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India and the Asian Security Architecture

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For perhaps the first time in Asia's history—certainly for the first time since European colonialism—a security architecture that is continent-wide in character is finally arriving in the Asia-Pacific. This continent-wide security interdependence, which is converting the landmass called Asia into a region, is clearly linked to the rise of China. In other words, if a rising China did not exist, there would be no Asia—in geopolitical terms. However, China is rising, and every one of China's neighbors has to make this fact an integral part of its policy calculus.

The rise of China is perhaps the most important element in a fundamental shift in the global center of gravity from the Atlantic world to the Pacific world. But the transposition of the global fulcrum is a world-historic movement that has many drivers other than China: for instance, northern California now trades more with Northeast Asia than it does with the rest of North America.

The shift from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific also represents a step back from the brink of postmodernity to the historical moment of political modernity. The principal driver in Asia is still the sovereign territorial state perfecting its sovereign territoriality. From the point of view of the Atlantic world, or the Europeans at any rate, an emphasis on sovereign territoriality may seem passive, even *passé*, but that is the existential reality of the Asia-Pacific. Even Japan, easily the most “advanced” country in the Asia-Pacific, is focused on becoming a “normal” power.

The Asia-Pacific is a part of the world from which the United States has been strangely absent in recent years. In terms of its capabilities—military, economic, and cultural—America is obviously present throughout the Asia-Pacific. The US absence in

the region has largely been in policy terms, since the “global war on terror” has made the Middle East the new central theater and terrorism the focal point of American policy in much of Asia. Nevertheless, the United States remains an integral part of Asia. It is, after all, a Pacific power. There is little sense in analyzing developments in Asia without the Pacific.

The rise of China, the normalization of Japan, and the emergence of India are combining with the permanence of America to reshape the continental security order. By 2020 we will all know that we have been living in an “Americasian” century. And it is within this geopolitical context that India is developing strategies to address old and emerging security challenges. It is also within this context that India could play a critical role in the development of a new security architecture for the continent.

2020 VISION

The focus on 2020 is not for obscure ocular or numerological reasons, but rather because India by that year, at current growth rates, would be a very different place and player. Indian economic growth from 1947 to the early 1990s averaged between 1.5 percent and 3 percent annually. Between now and 2020, India will aim for annual growth rates of 8 to 10 percent. Looking at growth figures in the Indian economy over the past few years, this appears achievable: real growth of Indian GDP was 8.2 percent in 2003, 6.4 percent in 2004, and 8.1 percent in 2005. Even with an annual growth rate of 7 percent, national income would double every 10 years.

India is already the world's fourth-largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, after the United States, China, and Japan. (Purchasing power parity is based on what a nation's currency actually buys in goods and services, rather than the exchange rate against the US dollar.) With the per capita income of a middle-income country and a

population of around 1.3 billion in 2020, India would be a major contender on virtually every global diplomatic-strategic chessboard. India's security threats over the next 14 years therefore have to be seen in the light of India's emergence as a state with system-shaping capabilities and intentions.

The year 2020 is also interesting because it is a useful marker of the future relative decline of the United States. The history of the sovereign state system would suggest that hegemony is a relatively rare condition, as Christopher Layne has shown: since 1648, only France under Louis XIV and Victorian Britain achieved a state of unmatched power akin to that which the United States enjoys today. History also tells us that once attained, hegemony lasts about 25 years before other powers rise, singly or in coalitions, to challenge the hegemonic power.

Thus, India's emergence will coincide with the rise of China and the relative decline of the United States, not to mention the future place and role of Brazil and perhaps a couple of other possible power centers. In a rather obvious way, India's security challenges over the next 14 to 20 years are tied to the changing map of Asia.

OUTSOURCED SECURITY

The holy grail for Indian security policy is its quest for strategic autonomy. To state the matter starkly, India finds itself largely friendless in the world today. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, New Delhi has had relationships with many states but friendship with none. George W. Bush's visit to India in early March, the fifth visit by a US president in 60 years, manifested budding ties with the United States. But this relationship is constrained by many factors, the most important of them being that America does not regard India as a member of the "democratic core" of states.

Since India is not a part of the security community led by Washington, it cannot rely on the latter for security backup as it successfully depended for two decades on the Soviet Union. Also, India is too large to be accommodated in any security community as a junior partner. Essentially friendless, faced by powerful foes and potential adversaries, India has no option but to rely on its own capabilities. But these capabilities, while significant in certain contexts, are by no means sufficient and are prone to debilitating weakness in crucial areas.

The greatest security challenge that India's quest for strategic autonomy throws up for its policies is the country's continued dependence on foreign powers for critical technologies. India is out front of other

nations in several frontier technologies, including biotechnology. It is level with the leaders in information technology, and is among the early entrants in nanotechnology. And yet, India's technological dependence in other areas is uncomfortably evident.

This is notably the case with India's military industry, where an emphasis on self-sufficiency has always been clear. India's Ministry of Defense administers 39 ordnance factories and eight military industries involved in aeronautics, shipbuilding, electronics, earthmoving equipment, missiles, and super alloys. Since 1983, India has invested heavily in such military programs as a fighter/ground attack aircraft for in-service use between 2008 and 2010, a light helicopter, a nuclear-propelled submarine, and a main battle tank. A variety of missile programs also are in place.

However, while the missile programs are proceeding largely on schedule (the intercontinental ballistic missile program seems to have been deliberately shelved), there have been significant delays in attack aircraft and tank programs, and the advanced light helicopter is just now entering squadron service. Meanwhile, little if anything is publicly heard of the nuclear submarine program. One can reasonably expect that these indigenously produced aircraft, tanks, and submarines will not enter regular service earlier than 2015.

In the meantime, India has no option but to buy costly and sophisticated foreign weapons systems to maintain military modernization, particularly given its tense external security environment. The Indian list of arms acquisitions from abroad remains a long one.

THE NUCLEAR GATECRASHER

Technology dependence is also an issue for India's civilian nuclear program, which appears to have reached a capability plateau and would therefore benefit hugely from an infusion of technology from outside.

With its growing economy and modernizing society, India can no longer treat issues of energy solely in economic or developmental terms. India's increasing hunger for energy is evident: it now is the sixth-largest energy consumer in the world, and has one of the fastest growth rates in energy consumption. Thus, energy security has become a core challenge for India, one that will claim considerable diplomatic energy and policy attention over the next 15 years.

India currently has fourteen nuclear reactor units operating at six sites; another nine are under

construction. Under the terms of a historic civil nuclear cooperation deal with Washington brokered this year by President Bush, India will sequester 14 reactor units into its civilian nuclear energy program and place them voluntarily under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Nuclear power currently generates about 3.3 percent of India's electricity. Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. has ambitious plans to boost output to 7 to 10 percent of India's total energy-generating capacity by 2020. India plans to have eight new reactors in operation by 2008, including two Russian-designed units, with a ninth plant (a prototype fast breeder reactor) expected to come online in 2010.

But India's 14 nuclear reactors currently under operation are all small, with none having a net generating capacity of more than 202 megawatts. This is an uneconomical way in which to proceed, and is a path of diminishing returns if the ambitious target of nuclear generation capacity of 250 gigawatts, or 25 percent of India's power, is to be reached by 2050. Clearly, the only way forward for the Indian civil nuclear sector is to import technology.

A distinct but linked security challenge for India is its future role in relation to global nonproliferation and counterproliferation arrangements. India is not a member of the web of interlocking treaties, arrangements, and suppliers groups that makes up the multilateral nonproliferation architecture, including the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Missile Technology Control Regime, or the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Indeed, these are located within a normative framework that stigmatizes both India and its programs.

The fundamental problem with a normative approach to nonproliferation is that it divides states in the international system into the "gatekeepers" and those who have been turned away at the gates. The normative approach works so long as none of the excluded states has both the capability and the will to buck the system. However, this approach is next to useless in dealing with successful "gate-crashers." The central dilemma for normative nonproliferation remains: How does one deal with an excluded state that is now within the gates, short of accepting that it too is now a gatekeeper?

The so-called Proliferation Security Initiative and the Container Security Initiative, led by the United States as coalitions of the willing outside the primary treaty-based nonproliferation regime, would

benefit from India's full participation, but this might require the prior accommodation of India within the exclusive and exclusionary multilateral proliferation initiatives.

LEARNING BY DOING

A fundamental security problem that India currently confronts is the construction of a deterrence relationship with Pakistan. As very new nuclear weapons states, both are still learning the basics of nuclear deterrence. Unfortunately, nuclear deterrence is not a one-size-fits-all business in which all nuclear dyads are subject to the same systemic constraints and hence behave in similar if not identical ways.

It makes much more sense to view each nuclear dyad as *sui generis*, in which a deterrence relationship is created from the beginning. In other words, the experience of others does not ultimately matter; instead, there is learning by doing. A stable deterrence does not magically emerge if two adversary states have nuclear weapons, but rather is an edifice that must be slowly and carefully constructed.

The concept of the deterrence relationship thus becomes critically important for India and Pakistan. The military mobilization crisis of 2002 would indicate that both countries are on a steep learning curve when it comes to building a robust deterrence relationship, which must necessarily be based on the notion of partnership with the adversary to prevent and manage conflict. As an indispensable starting point, nuclear risk-reduction measures and direct communications between the national command authorities are urgently needed.

Unfortunately, Pakistan has tended to drag its feet on this issue, since a larger nuclear comfort zone for India is understandably not in Pakistan's interest. This would suggest that as long as Pakistani policy is predicated on nuclear compellence rather than deterrence—that is, leveraging its nuclear capability to internationalize Kashmir in order to force a settlement on India—a stable deterrence relationship is unlikely to emerge between the two states.

The matter is likely to get even more complicated in the 2008–2010 time frame, when India's *Agni-3* missiles, which would have the range to cover all of China's territory, are to come on line. If a stable deterrence relationship with Pakistan has not materialized by then, India would face the complex task of signaling deterrence intent to Pakistan

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and China simultaneously. The danger that New Delhi could, in that situation, inadvertently send out mixed and confusing signals to its two nuclear adversaries should be evident.

A BLUE WATER NAVY?

India's naval modernization and expansion are another issue of primary security importance. The task that India's naval institutions confront is a daunting one. India is a country of continental proportions, with one of the longest coastlines in the world. Yet India's navy today is a force in decline, with more capital ships in the process of being decommissioned than there are hulls being laid and new vessels acquired.

This force shrinkage is taking place at a time when India's maritime responsibilities and challenges are increasing. Indian naval vessels provided escort cover to American assets moving from the Straits of Malacca to the Arabian Sea during the Afghanistan campaign, played an enormously important humanitarian role after the December 2004 Asian tsunami, and continue to perform a vital anti-piracy function in the northern Indian Ocean. Thus, what is at issue is not India's present naval capability, which if anything needs significant strengthening, but rather the Mahanian vision (after Alfred Thayer Mahan, the American theorist who argued that control of seaborne commerce is critical for strategic advantage) that underlies India's naval expansion plans for the future.

In any meaningful geostrategic sense, India is a continental state, and hence a land power. This is clearly evident in the long sweep of Indian history: even the Chola dynasty of peninsular India (900–1200 CE), which dispatched naval expeditions and extracted tribute from what is today the Malay peninsula and Indo-China, was primarily a land power rather than a sea power. It is true that India was colonized by European sea power. Nevertheless, India has not faced a threat on its shores, even remotely, since 1971, nor is one likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. India's main adversaries share disputed land borders with it. This is the geographic reality of Indian power.

Over the past century and a half, the two continental states that have aspired to become sea powers, Wilhelmine Germany and the Soviet Union, both came to grief in the process of bringing their mar-

itime aspirations to fruition. And now it appears that China and India are hearing the same siren's call and beginning to plumb the same fathomless depths.

DOMESTIC TROUBLES

Through much of the 60 years of India's sovereign existence, a significant proportion of the country's million-plus army has been engaged in internal counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations. However, the internal security tasks facing India's fighting forces will shrink dramatically over the next decade, for two reasons.

First, external sponsors of terror and insurgency in India will find their maneuvering room severely constricted by the international context and Indian reaction: the 2001–2002 crisis in Kashmir clearly showed that India was willing to risk war to put a stop to cross-border terrorism. Second, as India's global profile increases, the prestige associated with "being Indian" goes up as well, boosting a sense of Indian unity. The electronic mass media also have had an important impact in augmenting a pan-India sentiment within

the country. As a continent-sized state, India has always had the ability to deal with localized dissent, using coercion and cooptation with equal efficacy and often in tandem. This ability to manage dissent will only increase in the years to come.

There is, finally, a subterranean issue that is not often conceived of as a security challenge for India, but which surely is one in a very profound way. Over a period of 17 years, India's HIV-infected population has shot up from 2 people to 5.1 million. According to official figures, which for methodological reasons almost certainly understate the problem, nearly 1 percent of India's adult population is now carrying the deadly virus. Some Indian cities and regions are already reporting more than 5 percent infection rates.

India's aspirations for the future would be significantly impaired by an HIV/AIDS epidemic. The biggest negative impact would obviously be demographic. By 2020, an estimated 64 percent of the total population should be in its working years, giving India a huge economic advantage over competitor nations burdened with larger shares of children and the elderly. However, the mean age of HIV-positive people in India is currently between 25 and 30 years. A severe epidemic, it is expected, would imply 140 million new HIV-infected persons

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by 2025, leading to a decline in India's estimated working-age population then from 932 million to 854 million.

Maintaining democracy and promoting development—and treating both as equally important and necessary—are the biggest security challenges facing India. Nearly 60 years of genuine liberal democracy in a pluralist, multicultural, continent-size setting surely represent an achievement of world-historic importance that deserves to be celebrated. This, however, goes hand in hand with a deep-rooted socioeconomic deprivation that still characterizes much of India and makes the life of many Indian citizens a miserable and perpetual struggle for survival.

Six decades after achieving independence, India has yet to create authentic public health and public education systems. When we discuss the emergence of India, the dark underside of hundreds of millions of people struggling against unbelievable odds to maintain their human dignity and achieve their full potential should not be forgotten.

THE FUTURE OF “AMERICASIA”

India's emergence, of course, cannot be considered in isolation. It is occurring against the backdrop of the rise of China. Beijing is working hard to signal to its neighbors that its rise is “peaceful,” the odyssey of a large country on the road to development rather than the onward march of a rising power.

Will China succeed in convincing its neighbors that its rise is not the twenty-first-century version of Wilhelmine Germany seeking its place in the sun? This will depend not only on China's behavior, but also on how countries like the United States, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Australia—and India—respond to China's rise.

Should we even analyze Asian responses to China's rise in balancing terms? Many Asian scholars, such as the Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani, argue that Europe's past will not be Asia's future: the rise of China would merely indicate reversion to a pre-modern and pre-European Asian order based on notions of hierarchy and a tributary relationship with China that all Asians recognize and understand.

However, if deep historical memory of Chinese ascendancy truly exists in much of Asia, India does not share that memory. The Himalayas stood in the way. Between the world-historic transmission of Buddhism from India to China and the planting of tea in the Himalayan foothills, interaction between China and India was sparse across the centuries, limited largely to merchant caravans, itinerant pil-

grims, and cultural miscegenation in Indo-China. China and India met when Zhou Enlai and Jawaharlal Nehru met; in other words, the first real encounter between the two countries was as sovereign, territorial, postcolonial states.

Thus, Asia does have to take a cue from the historical processes that over time wrought a region out of the European continent. Without aping or mimicking Europe, what can we learn from European history that is relevant to Asia? Three moments in European history are particularly interesting: the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, the 1815 Congress of Vienna, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe at Helsinki, which began in the early 1970s.

Broadly speaking, three security futures could be envisaged for Asia: a region of opposing axes and balances (the logic of Westphalia), a region managed by a *directoire* of great powers (such as the Concert of Europe that emerged from the Congress of Vienna), or a region enmeshed in a cooperative security arrangement (the Helsinki process).

THE BALANCE OF POWER

The political logic of realism, with its power balances and security dilemmas, continues to drive interstate politics in large parts of Asia. Two opposing axes of power in Asia would emerge from the rise of China and American attempts to contain Chinese power. We can be reasonably certain about New Delhi's policy preferences regarding a possible Washington-Beijing bipolarity in the future: India will not be drawn into the containment of China.

The principal reason is that India is too large to be a member of America's security community. Also, it is a security community that has not considered India's security interests as its own interests. There is a great deal of asymmetry in the way the security community of the liberal democracies continues to treat India. On the other hand, India will not become a party to an Asian alliance against the West, for the simple reason that such an axis would be led by China. India is unlikely to trade in American global hegemony for Chinese regional hegemony.

Thus, if an Asian security architecture of opposing axes were to emerge, we can foresee a new non-alignment for India. India would be a fence sitter; let us remember that India is good at fence sitting. However, this new nonalignment would be much more difficult than the first round of nonalignment was for India, during the cold war. One of the poles of the new bipolar order, China, would be a neigh-

bor with which India shares a huge and as yet unresolved border.

Also, fence sitting would be difficult to pull off this time because India, like China and the United States, would have system-shaping capabilities. India would be too big to hide but not sufficiently powerful to transcend, unwilling to bandwagon with China but also unwilling to get involved in the American balancing game. Thus, there are compelling reasons why an Asia of opposing axes and balances would be bad news for India. If that continental shape does emerge, India will once again be not just on the fence, but on the sidelines.

A second possible future would see India as a member of the board, the future *directoire* in Asia. India would be part of a few leading states together taking responsibility for order and stability in the Asia-Pacific. On the face of it, this seems an eminently sensible idea, but there are serious problems.

One problem with a *directoire* is that it either freezes up the security architecture in a manner that does not reflect dynamic changes in capabilities and interests, or alternately, it grows divided internally on the question of change versus stability. Moreover, if the *directoire* is constructed minus the United States, it would effectively constitute an anti-US axis led by China, an outcome about which India would be very hesitant.

Another problem flows from India's own experience in South Asia. Smaller states are now autonomous actors. India is three times larger, demographically, geographically, and economically, than all of the other countries in South Asia combined. This would have been overkill dominance in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Today, it does not ultimately amount to as much. It is therefore an open question whether there can even be a *directoire* in the Asia-Pacific.

A more limited and benign version of this scenario would see India guaranteeing certain public goods in this part of the world. India could keep open the sea lanes of communication from the Straits of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca, and farther afloat. This would not be membership of the board so much as participation in a neighborhood watch.

HELSINKI IN ASIA?

The third conceivable future for Asia is a cooperative security arrangement. Obviously, the development of a Helsinki-like process in Asia would depend crucially on China: it would have the capacity to make or break the process. India, however,

could play an important role in signaling and nudging China in that direction. Indeed, in the years to come we may well find China well disposed toward an Asian Helsinki process, particularly if the only alternative is bipolarity and containment.

As is the case with the first two security architectures, Asia has much to gain from Europe's experience. The Helsinki process had numerous "baskets" of issues, some pertaining to interstate relations, others to matters within sovereign boundaries. Thus, mutual and balanced force reductions and concerns about human rights violations were both part of the Helsinki process.

In Asia, it is easy to see that the internal aspect of the Helsinki process may be considerably less acceptable to Asian states than it was even to the states of Eastern and Central Europe. The states of Asia are, with some notable exceptions, young states, many of them postcolonial. They are thus likely to guard their sovereignty with greater zeal than did the long consolidated and somewhat tired states of Europe.

Also, it is argued in some quarters that Asian cultures privilege the group over the individual, order over liberty, and obligations over rights. While this argument is clearly a contentious one, we should not be surprised if many states in Asia resist the intrusive nature of the Helsinki process in what they regard as their internal affairs, including considerations of individual rights.

Constructing an Asian Helsinki process would not be easy, but neither was the original Helsinki process. And it would be well worth the effort. It would reduce the size of arsenals in Asia. It would enmesh American and Chinese—as also Indian and Japanese—capabilities in Asia within a larger cooperative process. Over time, it might lead to the evolution of a new and authentic Asian—or American—identity. It would build habits of cooperative behavior on the Asian continent.

The reconfiguration of Asia into a more cooperative structure could unfold gradually, over a 10- to 15-year period. Since this is also a time during which US capabilities would probably begin to decline in relative terms, it would be an opportune moment to actually imagine the United States becoming enmeshed in a new cooperative security process. By building robust political and economic links with both China and the United States, India could end up playing an important catalytic role in bringing both countries together in a new cooperative Asia. ■