian practices to stimulate military growth, specifically its maritime component to dominate geography. In his well-known maritime analysis, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, Mahan argued that through sea power, the most prosperous nation-states focus their attention on sea control, namely critical sea lanes that bore profitable international maritime commerce.¹⁸ Mahan assessed six principles or conditions that positively influence a state's sea

power and yield prosperity. His principles included geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, number of population, character of the people, and character of the government.¹⁹ Though a product of the nineteenth century, China has kept Mahan's theories relevant, having applied many, if not all of his principles in the contemporary environment.

Drawing parallels, Mahan's ideas of geographical position and extent of territory are attributable to China's twenty-first-century power projection at sea. On a state's geographical position, Mahan said, "If, in addition to facility for offence, Nature has so placed a country that it has easy access to the high sea itself, while at the same time it controls one of the great thoroughfares of the world's traffic, it is evident that the strategic value of its position is very high."²⁰ In line with Mahan teachings, China has taken bold action to set the conditions for controlling several of the world's most active navigational thoroughfares, including the Taiwan Strait in the South China Sea and the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca in the Indian Ocean.²¹ Controlling the sea lanes within the South China Sea assures China's access to the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca, the main shipping lane connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Of note, the Strait of Malacca hosts fifty percent of the world's merchant fleet, accounts for over a quarter of global trade, and currently passes half the world's oil flow.²² What is more, according to United States Defense Department analysts, 82% of China's oil imports transit the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.²³ Geostrategically and geopolitically, then, it is access to the Indian Ocean that will define the future of global power dynamics.

In this capacity, China has challenged vital interests to India and the United States. Utilizing Mahanian principles, China has leveraged economic gains to quickly expand its naval reach to achieve a "Two-Ocean" navy and exercise its maritime authority. In its pursuit for control and access to the Indian Ocean, China has developed and apportioned more than one

thousand anti-ship missiles across its mainland and coastal fleets, manufactured sixty-two submarines armed with advanced torpedoes, and launched an array of anti-satellite capabilities to jam or destroy competitor communications, intelligence, and surveillance.²⁴ As a result, the Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has altered the status quo and destabilized the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Specifically, China's assertiveness at sea has presented a security dilemma to Indian and American freedom of navigation and seafaring commerce.

Across the waves of the Indian Ocean, China has exerted sea power for its geopolitical gain. Spanning across seven time zones and almost half the world's latitudes, the Indian Ocean accounts for key commercial oil shipping lanes, one-half of all the world's container traffic, and major navigational chokepoints – the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, and the Bab el Mandeb.²⁵ Simply put, the Indian Ocean “is the globe's busiest and most important interstate.”²⁶ As a component of its grand strategy, China has invested, developed, and laid claim to a series of strategically located deep-water ports, or “pearls,” aligned to principle oil shipping lanes distributed across numerous Indian Ocean nations (see Figure 4). This venture, otherwise known as the “String-of-Pearls Strategy,” promotes Chinese strategic influence in the Indian Ocean and advances its anti-access area denial capabilities by providing logistical support nodes for PLAN vessels operating in the area.²⁷ Part of China's major naval expansion program, these port projects, such as the earlier-mentioned Gwadar Port in Pakistan, have become a prominent subject in Indian public debate regarding China's suspicious intentions in the Indian Ocean.²⁸

Moreover, in his book, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the future of American power* Robert D. Kaplan detailed the String-of-Pearls Strategy as a form of Chinese soft power in the Indian Ocean region. Twice named by *Foreign Policy Magazine* as one of the world's “Top 100 Global Thinkers,” Kaplan argued that China's pearl concept is commercial, political, strategic,

and militarily focused.²⁹ He continued that China has come to recognize the Indo-Asia Pacific as a geopolitical province, “where coast guards sometimes act more aggressively than navies, where sea power is civilian as well as military, where access denial can be as relevant as the ability to engage in fleet-on-fleet battle, and where the placement of warships is vital less for sea battles than diplomatic ones.”³⁰ Hence, adjacent to India's southern coastal borders and across the Indian Ocean, China has put geopolitical thought into action.

Separately, in the western Pacific Ocean, specifically in the South China Sea, China has used its growing economic and naval might to create standoff distances from Indian and American navies. In 2010, citing claims of national interests, but more to affect seaborne commerce, China unilaterally detailed its right to regulate foreign military activities beyond its maritime Exclusive Economic Zone.³¹ Shortly after that, in 2012, despite vast international opposition, and an unfavorable ruling from the Permanent Court of Arbitration, China pressed further, having redefined its territorial claims with a “nine-dash line that encompasses nearly ninety percent of the South China Sea.”³² Despite vehement opposition from Vietnam and the United States, China then built airstrips, radar sensors, wave-monitoring devices, warship harboring facilities, and support structures on artificial and existing islands, such as the centrally-located Spratly Islands (see Figure 5).³³ For perspective, in a 2018 appearance before the House Armed Services Committee, Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command, stated he was most alarmed by China’s military development within the South China Sea, and that “the U.S. should assume Beijing plans to use these facilities for their clearly intended purposes at some point in the future.”³⁴ Operating in a grey area shy of deliberate fortification, China is attempting to deter and divert contesting navies, pointedly the United States Navy and its aircraft carrier strike groups.³⁵ Tensions also spiked in 2018, and have yet to

subside, following an unsafe encounter between a PLAN vessel and the USS *Decatur* while the American warship was conducting routine freedom of navigation patrols in the contested waterway.³⁶

Nonetheless, projecting sea power in the South China Sea also gives China profound sway over the \$5.3 trillion in global trade that passes through this body of water each year.³⁷ Applying Mahan's geopolitical practices, and under Sun Tzu's strategic maxim, President Xi Jinping and Chinese Communist Party elites have resisted rushing to premature strategic success. However, they have instead established leverage to surround any Indian Ocean or South China Sea competitor eventually.³⁸ To date, China has succeeded without a fight, "But if fight it must, Xi intends to win."³⁹

Apart from Mahan, credence for China's geopolitical agenda must also be given to British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder. In his famous article, "The Geographical Pivot of History," Mackinder argued that land power promoted global supremacy. Through his "Heartland theory," Mackinder stressed the importance of geography and its political influence over Eurasia's central position on the world island.⁴⁰ "The Heartland," Mackinder contended, "was the pivot area, and whomever would control it would control the international system. The reason for this was the wealth of resources that could be found in this pivot area, that could now be tapped because of the advent of transportation technology."⁴¹ As the world's most populous nation, China's insatiable economic and military growth can be attributed to its demand for natural resources. Still, if left unchecked, this presents global security and stability concerns.

Like its use of sea power to secure natural resources and increase global influence, China has also made strategic advances to attain land assets. For example, China has engaged in competition for land resources from across Eurasia to the African continent. Generating

geostrategic leverage, China has invested politically and economically in states such as Djibouti, Kenya, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.⁴² To create vassals, China has also demonstrated a pattern of buying foreign debt and investing in natural resource-rich failed states. In 2013 China invested 1.4 trillion dollars in building a new variation of the ancient Chinese Silk Road infrastructure.⁴³ In conjunction with its “String of Pearls Strategy,” this “New Silk Road” is a power grab effort to exploit geography and broaden China’s economic horizon.

The String of Pearls Strategy and New Silk Road are collectively known as China’s “One Belt, One Road” or “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” (see Figure 6; Figure 7). Allowing China to project power over several continents, the network links Chinese port investments to a “belt” of highways, fast railroads, airports, pipelines, and fiber-optic cables laid across 65 countries spread throughout Asia, Europe, and North Africa.⁴⁴ As such, China has attempted to reduce its dependency on the Strait of Malacca, especially the seaborne transportation of hydrocarbons and other natural resources back to its landlocked central and western inner regions.⁴⁵ In short, through Mackinder’s geopolitical views to generate power through natural resources control, China has expanded its geographic and cultural influence throughout the Indo-Asia Pacific region and beyond.

Also, to the world’s dismay, weaponized advancements in technology have and will continue to be used by China to widen its scope across its range of military operations. Although Chinese technological innovations are welcome worldwide to progress the human condition, how the Chinese government has acquired and subsequently militarized new technologies for long-term strategic use has raised alarm. For example, not long after a January 2007 anti-satellite (ASAT) test, where China used ballistic missiles to destroy one of its own weather satellites, the Feng Yun-1C (FY-1C), Xi Jinping overtly announced China’s commitment to a

dual-focused line of effort in developing (or acquiring) outer space and cyberspace technologies, as well as ensuring their shared securities.⁴⁶ Both pursuits, Xi asserted, are “two wings of a bird” that require a synchronized plan to advance both simultaneously.⁴⁷

To realize its technological hopes, China has stolen outer space, cyberspace, and artificial intelligence technologies to generate, collect, and falsify data for its political, economic, and social agendas. By methods of state property theft and espionage, “What Americans call R&D (research and development), Chinese think of as RD&T, where the T stands for theft. Of course, China only targets nations that have intellectual property worth stealing - the most important being the United States.”⁴⁸ Already the world’s largest communications equipment producer, including cell phones, computers, cyber and data technologies, China is expected to surpass India and the United States in the early 2020s to become the global leader in research and development spending.⁴⁹ Controlling cyber and outer space data is important because states that “can tap into that content, therefore, have power.”⁵⁰ China’s extended global reach into Indian and American space and technology pathways has had detrimental effects on stability. It will likely lead to constant tit-for-tat digital attacks that set the conditions for the next cold war if it has not already.

In sum, at sea, on land, and in space, China has exploited the Indo-Asia Pacific to serve its long-term strategic ends. To enhance its global influence and reduce dependency on geographical constraints, China has used lessons from Mahan and Mackinder’s geopolitical theories to gain greater access to the wealth of natural resources from Indian Ocean nations. As part of its geopolitical and geostrategic aims, China has also undertaken strategic initiatives in outer space and cyberspace to seize pivotal positions, just as it has done on land and at sea. Nevertheless, provocative Chinese advancements have undermined regional, terrestrial, and extraterrestrial stability in the Indian and western Pacific Oceans. To the detriment of Indian and

American interests, and with disregard for international law, China has put its hegemonic aspirations ahead of relative peace.

India's Counterbalance

In the modern era of great power competition, India has emerged as a challenger to China in the Indo-Asia Pacific. With its global position and growing industrial and economic base, India has developed a military that will continue to expand and serve as a counterbalance to China's grand strategy. China's regional and global assertiveness have elicited concern from Indian leaders, including current Prime Minister Narendra Modi.⁵¹ In particular, India views China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean littoral, such as BRI, as a threat to constrain India geopolitically.⁵² Most alarming is the Chinese-controlled port facility at Gwadar in rival Pakistan, which by Indian estimation, is a militaristic advancement to surround and regulate Indian Ocean lines of communication.⁵³ Reasonably then, given previous confrontations, ongoing border disputes, and continued tense relations, Chinese advancements have evoked a militaristic response from India to prop up its defense capabilities.

On land, India's military has historically always prided itself on a reputation of professionalism and a forward-focused mindset.⁵⁴ Through this mentality, Indian defense analysts have long-held the belief that China is following a protracted grand strategy to isolate India in the subcontinent and that the catalyst for its effectiveness revolves around the China-Pakistan alliance.⁵⁵ Having assessed the strategic environment against its difficult neighbors, Indian policymakers and military planners have set out to reshape India's defense forces around a "two-front" military doctrine. Initially enacted in 2008 by Indian Defense Minister Arackaparambil Antony, India's military forces have reconstituted to prepare for war on two

fronts against China and Pakistan.⁵⁶ This two-front doctrine called on the Indian Army to increase manpower and outfit new technologies and equipment to gain superiority over Pakistan and hedge against an attack from China.⁵⁷ In the immediate and long-term, this doctrine seeks to protect India's geopolitical and national security interests in the Indo-Asia Pacific.

Accordingly, as part of its strategic outlook, India has heavily invested in developing its land and air forces. Very much aware of Chinese incitement on its land borders and to meet the threat of a possible two-front war with China and Pakistan, the Indian Army has raised four additional mountain divisions.⁵⁸ Numbering roughly 64,000 troops, these mountain units provide skirmish forces and mobile strike capability that can move hastily over the Himalayas to attack in the northeast and northwest simultaneously.⁵⁹ Also, per records data from the Indian Defense Ministry's Eleventh Plan, since 2012, Indian Air Force squadrons rose from 32 to 44 to neutralize Pakistan in a full-scale war. Procurement of these formations continues with an end goal of 55 Indian Air Force squadrons, the estimated number of squadrons required to defend against dual attacks from China and Pakistan.⁶⁰ Further, in conjunction with India's Center for Land Warfare Studies in New Delhi, KPMG International regulatory services reported that India spent up to \$100 billion on purchases of advanced land and air component military equipment over the last decade.⁶¹ These resources included but were not limited to state-of-the-art mechanized weapons platforms, 1,500 howitzers, air defense weapons, guided missile systems, improved radar and battlefield information management systems, weather and night-fighting surveillance capabilities, marine reconnaissance aircraft, 250 light helicopters, "Super Hercules" transport aircraft, and heavy-lift aircraft for its Special Forces.⁶²

Having reinforced its land and airpower, India has now turned its predominant focus to sea power. Traditionally focused on military threats coming overland, India's shift from land to

sea power demonstrates its border defense confidence. This posture also delineates India's preparedness to take on a more geopolitical role in the maritime domain. In an October 2020 interview, Indian foreign ministry policy advisor, Ashok Malik, asserted that "China's presence in the Indian Ocean to our east and west is changing our perceptions of maritime security like nothing since the Europeans arrived at the end of the 15th century."

Dating back to the Cold War between the United States and Russia, India has maintained a position of neutrality on global security issues. However, with the rise of great power competition, India and its navy have exploited Chinese geographical constraints in the Indo-Asia Pacific. For example, in a recent *Financial Times* article written after the Sino-Indian border clash of August 2020, retired Indian Navy Commodore, Uday Bhaskar, commented that "India still had a big geographical advantage over China, given its location in the Indian Ocean, through which most of China's energy supplies pass."⁶³

Similarly, it is important to revisit that India sits astride two of the most geostrategic locations and navigational chokepoints within the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Hormuz in the west and the Strait of Malacca in the east. Thus, to hedge against China's envisioned long-term success at Gwadar, India has built an \$8 billion naval base in the adjacent area at Karwar south of Goa to prevent China or Pakistan from obstructing its entrance into the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz.⁶⁴ This enormous facility can berth forty-two ships, including strategic submarines. Despite China promoting its port access through littoral countries in the Indian Ocean region, it still "approaches the Indian Ocean as a landlocked power."⁶⁵ Conveniently, "Even with modest capabilities, given India's peninsula location, it's like having a permanent aircraft carrier,"⁶⁶ Commodore Bhaskar said.

To project power globally, India has taken progressive measures to develop its naval capabilities. Having operated aircraft carriers since 1961, India began construction of its first domestic aircraft carrier in 1999.⁶⁷ By 2015, India launched two aircraft carrier strike groups, with a third planned for fleet and operational service by 2022.⁶⁸ India has also recently overhauled seven of its frigates and developed thirty-one new surface warships.⁶⁹ In 2016, India commissioned its first indigenously built nuclear-powered submarine (SSBN), INS *Arihant*, with two more currently nearing shipyard completion.⁷⁰ India launched its second SSBN, the INS *Arighat*, in November 2017, with planned commissioning set for 2021.⁷¹ India further augmented its undersea warfare arsenal by acquiring six diesel-powered and foreign-built submarines.⁷² Strategically, India operates a ship-launched and submarine-launched nuclear-capable ballistic missile; it is also developing two additional submarine-launched ballistic missiles for deployment in the near future.⁷³ Committed to a robust, powerful naval fleet, India has sent a deliberate message to Beijing.⁷⁴ For instance, although China has increased naval operations in the Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy has responded in kind by rotating warships in-and-out of the South China Sea. Such action delineates the Indian Navy's strategic mobility, confidence, and developed capacity.⁷⁵

Although sea power continues to dominate great power competition across the Indo-Asia Pacific, geopolitics and geostrategy between India and China have also extended into the space domain. As indicated earlier, advancements in space technology have not been limited solely to outer space but cyberspace as well. This competition between India and China in the space continuum has increased in “focus, force, and global reach since the birth of the Internet as an e-platform for commerce, information flows, and power projection.”⁷⁶ To maintain pace, compete, and counter China in the space domain, India has become heavily reliant on space-based

technologies for intelligence collection and offensive counterspace ability to protect its national security. As highlighted by Everett C. Dolman in his article, “Geostrategy in the Space Age: An Astropolitical Analysis,” nations that wish “to remain sovereign must at a minimum prevent other states from gaining viral control of strategic space locations, pathways, and chokepoints.”⁷⁷

India, like China and the United States, has capitalized on the advent of space-based capabilities to attain its state policy goals and project power. Aware of China’s anti-satellite capabilities and to ensure its national defense, on March 27, 2019, India successfully conducted an ASAT test from a launch site on Abdul Kalam Island in the Bay of Bengal.⁷⁸ Generating such power from digital systems, Prime Minister Modi declared India to be a space power on par with China and the United States and that the test would have “a historic impact on generations to come.”⁷⁹

Lastly, a nuclear-powered state, India continues to refine its proven nuclear capacities to deter Chinese and Pakistani threats. Shortly after China’s first nuclear test at Lop Nor on October 16, 1964, segments of India’s political and scientific establishments signaled the importance of developing India’s militarily-focused nuclear weapons program.⁸⁰ Subsequent tangential nuclear threats and physical altercations with China and Pakistan, including the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971, added to the acceleration of India’s nuclear weapons capabilities.⁸¹ Thus, at the start of the 1970s, India had both the competency and political backing to conduct its first nuclear test, which it executed in 1974 at a test site in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan.⁸² Continued strains with Pakistan and China, including repeated evidence of Chinese collusion and assistance with Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program, made the 1980s and 1990s a difficult period for India.⁸³ Consequently, as alluded to earlier, fueled by Sino-Pakistani concerns, India conducted five

more nuclear tests twenty-four years later on May 11 and 13, 1998.⁸⁴ Though denounced by the international community, the 1998 tests were a product of India's nuclear program's evolution and calculated political choices based upon national security considerations, military prowess, prestige, and status in the international system.⁸⁵

Today, India remains a nuclear threat and continues to advance its nuclear arsenal. "While the Cold War transformed the political landscape of Europe, it did little to ameliorate India's security concerns."⁸⁶ According to Hans M. Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project within the Federation of American Scientists in Washington, DC, India is expanding its nuclear-capable delivery forces.⁸⁷ Regularly published within the Bulletin for Atomic Scientists, Kristensen asserted that India's traditional focus on Pakistani nuclear deterrence has shifted to "increased emphasis" on China.⁸⁸ Based on available information and research, in his article "Indian Nuclear Forces, 2018," Kristensen estimated India to own 130-140 nuclear warheads, with enough weapon-grade plutonium for 150-200 missiles (see Table 1).⁸⁹ India is also projected to operate seven or eight nuclear-capable systems: two aircraft, four land-based ballistic missiles, and two sea-based ballistic missiles.⁹⁰ India has at least five more long-range land- and sea-based missile systems in development for future deployment within the next decade.⁹¹ Although China's substantial nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities can range and inflict substantial damage on Indian cities, India's development of the Agni-IV and Agni-V ballistic missiles (road- and rail-mobile) are capable of striking targets in nearly all of China, including Beijing and Shanghai.⁹² Thus, as argued in his *Foreign Affairs* article, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," Jaswant Singh observed that "If nuclear deterrence works in the West, why won't it work in India?"⁹³

Put concisely, India's emerging military presents a formidable counterbalance to a rising China across the Indo-Asia Pacific. Complementing its land, air, sea, space, and nuclear power, India also projects power through its geostrategic sphere of influence and position of dominance to ensure China remains a status quo power. While the Indian Ocean has provided a gateway for Chinese expansionism and its grand strategy, India holds the keys to that vision's future. In this capacity, India serves the strategic role of "protector of the international order...as it pertains to maintaining open sea lanes and the freedom of navigation."⁹⁴ However, for India to maintain oversight and check Chinese aggression, it will require continued allocation for defense spending and devotion to its military development, which will undoubtedly stretch its resources and burden its economy. Therefore, alongside common interests, it benefits India to look to the west for general support.

United States Reinforcement

Turning to Indo-American relations, through unfaltering diplomatic engagement and military cooperation, the United States can reinforce India to ensure China remains a status quo power in the Indo-Asia Pacific. China's assertiveness across this region has not only posed a threat to the vital interests of India, but the United States, its allies, and partners in the Indo-Pacific as well. Canvassed across the international arena, India holds the most strategic value to American influence in South Asia and the Middle East. Preoccupied over the last twenty years with ongoing wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Syria, the United States has been heavily invested in the Middle East. Meanwhile, China has been lying in wait and building upon its strategic initiatives to challenge the United States' global leadership and world order as its currently known. As stated in the 2017 United States National Security Strategy, "China seeks to

displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor.”⁹⁵ Two-years later in the *2019 Annual Report to Congress*, Defense Department officials stated that “China’s leaders are leveraging China’s growing economic, diplomatic, and military clout to establish regional preeminence and expand the country’s international influence.”⁹⁶ Thus, if the United States wants to maintain a leading role in the Indo-Pacific region, it is imperative that the United States factor India into the equation when determining its future foreign policy.

To yield the most benefit, United States foreign policy in South Asia must better incorporate diplomatic and military cooperation with India. For Western and East Asian diplomats that see India as a prospective geopolitical counterbalance to China, a developing India seems favorable to meet those ends.⁹⁷ While the world has become seemingly smaller because of emerging technologies and instant communications, particularly the strategic reach of war instruments, the United States must prioritize diplomatic affairs with India. To do so, the United States Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of State (DOS) require better integration and more accurate alignment concerning Indian diplomacy.⁹⁸ This will reduce the possibility of conflict with China and promote a free and open Indo-Asia Pacific. Call to mind Graham Allison’s book, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides Trap*, which underlined the fact that over the past five-hundred years, in twelve of sixteen separate occurrences, when a major rising power has threatened to displace a ruling power, the result was war.”⁹⁹ The four cases that avoided armed conflict resulted from tactful negotiation and diplomatic skill. Hence the importance of American diplomatic support to India.

While the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 revamped, realigned, and refocused the American military organization, similar synchronization is needed to align DOS and DOD

objectives that put India at the forefront of the United States' approach toward China. Exchanged country visits in 2019 and 2020 between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former United States President Donald Trump, respectively, reinforced the strategic acquaintance between the United States and India.¹⁰⁰ Yet, focus and cohesion between DOS and DOD are required to align Indo-American policies and operations against delicate Chinese challenges. For example, joint meetings held in New Delhi in 2018 between then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis with their respective Indian counterparts, Sushma Swaraj and Nirmala Sitharaman, were steps in the right direction. Discussion and debate among the dignitaries synchronized strategy and perspectives on critical topics such as maritime security and countermeasures to China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰¹ This joint venture boosted DOS and DOD alignment and helped bring India and the United States closer together than they have been since the Cold War.¹⁰² Bearing continuity, such policy has seemed to continue under President Joseph Biden's Administration, evidenced by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's recent visit to India on March 19, 2021. For continued mutual support to occur, though, DOS and DOD interrelationships of policy, strategy, and operations must emphasize countering China's grand strategy together with India.

Similarly, beyond bilateral ties, the United States and India require multilateral cooperation through other Pacific and Southeast Asian nations with similar interests to curtail Chinese intentions. The foundation for a successful rebalance rests upon Indian and American accord, but to bolster support and avoid further Chinese-promoted instability, concurrent cooperation with other regional countries and organizations, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is essential.¹⁰³ The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, otherwise known as "The Quad," builds on an overlapping web

of alliances and partnerships between four major democracies within the Indo-Asia Pacific region, Australia, Japan, India, and the United States.¹⁰⁴ Relevant and security concentrated, The Quad serves as a mechanism to converge democratic strategic interests that are “Underscored by principles of openness, freedom of movement, and respect for the rules-based international order.”¹⁰⁵

Comparatively, ASEAN is a legally bound alliance among ten Asian states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.¹⁰⁶ Formed in 1967, ASEAN registered with the United Nations in 2011.¹⁰⁷ Per its aims and purpose, ASEAN proclaims to be “a community of and for all Southeast Asian states” that thinks not only of national interests but posits those against regional interests for the greater good.¹⁰⁸ Its charter calls on its member states and dialogue partners to promote the “prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations...through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.”¹⁰⁹

That said, despite being granted full dialogue partner status in 1996, China has routinely engaged in sovereignty disputes with ASEAN members. Presently, negotiations with China over its maritime actions and policies in the South China Sea, which violate a Code of Conduct agreement with ASEAN, remain contentious issues with no end in sight.¹¹⁰ China has rejected to address its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea with ASEAN and its other international dialogue partners, including India and the United States. Refusing to do so has ultimately detracted from ASEAN’s key objective to resolve disputes in a multilateral setting.¹¹¹ As such, with its affiliates keenly aware of Southeast Asia's shifting power dynamics from an overly

ambitious China, escalation and criticism are sure to continue internally and externally to the ASEAN alliance.

Thus, to shape the prospects for stability in the years ahead, the United States and India have a strategic obligation to exploit the opportunity with ASEAN to counterbalance China. Since India became a dialogue partner of ASEAN in December 1995, its relationship with the alliance has transcended the scope of functional teamwork to cover political and security dimensions.¹¹² India also established a separate diplomatic Mission to ASEAN in 2015, and its foreign direct investment (FDI) to ASEAN has substantially increased since 2018.¹¹³ Along the same lines, since the establishment of dialogue relations between ASEAN and the United States in 1977, communal concerns have evolved from political and security issues to a wide range of shared interests.¹¹⁴ Focus areas include but are not limited to maritime security, cybersecurity, eliminating trafficking in persons, disaster management, combatting terrorism and transnational crime, promoting and protecting the rights of women and children, as well as education.¹¹⁵ In November 2015, ASEAN leaders elevated relations with the United States to a strategic level.¹¹⁶ Like India, the United States was among the first dialogue partners to appoint an ambassador-level mission to ASEAN. It is also worth noting that per 2019 records, ASEAN declared the United States its largest external source of FDI (China is a similar contributor).¹¹⁷

Together, the United States, India, and ASEAN can promote a more prosperous Southeast Asia by increasing ASEAN's capability to resolve regional and global challenges through an effective, rules-based architecture that upholds human dignity, ensures cooperation, and enforces international law.¹¹⁸ To curb Chinese assertiveness and instill accountability across the region, the path ahead requires a wider multilateral coalition and sphere of influence.¹¹⁹ Such cooperation involves military exchanges, expanded trade and investment, and other

diplomatic interactions that would benefit the economies and the security interests of ASEAN (and Quad) governments while serving India and the United States' interests at the same time.¹²⁰ Indeed, as asserted in the Biden Administration's 2021 *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, the United States "will deepen [its] partnership with India and work alongside New Zealand, as well as Singapore, Vietnam, and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states, to advance shared objectives."¹²¹

Through engagement in shared objectives, ASEAN's regional powers will seek harmonious relations between the United States, India, and China.¹²² Along this front, recent undertakings include the September 2019 inaugural ASEAN-United States Maritime Exercise held in Southeast Asia's international waters and the Singapore-hosted ASEAN Cyber Policy Dialogue in October 2019.¹²³ In addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN, the United States, and India have collaborated through a series of high-level engagements such as the Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID-19 and the ASEAN-United States interagency meeting on Public Health Emergencies and Countering COVID-19.¹²⁴ Indo-American cooperation that focuses on ASEAN countries but avoids regional instability by direct challenges to China preserves peace while supporting ASEAN policy priorities and acknowledging state's sovereignty.¹²⁵ Having said that, from a realist perspective, Indo-American collaboration with ASEAN also denotes "the significant costs China will likely bear if it insists on using its greater coercive capabilities along narrowly nationalistic paths."¹²⁶

Additionally, on an even broader scale, United States diplomatic support to India needs to extend beyond South Asia to counterbalance China. Looking to the Middle East, India also holds strategic implications for the United States, particularly its foreign policy with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, fostering Indo-Iranian relations is in the strategic interests of the

United States. Guided by the radical, anti-American agenda of its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran has subscribed to Chinese influence in the Middle East. Through ways and means that undermine India and the United States' legitimacy, Iran has continued to align itself with China. As a result, Sino-Iranian relations are strategically detrimental to both India and the United States. American and Arab fears of Iran's pursuit for regional power and its increased ties to China adversely affect regional politics and the United States' foreign policy in the Middle East.¹²⁷ The United States' 2018 withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under President Donald Trump's Administration established a policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran, which weakened Iran's economy but added to Western resentment in Iran.¹²⁸ How relevant the Trump Administration's Iranian policies remain in place under the Biden Administration remains to be seen. Will the 46th President of the United States continue with maximum pressure against the Iranian regime? Or, perhaps, does President Biden have intentions to re-enter the JCPOA that he helped create as vice president under President Barack Obama's Administration? Will Iran even entertain such an idea? Is it a good idea?

Nonetheless, while the world awaits answers to these questions, United States foreign policy toward Iran and the Middle East writ large needs to leverage the growing Indo-American partnership. Having departed from JCPOA, United States policy has also caused consternation with American partners that have continued to engage with Iran; India is one of them. Sanctions of maximum pressure against Iran have strained India's economy, thereby leading to Indian frustrations with the United States.¹²⁹ India relies upon Iran for some of its energy needs, with which it has preestablished trade arrangements in place. For example, "India imports 80 percent of its oil requirements from the Middle East, with ten percent of that coming from Iran."¹³⁰ Similarly, in its quest for economic expansion and other natural resources, "New Delhi and

Tehran are working on other strategic projects, such as the development of the Chabahar Port in the Arabian Sea that will provide India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, circumventing rival Pakistan.”¹³¹ Yet, given its ultimate aims, China has already attempted to thwart this Indian initiative for its own strategic gain. It is also important to point out that India is one of Iran’s top crude oil importers, second only to China.¹³²

To leverage common interests against a rising China, the United States cannot hamper its relationship with India by hindering Indian trade with Iran. Instead, from a grander strategic perspective, a more effective United States foreign policy toward Iran considers Chinese influence in the Middle East while also acknowledging India’s connection to Iran. To build upon diplomatic relations and garner further trust, the United States should demonstrate flexibility and grant more exemption to India for its business dealings with Iran. Doing so keeps intact the growing and vital relationship between the United States and India. Such exemptions also put pressure on Iran to remain steadfast in its trade agreements with India. Doing otherwise most certainly would disrupt cordial commerce and spur additional economic decline to Iran’s already stricken economy. Enabling Indo-Iranian trade also leverages against Chinese economic encroachments against India, including the previously mentioned Chabahar Port project. Ongoing Chinese expansion in the Middle East is strategically problematic to the United States and India. Therefore, American acquiescence or support of Indo-Iranian relations can serve as an offset to Chinese ambitions in the Middle East while keeping American and Iranian tensions at bay.¹³³

Building upon diplomatic affairs, the United States can facilitate and reinforce India through military cooperation, especially in the maritime domain. Though diplomacy must always be first pursued, should Chinese armed aggression and questionable alliances continue to disrupt

diplomatic relations between the two democracies, military cohesion between the United States and India will be vitally important to thwart this threat. As an immediate priority, Chinese affronts demand further Indian and American military coordination. Doing so, increases joint interoperability between the two nuclear-powered nations and leverages against the above outlined Chinese provocations. In a November 2020 speech that centered on the growing concerns of Chinese expansion into the Indian Ocean, United States Secretary of the Navy, Kenneth Braithwaite “made clear that the U.S. alone cannot stand up to China and that nations around the Pacific and around the globe needed to assist in pushing back militarily and economically if there was a chance for deterrence to work.”¹³⁴ Alike, and also sea power minded, United States President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “preparation for war is the surest guaranty for peace.”¹³⁵ Though the United States Navy will innately continue to prepare for the possibility of future conflict with China, it must make use of the multi-national arena with the Indian Navy at the front of that effort.

Given the increase in Chinese naval influence, it behooves the United States to reinforce India at sea. In fact, Xi Jinping and Chinese strategists have become most frustrated and concerned with the increased capability of the Indian Navy.¹³⁶ According to assessments made by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, India serves as the chief balancer and major swing state in Indo-Asia Pacific politics because of its developing naval prominence.¹³⁷ Already having substantiated routine naval patrols in the South China Sea, India has expanded naval collaboration with Indonesia and Vietnam to hedge against China at the eastern crossroads of the Indian Ocean.”¹³⁸ So, then, India is perhaps China’s most realistic strategic adversary; geographically, this certainly holds true. Understanding this, the United States should put forth every effort to reinforce the Indian Navy and capitalize on this strategic advantage.

In general, the United States possesses the capability, planning skills, and technology to reinforce Indian sea power and naval expansion to exert more strategic pressure on China. Indo-American naval integration has just as much value to India as it does the United States. Strategically, India must avoid being “boxed in” by Chinese advancements throughout the Indian Ocean; meanwhile, the United States needs to account for its contested global leadership and reduction in prominence in these once uncontested waters. To do so, the United States needs to increase joint planning efforts with India, such as the 2008 Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which facilitated India’s better understanding of United States–led naval coalition models.¹³⁹ Similarly, the United States should also take the lead to enable more frequent multi-national naval operations within the Indian Ocean, like that of the Malabar Naval Exercise, conducted with India, Japan, and Australia.¹⁴⁰ And to maximize a sound basis for operational and strategic-level planning, Indian and American military officer exchange programs will produce deeper discussion and instill a common operational picture. Information sharing, war game simulations, and the execution of limited-scale military drills also require implementation. From a naval technology standpoint, as China’s fleet becomes more sophisticated, naval dominance, missile defense, and nuclear deterrence from Indian and American maritime assets must evolve to meet the challenge. Therefore, to increase interoperability, the United States can better assist India with installing and training with the Aegis integrated combat system used by the American Navy, Spanish Navy, Royal Australian Navy, Royal Norwegian Navy, Japanese Maritime Defense Force, and the Republic of Korea Navy.¹⁴¹

Finally, and most importantly, United States foreign policy across the Indo-Asia Pacific must provide reliable and consistent strategic reassurance to India and the other Southeastern Asian states. Because of armed American involvement in the Middle East in

all but one year of the Twenty-First Century, India, ASEAN, and other partners within the region, require confidence that the United States Government and its military will not disengage from Indo-Asia Pacific affairs.¹⁴² To rebalance against an increasingly assertive China, the United States' military instrument of national power only remains credible if America's commitment to this threat remains intact and not deterred by weakened economic and political problems at home.¹⁴³ Strengthening diplomatic relations and broadening military cooperation are the goals needed to successfully counterbalance China in the Indo-Asia Pacific for the foreseeable future.

By restructuring and refocusing its naval force posture, the United States can reassure and supplement Indian deterrence against China. To do so, the United States Navy's strategic outlook needs adjustment to emit sea power most effectively and best distribute forces in the Indian and western Pacific Oceans. Specifically, the United States Navy should establish its debated First Fleet that would operate closer to the border of the Indian and western Pacific Oceans.¹⁴⁴ Based perhaps out of Singapore or continually at sea in an expeditionary manner, the First Fleet concept provides constant forward presence to ensure freedom of navigation throughout the Indo-Asia Pacific.¹⁴⁵ Shipyard maintenance and port visits could vary strategically and include increased underway maintenance cycles and replenishment, all while maintaining mutual support. Most of all, this innovative step will generate more widely dispersed United States maritime and expeditionary forces. Restructuring the American naval force through a new numbered fleet demonstrates a strategic commitment to this part of the world while reinforcing shared maritime objectives with India to repudiate unlawful Chinese anti-access area denial initiatives.¹⁴⁶

Expanded upon further, with allies, partners, and India in mind, this new American fleet will meet United States combatant commander maritime challenges while exercising greater

economy of force. Doing so alleviates operational stress on the 7th Fleet and enables more concentrated attention to a smaller area of responsibility, but with shared areas of interest that incorporate India.¹⁴⁷ In its current configuration, the 7th Fleet operates out of Japan and oversees a large operational area of responsibility that spans from the International Dateline to roughly the India-Pakistan border.¹⁴⁸ Not since the War of 1812, Secretary Brathwaite argued, “has the United States and our sovereignty been under the kind of pressures that we see today.”¹⁴⁹ A new numbered fleet at the crossroads between the Indian and the western Pacific oceans helps lessens those anxieties, demonstrates consistent engagement across the Indo-Asia Pacific, and nullifies Indian doubts about American commitment to the region.

Yet, the United States must tread lightly not to provoke China. The United States should also encourage Chinese and Indian integration, but with a watchful eye. Through naval integration and shared technologies in the space domain, the United States and India can build upon diplomatic efforts to maintain a relative degree of steadiness with China. Still, “One cannot caution enough how subtly this game will have to be played.”¹⁵⁰ Put concisely, United States military cooperation with India, or its general reinforcement, enhances national security for both democratic nations while answering questionable Chinese tactics across all domains in the Indo-Asia Pacific theater.

Conclusion

In conclusion, China has weaponized its economic and military instruments of national power to assert a geopolitical and geostrategic agenda. China has manipulated or disregarded international law and exploited the geopolitical principles of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Halford Mackinder, which, by design, has led to “ominous implications for international

stability.”¹⁵¹ Through tilted trade practices, territorial expansion in the South China Sea, and power grabs for natural resources and strategic maritime positions across the Indian Ocean, China has amplified already fragile relations with India and the United States. Strategically, “A one-ocean navy in the western Pacific makes China a regional power; a two-ocean navy in both the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean makes China a great power.”¹⁵² Further, in pursuit of its long-term aims, China has stuck to the adages of Sun Tzu, seeking to evade the field of battle and outmaneuver one’s adversaries by placing them in positions where escape is impossible.¹⁵³ If left unchecked, China’s aggressiveness in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans confines India and the United States to this fate. Indeed, as Napoleon observed in 1817, “Let China sleep; when she wakes, she will shake the world.”¹⁵⁴

However, by and large, India can leverage its military instrument of national power to counter China. Through continued investment in a forward-operating military that projects power across all domains, generally reinforced by consistent American diplomatic and military collaboration (directly and indirectly), India can effectively counteract China to ensure the latter remains a status quo power. From decades-long border disputes to overlapping claims for influence in South and Southeast Asia, India and China's far-ranging strategic rivalry has expanded to include the United States.¹⁵⁵ In this era of great power competition, aggressive Chinese expansion, and legally disputed territorial claims, demand the necessity for a rebalancing strategy. Through a coalition of democracies, India and the United States can solidify this balance.¹⁵⁶ Despite China’s growing military power and asymmetrical economic strength, with strengthened Indo-American unity of effort, both democracies can facilitate global stability and further exert strategic pressure on China. Likewise, constructive relations and unwavering commitments to multilateral partnerships such as The Quad and ASEAN, expand

and reinforce Indian and American influence on China's periphery. All things considered, Indian policies that hedge against China and moderate its contentious behavior, namely increased sea power, careful preparations for a two-front war with China and Pakistan, and armed forces cooperation with the United States, are the best ways forward.

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Figure 1



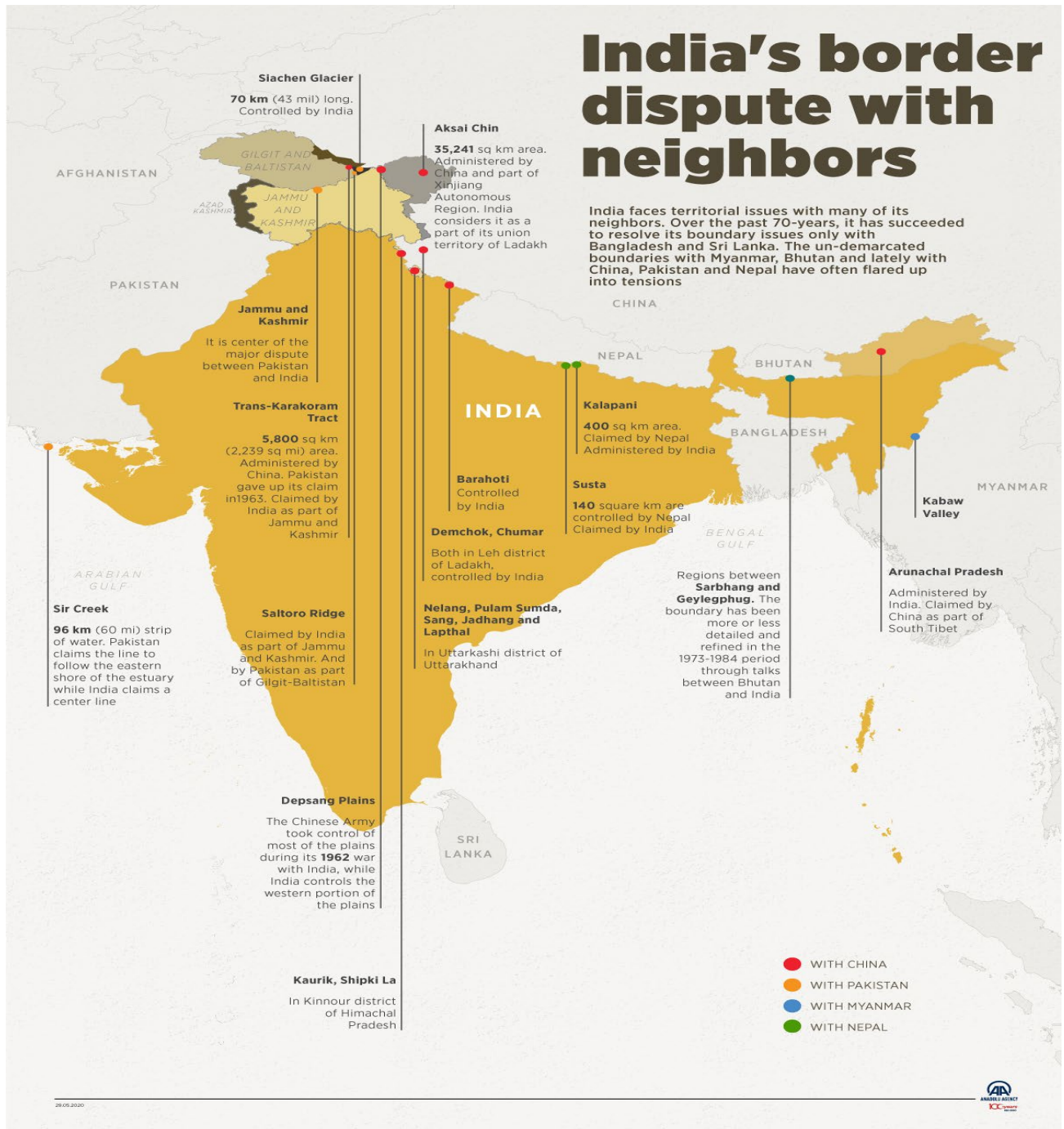
Source: Maps of India, 2020

Figure 2



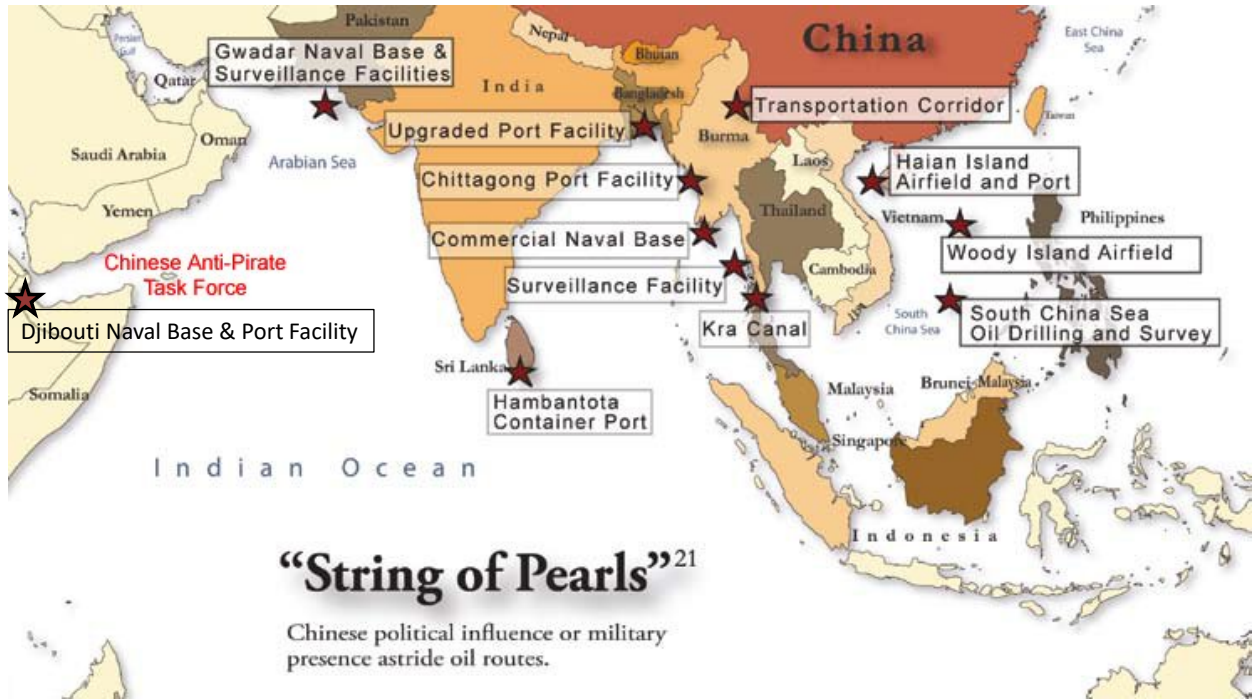
Source: *China-US Focus Digest*, 2018

Figure 3



Source: Anadolu Agency, 2020

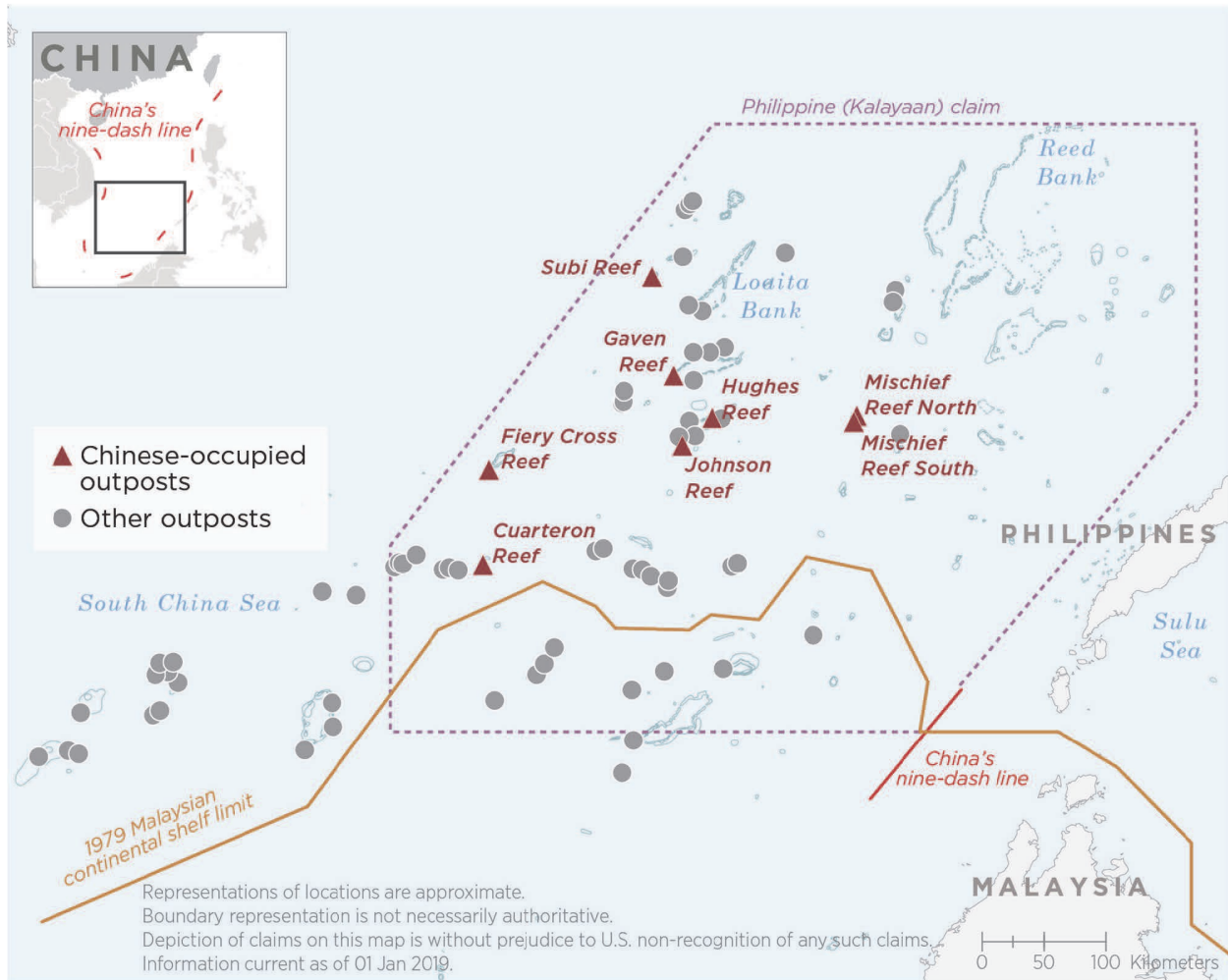
Figure 4



Source: United States Naval War College, 2018

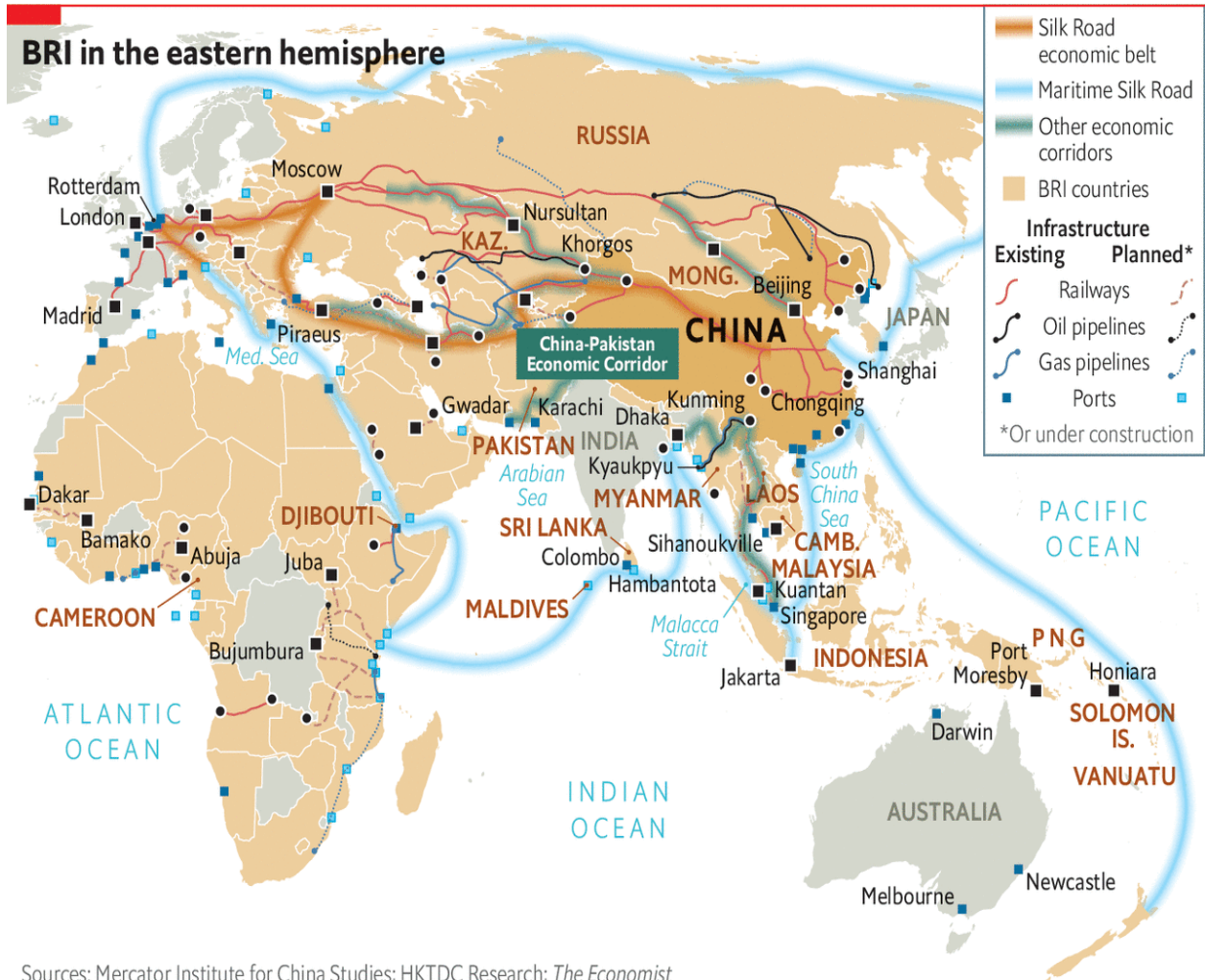
Figure 5

Outposts in the Spratly Islands



Source: Office of the United States Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*

Figure 6



Sources: Mercator Institute for China Studies; HKTDC Research; *The Economist*
The Economist

Source: *The Economist*, 2020

Figure 7



Source: Deputy Commandant for Information, United States Marine Corps, 2020

Table 1**Table 1. Indian nuclear forces, 2018.**

Type	NATO designation	Number of launchers	Year deployed	Range ^a (kilometers)	Warhead x yield (kilotons)	Number of warheads
Aircraft						
Vajra	Mirage 2000H	~16	1985	1,850	1 × bomb	~16
Shamsher	Jaguar IS/IB	~32	1981	1,600	1 × bomb	~32
Subtotal:		~48				~48
Land-based ballistic missiles						
Prithvi-II	n.a.	~24	2003	350 ^b	1 × 12	~24
Agni-I	n.a.	~20	2007 ^c	700+	1 × 40	~20
Agni-II	n.a.	~8	2011 ^d	2,000+	1 × 40	~8
Agni-III	n.a.	~8	2014?	3,200+	1 × 40	~8
Agni-IV	n.a.	n.a.	(2018)	3,500+	1 × 40	n.a.
Agni-V	n.a.	n.a.	(2020)	5,200+	1 × 40	n.a.
Subtotal:		~60				~60 ^e
Sea-based ballistic missiles						
Dhanush	n.a.	2	2013	400	1 × 12	4
K-15	(Sagarika)	(12)	(2018)	700	1 × 12	(12)
K-4	n.a.	(4)	?	3,500	1 × ?	0
Subtotal:		(18)				(16)
Total						130–140 ^f

Source: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2018