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BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Frédéric Grare's

India Turns East:
International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry

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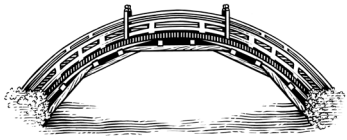

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The Elephant Looks around the Dragon

Aparna Pande

The belief in India as an Asian leader and a model for other countries in the region has been deeply ingrained in Indian thinking for centuries. The 1947 Asian Relations Conference and the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung—which served as the launching pad for the Non-Aligned Movement—advanced India's aspiration to emerge as the leader of formerly colonized nations. That hope, however, was never fulfilled. Instead, India remained bogged down in South Asian politics and security challenges, first from Pakistan and later from China. Slow economic growth also impeded India's efforts to play a greater role on the world stage and resulted in an inward orientation for more than four decades. In the early 1990s, the end of the Cold War triggered both domestic and international changes, compelling New Delhi to implement economic reforms and rebuild relations with countries in Southeast and East Asia.

India's antagonistic relationship with China has always framed both its perception of East Asia and how countries in the region view India. As India opened its economy, it sought economic partners, partly to offset the impact of growing Chinese economic and military prowess. Countries in East Asia turned to India as they looked for options beyond China. As India deepened ties with the primary military and economic power in the Asia-Pacific, the United States, it became easier to forge closer ties with countries that were U.S. allies.

While the initial pillar of the Look East policy was economic, over the last three decades India's relations with Southeast and East Asia have acquired strategic and military dimensions as well. Moreover, most countries in Asia are beginning to consider China an economic and military great power that seeks to undermine the international liberal order established by the United States and its allies at the end of World War II. Washington and its allies see India as a like-minded democratic, free-market society that will help uphold this rules-based order. The 2015 U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision on the need for a free and peaceful Indo-Pacific and India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—a strategic grouping of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—reflect this view.

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Frédéric Grare's new book *India Turns East: International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry* helps us understand how India views its relations with Southeast and East Asia and the role that the United States and China play in New Delhi's worldview. The book analyzes India's compulsions, desires, and challenges and provides many fresh insights. Though he is sympathetic to the Indian perspective, Grare maintains objectivity in this tour de force.

India Turns East is divided into four parts, with each part seeking to understand one dimension of the Look East policy. The first part of the book deals with the drivers of the policy, primarily India's relations with China and the United States. Starting with a short history of India's relationship with China, the focus of the chapter is on recent changes in Chinese policy after President Xi Jinping came to power. As Grare rightly notes, China remains "India's main security challenge today" (p. 30). New Delhi's "security concerns with China derive primarily from 'Chinese efforts to establish and expand political and security relations with the countries of the South Asia–Indian Ocean region' which India feels compelled to counter" (p. 30). Many Indian strategists argue that if New Delhi moves closer to the United States and provokes China in the South China Sea, Beijing will retaliate along the land border. Grare disagrees with this view and argues instead that "the most likely trigger for a maritime conflict between the two nations would result from a security dilemma arising from Chinese naval deployment in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal to protect Beijing's commodity supplies" (p. 34).

In the last few years, China has repeatedly made it clear that it does not accept Indian predominance in the Indian Ocean, and Chinese naval ships and even submarines have docked at ports belonging to India's neighbors (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives). As Grare notes, India "is not without assets" in the region and "commands enduring advantages in the nearby seas. It knows the physical and cultural terrain much better than China does and enjoys a much larger and stronger presence in the theatre" (p. 35). India's strategic geopolitical location and partnerships with Indian Ocean island nations (especially Mauritius and Seychelles) ensure that its "capacity to employ access denial capabilities can curb and even prevent Chinese inroads into the Indian Ocean" (p. 35).

The next chapter provides an in-depth overview of India's relations with the United States. While U.S. and Indian interests have increasingly converged on most regional issues, there are, as Grare observes, differences in how the two countries deal with China. New Delhi agrees with

Washington on the issue—Beijing's growing assertiveness—but it differs on the prescription. Sharing a land and sea border with China makes India more exposed to an attack, and this threat, combined with the asymmetry in military power, means that New Delhi is cautious.

In this context, Grare outlines three schools of thought in India on U.S.-India relations: those who see the U.S. rebalance to Asia as an opportunity for India to finally align with the United States, those who still remain skeptical and do not want India to become a U.S. pawn, and finally those who see current benefit to aligning with the United States but want to preserve India's strategic autonomy.

For now, Washington agrees that "a strong but autonomous India contributes to the U.S.'s interests in the region" (p. 48), and that the United States will help in India's military modernization without seeking a reciprocal Indian commitment. However, in the words of Grare, "these bilateral trends underpin a complex situation in which mistrust in India and frustrations in the U.S. coexist with sustained progress in the relationship" (p. 48).

The second part of the book examines India's relations in Southeast Asia, with a special emphasis on Myanmar. Grare provides a detailed explanation of the Look East policy, the domestic and international compulsions that led India to adopt this policy, and how it has evolved over the years. Grare argues that the policy's threefold objectives were to build institutional links with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), deepen bilateral ties with each country, and create a place for India in Southeast Asia to prevent the region from falling under the sway of one power, namely China.

Grare also argues that Indian skepticism about U.S. policy toward China and the fear that the United States may accept China as another superpower—the "G-2 syndrome"—have also played into New Delhi's decision to seek closer ties with Asian countries so as to have partners that balance the rise of China. He explains: "A consensus-based regime has been assumed by India to constitute its best protection against any regional hegemonic aspiration by China or any other power" (p. 48).

In the third part of his book, Grare examines India's relations with two U.S. allies, Japan and Australia. Regarding India's relationship with Australia, he argues that after decades of operating in "separate strategic spheres," there has been growing overlap between the strategic and economic spheres of both countries in the last ten years (p. 115). What prevents closer ties is how each country views the other—to Australia,

India is still a developing nation that has problems with its neighbors, has not really modernized its military, and does not have sea-denial capabilities in its own region. India "does not view Australia as a potential security provider" and is skeptical of whether Australia would jeopardize its close economic relationship with China (p. 131). According to Grare, India and Japan have more in common, as their relationship appears to offer benefits to each country. India needs Japanese investment and technology to build its economy and make itself more attractive to foreign companies, while Japan needs India as a hedge to protect itself against the rise of China and the uncertainties of U.S. policy (p. 138).

The fourth and last part of the book examines the limitations of the Look East policy and assesses the future of the India-U.S. relationship in this context. It argues that the inbuilt limitations to India's "capacity to buy political influence…in Asia" (p. 161) are a direct product of the economic strategy the country chose in the 1990s. This strategy, Grare argues, "failed to address regional integration as sufficiently as China's strategy" (p. 161).

The Look East policy began as an attempt to re-establish links with Asian countries and deal with the economic consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which left India without a superpower ally. In need of major reforms and massive investment, India decided to literally "look east," beyond its South Asian neighborhood, to that part of Asia where there was economic growth and integration. This policy toward Asia has also been aimed at preventing "the rise of a regional hegemon"—i.e., China (p. 184). It has as one of its goals the desire to "set limits on China's influence in the region" and "balance" China's economic and political power (pp. 1–2).

The importance of India's relations with its Southeast Asian neighbors was recently on full display when all ten leaders of ASEAN were present as guests of honor at India's celebration of its 69th Republic Day on January 26, 2018. Some may see this as New Delhi sending Beijing a message that India has allies and partners. There are others, however, like Grare, who argue that the desire to maintain strategic autonomy and the vast gap between India's and China's military and economic power will make India reluctant to provoke China beyond a certain point.

In summary, in this impressive book Grare offers insight into why the Indian elephant might not confront the Chinese dragon, and why it might instead be content with befriending China's East Asian neighbors for strategic and economic advantage. ◈

The Promise and Limits of Structural Explanations of Foreign Policy

Sunil Dasgupta

After the collapse of the Soviet Union cut India's strategic moorings in 1991, New Delhi looked for new anchors for its foreign policy. It found great success in the West, with its rapprochement with the United States and its accommodation into the international nuclear regime, but India's engagement of other Asian states—called the Look East policy—has seen mixed results. Frédéric Grare's new book, *India Turns East: International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry*, offers a framework in which the mixed results of the Look East policy are explained by the larger structural conditions of U.S. and Chinese power in the region.

Grare documents the vast efforts of the Indian government and its national security leaders to build the Look East policy into a strategic lever against China. He argues that India and China have been engaged in a long struggle over the leadership of Asia going back to Mao and Nehru, even fighting a war in 1962. In the 1990s, Indian leaders recognized that China's rapid economic progress was going to heighten the military threat and open the possibility of Chinese hegemony in Asia. India had originally embarked on the Look East policy to attract foreign investment from Asian states that were by then already on their way to prosperity. Motivated by the rise of China, this effort "grew rapidly into a comprehensive strategy with political and military dimensions concerning the entire Asia-Pacific region" (p. 1).

Through case studies of India's efforts vis-à-vis the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Myanmar, Japan, and Australia, Grare shows the promise and evolution of these relationships. But the book is most compelling when it discusses the limits that have circumscribed these ties. In particular, India has been outmatched by China and has failed to effectively coordinate its efforts with the United States. Similarly, Grare examines thematic cases of Sino-Indian competition in Asian trade and economics and within regional organizations where China is a looming presence. Chapter 5 of the book demonstrates that even a country like Australia, so firmly in the Western camp, has an ambivalent relationship with India because of the appeal of China's power and market. Consequently, Grare

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portrays the outcome of the Look East policy as epiphenomenal of the dynamics of the relationship between United States, China, and India.

Driven by its rivalry with China, India looked to the United States for help. U.S. political leaders who had begun to worry more about China themselves responded with vigor, transforming the U.S.-India relationship. India's Look East policy was similar to the U.S. pivot and rebalance in Asia. Despite the success of U.S.-India bilateral relations, however, Grare finds that the differences in the interests and capabilities of the two countries have hobbled their coordination in Asia. Countries in East and Southeast Asia, for example, recognize the difference in relative capabilities and thus prefer to work directly with the United States rather than work through India. India's Look East diplomacy has led the country to join regional organizations, but it has not become a net provider of security in the region. Although Grare's argument that closer coordination between India and the United States might have helped is true, the conclusion is that structural conditions proved hard to surmount.

The triangular relationship between the United States, China, and third states or regions has been the primary manner in which structuralists have seen different parts of the world for the last two decades. Those who study the foreign policies of African states see a similar U.S.-China dynamic playing out across that continent. European leaders who at one time saw in China a balance to U.S. power now fear U.S. withdrawal. Japan and India have wanted to become closer, yet the full promise of that relationship remains unrealized as the United States, China, and Japan sort out their own triangular relationship.

This structural view of the world is popular but also contested. There is a long tradition of scholars who have highlighted the domestic, ideational, and cultural roots of foreign policy.[1] Alexander Wendt's case for looking at the social makeup of international relations—called constructivism—has posed a powerful challenge to structuralists; Indian foreign policy has been explained by domestic variables as well.[2]

Grare has chosen his side in the debate, but the logic of structuralism is not always clear. As it happens, China is India's fastest-growing major trade partner. Although India has a negative trade balance with China, so do

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1 See, for example, Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

2 Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2. (1992): 391–425; and Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

many other major powers. Even as Indian national security strategists have fretted over the rising Chinese threat, Indian businesses have embraced the explosive potential of bilateral trade between the two countries.

Contrary to Grare's hostile triangle thesis, Teresita Schaffer, a former U.S. diplomat, once described the United States, China, and India as a "virtuous cycle," where efforts by one country to close the gap with a second led the third to want to move closer.[3] While the circumstances of that description have changed now, all the actors in *India Turns East* still appear to be pursuing economic engagement alongside incipient measures of military containment.

India's hedging on China is more than matched by other Asian states. South Korea and Japan need China more than ever on the North Korea issue, even if a breakthrough somehow occurs in 2018. In Southeast Asia, few states, if any, want to be forced to choose between China and the United States, let alone between China and India. A choice might become inevitable, but not without a breakdown in the region's economic ties with China, which would be catastrophic for the world economy.

Grare writes that it was India's relative weakness at the end of the Cold War—not its strength—that led Southeast Asian states in particular to want to cooperate with New Delhi, reassured that India would not be a threat. As China has become stronger since then, the logic of cooperation with India has only strengthened. In the terminology of alliance politics, India is the natural balancing partner for other Asian states; however, China is equally the natural bandwagoning partner. We do not know which side will prevail, or in the case of an economic breakdown, whether the cause will be China's rise or U.S. protectionism. Under the Trump administration, the United States appears to be taking a diminished view of Asia's place in U.S. foreign policy, offering up the prospect that Asian states might choose to bandwagon with China rather than balance alongside India.

Perhaps most important is that for the Look East policy to fulfill its promise, India needs to step up to become a provider of security in the region, which means accepting the political and economic costs of maintaining a forward naval presence and aggravating an arms race with China. While Indian defense spending is growing, Chinese military expenditure remains far greater. Furthermore, China might choose to respond to India's advancing presence in East and Southeast Asia by

[3] Teresita C. Schaffer, "Building a New Partnership with India," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2002): 41.

expanding its own already strong ties with Pakistan. Grare's book skirts past the problem of Pakistan in India's foreign policy, and specifically in its rivalry with China. This is especially puzzling in a structuralist approach, which normally emphasizes immediate military threats over longer-term challenges. If anything, China has sought to contain India via its relationship with Pakistan and so the omission is striking.

Grare states that India has been unwilling to take on the extra burdens of a more robust security policy, with attendant complaints of "Indian passivity" from its Asian partners (p. 216). Furthermore, rather than following through on the implications of his structural argument to conclude that India will be forced to change its position, he makes the case for the United States helping "India be India" (p. 217). For India to become a true balancer of China in Asia, the United States and India need to coordinate their policies and other Asian states must ask India to become a security partner. Yet it seems that the linchpin is still the ideational, domestic, and cultural character of Indian foreign policy. The book begins by placing Indian foreign policy within its structural context, but ends with international structural conditions made subject to a constructivist project, highlighting the limits of structural conditions in explaining foreign policy. ◈

How Does India's Look East Policy Look after 25 Years?

Deepa M. Ollapally

The long arc of India's Look East policy has coincided with dramatic economic and strategic power shifts in Asia. Introduced in 1991 at the end of the Cold War, Look East is no longer just a policy instrument constructed to lift the country out of an immediate foreign and economic crisis. India's re-engagement eastward initially was focused on developing trade and investment opportunities and finding new strategic partners in Southeast Asia, but it has evolved into a multilayered approach that now reaches all the way to Australia. The Look East policy today is also intertwined with the big ideas of the United States on Asia—the concept of the Indo-Pacific and the erstwhile rebalance strategy to counter the rise of China.

There is a high degree of strategic uncertainty in Asia, ranging from concerns about U.S. alliance commitments and the nature of China's ambitions to questions about what countries like India and Vietnam are willing to contribute to making sure that the regional order does not become fully China-centric. The environment is further complicated by the reality that most regional states cannot resist economic interdependence with China at the same time that they want strategic interdependence with the United States. Although none of them want to see a direct conflict between the United States and China, many do want the United States to assert its dominance. This has given rise over the last decade to some form of hedging or soft balancing against China by key regional states.

India has been no exception, but for it the contradictions have become sharper than for others. On the one hand, India has no ally in the traditional sense. It has a near obsession with "strategic autonomy" and is the only regional actor that can envision itself as a peer-competitor of China in the future. On the other hand, China's recent assertiveness in India's neighborhood, especially the Indian Ocean, is coming well before India can effectively narrow the considerable economic and military power gap between the two countries. India's Look East policy might then seem like a logical, multifaceted organizing principle to meet what appears to be a growing Chinese threat without tipping the balance decisively

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toward conflict. But then, are we asking too much of Look East (or the Act East policy, in its new avatar) and overestimating what the policy can realistically deliver?

Given the enormous uncertainty and ongoing power shifts in Asia, it takes someone with intimate knowledge of India and international security to successfully chart the long course of the Look East policy in a way that explains how it interacts with both regional actors and the United States and affects regional security dynamics and architecture. Frédéric Grare's new book, *India Turns East: International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry,* provides a comprehensive and insightful account of the Look East saga and what the policy can and cannot be expected to do for India as well as its partners. His main focus is on the India-U.S.-China triangle and whether the Look East policy can be an effective instrument to address Indian concerns about China. Other important considerations are how congruent Indian and U.S. objectives are and to what extent the Look East policy and rebalance strategy are complementary. The book is thoroughly researched and carefully argued, giving alternative explanations a good sounding along the way.

The timing of the book is somewhat unfortunate, given that the Trump administration has now put the rebalance in abeyance, if not jettisoned it altogether. The new National Security Strategy announced in December 2017 presents an Asia policy that is clearly more militarily edged than the rebalance. The changes in the U.S. political circumstances could call into question some of Grare's findings and recommendations. To his credit however, the book's most important recommendations remain quite pertinent, even if made more demanding under President Donald Trump. Grare rightly warns against the United States "overmilitarizing" its relations with India for a variety of reasons. This is an excellent recommendation that should hold even as the National Security Strategy essentially concludes that China is already a "revisionist" power seeking to "project power worldwide" and calls on India to be a "stronger strategic and defense partner" for the United States.

Grare's conclusion is sound because he understands the mixed history of the U.S.-India relationship so well. While Washington's sharper characterization of China is no doubt welcome to India, it is equally true that New Delhi remains loathe to join any open containment of China with the United States and its treaty allies. This long-standing reluctance on India's part is a structural (and I would add ideational) limitation to U.S.-India defense ties. Grare offers a compelling discussion on how the structural

impediment plays out between the U.S. rebalance and the Look East Policy. He correctly notes that the latter "is an attempt to neutralize China by inserting India into a web of relationships while hyphenating its own strategic interests to those of the United States without ever losing its autonomy" (p. 201). Without a direct military conflict between India and China, which Grare and most observers find unlikely in the short term, India's attachment to strategic autonomy and aversion to alliances will not change.

We can surmise that although the new National Security Strategy strongly implies that the United States will now seek to actively contain a revisionist China (rather than counter and manage an assertive China, as the Obama administration's rebalance strategy sought to do), India would still prefer to neutralize China rather than try to contain its rival. This is because India wants to leverage the U.S. relationship against an increasingly assertive China, but at the same it is keenly aware of the need to avert any overt conflict with its much more powerful neighbor, especially one stimulated by a Sino-U.S. confrontation. The latter outcome could lead to a permanent Sino-Indian rupture, seriously complicating India's security calculus and potentially derailing the country's economic growth.

In Grare's telling, the Look East policy has created a web of relationships for India that keeps expanding and multiplying. He describes the policy as having sprung from a combination of economic and strategic imperatives, along with a desire to reclaim India's lost status in Asia during the Cold War years. One gets the impression from the focus of the subsequent discussion that Grare gives much greater weight to the strategic, which can be challenged. India's security and military ties with Southeast Asia remain undeveloped and rhetorical. For example, despite efforts, India's arms exports to the region are almost zero.

Over several chapters, Grare offers an extensive discussion of India's relations with each country that falls into the Look East ambit in Southeast Asia and East Asia. The list is exhaustive and detailed (leading to exhausting reading at times) and includes assessments of India's lesser studied relationships with countries like Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, and Australia. The book's best analysis, however, is of the India-U.S.-China triangle. Grare displays a fine-tuned understanding of the strategic mindsets of India and the United States and of how China figures into their bilateral relationship. He is correct to point out that it is at the multilateral level where we find some of the biggest differences between India and the United States, as well as the biggest commonalities between India and China.

Another triangle growing in importance and deserving of greater attention is the India-U.S.-Japan relationship, which can also demonstrate the resilience of the Look East policy, especially on the India-Japan leg. This is because the strategic and economic aspects of the policy come together so well in their bilateral diplomacy, epitomized by the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. This initiative not only stands as a soft strategic parallel to China's Belt and Road Initiative but also could serve India's and the Indian Ocean littoral states' critical need for infrastructure connectivity and integration into regional and global supply chains.

The longevity of the Look East Policy, adopted by both the Congress Party and Bharatiya Janata Party, is itself a testimony to its utility for Indian policymakers. It could be argued that Look East is an especially useful discursive foreign policy tool—an idea that does not figure much in Grare's analysis. As for one of his central questions about how effective the policy will be as a complement to U.S. strategic interests, Grare argues that its success will ultimately depend on how quickly India is able to reform economically and institutionally to make itself more attractive as a partner to the United States.

It is indeed welcome to see that Grare ultimately circles back to the economics of the Look East policy in his conclusion, despite seeming to privilege the strategic drivers in much of his earlier discussion. One could make a strong argument that the leading edge of India's strategic orientation eastward continues to be economics, even under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has put forward a more forceful vision for India to meet the growing China threat. The fact is that becoming a developed country remains India's foremost ambition, strategic flux or not. This will require deft balancing to take advantage of the benefits of the U.S. security partnership without incurring unacceptable costs of conflict with China triggered by that same partnership, which could knock India off its upward trajectory. In *India Turns East*, Grare offers a masterful exposition of this critical triangle and India's dilemma. ◈

Fair Winds, Heavy Burdens: The Limitations of India's Turn East

Andrew Small

Where many authors set out to magnify the importance of their subject matter, Frédéric Grare's *India Turns East: International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry* aims to define its limits. The book is a comprehensive look at the confluence of factors that have both driven and constrained India's efforts to regain its historic status as a player on the wider Asian strategic stage. It traces the shift from India as a "politically suspect, economically unimportant, and, at times, even militarily threatening" (p. 181) power in Southeast Asia, skeptical of ASEAN, aligned with the Soviet Union, and distant from the United States and its allies, to the current "unprecedented degree of goodwill [India] is receiving" (p. 215). Yet perhaps the book's central concern is that India risks failing to capitalize on this shift. Grare is a natural skeptic, and much of the book's value comes from his digging beneath the surface of supposed diplomatic and economic breakthroughs to find the persistent divergences in strategic outlook, the failures of execution, and the structural issues that still prevent India's Act East policy from achieving as much as the benign conditions for it merit.

India Turns East was largely written before the ascendancy of Donald Trump, but developments over the last year have amplified rather than undermined the book's principal claims. Grare's overarching contention is that while regional anxieties about China's rise have provided the crucial impetus for India's burgeoning relationships, New Delhi's countervailing efforts fall far short of the stakes, both militarily and economically.

On the security front, this is partly attributed to India's caution. Grare cites Japanese officers complaining that "it is almost impossible to plan for any meaningful naval exercise with their Indian counterparts since they refuse to consider any scenario that appears confrontational towards China" (p. 147). The criticism only partly holds true. The intensification of Sino-Indian competition in the last couple of years has already resulted in some of that caution being cast off. More importantly, as Grare notes earlier in the text, it has been New Delhi's deftness in navigating relations with Beijing that has made it possible for many Asian states to deepen ties with India without facing a zero-sum political choice. A sharp acceleration in

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the competitive dynamics between Beijing and New Delhi will make India a more attractive partner to some, but most states in the Asia-Pacific are still trying to navigate a healthy relationship with all the region's major powers. If that proves impossible, ties with India will more often than not be the ones that suffer. In that sense, New Delhi's current efforts to reach a revised *modus vivendi* with Beijing in the aftermath of the Doklam standoff are also a way to ensure that India's influence in East Asia can continue to grow unimpeded. Given the limitations of India's current capacity to project power in the Asia-Pacific, gaining real leverage over China through an expanded security role is still a long-term goal. In the short term, India remains "unlikely to solve the challenges presented by Beijing to China's other neighbors" (p. 205) and is focused on fending off the growing Chinese strategic presence in its traditional sphere of influence in South Asia.

The principal thrust of Grare's critique, however, is directed at the economic underpinning of the Act East policy. Some of the obstacles that India faces are the residue of older strategic choices. After the war with China on the two states' border in 1962, India's leadership "deliberately decided not to develop the region in order to better ensure its defense against Chinese penetration," meaning that "until recently, the Indian northeast has been more a buffer zone…than a gateway" (p. 92), all the more so given the insurgencies that have racked the region. This at least is in the process of being remedied, with the Modi government making even more significant efforts than its predecessors to place the northeast at the heart of regional connectivity initiatives. India has also acknowledged and sought to address the problematic reputation of Indian companies for being "slow in implementing their projects" (p. 101), which continues to dog New Delhi's attempts to pitch an attractive alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Yet the more important problems run deeper. Grare contends that "the primary hurdle India is faced with…is the structure of its own economy" (p. 101). While its "size and potential" continue to make India an attractive partner, China has emerged as "the pivot of the Asian export platform," whereas India's manufacturing sector "has not integrated with Asian production networks" (p. 171). While New Delhi's criticism of Chinese debt traps and opaque contracts may be well-founded, China's deep economic integration in the region primarily reflects the fundamentals of its reform process rather than a strategic gambit. When the book was written, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) at least provided a source of external pressure on India in this regard: in the absence of further reform

and opening, India risked being left out of the advanced, high-standard economic club that the United States and Japan were building. With the U.S. withdrawal from the pact last year, the perceived costs of Indian inertia in trade policy are less acute, even though it arguably acts as a greater drag on India's strategic position in Asia than any other single factor.

Another theme that runs through the book is that while a stronger U.S.-India relationship may once have helped deepen India's relationships in the Asia-Pacific—not least with U.S. allies from which it was estranged—anxieties about the United States' future role in the region are now doing as much to push countries toward New Delhi. This is a question of U.S. resolve rather than capabilities: "The United States is viewed with increasing concern due more to uncertainties regarding its resolve and commitments to its existing alliances than any fear over its premature power decline" (p. 85). To say that these concerns have grown since November 2016 would be a considerable understatement. This leaves India in an advantageous position. The Trump administration has privileged and deepened its relationship with New Delhi. Despite occasional moments of presidential oddity over Harley Davidsons, Afghanistan, and climate finance, India has been one of the few areas of foreign policy on which there is genuine consensus across the administration. But India has also been a beneficiary of the uncertainty facing U.S. allies who are dealing with an assertive Beijing and a highly unpredictable Washington. If a long-standing concern on New Delhi's part was that an excessively enthusiastic Act East policy may appear to be taking place at the United States' behest, now there is a queue of manifestly eager partners desperately looking for additional sources of long-term stability in the region. A vivid manifestation of this was India's *coup de theatre* in having the ten ASEAN heads of state and government attend its Republic Day celebrations in January.

But by far the most important regional ally for India's turn east is Japan. The book's skeptical analysis again gives some reason to pause, as it notes the "sharp contrast between the excellence of the political relationship, the broad political consensus in Japan about the strategic importance of India, and the actual substance of the relationship" (p. 146). Yet this is one instance where developments in the last couple of years feel as if they have outpaced Grare's measured take. As strategic economic issues in the region loom larger—with the Belt and Road Initiative consuming ever more oxygen—the Indo-Japanese partnership has become one of the few effective counterpoints to China's efforts, setting the pace for other powers' responses rather than lagging behind them. Japan also provides a

lesson: in light of the unique strategic threat posed by China's rise, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made difficult, and at times unpopular, domestic political choices to ensure that Japan is in a position to meet this challenge. This has included overcoming decades of protectionist policies to agree to both the TPP and a free trade agreement with the European Union—the trade architecture that provides the best promise of an alternative to Chinese rules and standards. Could India do likewise and position itself at the heart of a deeper, higher-standard economic integration in the region? Grare's excellent book provides both the reasons to hope so and the reasons to fear that the answer is "no." ◈

Author's Response: From Isolation to Loneliness?

Frédéric Grare

India's foreign policy has experienced dramatic changes in the last three decades. As underlined by Aparna Pande, "the importance of India's relations with its Southeast Asian neighbors was recently on full display when all ten leaders of ASEAN were present as guests of honor at India's celebration of its 69th Republic Day on January 26, 2018." This would have been unthinkable 25 years ago. At the end of the Cold War, India was an isolated country in Asia. It no longer is. Yet reversing the trend of isolation took more than a patient rapprochement effort with each and every Asian country. The process followed an economic and strategic rationale that evolved over time under the dual influence of India's own economic development and the gradual shift in the Asian balance of power to favor China, compelling India to look beyond the confines of its traditional economic policy and diplomacy. The formulation of the Look East policy was a complex process with multiple phases, which is reflected in the variety of perceptions found in the reviewers' comments.

Sunil Dasgupta believes that the underlying argument of *India Turns East: International Engagement and U.S.-China Rivalry* is that India's Asia policy is epiphenomenal of the triangular ties between India, China, and the United States. This interpretation calls for a nuanced answer. In my view, India's Asia policy has a dynamic of its own. The policy does make economic sense, irrespective of its strategic dimension. However, as the U.S.-China rivalry in Asia grows, the triangular relationship is indeed taking on a greater relative importance in the shaping of large parts of India's Asia policy to the point of challenging some of the assumptions on which the strategic and institutional dimensions of the policy are based. The growing polarization of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the challenge to ASEAN centrality, understood as a consensus-based decision-making process, is such an example. Yet the India-China-U.S. triangle does not turn these dimensions into epiphenomena. Large parts of the policy—notably, its entire economic dimension—have never been dependent on such considerations, even though they do have an impact on

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the triangular relationship through affecting India's capacity to increase its military might and political influence.

Seen from that angle, the question of whether India should become a net security provider is much less relevant than the issue of India's capacity to become one. The latter is a different and much more dynamic argument, related not only to India's capacity to conduct reforms but also the pace at which it could do so. This question cannot be easily answered in a fast-evolving environment in which the sustainability of the current economic, political, and even military trajectories, including China's, can also be questioned.

Indeed, as rightly observed by Deepa Ollapally, "India would still prefer to neutralize China rather than try to contain its rival." The focus of the book is primarily on the strategic domain rather than economics and politics. But the tension between these three realms is in fact at the core of not just the relationship between India and the United States but also the never-ending redefinition of India's own hierarchy of priorities. Strategic considerations and concerns about the well-being of the population are in constant competition under the influence of an ever-changing international environment.

The history of India's Asia policy over the past 25 years reflects this dialectic between domestic and international concerns. When in 1992 the Narasima Rao government launched the Look East policy, the objective was to reform an economy, the insufficiencies of which had been made unsustainable by the collapse of the Soviet Union—a strategic earthquake of sorts. All of a sudden, India stopped benefiting from the preferential trade terms it had established with the Eastern bloc while also facing the economic shock generated by the 1991 Gulf War. From 1992 to 2003, New Delhi's focus was on economics. Improving India's trade and attracting FDI from capital-rich regional economies became the primary objective of Indian diplomacy in Asia. It was not until 2003 that the scope of this approach was geographically and thematically expanded to the Asia-Pacific and security issues. This reorientation of the Look East policy resulted from the need to take into account the strategic consequences of India's economic performance.

In 2011, in the context of the U.S. rebalance to Asia, the policy assumed a new strategic significance when then secretary of state Hillary Clinton

called on India "not just to look East, but to engage and act East as well."[1] As soon as he was elected in May 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed the name of the policy from Look East to Act East to convey the sense of a new voluntarism, without changing either the objectives or the framework of the policy. Indeed, if India needed to grow closer to the United States and its Asian partners, it still intended to do so on its own terms. To accomplish this, India had to focus on further reforming its economy—no longer only as a way to promote the economic survival and well-being of its citizens but also to support its strategic efforts. The domestic impediments to faster economic growth once again became the primary concern. Like all foreign policies, the Look East policy starts and finishes at home.

Andrew Small, therefore, rightly asserts that the book's main criticism of the Look East policy is focused on the economic underpinning. India inherited its economic architecture from the Cold War. The country has since then tried to reform, but has so far been unable to close the gap with China and is unlikely to do so soon, unless China's own economy were to experience a dramatic downturn. This is in itself important, but the argument is perhaps as much about managing expectations as about criticizing India's economic inefficiencies.

Development is an incremental—and often slow—process in democratic countries, which are by definition bound to take their population's concerns into account. The issue of connectivity, underlined in the context of India's relations with Myanmar, illustrates the argument for incrementalism. Despite the occasional dysfunctionalities of Indian state-owned companies in Myanmar, the overall Indian strategy to penetrate the country's economy is perfectly rational. But this strategy will take time to mature in a country where the economic space is already occupied by India's rival, China, as well as by India's partners, in particular Japan and the United States. Similarly, the model of economic reform chosen by India has so far resulted in much less integration into the regional economy than China has accomplished, but this approach was primarily aimed at meeting the needs of the Indian population. As debatable as this choice may be over the longer term, it has weighed heavily on India's decisions regarding its economic policy.

India's economic choices are reflected in both its diplomacy and strategic orientations. Its preference for membership in inclusive organizations as well as for consensus-based regimes reflects a willingness to manage China

[1] Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks on India and the United States: A Vision for the 21st Century" (speech, Chennai, July 20, 2011) ~https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/07/168840.htm.

collectively in a nonconfrontational manner, while in its spectacular, yet cautious, rapprochement with the United States, New Delhi has always made sure that it would not be pushed into an unwanted confrontation with Beijing. Indian decision-makers have fared quite well at this so far and in the process have contributed to the stability of Asia and diminished the United States' burden. It is, therefore, in the U.S. interest for India's asymmetry with China to remain at a manageable level. Hence, the United States needs to "help India be India": to assist India in exercising a role commensurate with its potential without imposing on the country models of development and strategic considerations that its economy, history, and geography make politically unacceptable and strategically absurd.

However, India, like the rest of the world, has entered a new era. All the reviews have in common the regret, implicit or explicit, that the period considered by the book stops in November 2016, just before Donald Trump was elected. Since then, they argue, India's relationships with its Asian partners, as well as with the United States, have intensified and have generally been marked by less hesitancy. After Trump's election, Prime Minister Modi did indeed seek a closer rapprochement with the United States while at the same time conducting a very proactive policy of engagement with the rest of Asia, including China. On the U.S. side, nobody in the Trump administration questions the value of the relationship with India, and there even appears to be a strong degree of continuity with the Obama administration. But the intensification of India's engagement with the rest of Asia tells us that New Delhi is seeking more than just continuity. This is of course the consequence of China's assertiveness in Asia—and more specifically in South Asia and the entire Indian Ocean region. But it also indicates growing Indian anxiety regarding the U.S. commitment to the security of Asia.

Therefore, any attempt by India to become closer to the United States must be accompanied by a parallel attempt to engage in closer cooperation with other Asian partners. In fact, this cooperation is now consubstantial with the rapprochement with the United States, almost reversing the dynamic that prevailed in the early 1990s when the rapprochement with the United States de facto conditioned cooperation with other Asian partners. The more India shows its willingness to share the burden of regional security, the more likely it is to convince the United States of its strategic worth and the easier cooperation will be. More than ever, India is "looking east to look west."

There is, moreover, a qualitative change in the relations between the United States and India under Trump. As rightly observed by Small, Trump's refusal to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership diminished pressure on India to reform. But the net result for India is increased isolation in its dealings with the United States. The Trump administration is trying to conduct its foreign policy—in Asia and elsewhere—as a series of bilateral relationships in which the vast asymmetry of power in the United States' favor will allow it to prevail. Interestingly, Trump's foreign policy follows the pattern of behavior that has characterized for decades the foreign policy of hegemonic yet insecure regional powers, be it India or China. For India, this increases the cost of the U.S. partnership for no additional security guarantees. The irony of the bilateral relationship under Trump is that the apparent strategic convergence between the two countries hardly hides their growing trust deficit. ◈