India's Strategic Traditions and Options in the Indo-Pacific Security System

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Resumo
As Tradições e Opções Estratégicas da Índia no Sistema de Segurança do Indo-Pacífico

Perante um complexo de segurança Ásia-Pacífico que se encontra em expansão para a região mais ampla do Indo-Pacífico, a Índia é forçada a adaptar-se e redefinir as suas prioridades estratégicas. Este artigo apresenta os novos desafios que o país enfrenta nesta nova Ásia, bem como o grande debate indiano sobre a futura postura estratégica do país, incluindo a sua ambição em garantir autonomia estratégica. São desenvolvidos quatro cenários possíveis: continuada aproximação aos Estados Unidos de forma a contrabalançar a China; criação de uma aliança ou eixo de segurança de estados asiáticos visando a contenção da China; estabelecimento conjunto com a China de um regime de segurança continental baseado num"G-2 asiático" ou "Panchsheel 2.0" que exclua os Estados Unidos; ou uma postura isolacionista e introvertida focada em desenvolver capacidades domésticas e assim evitar o envolvimento do país em espirais de competição e insegurança internacional.

Abstract

As the Asia-Pacific security complex expands and morphs into a larger Indo-Pacific system, India will need to adapt and redefine its strategy. This article sets out the new challenges India faces in this new Asia, and then proceeds to review the great Indian debate about its strategic culture and perennial quest for autonomy. It evaluates four possible strategic postures for India to choose from: further rapprochement with the United States to balance China; initiating a pan-Asian security framework to contain China; joint establishment with China of an "Asian G-2" or "Panchsheel 2.0" security regime that excludes the United States; and an isolationist, introvert focus on domestic "soft balancing" by avoiding entanglement in security and competitive power politics.

Whether because of China's rise or the American oriental "pivot" or "rebalancing" act, Asia is once again being proclaimed as the new "global geopolitical center". This is all about a "new Asian century." CNN's Fareed Zakaria (2008) speaks about a "post-American world" due to the "rise of the rest" and Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani (2008) about the "new Asian Hemisphere" as the natural outcome of an "irresistible shift of global power to the East". It's as if the whole world was suddenly tilting.

This "brouhaha" about a new Asia, and the impeding collapse of the West dates back to at least the Ancient Greeks and their anxiety about the "oriental" barbarians. In regard to modern times, in his recent book on key Asian leaders in the late 19th and early 20th century, including India's Rabindranath Tagore, Pankaj Mishra (2012) reminds us that the idea of a "new Asia" has been around for at least a century – starting with Imperial Japan's victory over "Western" Russia in, a key event he sees as determinant in inspiring a new generation of Asian nationalist leaders. One of them, Jawaharlal Nehru, thus referred to the rise of Asia as early as 1935. In his presidential address of the National Congress, at Lahore, in that year, he noted that "Asia, and even India, will play a determining part in the future of world policy. The brief day of European domination is already approaching its end. Europe has ceased to be the centre of activity and interest." (Nehru, 1936: 15)

Whether radically new or not, there is little doubt that Asia today is more than just old wine in new bottles. The continent has indeed undergone dramatic economic, social and political transformations in recent decades. One good example is that of South Korea whose developmental standards in the 1950s, still ravaged by the impact of war, were equivalent to those of India and Ghana. Today it is one of the most advanced economies f the world, ranking 15th in terms of the Human Development Index (India 134th, Ghana 135th), and 29th in terms of per capita income based on purchasing power parity (India 126th, Ghana 148th).

The "developmental" state-driven model of economy growth, often with authoritarian undertones, propelled the so-called Asian tigers to the forefront of global growth, productivity and innovation. Southeast Asia witnessed the emergence of ASEAN and an advanced level of new regional institutionalism and economic cooperation based on liberal trade and investment regimes. Most importantly, however, were the economic reforms of China (1978) and India (1991), which opened up immense markets and initiated two of Humanity's largest and fastest socioeconomic transformations.

These changes have naturally constrained the foreign policies and strategic postures of China and India. For example, both countries remain acutely dependent

on foreign energy resources, the global free trade regime, and on the economic growth and demand of consumer markets in the United States. Both countries also have several million-strong diasporas, with many overseas citizen spread around the world.

At the same time, in terms of relative power, most analysts agree that America's is now beyond its maximum peak, having begun a slow, steady decline. The United States continue to as the uncontested global hegemon, a preponderant power that President Obama likes to call an "indispensable nation" with immense absolute advantages over the military, economic and technological capabilities of its immediate followers. One must also not forget that it has been able to reinvent itself before.

The relative gap, however, is narrowing. The current debate on what "limited" role the United States should assume in managing the global order, and President Obama's focus on the "nation-building at home" narrative, signal the current mood – Washington wants to figure out how to save on managerial costs without reducing its relative power. This is the new "frugal superpower", in the current words of Michael Mandelbaum (2010), who only in the mid-2000s had called the United States a "reluctant Goliath" without which the global order would collapse (Mandelbaum, 2005). What is less clear, however, is whether or how these changing circumstances in the United States and globally may shape the strategic postures and options for China and India in Asia.

This article argues that based on these innumerous new challenges and circumstances, India faces a menu of four different strategic postures in the new Asia-Pacific security complex, now also referred to as Indo-Pacific. It starts by setting out the new challenges India faces in this new Asia, and then proceeds to review the great Indian debate about its strategic culture and perennial quest for autonomy. A final section lists the four possible postures: further rapprochement with the United States to balance China; initiating a pan-Asian security framework to contain China; joint establishment with China of an "Asian G-2" or "Panchsheel 2.0" security regime that excludes the United States; and an isolationist, introvert focus on domestic "soft balancing" by avoiding entanglement in security and competitive power politics.

The New Asia

Asia has witnessed four main transformations at the strategic level that are of direct concern to India. This is – at least in India's perspective – a new Asia indeed. First, the rise and increasing assertiveness of a self-reliant China. India's rivalry with China is not a new factor per se. The Sino-Indian border has been object of a protracted border dispute, which led to a war in 1962 and repeated military skirmishes since then. India also hosts the Dalai Lama and his separatist Tibetan

government-in-exile. What did change is the relative balance, with a China that has progressed dramatically on the military front and, unlike in the past, is no longer dependent on external security support from the Soviet Union or the United States. This Chinese self-reliance is linked to a new Chinese assertiveness, in unprecedented terms and scale, most recently in the South China Sea.

The big debate is on whether this assertiveness is a new behavior (or just more visible and capable than before) and its underlying causes. Is it domestic nationalism, political party and elite competition, changing civil-military dynamics, or merely the perception of a strategic window of opportunity to gain advantage and consolidate territorial gains? Or, at the external level, is China's assertiveness motivated by a mounting sense of insecurity, perception of encirclement, containment and isolation induced by the "American pivot"?

These are important questions because different explanations will necessarily lead to different policy recommendations. This exercise is thus an elementary task for India, which is paradoxically locked in both in increasing competition and cooperation with China. China is now India's largest trade partner, with a total volume of US$75 billion – mostly Indian imports that have led to a tremendous deficit. If one adds to this trade asymmetry the logic of historical rivalry and competition (war and border conflict), a variety of domestic factors (nationalism, economic protectionism), as well as the reality of increasing inter-dependence and cooperation, one can see why this will not only be one of the most complex, but also most crucial relations for 21st century geopolitics.

Second, India now also faces an increasingly assertive presence of the United States in Asia. Unlike what is often suggested, the United States has been a resident Asian power since at least the Second World War, if not even earlier, since its Philippine war (1899-1902). However, its post-War strategic "hub-and-spoke" system of Asian alliances with South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia and Thailand, was always one that focused on East and Southeast Asia, or broadly the region known as Asia-Pacific.

Excluded from the American system of regional alliances, India was therefore always the "least Asian" actor in the embryonic pan-Asian security system, and a mere observer in terms of the East and Southeast Asian sub-systems. While its military forces were sent for peacekeeping missions to Africa (since the Congo crisis in the early 1960s), New Delhi abstained from armed intervention in the Korea war, and kept a safe diplomatic distance from the Vietnam crisis. There were certainly important cultural, historical ties to Southeast Asia, from where the Indian National Army had fought on the Japanese side against the British. Jawaharlal Nehru was a regular presence in the region, culminating with his presence at the Bandung conference, in 1955. But in economic and military terms, and unlike China, India was largely absent from East and Southeast Asia.

All this has now changed, as India "asianizes" its economic and security profiles. This integration (or reintegration) of the South Asian regional security sub-system into the larger Asian one underlies the larger transformation of Asia-Pacific system into what is now called "the Indo-Pacific", as forwarded by some Australian analysts seeking to underline the new geostrategic centrality of their country (Medcalf, 2012). As the United States reconsiders and strengthens its role in Asia, we thus have, for the first time, a truly integrated security system spanning two oceans, from the East African coast to the Western coast of the United States. This naturally poses major challenges to Indian strategic thinking, forcing it to reconsider its traditionally continentally introversion towards Pakistan and the Himalayan border with China, to a much wider and oceanic Southern horizon. In the words of India's ambassador to Washington, Nirupama Rao (2013):

> "The earlier concept of the Asia-Pacific had sought to exclude India – today the term Indo-Pacific encompasses the subcontinent as an integral part of this eastern world. We are glad that the mental map of the Asia Pacific has changed and that the center of gravity has moved westward to include India."

This reorientation is reflected in India's major investments in its naval capabilities, traditionally neglected in previous decades. The shifting of its Western Naval Command from Mumbai southwards to Karwar, just South of Goa, signals this new Southward focus. There are several other initiatives India has taken to reinforce this strategic reorientation in order to pursue immediate economic interests, strengthen its naval footprint, and also respond to the increasing centrality and importance of the Indian Ocean within the larger Indo-Pacific security system.

New Delhi thus initiated a regular Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in 2008 (South Africa hosted the 2012 edition), revived the multilateral Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), and has played a leading role in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. At the same time, its Navy has strengthened outreach program to its counterparts in the smaller countries of the region – from joint exercises, to setting up listening posts, donating vessels and equipment etc.

A third factor in this new Asia that affects India relates to the increasing levels of interdependence. As previously highlighted in the case of China, India now has reached unprecedented volumes and shares of intra-regional Asian trade and investments. Its "Look East" policy initiated in 1992 has been pursued steadily, especially towards Southeast Asia. India's profile in the rest of Asia has thus improved dramatically, as smaller countries increasingly look up to India to balance Chinese

power. India has often been unable or incapable to respond to such expectations, which is often rooted in its reluctance to play such a game and possibly becoming entangled in a spiraling competition logic with Beijing.

Paradoxically, the mantra of non-alignment, despite never having really been followed in the past, has now turned into a paradigmatic straightjacket that domestically constrains Indian diplomacy. The fact remains, however, that India has dramatically expanded its presence in the rest of Asia: it has increased the number of joint naval exercises with Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and other Asian navies, it holds an unprecedented number of high-level and strategic partnerships, and – most importantly – has shown great interest in joining a number of multilateral and regional frameworks, both as a participant, dialogue partner or observer (including ASEAN and the East Asia Summit).

Finally, one must also acknowledge the proliferation of democratic regimes in Asia since the end of the Cold War. A few decades ago, India was still an outlier, an exceptional case of democratic success and longevity in a continent marred by a variety of military and civilian authoritarianism, from Zia ul-Haq's Pakistan to Suharto's Indonesia and Park Chung-hee's South Korea. Today, while India remains exceptional in its democratic longevity, it is no longer alone because Asia is at the forefront of what Samuel Huntington would have possibly called the fourth democratic wave.

As Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines and South Korea are now all experiencing unprecedented levels of political freedom, and even Myanmar and Singapore are experimenting with democratization, it is China that is seen as the extraordinary outlier. The "Beijing model" and popularity of the so-called "Asian authoritarian capitalism" remain strong, but are suffering unprecedented scrutiny and opposition. In this scenario, the normative agenda of "values" is making a comeback and contesting the assumption that economic growth and social order can be sustained, in the long term, in an authoritarian, closed and military – or party-led political system.

At first sight, this may seem more of an advantage, than a challenge for India. After all, in a world increasingly dominated by democracies, one would naturally assume that India would reap reputational benefits, often also called "soft power". The challenge, however, resides in India overcoming its traditional reluctance to brand and promote itself as a democracy and adopt this as a factor in its external relations. As with the United States in the beginning of the 20th century, India will need to settle on what "normative" identity it wishes to play. The default option, still very popular, is to keep a safe distance from this rhetoric, especially after the "American neo-con" disaster of militarized democracy promotion. This Indian isolationist stance is often associated with a "prudent" realist India, a democratic city on the hill that refuses to impose its democratic regime as an "advantage" and a

"model". The consequent dilemma is defined thus in the report *Non-Alignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the 21ˢᵗ Century*:

> "In many ways the paradox is that precisely at the moment nations become powerful, they are vulnerable to being blindsided by their own ambition. Precisely at the moment they have an ability to shape the world, they shape it according to imperatives of power. India must remain true to its aspiration of creating a new and alternative universality." (Khilnani *et al.*, 2012: 69)

This leads us to the issue of India's strategic culture, the core tenets of its worldview and its external posture.

Strategy and Culture

Debates about strategic culture are necessarily at the intersection of the material (security) and ideational (culture) – this is obvious in the very nature of each of the two composing words: "strategy" reflecting a rather objective and planned nature, and "culture" a flexible, contingent and mutable one.

The same may be said about Indian strategic culture, in particular: it is impossible to distinguish and segment ideational and material drivers in Indian strategic thought. Scholars have tried to privilege one over the other. Instead, a more productive approach may be to look at them as mutually constitutive, ideas and imperatives both continuously shaping and replacing each other as the main driver. From this perspective, India has always been hospitable to a very cautious, prudent and realist tradition of strategic thinking. Except for pure chance, which is unlikely, how else could have its diplomacy managed to keep India relatively secure in a region plagued by hostile nuclear-armed rivals (Pakistan and China: five wars), a variety of insurgencies and separatist movements (from Kashmir, to the Naxalites and the Northeast), and many other transnational threats (Islamic terrorism, in particular)?

These many challenges and the constant task of "putting off fires" may have not allowed for the emergence of an institutionalized, consensual and integrated strategic framework. That does not mean, however, that there is no Indian strategic tradition. The debate on this question is intense and has important repercussions on how India will operate in the new Asia.

A first approach to the nature of India's strategic culture can be found in a popular report prepared by George Tanham (1992) for the RAND Corporation just after the end of the Cold War, in 1992. His assessment is unambiguous: India lacks a strategic mindset. He identifies four factors of deep continuity ("determinants") in Indian strategic thinking, all of which either geographic, historical, and cultural: South Asia as an isolated geographic entity and thus regional straightjacket responsible for Indian strategic introversion; a deep historical influence of a weak central state

authority, with a continuous cycle of integration and fragmentation of imperial powers; the lack of rigid and institutionalized strategic thinking as a reflection of Indian society's diversity and constant necessity of peaceful accommodation, assimilation and adaption; and the historical influence of British colonial rule of creating buffer states and achieve sea denial capacity to protect India's regional preponderance. He thus concludes that Indian strategic thinking is "inchoate and ad hoc (reactive) rather than precise and systematic."

His 1996 rejoinder is even more explicit: "Indians continue to be relatively neglectful of security issues and to have no institutionalized method of appraising threats and fashioning strategic responses" (Tanham *et al*., 1996: 19). This understanding has dominated Indian official, policy and public thinking since then, reflected in the popular idea that India is still in "search for a foreign policy" and lacks the capacity to develop a "grand strategy" (Pant, 2009). It thus remains a "soft state" and easy prey in the supposedly nasty and Hobbesian arena of world politics, particularly vulnerable to the idea of a formidable, authoritarian and rational China.

Other approaches are less categorical and argue that what analysts see as a "lack" of strategic thinking is actually the outcome of a variety of historical, cultural, contextual and institutional factors, as well as a conscious decision to minimize the role of force in foreign policy. For example, in *Arming without Aiming*, Cohen and Dasgupta (2012), explore how despite unprecedented access to wealth and resources after embracing economic reforms in the 1990s, the Indian state has been unable to craft a coherent strategy to efficiently use its military assets and thus improve its strategic position vis-à-vis Pakistan and China.

They argue that this is the result of a deeply embedded doctrine of "strategic restraint" based on four historical factors: the perceived benign nature of the international context and success in diffusing threats diplomatically; a budgetary bias privileging developmental concerns over defence and security concerns; an ideological aversion to using the military as an instrument of state policy; and a conscious attempt to reassure rivals by maintain a non-threatening profile and thus avoiding the security dilemma. The doctrine of strategic restraint, a policy they thus describe as "not without wisdom," and India's consequent peculiar civil-military and defense dysfunctionalities are thus attributed to mix of conscious and strategic choices, and cultural and historical factors. At the same time, however, Cohen and Dasgupta (2012: 146) question the sustainability of the doctrine given new challenges and threats, and note that "Indian policy, like Japan's, is reactive, not strategic."

There is also an important evolutionary approach, which presents post-independence Indian leadership as having been excessively idealistic, naïve and even utopian, taking unwarranted inspiration in the success of its non-violent freedom struggle. This approach presents India, and in particular Nehru, as a naïve post-

colonial actor initially drawn onto a dangerously utopian foreign policy path only to be progressively socialized (and punished, as in 1962) into the hard reality of Westphalian power politics. From this angle, India's foreign policy and strategic limitations of today are ossified remains of that post-1947 past.

This line of inquiry has most notably been developed by Sumit Ganguly (2003) and his quasi-biological narrative of an Indian foreign policy that "finally grows up" after the end of the Cold War. His three-staged evolutionary periodization informs also the scholarship of several others (*e.g.* Mukherjee and Malone, 2011). While C. Raja Mohan (2003: 261, 268) does recognize that Nehru had crafted a careful balance between idealism and realism, he does reflect the evolutionary approach by describing India's fundamental transformation during the 1990s from a "reactive power" that he metaphorically describes as a "vegetarian, slow-footed and prickly porcupine" to a "normal power" he describes as a "tiger". For Mohan (2003: 266), this is because the "centre of gravity of Indian foreign policy (…) shifted from idealism to realism in the 1990s."

A recent critique of this evolutionary school of thought is presented by Srinath Raghavan (2010: 14), who presents Nehru as a statesman "far more adroit and pragmatic than the naïf and idealist of retrospective detraction, (…) at the juncture of liberal and realist traditions." This is also the reasoning of Pratap B. Mehta (2011: 208), for whom this Nehruvian legacy has ever since offered a line of continuity to Indian foreign policy, whose driving "mindset" he describes as "cautious prudence".

Given these rather gloomy narratives and approaches to studying Indian foreign policy, security policies and strategic posture, it is therefore not surprising that, in recent years, India's academic and policy focus has been to "correct" the supposedly "lack of" or "limitations" in Indian strategic thinking and policy-making. The term "grand strategy" has proliferated into a variety of research projects, think tank reports, scholarly articles and books, and doctoral dissertations – some of which candidly acknowledging that they ambition to "invent" a "grand strategy" for the country's future.

Such exercises are often funded by government agencies and have initiated a large-scale, often also public debate on the country's strategic priorities, from its policy towards climate change, trade negotiation or relations with other major powers (Khilnani *et al.*, 2012; Sikri, 2009; Krishnappa *et al.*, 2012; for a good overview, see Schaffer, 2010). A key debate has been the role of the military and the objectives of series of required defence and security reforms – from procurement and production policies (Mukherjee, 2011) up to force allocation and projection along its borders and even abroad, beyond the region (Ladwig III, 2010).

The Quest for Autonomy

One of the most frequently cited concepts in these debates is the phrase "strategic autonomy," which also forms the core of the much-debated semi-governmental report *Non-Alignment 2.0* cited above. This revival of non-alignment as a strategy to achieve India's perennial core interest of "strategic autonomy" in New Delhi is puzzling, given that non-alignment (and associated principles such as non-interference) was, for sure, a core rhetorical concept, but only rarely implemented India during the Cold War. Four examples illustrate such discrepancies between the idea and the practice of non-alignment.

First, India's nuclear program, which slowly developed in the civil energy realm but eventually, especially after the 1970s and the 1974 test, transformed into an active military program. The 34 long years between the 1964 Chinese tests at Loop Nor and India's *Pokhran* 2 tests in May 1998 reflect the immense dilemma India faced between its stated commitment to disarmament, denuclearization, non-proliferation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the exigencies of a rising China, an uncertain nuclear program in Pakistan and a tightening international legal framework on non-proliferation, testing and supply guarantees.

A second example is that of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, in 1979, which Indira Gandhi supported implicitly. While in stark violation of its principle of non-interventionism and a blatant instance of use of force against a non-aligned nation, New Delhi succumbed to the potential benefits of a friendly Afghanistan to gain further strategic depth over Pakistan and thus further consolidate its autonomy. Similar concerns stimulated three other examples of active Indian military interventionism in the region: East Pakistan in 1971; Sri Lanka in 1987-90; and Operation Cactus in the Maldives, in 1988.

The objectives was always to secure India's regional hegemony and, at the same time, diffuse any opportunity for outside intervention by an extra-regional power, a major concern highlighted by Howard Schaffer in his work on the limits to American influence in Kashmir, and South Asia in general. This is conventionally also referred to as the "Indira doctrine," in reference to a set of principles she asserted to signal India's opposition to any outside interference in a region she wished to claim as Delhi's strategic backyard (Hagerty, 1991).

The terms of this debate changed dramatically after 1991: strategic autonomy remained as a central concern, but now in a different form. Was it possible to remain "negatively" autonomous, *i.e.* isolated from an increasing interdependent global economy? Could the objective (or myth) of self-reliance, in the economic or defense realms, still be sustained by a country that today imports more than 70% of its total energy requirements, and 90% of its oil through sea lanes?

In this new post-Cold War era, autonomy could now be ensured in two ways: by shedding the ideational and moral baggage of the Cold War, which obviously

offered severe limitations to dealing with authoritarian and resource-rich states like Myanmar or Sudan; or by diversifying the basket of economic and security partners, thus reducing the risk of depending on solely one provider, like during the Cold War. The latter is clearly winning; an approach referred to as strategic diversification, or "omni-alignment".

India's great strategic debate is far from settled, however. Three examples illustrate this. First, as highlighted in David Malone's recent work (2011), India has started to discuss its possible more positive and proactive role in global governance. Thus, instead of only throwing its weight around, can India play the role of what Robert Zoellick referred to as "responsible stakeholder" in international institutions and in the regulation of public, global common goods, such as the free trade regime or freedom of the sea lines of communication, from the straits of Ormuz to Malacca? The areas of global trade (the Doha round), climate change, and liberal interventionism (responsibility to protect) assume particular significance in this regard. While India is still reluctant to play a proactive role in any of these, the very fact that a debate has been initiated about these issues in India is an indicator of how the definition of strategic autonomy is bound to change.

Second, in relation to the security complex of Afghanistan and Pakistan, can India keep its strategic autonomy without first establishing its regional hegemony in practice and, necessarily, normalizing its relations with Pakistan? To what extent can the latent Indo-Pakistani battlefront in Afghanistan be pacified, allowing India to shift important resources to other regional fronts, with China, and beyond South Asia? Most importantly, settling the continental fronts with Pakistan (Afghanistan) and China would allow India to strengthen its Southward, oceanic profile. This has already led to massive investments in the Indian Navy, and a rediscovery of their classical strategists on the Indian Ocean (Pannikar, 1945). This is therefore an example of how economic opening and external material dependence have changed not only the substantive definition of strategic autonomy, but also the procedural mechanisms through which India seeks to achieve it.

A third example of this redefinition resides in India's policy towards China. Here, structural readings of international relations come in handy again: with a rising China across the Himalayas, and the 1990s myth of a strategic tripolar Russia-China-India alliance dismissed, India has unambiguously moved closer to the United States. One indicator can be found in the hardest realm of all in international politics: defense acquisitions – in the last five years alone, India imported as much American armament as it had in the previous 25 years altogether. This is why the nuclear cooperation deal with the United States, negotiated between 2005 and 2005, led to such unprecedented levels of political conflict and fragmentation in the Indian strategic community: to what extent is the quest for strategic autonomy endangered by such a rapprochement? Will Delhi now be an American "ju-

nior partner," increasingly dependent on Washington? Can the Chinese "threat" be dealt with without such a tilt? These are questions that continue to animate the great Indian strategic debate.

India's Strategic Autonomy in the New Asia: Four Options
Given India's strategic traditions, the current debate, and the complexities of the new Asia-Pacific security system, what possible postures can one assume New Delhi to adopt in future? Its strategic menu offers a choice of four different options.

One option is to counter-balance China through even tighter rapprochement with the United States. From a structural point of view, this is already ongoing. Compared to the relative hostility in US-India relations until the late 1980s, the post-Cold War has been one of gradual thawing of the relations, culminating in unprecedented levels of military and intelligence cooperation, including joint exercises, as well as a series of new strategic dialogues and agreements, from agriculture to education, science and technology. The 2005-08 negotiations for a bilateral civil nuclear energy agreement eventually led the United States to recognize India's nuclear status, de facto and de jure, outside the non-proliferation regime. Never before have India and the United States been so close. Their shared democratic values, now so often invoked, certainly play a role in facilitating this rapprochement, but the rise of China is certainly the main driver. While this allows India to enjoy some degree of protection under the American security umbrella in Asia, it also exposes it to the risk of further alienating China. India would also never be an equal partner in a possible Indo-American alliance, which would also perpetually expose it to risk of ending up in the worst of all scenarios: abandoned by the United States, and exposed to a belligerent, insecure and rancorous China.

A second option is to go alone and play hardball with China, seeking to contain it by working out an alliance of like-minded Asian powers. This would put India in the leading role, actively seeking out to construct a security axis of regional powers and other smaller states that share its anxiety about China's uncertain future posture. Japan assumes a strategic importance in this context – Tokyo may not be as reluctant to be a junior partner to the United States, but it shares the same Indian concerns about being abandoned by a declining America. Even if Washington does not oppose such an initiative, it would still face two major obstacles. First: the classic security dilemma. Such an autonomous pan-Asian alliance to contain China, even if thought of as being a last resort defensive mechanism against a possibly aggressive China (territorial expansion, military coercion by missiles, air and sea power, blocking sea lines of communication, increasing cyber attacks) plays the risk of being interpreted by Beijing as an offensive maneuver to isolate it. Second, it also faces a

collective action problem: who will take the leadership in crafting, coordinating and implementing such a security mechanism? All these states may be anxious about China, but they are, at the same time, also increasingly dependent on it in terms of trade and investments for sustained economic growth. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine who, if not India, would take upon such a responsibility and consequent exposure to Beijing's probable wrathful response.

A third, softer alternative, of liberal-institutionalist inspiration, focuses on the possibility of India taking the initiative to craft a pan-Asian multilateral security framework, as Europe crafted with the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Rather than a global Sino-American "G2", this would be an Asian Sino-Indian G2, lead jointly by both China and India. Such a fundamental step would constitute a new coopera-tive security order and settle the deep mistrust prevailing between several states in the region: if India and China can agree on setting up such an order, one cannot imagine why other Asian states would shy away from it. Northeast and Southeast Asia have experimented with their own mini-lateral security frameworks, but the time may now have come to integrate them into a wider "Asian security regime," maybe based on a revised version of the 1954 Sino-Indian Panchsheel Treaty, based on the five principles of mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

It is questionable whether China, at least from its current advantageous stand-point, would acquiesce to such a "Panchsheel 2.0" agreement and thus give up what it may perceive as its absolute and relative security advantage over all oth-er Asian states, India included. But it does address growing Chinese concerns to find a way to legitimize its disproportionate role and assuage anxieties among its neighbors. One of China's leading international relations scholars, Yan Xuetong (2012) notes that "for China it is not a question of what type of leadership we might want to provide. (…) What they [leadership] discuss is whether we should take on a leadership role in the first place." His idea of a Chinese leadership based on "humane authority" may well be compatible with an Indo-Chinese concert to revive the Panchsheel principles.

But could such an Asian Helsinki be reached without the participation and lead-ership of the United States? It must. Participation of the United States would fundamentally alter the balance of power and further increase the disincentives for China, already wary about America's profile in the region. In this sense, Washington's role in an Asian "G2" would have to be limited to mere sponsor-ship from the sidelines – allowing Asian states to work out their own, specific modalities of Asian security. This may sound utopian at this stage, but is a po-ssibility that may become more probable as the United States declines in relative power and adapts to its lesser role in Asia. It is also a posture the United States

may have to grow more comfortable with as it increasingly seeks to delegate its managerial duties to other states.

A fourth and final alternative on the Indian strategic menu is one that is currently quite popular in New Delhi. It focuses in the sacred quest for "strategic autonomy," which has seemingly served India so well during the Cold War. This extremely pragmatic stance focuses on introversion and what is traditionally called "internal" balancing – *i.e.* refusing "external" balancing (alliances) in favor of strengthening the domestic sources of economic, military and technological power. This refusal of power politics, often erroneously called the "Nehruvian legacy" in India's strategic thought, assumes that India will be able to separate the technical, economic dimensions of power from the security realm. For example, it assumes that India will be able to access energy resources, transport them to India, and convert them into power (whether electric, scientific or military) without engaging into security competition with China and other states. This isolationist, introvert and exceptionalist India would certainly face a series of threats and challenges, as described by Ashley Tellis (2012: 55) in his critique of the *Non-Alignment 2.0* report:

> "…the notion that Indian exceptionalism can survive by sheer force of example in a world of beasts could turn out to be excessively optimistic if not simply naive. After all, India's capacity to lead by example will be, in the final analysis, largely a function of its material success, and this accomplishment will not come to pass without strong economic, political, and military ties with key friendly powers, especially the United States."

One glaring example of how difficult this would be in practice is illustrated by the 2012 case of India's exploration of oil blocks in offshore Vietnam, which was immediately opposed by China and consequently securitized under the South China Sea dispute. The same applies to the sea lines of communication and enjoying the current freedom of navigation. New Delhi may have grown used to be a free-rider in certain areas, or may not be aware of the hidden costs that go into managing the current liberal order as we know it, but that does not mean it will continue to be able to enjoy such benefits in the future. This explains the American focus on the concept of a "transactional" relationship with New Delhi.

Which of these four options – or maybe a combination of two or more – India will eventually adopt remains uncertain. Once thing is certain, however: New Delhi is now irreversibly enmeshed into the greater security complex of the Asia-Pacific, or Indo-Pacific, and its future posture will have a dramatic, if not determinant impact on the future of the global order, as well as on the prospects of war and peace in Asia.

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