STRATEGIC ASIA 2017–18

POWER, IDEAS, AND MILITARY STRATEGY
in the Asia-Pacific

Edited by

Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills

India

Challenges for India's Military Strategy: Matching Capabilities to Ambitions?

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Seattle and Washington, D.C.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter examines India's dominant military strategy, discusses how evolving requirements may induce changes in the country's thinking, and assesses the adequacy of this strategy in terms of its national ambitions.

MAIN ARGUMENT

India's security orientation has traditionally been continental, focused on internal unrest and external threats across contested land borders with Pakistan and China to the detriment of maritime concerns and expeditionary options. China's military expansionism, Sino-Pakistani cooperation, evolving regional nuclear dynamics, and other factors, however, are altering the strategic environment. Furthermore, India's ambitions to be a leading power on the global stage and the expectations of other international actors (not least the U.S.) for India to contribute as a regional "net security provider" impose substantial demands on Indian military capabilities. Despite its many strengths and significant potential, India will be challenged to respond to these new circumstances and objectives while still attending to its existing problems.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The persistence of India's traditional internal and external security threats means that changes in its dominant military strategy will be slow and incremental. It will be difficult for India to serve as a net security provider without the ability to deploy at least a subset of world-class military formations with significant reach and endurance.
- While India's enhanced military capacity can benefit security in the Indian Ocean region, it will excite Pakistani concerns and could lead to increased Sino-Indian friction in the maritime domain as well as on land. The growing deployment of nuclear weapons at sea will be especially challenging.
- The U.S. will be in a position to support increases in India's capabilities through sustainment and expansion of military exercises, strategic exchanges, and defense sales, but this will be a long-term investment requiring continued strategic patience.

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India's rise will be one of the major factors shaping the world's geopolitical landscape in the near to medium term. The pace may vary, but barring war, a drastic economic downturn, or an environmental catastrophe, the elevation of India to the stature of a leading power, ongoing since the economic reforms of the early 1990s, seems inexorable and is already generating reverberations in South Asia, in the greater Indo-Pacific region, and across the globe.[1] This evolution is in accord with long-standing national ambitions for India to assume its "rightful place" in the world order with an essential voice as a permanent member of a revised UN Security Council and other institutions of global governance.[2] Furthermore, many features of modern India argue for its increased regional and global influence, specifically its location along some of the world's most important maritime trade routes, its position as one of China's largest neighbors, its large and youthful population

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The author wishes to thank Walter C. Ladwig III, Shashank Joshi, the editors, and an anonymous outside reviewer for insightful recommendations. The views expressed in this chapter are solely those of the author and do not represent the policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

[1] Shivshankar Menon, "India Will Not Become a Great Power by Loudly Proclaiming Its Intentions," *Wire* (India), November 22, 2015; and Ashley J. Tellis, "India as a Leading Power," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 4, 2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/04/04/india-as-leading-power-pub-63185.

[2] "PM's Statement to the Media with Japanese Prime Minister," Prime Minister of India and His Cabinet, December 12, 2015; and "UNSC Permanent Membership: India Offers to Temporarily Give Up Veto Power," *Indian Express*, March 8, 2017.

(predicted to surpass China's within a decade), its democratic political culture, and especially its impressive economic performance.

Particularly pertinent to this chapter is India's military potential. It has the world's third-largest military, behind only China and the United States, and possesses a demonstrated nuclear weapons capability. India, however, has traditionally approached questions of military force with reticence: its dominant strategy has been conservative, and its efforts have been hampered by governmental institutions unsuited to the task of managing "the acquisition of great-power capabilities."[3] If one adopts the view that countries aspiring to great-power status must "demonstrate mastery over the creation, deployment and use of military force in the service of national objectives,"[4] one must ask how India's considerable military potential relates to the promotion and protection of its national interests. This is not simply a case of India responding to its threat perceptions; rather, the country must cope with new circumstances that challenge its historically dominant strategy by translating its potential into usable military capacity in support of the role it envisages for itself in the Indo-Pacific and around the globe.

Previous *Strategic Asia* volumes examined India's national power, including military strength, and the strategic culture that informs the country's international behavior. In the 2015–16 volume, Rajesh Rajagopalan argued that India's potential power, despite numerous advantages, is "unrealized" because of political dysfunction and pervasive bureaucratic inefficiency.[5] Ian Hall's chapter in last year's volume on strategic culture stressed the persistence of Nehruvianism as the guiding tradition in Indian foreign policy, in particular shaping views on the utility of military force. Although other intellectual viewpoints now influence Indian behavior, Hall concluded that New Delhi's actions will be characterized by strategic restraint for the foreseeable future. "Status-seeking" and a desire for "recognition of civilizational greatness," however, will also continue to be important components of India's worldview.[6]

The current chapter builds on these assessments to analyze India's key strategic problems and consider the ways in which its national capabilities

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[3] Ashley J. Tellis, "Future Fire: Challenges Facing Indian Defense Policy in the New Century" (speech presented at the India Today Conclave, New Delhi, March 13, 2004).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Rajesh Rajagopalan, "India's Unrealized Power," in *Strategic Asia 2015–16: Foundations of National Power*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research [NBR], 2015), 160–89.

[6] Ian Hall, "The Persistence of Nehruvianism in India's Strategic Culture," in *Strategic Asia 2016–17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills (Seattle: NBR, 2016), 140–67. See also Teresita C. Schaffer and Howard B. Schaffer, *India at the Global High Table* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), chap. 4; and Manjari Chatterjee Miller and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "Pragmatism in Indian Foreign Policy: How Ideas Constrain Modi," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (2017): 27–49.

and strategic culture combine to shape the military strategies it has adopted to address them. The chapter begins with an overview of India's strategic challenges and plausible military responses in the past before proceeding to an examination of why India chose manpower-intensive, continentally focused, conservative strategies with relatively low-technological content and minimal expeditionary capacity. India's situation, of course, is not static, and the analysis then proceeds to explore how the country's strategic environment is changing or could change and whether its military strategies and capabilities suffice to satisfy its ambitious geopolitical aims. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications that India's chosen strategies are likely to have for regional stability and U.S. policy interests.

Security Challenges: External and Internal

India has had to contend with significant security challenges in both the external and internal domains. China and Pakistan have been and remain the preeminent external threats, with Pakistan generally the most salient of the two. Though Pakistan is smaller and less militarily powerful, decisive elements of the state harbor a revisionist agenda that seeks to overturn the territorial status quo in the subcontinent by force or coercion through acquisition of all or a substantial portion of Indian Kashmir. At the same time, Pakistan also endeavors to retain a level of near-parity with its larger neighbor by retarding India's progress. These aims, especially the desire to take possession of Indian Kashmir, have led to three of the four India-Pakistan conflicts (1947–48, 1965, and 1999) and provide the rationale for creating numerous anti-India militant groups, which have employed terrorism and insurgency against the Indian state for 30 years.[7] Absent territorial change, Pakistan hopes, at a minimum, to mire India's large army in domestic conflicts, thereby staving off what it believes to be a standing Indian desire to destroy the Pakistani state.

The historical, linguistic, and cultural linkages between the two countries and Pakistan's support for jihadi organizations make the Pakistani threat both immediate and visceral. In contrast, since the 1980s, India has regarded China as a more theoretical and distant danger. This relative arrangement of threats has been changing over the past decade, however. The passion associated with Pakistan remains, but the prominence of China in New Delhi's threat perceptions has grown, owing to its increased international

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[7] C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); T.V. Paul, *The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Stephen P. Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

assertiveness, its tightening ties with Pakistan, and material improvements in the transportation infrastructure in Tibet.[8]

Beyond the two rivals with which it shares land borders, India has had to include its maritime frontier and the possibility of more distant obligations in its calculations. Other than ad hoc responses to local situations and occasional rhetoric, however, India has suffered from "sea blindness," historically allocating only minimal resources and policy attention to maritime security.[9] Similarly, it has treated out-of-area operations (almost exclusively under the UN flag) as requirements that do not demand any particular strategic investment beyond the maintenance of routine army and navy capabilities.

On the domestic front, India has faced serious challenges combatting insurgency, terrorism, and communal violence. Many of these conflicts continue to simmer and flare today. Despite an enormous federal paramilitary establishment intended to supplement local police, these situations often demand the employment of the regular army. At present, the army's principal commitment is in the Indian-administered portions of Kashmir and in India's northeastern states, but it has been deployed in Punjab and elsewhere on many occasions, often for extended periods of time. These missions represent a significant distraction from the army's foundational task to "preserve national interests and safeguard sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of India against any external threats by deterrence or by waging war."[10] Furthermore, Pakistan's support for militancy and terrorism in India greatly complicates New Delhi's responses to domestic security problems. China has also provided backing for Indian militants in the past and could do so again should bilateral tensions spike for a prolonged period. Although many of India's domestic security problems are homegrown, these cross-border connections make the resolution of internal violence significantly more difficult and create tinderboxes where insurgency or terrorist incidents could escalate to the level of interstate conflict on short notice.

The Evolution of a Dominant Strategy

India's colonial history and choices made in its earliest independent years continue to exert a powerful influence on New Delhi's strategic thinking in addressing security challenges. Upon gaining independence from Great Britain in 1947, India had three broad options in formulating a grand

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[8] Shivshankar Menon, "As China's Ties with Pakistan Deepen, India Needs a Strategy to Mitigate the Fallout," *Wire* (India), July 11, 2016.

[9] C. Raja Mohan, "Choppy Waters, Unsure Navigator," *Indian Express*, March 7, 2017.

[10] Headquarters Army Training Command, "Indian Army Doctrine," 2004, part 1, 9.

strategy as it adjusted to its position as a sovereign state in a world system overshadowed by the nascent Cold War. The first option would have been to align itself with either the Communist bloc dominated by the Soviet Union or the anti-Communist Western powers led by the United States. Having just emerged from two centuries of foreign rule under a "Western" empire and determined to assert its autonomy, India, led by its first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, consciously rejected the alignment option as inconsistent with its cultural heritage, moral outlook, and future potential. Neutralism, the second option, was likewise spurned as inappropriate, given India's historical greatness and the global role its leaders expected the country to play in the post–World War II era. Wending a path between these two poles, Nehru crafted a policy of "nonalignment" intended to grant India an active role in the international system. He then employed that system to advance Indian interests and over time placed India in a leadership position among developing states in the Non-Aligned Movement.[11] The nonalignment concept, combined with India's colonial past, Nehru's Fabian socialist proclivities, and pragmatic policy concerns, frequently led to India tilting toward the Soviet Union or at least tolerating aggressive Soviet behavior. But New Delhi always kept some distance from the Kremlin; the Indian military, for instance, was never a Soviet clone, as some Arab states were, even though it was largely equipped with Soviet weaponry. Although the Cold War ended a quarter of a century ago, the allure of nonalignment lingers in India, now manifesting itself as the determination to maintain "strategic autonomy" in a multipolar world order.[12]

Having opted for nonalignment as a grand strategy, India had to adopt a national military strategy to account for the internal and external threats outlined above. The internal threats were multifarious and pernicious, ranging from law-and-order challenges associated with communal violence among India's multiethnic population to outright rebellion, especially in the northeast. Despite a growing profusion of police and paramilitary organizations, the army remained the state's ultimate resort in many situations. Externally, India had to contend with threats from Pakistan and China along lengthy and unsettled borders, giving its security strategy a decidedly continental focus. Although maritime security received frequent rhetorical attention, the navy was not a priority, and India's brief ground force forays to Sri Lanka (1987–90)

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[11] Schaffer and Schaffer, *India at the Global High Table*, 14–30, 65–68.

[12] Nonalignment's most recent incarnation is a policy monograph prepared by respected scholars and former senior government officials. See Sunil Khilnani et al., *Nonalignment 2.0* (New Delhi: Center for Policy Research, 2012). For a critique, see Ashley J. Tellis, "Nonalignment Redux: The Perils of Old Wine in New Skins," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 10, 2012. Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has been using the term "plurilateral" to characterize Indian thinking. See Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, "Indian Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's Remarks," Carnegie India, April 6, 2016.

and Maldives (1988) were "lesser included" missions, not core tasks. On the other hand, Nehru and his successors regarded support for UN peacekeeping as essential to their visions of India's place in the world, and India became one of the largest and most frequent contributors to blue-helmet missions. These, too, were within the general compass of the Indian Army's capabilities, requiring only some specialized pre-deployment training, not a major reorientation of strategy.

Given these broad military requirements, New Delhi could select from a spectrum of national military strategies to protect and promote its interests. On the low end was a "people's war" philosophy based on absorbing enemy invasions and fighting back with guerrillas, stay-behind parties, and regular formations largely composed of light infantry. At the other end of the spectrum was the option of constructing almost from scratch a smaller but much more mobile, mechanized army reliant on agile organizations combined with heavy injections of technology and modern hardware. India, however, developed a compromise strategy between these two extremes. This was founded on static frontier defense by large infantry formations backed up by limited mobile reserves to regain any terrain lost to an invader and to seize pieces of the enemy's territory for use as bargaining chips in the negotiations that were expected to ensue at the end of conflict. Notably, all these options privileged the ground forces. The air force was treated as an adjunct to the army's operations and the navy as an ancillary holding and harassing force. Both of the latter services certainly envisaged wider roles for themselves and endeavored to develop their own capabilities, but budget, manpower, and equipment allocations historically favored the army, a situation that remains true today.

Consciously or by default, India ended up on this middle path for several reasons. In the first place, the people's war option was anathema in a strategic culture that evinced extreme sensitivities about sovereignty and thus could not abide losing an inch of Indian soil. Moreover, this strategy seemed unworthy of a state that aspired to great-power status and might leave India vulnerable to fracturing along ethnic lines, given its diverse population, particularly in some of the more vulnerable border states. The mechanized, technology-heavy option, on the other hand, was unrealizable until recently. India possessed neither the financial resources to import sufficient high-end systems nor the technical-industrial base to develop, field, and sustain such a force indigenously. Evanescent forays toward increasingly mechanized and mobile forces in the 1980s generated some new thinking but proved overly ambitious and unsupportable. In contrast, the foot-mobile, infantry-dominant army that evolved during and after World War II exploited the comparative advantage of a large pool of potential soldiers who, provided with adequate if

pedestrian doctrine, training, and equipment, could substitute numbers for technology. This sort of low-technology force also alleviated the suspicions that India's early political leaders harbored toward the military. For many key national figures, the armed forces represented a drag on national development and a potential political threat. They regarded the military as a necessary evil to be funded at the minimum level and restricted to a subservient status in the governmental hierarchy. In this manner, the armed forces would neither divert resources from essential developmental needs nor pose the danger of the sort of military takeover that plagued so many other newly independent nations. An unintended negative consequence of this attitude, however, was the distinct division of military and civilian security responsibilities. Cocooned in almost hermetically sealed compartments, military officers were excluded from the formulation of national security policy, while civilian bureaucrats and political leaders seldom perceived any need to inform themselves about military capabilities or involve themselves in the details of military operations.[13]

Beyond the appealing but misleading notion that supposedly inexpensive infantry units could replace costly hardware, this middle path also fit India's history and its conception of possible war aims. As far as a potential conflict with China or Pakistan was concerned, India harbored no serious dreams of conquest; its political objectives were conservative and defensive, aiming to deter any attack in the first instance and, should war eventuate, to preserve its own territorial integrity. Against Pakistan, a large army was expected to be able to hold its ground initially and then transition to a powerful counteroffensive that would defeat the Pakistan Army in the field and dominate enough of the enemy's territory to provide an advantage in postwar negotiations. Given the daunting terrain and dismal infrastructure in the Himalayas, India did not foresee significant offensive operations in the event of an attack by China. Rather, the Indian Army would hold its ground and seek to avoid a repeat of the humiliating debacle that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had inflicted on it in the 1962 war. In short, India's strategy was to deter both adversaries, but if deterrence failed, its aims would be defeating Pakistan and defending against China.

India's colonial history and the legacy of the British Indian Army were also crucial factors in shaping its armed forces after independence. As a colony under the British Raj, India's strategic orientation had been principally concerned with thwarting any Russian thrusts from Central

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[13] One former army chief laments what he calls "bureaucratic control instead of civilian control over the military." Ved Prakash Malik, "Introduction: Defence Policy and Management of National Security," in *The New Arthashastra: A Security Strategy for India*, ed. Gurmeet Kanwal (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2016), 12.

Asia and maintaining control over the native population. The Raj, of course, also supplied hundreds of thousands of troops for the empire's foreign wars. With the Royal Navy responsible for securing the seas and British authorities wary of arming a potentially restive colonial population, however, the forces drawn from India were almost exclusively light infantry. Though some two million Indian volunteers enlisted during World War II, for example, the vast majority served in foot infantry units. Indian mechanized formations, air force squadrons, and naval units were miniscule, and very few saw any real combat.

Independent India inherited this force largely intact, and the military legacy of its history as a British colony remains evident today in the dominance of the army, the limited mobility of the ground forces, and the military's residual continental orientation. Embodied in army regiments that trace their origins back to the 1780s, this legacy also helps explain the institutional inertia and conservative culture so prevalent in India's modern military.[14] Complacency after 1947 has also dampened urges to alter the dominant strategy.[15] Other than the ignominious loss to China in 1962 and the controversial counterinsurgency operations in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990, India's military performance in war has arguably been adequate to New Delhi's needs. The dramatic victory in the 1971 war that led to the creation of Bangladesh, for example, dampened future movement toward reform as the success seemed to validate existing arrangements. For independent India, therefore, the middle-path strategy was the path of least resistance—the one requiring the least change on the part of the country's governing institutions or its armed services and posing the lowest threat to the priorities of the civilian leadership. Moreover, this sort of force structure also provided other benefits. On the domestic front, large numbers of infantry would have utility *in extremis* in counterinsurgency situations and in quelling civil unrest. Likewise, UN missions seldom demanded mobile mechanized forces. A professional, but relatively simple, infantry-based army could supply reliable units to meet India's international duties.

Finally, in terms of strategic culture, the middle path India chose to tread matched well with its "conflicted attitude to power" and the unquestioned primacy of developmental goals in national policy. Moral imperatives favored strategic restraint and made the pursuit of maximized military power unpalatable, while considerations of realpolitik militated against these ethically inspired urges, painting them as naive in the context of a harsh and threatening world. A large, inwardly focused, relatively low-technology military thus

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[14] Mrinal Suman, "Jointmanship and Attitudinal Issues," *Journal of Defence Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 71–87.

[15] Arzan Tarapore, "India's Use of Force: The Missing Indirect Approach," Observer Research Foundation, Issue Brief, no. 106, September 27, 2015.

seemed to achieve a practical balance consistent with the preferences of India's early leaders. It was sufficient to satisfy India's principal internal and external defense needs without violating foundational moral tenets or imposing costs that might impinge on the state's economic and developmental priorities. As Hall asserts, India's ambivalence toward power and its predisposition for strategic restraint are likely to remain important, if not always decisive, elements in policy formulation, despite the assertive nationalism embedded in much of the Narendra Modi government's rhetoric.[16]

Changing Circumstances Prompt Strategic Reconsideration

This dominant military strategy is now under reconsideration for two broad reasons. First, for perhaps the first time in India's history, there is a real possibility for change. This is a consequence of the economic reforms instituted in the early 1990s and the subsequent dramatic growth of India's economy. Higher state revenues have in turn laid the foundation for substantial increases in the Indian defense budget. Economic reforms and greater integration with the world have also bolstered national confidence.[17] Although foreign and defense policy are seldom major factors in Indian elections, this heightened confidence offers political leaders more scope for taking the initiative in the international arena and assuming new roles in regional and global security affairs.[18] India's economic boom and its broader interaction with the world have also opened the door for enhanced access to defense technologies, especially from the United States. The current level of U.S.-India defense exchange is unprecedented and will increase further if the two sides can conclude negotiations on the two remaining "foundational agreements" required by Washington.[19] The combination of these factors thus

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[16] Hall, "The Persistence of Nehruvianism," 164–66; and Ashley J. Tellis, "Overview," in Tellis, Szalwinski, and Wills, *Strategic Asia 2016–17*, 22.

[17] Daniel Twining, "India's Optimism Is a Welcome Antidote to Western Pessimism," *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2017.

[18] Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (speech at the second Raisina Dialogue, New Delhi, January 18, 2017), http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/27949/Speech_by_Foreign_Secretary_at_Second_Raisina_Dialogue_in_New_Delhi_January_18_201. See also Prashant Jha, "Mr. Indispensable: Why S. Jaishankar Got Another Year as Foreign Secretary," *Hindustan Times*, January 24, 2017.

[19] The remaining items are known by their U.S. designations: the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement. The latter, renamed to be specific to India, is more commonly known as a communications and information security memorandum of agreement. India signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement with the United States in 2002 and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement in 2016. See Mark Rosen and Douglas Jackson, "The U.S.-India Defense Relationship: Putting the Foundational Agreements in Perspective," CNA, February 2017.

positions India to explore previously unrealistic military strategies and back them up with hard capacity.

Second, India's strategic environment is shifting in ways that suggest the need for an Indian response. The most important factor here is the rapid rise of China. The size of its economy, the pace and scope of its military modernization, and its increasingly forceful, sometimes bellicose, international conduct have pushed India to shift its "strategic focus from Pakistan to China" over the past decade.[20] This is partly a structural outcome generated by the friction of two major states rising simultaneously, but it also derives from the manner in which Beijing is pursuing its growing prominence. From New Delhi's perspective, troubling aspects of China's aggressive behavior include claims on large swaths of Indian territory, persistent probes along the contested border, significant enhancements to force levels and logistical facilities in Tibet, and the almost routine presence of the PLA Navy in the Indian Ocean. The summer 2017 Sino-Indian confrontation at Doklam (where both countries border Bhutan) has accentuated India's perception of the trans-Himalayan threat. China's ties to India's neighbors are also a concern, especially the recent deployment of Chinese submarines to the region.[21] Above all, Beijing's seemingly uncritical military, economic, and diplomatic support for Pakistan has created fears in New Delhi about Sino-Pakistani collusion and the possibility of future two-front confrontations.[22] The inauguration of the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015 and its subsequent development have further heightened Indian concerns. Additionally, though actual conflict with China is unlikely, India is faced with the challenging prospect of coordinating ground and air forces along a 3,000-kilometer front in the Himalayas with naval operations in the Indian Ocean and integrating those conventional dimensions of warfare with its nuclear capacity.[23]

The situation vis-à-vis Pakistan has also altered since the early 2000s. Spurred by major incursions across the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir in 1999 that led to the Kargil conflict and by the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament by terrorists based in Pakistan, India has

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[20] Menon, "India Will Not Become a Great Power."

[21] C. Raja Mohan, "Neighborhood Defence," *Indian Express*, March 28, 2017; and Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, "New Threat in Indian Ocean: China to Build at Least Six Aircraft Carriers," *Economic Times*, April, 21 2017.

[22] Vinod Anand, "Review of the Indian Army Doctrine: Dealing with Two Fronts," *CLAWS Journal* (2010): 257–64; and Deepak Kapoor, "Challenge of a Two Front Threat," *Journal of the United Services Institution of India*, no. 603 (2016).

[23] For a recent overview of China's perspective on the land dimension of a potential conflict, see Larry M. Wortzel, "PLA Contingency Planning and the Case of India," in *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, ed. Andrew Scobell et al. (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015).

sought conventional military responses that would deliver consequential punishment on short notice without crossing Pakistan's nuclear threshold. From consideration of "limited war" options, this thinking has evolved into the Indian Army's so-called Cold Start doctrine or "proactive strategy."[24] As several scholarly assessments have highlighted recently, however, New Delhi has no good options to achieve its desired result of curbing Pakistan's reliance on jihadi militants as an asymmetric tool against India. Not only is Cold Start problematic as a strategy, but India's conventional military superiority over Pakistan is not as substantial as is often assumed from simple bean-counting comparisons of hardware inventories or troop numbers.[25] Although the recently published "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces" states that the "response to terror provocations could be in the form of 'surgical strikes'" (presumably similar to those conducted in September 2016), the strategic conundrum of effectively retaliating against terrorist attacks by groups based in Pakistan remains frustratingly intact with no viable military options at acceptable levels of risk.[26] Furthermore, the presence of Chinese personnel and investment in Pakistan complicates Indian military response options, especially in the Pakistani areas of Kashmir.

The evolving nuclear dynamic with China and Pakistan has also affected India's strategic situation. This is not an altogether new problem. India demonstrated an incipient atomic capability in 1974 and tested several warheads in 1998, as did Pakistan. Yet for many years, nuclear weapons were additive rather than transformative in strategic terms. That is, they were not weapons to be used but were intended solely to deter nuclear use by others. This "unusable weapons" paradigm is the foundation for India's no-first-use policy. Nuclear weapons thus have restricted India's conventional military options when considering reactions to terrorism originating from Pakistan, but have not fundamentally altered its overall strategic outlook nor been integrated into its military strategy against either Pakistan or China as warfighting instruments. As discussed below, however, technological

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[24] Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start to Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2008): 158–90; Vivek Chadha, *Even If It Ain't Broke Yet, Do Fix It: Enhancing Effectiveness through Military Change* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2016), 54–58; Sandeep Unnithan, "'We Will Cross Again': Interview with Army Chief General Bipin Rawat," *India Today*, January 4, 2017; and Walter C. Ladwig III and Vipin Narang, "Taking 'Cold Start' Out of the Freezer?" *Hindu*, January 11, 2017.

[25] George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, *Not War, Not Peace? Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Walter C. Ladwig III, "Indian Military Modernization and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 729–72; and Shashank Joshi, "India's Military Instrument: A Doctrine Stillborn," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2013): 512–40. See also Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 62–64.

[26] Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces," April 2017, 14.

developments are challenging this doctrinal foundation and opening new and potentially destabilizing possibilities on the nuclear front.

Other aspects of India's strategic environment are also changing, especially in the maritime realm and what may be termed India's "near abroad." Beyond the PLA Navy deployments across the Strait of Malacca into what India has traditionally seen as its neighborhood, the fact that the terrorists who attacked Mumbai in 2008 came from the sea has brought maritime border security into focus. Farther afield, Indian policymakers are devoting increased attention to Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and what India generally refers to as West Asia.[27] In addition to traditional interests in protecting seaborne commerce and access to oil and natural gas resources in the Persian Gulf, a key consideration is the large Indian diaspora population in the region.[28] The presence of over five million Indian citizens in the GCC countries alone imposes significant responsibilities on New Delhi. The evacuation of around five thousand civilians, including nearly one thousand non-Indians, from Yemen in spring 2015 was a successful but relatively small-scale example of what is certain to be a continuing requirement.[29] The evacuation of larger populations from less permissive environments, however, could seriously stress India's capacities.[30] The role of this vast diaspora in Indian foreign policy and security thinking is a concrete example of India's greater connectedness with the world at large in the context of the globalized 21st century. Combined with India's broad sense of confidence and the assertive nationalism exhibited by the Modi government, this expanding perception of national interests and security threats represents an ideational aspect of India's changing environment and is an additional motivation for greater engagement beyond the confines of South Asia.

Finally, the expectations of the international community, India's image of itself as a modern military power, and the interests of its military services are factors in the country's reconsideration of its military strategy. The United States has promoted the notion of India as a "net security provider" in the

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[27] Recent examples include the May 2016 Indo-Iranian agreement on the development of Iran's Chabahar port and the attendance of Abu Dhabi's crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as chief guest for India's annual Republic Day ceremonies in January 2017.

[28] Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces," 9, 21; Kadira Pethiyagoda, "India-GCC Relations: Delhi's Strategic Opportunity," Brookings Doha Center, Analysis Paper, no. 18, February 2017; and W.P.S. Sidhu, "India in the Middle East," Brookings Institution, Interview, December 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/interview-india-in-the-middle-east.

[29] Ishaan Tharoor, "India Leads Rescue of Foreign Nationals, Including Americans, Trapped in Yemen," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2015; and Sahil Makkar, "The Dramatic Evacuation of Indians from Yemen," *Business Standard*, April 18, 2015.

[30] Sushant Singh, "The Poverty of Expectations: Likely but Unfamiliar Challenges," in *Defence Primer 2017: Today's Capabilities, Tomorrow's Conflicts*, ed. Sushant Singh and Pushan Das (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2017), 76–81.

Indian Ocean region since at least 2001. Indian leaders have deployed this term in international forums, and it is one of the key components in the Indian Navy's 2015 maritime strategy.[31] Additionally, as scholar Shashank Joshi notes, expansive military strategies can create "parochial pressures for service-specific prestige platforms" that "shape a country's force structure" and "generate incentives to find rationales for new capabilities" to suit specific branches of the military.[32] India's revived or rediscovered interest in the Indian Ocean also represents the beginning of a change from its traditional strategic posture. Over time, this attention to more distant interests will have an impact on international partnerships, military doctrine, and equipment acquisition, but this is still relatively new territory for India, and adaptation to accommodate this role will be gradual at best.

Challenges to the Reformulation of India's Military Strategy

India's defense establishment confronts significant challenges in attempting to adjust to these shifts in its strategic environment. The myriad interwoven problems may be grouped in four broad categories: hardware, institutional capacity, structural issues, and the emergence of new arenas of warfare.

The Hardware Challenge: Contending with Massive Obsolescence

The first of these challenges concerns hardware, both the massive obsolescence of key systems across all three services and the absence of essential enablers. The Indian Army, for instance, faces a crisis in key major weapon systems. Most of its tanks, armored fighting vehicles, and air defense missiles are Soviet-origin items initially inducted during the 1980s. Upgraded and rebuilt, its 1,950 T-72 models (constituting two-thirds of the tank fleet) and 2,500 BMP variants in the near term may suffice against Pakistan, which is more or less a peer competitor in terms of ground force technology, but they are reaching the end of their service lives.[33] Air defense systems such

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[31] U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Nomination of Colin L. Powell to Be Secretary of State," January 17, 2001, 34; "Speakers Praise Diplomatic Successes over Iran, Cuba-U.S., Address Long-Standing Africa Conflicts, as General Assembly Continues Annual Debate," United Nations, October 1, 2015, http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11697.doc.htm; and Indian Navy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (New Delhi, October 2015), 8.

[32] Shashank Joshi, *Indian Power Projection: Ambition, Arms and Influence*, Whitehall Paper 85 (London: Routledge, 2015), 10.

[33] Numbers drawn from International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2017* (London: Routledge, 2017), 290.

as the SA-6 Gainful, SA-8 Gaskin, and SA-13 Gopher, on the other hand, are examples of what may be called "niche modernization" during the 1980s and 1990s: never acquired in numbers proportionate to an army the size of India's in the first place, they are now likely obsolete.[34] The army's artillery is in especially critical condition. India has not purchased any artillery since 1986 and has never possessed a self-propelled gun in sufficient numbers to equip even its modest number of mechanized formations. Some steps to address the artillery situation have been taken over the past two years with the issuance of contracts and the arrival of the initial batch of towed howitzers from the United States. But India still must replace some 3,000 artillery pieces and introduce self-propelled systems in numbers for the first time.[35] These major end items are only the tip of the army's equipment iceberg. Defense commentators consistently mention the lack of ammunition, spares, and essential gear such as assault rifles, body armor, and night vision devices when assessing the army's modernization needs.[36]

The situation is worse in the Indian Air Force. Described as a "crisis" by one outside observer, the air force faces "a growing force structure predicament as a result of its declining number of fighter squadrons" compared with the expanding capabilities of its potential Chinese and Pakistani adversaries.[37] The central problem in force size is the gap between the phasing out of obsolescent aircraft and the induction of new types in sufficient quantity. Authorized at 42 squadrons, the Indian Air Force maintains only 34 squadrons today, and that number could slip into the low twenties by 2022 as it retires its aging MiG-21s and MiG-27s.[38] The indigenous Tejas is not coming online fast enough, and the collapse of the 2012 deal to purchase and coproduce 126 French Dassault Rafale fighters has left the air force with an urgent requirement for 200 to 250 medium

[34] Gainful, Gaskin, and Gopher are the NATO designations for these former Soviet systems.

[35] "India—Army," *IHS Jane's World Armies*, January 10, 2017.

[36] Rahul Bedi, "Arrested Development: Indian Army Modernisation Falls Short," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 17, 2016; Manu Pubby, "Army Grappling with Arms Shortages, Delays in Acquisition of Weapons," *Economic Times*, September 28, 2016; and Rajat Panditl, "Urgent Arms Deals of Rs 20,00 Crore Inked to Keep Forces Ready," *Times of India*, February 6, 2017.

[37] Ashley J. Tellis, *Troubles, They Come in Battalions: The Manifold Travails of the Indian Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), 1; Benjamin S. Lambeth, "India's Air Force at a Pivotal Crossroads: Challenges and Choices Looking to 2032," in Singh and Das, *Defence Primer 2017*, 35–51; and Justin Bronk, "Future Challenges for the Indian Air Force: Innovations and Capability Enhancements," in ibid.

[38] The number of active squadrons is estimated at between 33 and 35. See Lambeth, "India's Air Force at a Pivotal Crossroads," 35–36; "India—Air Force," *IHS Jane's*, January 2017; and Ajai Shukla, "Shrinking Fleet Poses Tough Choices for IAF: Light, Medium or Heavy Fighters?" *Business Standard*, January 4, 2017. Other analysts suggest that some of the legacy aircraft could continue in service even longer. See Abhijit Iyer-Mitra and Pushan Das, "The Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft: A Technical Analysis," Observer Research Foundation, Issue Brief, no. 105, September 2015.

combat aircraft, according to a recently retired air chief.[39] The quantity issue is compounded by the "staggering diversity" of fighter types at various levels of sophistication and imported from different foreign manufacturers, which creates enormous complications in logistics and maintenance.[40] Although the larger Rafale deal fell through, for example, India has decided to purchase 36 of these airframes from France under a one-time arrangement announced in 2015. As one analyst notes, the Indian Air Force will likely be "technologically adequate" but "short on mass" vis-à-vis Pakistan over the medium term. On the other hand, it could find itself numerically inferior and technologically outclassed by the PLA Air Force, particularly when it comes to fifth-generation fighters.[41] The acquisition of U.S. C-17s and C-130Js has modestly improved India's airlift and special operations capabilities, but their numbers remain small. Similarly, air-power enablers such as air-to-air refuelers, airborne early-warning platforms, search-and-rescue assets, and intelligence collectors are also in short supply. These represent especially significant gaps in the capacity to project power by air, as called for in the Indian Air Force's 2012 doctrine.[42]

The Indian Navy shares the hardware woes of the other services. An estimated 60% of its ships are approaching obsolescence, while procurement and construction delays retard the induction of replacements.[43] The decommissioning of India's two older aircraft carriers, for example, has left the navy with only one carrier, the *Vikramaditya*, commissioned in 2013 after a multiyear odyssey and a fourfold increase in the initial cost of transforming it from the former Russian *Admiral Gorshkov*. An indigenous carrier is under construction, and another is in the planning stages, but the former may not be ready until 2023, while the completion of the latter, a much larger vessel, may be even further in the future. In the interim, India will have to make do with a lone carrier rather than the preferred suite of three.[44] The submarine

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[39] Manu Pubby, "India Needs About 200–250 Medium Fighter Aircraft: IAF Chief Raha," *Economic Times*, December 29, 2016. The new air chief recently estimated that induction of the Rafale fighters would be accomplished between 2019 and 2022, while the Tejas, a program that began in the mid-1980s, would not be complete until 2025–26. See Nitin Gokhale, "IAF Has a Two-Pronged Plan for Force Accretion, Reveals Air Chief," *Bharat Shakti*, February 12, 2017.

[40] Bronk, "Future Challenges for the Indian Air Force," 46.

[41] Joshi, *Indian Power Projection*, 96–118. The prospects for the Indian acquisition of a Russian fifth-generation fighter remain cloudy. See Rajat Pandit, "To Avoid Sukhoi 'Mistake,' India to Go for Russian 5th-Generation Fighter Only on Complete-Tech Transfer," *Economic Times*, March 9, 2017.

[42] Indian Air Force, *Basic Doctrine of the Indian Air Force* (New Delhi, 2012), 1.

[43] IISS, "Challenges for India's New Naval Chief," *Strategic Comments* 20, no. 4 (2014); and Pradeep Chauhan, "Ships and Shipbuilding in India through a Sino-Indian Prism," *Bharat Shakti*, April 7, 2016.

[44] Comptroller and Auditor General of India, "Report No. 17 of 2016—Union Defence Services Navy and Coast Guard," July 26, 2016, 37; and Rajat Pandit, "India without Aircraft Carrier for 8 Months," *Times of India*, July 27, 2016. The navy believes the ship can be commissioned as early as 2018.

force has likewise suffered degradation. At more than 25 years old, many of its diesel boats have exceeded their service lives and only two of the projected six Kalvari-class (India-built French Scorpène-class) replacements have been launched.[45] Moreover, subsystem and supply problems abound. In two prominent examples, the Kalvaris lack torpedoes, and the MiG-29Ks, which are slated to be the mainstays of the carrier air wings, are experiencing multiple problems.[46] Mundane but crucial enabling assets, such as mine countermeasures ships and naval helicopters, are also a problem.[47] With more than 40 hulls under construction in various dockyards, the navy's desire to expand from 135 to 200 ships by 2027 may be attainable, but equipment deficiencies and manpower shortfalls may leave them ineffective when they take to sea.[48]

The hardware obsolescence issues outlined above should not mask India's new equipment acquisitions: the army has initiated two new howitzer programs, the air force is slated to purchase U.S. Apache attack helicopters, and the navy now operates an indigenous nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine as well as a nuclear-powered attack boat leased from Russia. However, the pricey proposition of replacing large numbers of aging systems across the three services will impose a serious drag on Indian military modernization efforts for the foreseeable future. It also highlights the importance of a nuanced review of India's defense budgets and stated modernization goals. That is, much of the relatively small capital portions of the defense budget will be consumed simply through replacing the many outdated items in India's inventory rather than acquiring adequate quantities of new systems. Similarly, the introduction of more technically advanced, but also more costly, weaponry in small numbers (niche modernization) can create a misleading impression of modernization without significantly improving national military capability.

Issues of Institutional Capacity

The second broad category of challenges for India's defense establishment concerns institutional capacity. A culture of strategic restraint, the continental legacy of the British Raj, civilian suspicions toward the employment of armed

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[45] "Make the Weight Count: Interview with Former Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Suresh Mehta," *FORCE*, December 2016.

[46] Vivek Raghuvanshi, "No Torpedoes for India's Second Scorpene Submarine," *Defense News*, January 12, 2017; and Manu Pubby, "MiG-29K Fighter Planes Face Operational Deficiencies: CAG Report," *Economic Times*, July 27, 2016.

[47] Arun K. Singh, "Periscope: Indian Navy's 4 Critical Needs," *Deccan Chronicle*, March 14, 2017.

[48] "Indian Navy Aiming at 200-Ship Fleet by 2027," *Economic Times*, July 14, 2015. For comparison, see S. Vijay Kumar, "Navy Displays Marine Power," *Hindu*, November 14, 2013.

force, and decades of financial constraints have combined to produce a national political elite that seldom focuses on military power. Adapting to evolving strategic circumstances and achieving its bold national aspirations will require New Delhi to reassess many of these features of its extant military strategy and institutional culture. At the top level, this implies the need for "appropriate institutions to manage acquisition of leading power capabilities."[49] Whether this process results in the redesign of existing government agencies or the construction of new ones, the aim would be stating political goals clearly, mobilizing resources, and transforming those resources into the instruments that appertain to a great power capable of functioning as a net security provider. Such an approach places a burden on the central government to perform integrative functions to an extent perhaps unprecedented in India's independent history. That is, federal agencies in New Delhi will have to weave military capabilities into national policymaking in a conscious and deliberate fashion to overcome the "ad hoc defense planning" of the past.[50] Stated another way, India must decide on the role of military force in its grand strategy and thus the types of missions it expects its armed forces to perform, with the attendant requirements for equipment, manpower, doctrine, education, and training.

This process would have at least three immediate consequences for civil-military interaction. First, more purposive integration requires the civilian political leadership to provide clear guidance on national priorities to the armed services and to oversee implementation of that guidance in the pursuit of national objectives. India at present has no "apex" security strategy that might set broad national priorities for the missions, deployments, acquisitions, and integration of the three services in concert with the diplomatic corps, the vast paramilitary forces, and other arms of the state.[51] Second, it means involving the uniformed military in the formulation of policy, strategy, and decision-making at senior levels on a routine basis rather than solely during crises (as occurred during the Kargil War in 1999). Third, it suggests that significant benefits would accrue from incorporating serving officers into the Ministry of Defence and from creating a civilian cadre in the ministry that would specialize in national security affairs. The current practice of appointing generalist bureaucrats to defense postings may have

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[49] This section draws heavily on Tellis, "Future Fire."

[50] Malik, "Introduction," in Kanwal, *The New Arthashastra*, 13. Close civil-military integration seems to have been a feature of the September 2016 "surgical strikes" along the Kashmir LOC.

[51] "Need National Military Strategy, Army Spending Considered a 'Burden': Rawat," *Asian Age*, May 4, 2017; Nitin Gadkari, "India's Defence Policy: Issues and Perspectives," *Bharat Shakti*, March 11, 2017; Pravin Sawhney and Ghazzala Wahab, *Dragon on Our Doorstep: Managing China through Military Power* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2016), 156–57; and Aditya Singh, "National Security Objectives," in Kanwal, *The New Arthashastra*, 77–91.

sufficed for the ruling authorities in British India, but it seems inconsistent with the goals that Indian leaders have set for the country in the 21st century.

The defense budget is a key manifestation of India's institutional challenges. The budget could be reasonably expected to underwrite the national military strategy, balancing the comprehensive requirements of the three services in support of the country's larger internal and external objectives. Instead, it often represents, in the evocative title of a recent book, a case of "arming without aiming"; that is, defense acquisitions as part of India's military modernization may not be organized around a "strategic intent," are seldom coordinated across the three services, and may not be consistent even within a single service.[52] A byzantine procurement process overseen by a risk-averse "itinerant generalist bureaucracy" has seldom been able to reconcile the competing—and frequently shifting—demands of the services or to assess them within the context of a broader national strategy.[53]

Compounding these institutional challenges is the presence of a large public-sector defense industrial establishment that has a long record of underdelivering on promises and has impeded rather than contributed to the formation of a solid technical-industrial base for defense items. The privileged position of agencies such as the Defence Research and Development Organization and the government's ordnance factories not only has led to the exclusion of foreign firms under the mantra of promoting self-reliance and indigenization,[54] but Indian private corporations also have been prevented from engaging in major defense deals. Only recently has this structure begun to change in an effort to tap into commercial innovation and incorporate Indian as well as foreign expertise on a more regular basis. Thus far, however, the legacy of the autarkic past, the murkiness of the new regulations, and the continued institutional dominance of the various public-sector units have left Indian firms cautious and foreign corporations distant.[55]

The size of the defense budget is another aspect of this challenge. Although growing in absolute terms in recent years, the budget has declined both as a share of the central government's expenditure and as a percentage of GDP. Moreover, the steady increase in personnel costs, most of which are

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[52] Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013); and Sushant Singh and Pushan Das, "India's Defence Goals," in Singh and Das, *Defence Primer*, 2–5.

[53] Arun Prakash, "No More Committees," *Indian Express*, January 21, 2017.

[54] Ravi Sharma, "Failing to Deliver," *Frontline*, April 17, 2013; and Laxman Kumar Behera, "India's Ordnance Factories: A Performance Analysis," *Journal of Defence Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 63–77.

[55] Laxman Kumar Behera, "Making FDI Count in Defence," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, June 22, 2016; Anuj Srivas, "No Bucks for Bang? India Has Netted Only $1 Million in FDI for Defence Sector," *Wire* (India), December 30, 2016; and Sushant Singh, "No Model, Make in India Defence Projects Stuck," *Indian Express*, January 4, 2017.

consumed by the 1.3 million–person army, has had "a debilitating effect" on operations and maintenance funding for readiness and capital modernization for the future.[56] The air force and navy, as more capital-intensive services, thus lack the funds for many urgent and long-term upgrades, and the army itself is unable to meet even modest modernization needs. Yet a larger budget would not automatically translate into increased military capability and would require improved revenue generation or cuts to domestic programs.[57] So far, New Delhi has placed a higher priority on the latter. The 2017–18 budget "contains no hint" of any shift in defense policy.[58] In contrast to the historically freighted and seemingly immediate dangers across India's land borders that command a domestic political constituency, it is difficult to orchestrate public support for the longer-term investments required in naval and air capabilities to address security concerns in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean littoral, or the Persian Gulf.[59]

Structural Issues in Defense: Joint Service Cooperation and Civil-Military Readiness

The third broad category of challenges concerns the structure of the three services, especially their ability to work together as joint forces constituted to accomplish missions assigned by the political leadership.[60] A robust capacity for joint operations will be particularly important in any force-projection operations, whether benign or opposed. Furthermore, many potential overseas scenarios would have to be executed in close conjunction with local Indian embassies, host countries, and almost certainly other governments and militaries as well. As such contingencies are likely to arise with little warning, advance training and preparation is necessary to build familiarity and promote interoperability among Indian services and between Indian forces and those of potential international partners. Despite rhetorical advocacy of joint operations in Indian military writings, however,

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[56] Laxman Kumar Behera, "India's Defence Budget 2017–18: An Analysis," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, February 3, 2017; C. Uday Bhaskar, "India's Defence Budget: Trapped in a Straitjacket," *Economic Times*, February 7, 2017. For a discussion of the difficulty of deciphering the size and content of the defense budget over time, see Amit Cowshish, "Defence Expenditure: A Challenge for Defence Economists," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, March 14, 2017.

[57] Nirupama Soundararajan and Dyanada Palkar, "Spending More on Defence Won't Automatically Mean New Tanks, Weapons for Indian Army," *Wire* (India), October 25, 2016.

[58] Amit Cowshish, "Defence Budget 2017–18: Chugging Along," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, February 2, 2017.

[59] Arzan Tarapore, "India's Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2017): 163–78. Thanks to the author for sharing a draft version of this article.

[60] In the U.S. lexicon, "joint" is used for organizations or operations where more than one service is involved; "combined" is the term for activities with other countries.

the history of interservice collaboration is thin. This is another legacy of India's strategic culture, historical experience, and institutional inertia. India has traditionally relied on personal relations among senior officers rather than adherence to universally accepted doctrine or institutional norms. As a result, the three services seldom cooperate in peacetime—on defense procurement, for example—and in wartime, they tend to fight in parallel domains, simultaneously but separately.[61]

India's highest military body is the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which is composed of the three sitting service chiefs. The most senior officer presides over the committee on a rotational basis while retaining management of his own service. The arrangement has long been criticized as ineffectual, and the Modi government has entertained long-standing proposals for a new four-star position that would serve as a single point of military advice for the highest circles of political leadership. After decades of interservice rivalry and bureaucratic resistance, this change may be edging toward partial implementation. Although many have advocated a true chief of defense staff, with apposite staffing and authority, the most probable outcome would be the appointment of a permanent chairman for the Chiefs of Staff Committee, an alteration that may be more symbolic than substantive.[62] India's embryonic joint staff is therefore likely to persist as a marginal organization with little influence over the powerful service chiefs. Similarly, the fringe Andaman and Nicobar Command remains the lone joint theater headquarters. Suggestions to establish other joint service organizations beyond the unique and secretive Strategic Forces Command (for nuclear forces) seem to have foundered, and even the Andaman and Nicobar Command may revert to its status as a single-service preserve.[63]

An additional challenge in terms of institutional capacity is the degree to which strategic thinking is incorporated into officer education. As one retired officer laments, this deficiency "is essentially because of the tactical orientation of instruction during formal teaching [in military educational institutions] that focuses on rote learning rather than holistic understanding of issues and a very weak theoretical framework to enable understanding…beyond

[61] One recent study characterizes steps toward integration as "almost entirely superficial/cosmetic." See Vijai Singh Rana, *Status of Jointness in Indian Security Apparatus* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2016), 12. The April 2017 "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces" does little to address these gaps. See Anit Mukherjee, "Joint Doctrine for Armed Forces: The Single-Service Syndrome," *Hindu*, May 9, 2017.

[62] Sushant Singh, "After PM Modi Steps In, Consensus Builds on Combined Services Committee's Top Post," *Indian Express*, February 21, 2017.

[63] Sushant Singh, "Three Services Are Split on Forming Joint Theatre Commands," *Indian Express*, May 9, 2017; Deepak Kapoor, "Need for Integrated Theatre Commands," *CLAWS Journal* (2013): 46–60; and Gurmeet Kanwal, "CDS and Theatre Commands: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," *Defence and Security Alert*, May 2015, 66–69.

the limited scope of military experience."[64] Commenting on the continual delays in establishing a national defense university, another observer remarks that "very little effort is being [done] to educate Indian civilian and armed forces officers in strategic studies and international affairs."[65] Within the larger defense establishment, these deficiencies can result in serious gaps in the conception of strategy and the utility of military force between the officer cadre, the defense ministry bureaucracy, and the elected national policymakers. That is, no one may be attending to broader strategy if senior officers whose horizon is tactical or perhaps operational are disconnected from generalist bureaucrats who are principally concerned with management and administration rather than serving as a conduit for strategic guidance from the political leadership. The navy, especially in peacetime, is often a notable exception to this weakness because its missions demand a wide outlook and nurture an inclination to support India's foreign policy as the principal practitioner of "military diplomacy."

Nonetheless, there is a danger of civilian leaders having an inadequate understanding of the nation's military instrument and of military officers failing to situate their actions within the larger context of the government's political intentions. "It is not just a question of political ends," notes one of India's most respected defense analysts, "but the necessity of the political leader controlling every aspect of war—its intensity, its direction and length." It is thus "vital for the politicians to have a grasp of military affairs," and "military leaders, too, need to understand national policy."[66] These concerns are especially salient in India's situation, where nuclear weapons are present and tactical actions (e.g., on the LOC) could have significant strategic consequences.[67] The considerable operational latitude that the Indian armed forces currently enjoy—owing to the prevalent attitude among civilian politicians that military detail is a matter for the generals and admirals—thus could prove detrimental to India's national interests.

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[64] Vivek Chadha, "An Assessment of Organisational Change in the Indian Army," *Journal of Defence Studies* 9, no. 5 (2015): 238; and Harsh V. Pant, "Bridging the Soldier-Scholar Divide," *Hindu*, June 4, 2013.

[65] Gurmeet Kanwal, "The Role of Think Tanks in National Security," Forum for Strategic Initiatives, January 12, 2015, http://www.fsidelhi.org/author/gurmeet-kanwal.

[66] Manoj Joshi, "'Dragon on Our Doorstep'—Why Politics and Military Should Go Hand-in-Hand," *Wire* (India), February 13, 2017. As the doyen of American scholars on South Asia writes, "there may be civilian control but there is no credible civilian direction." See Stephen P. Cohen, "India and the Region," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 351.

[67] Yogesh Joshi, "Political Abstention in War and the Influence of Nuclear Weapons," *Journal of Defence Studies* 7, no. 3 (2013): 147–58; and Vijay Shankar, "Catechism of a Minister," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, November 28, 2016.

Beyond Conventional War: Cyber, Space, Special Operations, and Nuclear Dimensions

Finally, new arenas of warfare constitute a fourth category of institutional challenges. These include cybersecurity and cyberwarfare, the military utilization of space, and the widely expanded employment of special operations forces—what the recent "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces" terms "the new triad."[68] The Chiefs of Staff Committee proposed joint service commands for all three of these areas in 2012, and press reporting in 2015 indicated plans for their imminent establishment.[69] At the time of writing, however, these remain two-star "agencies" rather than three-star commands. Moreover, in all three cases, Indian commentators express concerns about the adequacy of synchronized long-term planning, the domestic technology base, the recruitment of appropriately qualified personnel, and the integration of military, civilian, and intelligence establishments. In the cyber realm, for example, India issued a National Cyber Security Policy in 2013 and is slated to inaugurate a National Cyber Coordination Centre in 2017, but progress otherwise has been slow. Similarly, despite an established space program and serious concerns about China's anti-satellite capabilities, India has few military satellites of its own and lacks a comprehensive national space policy to incorporate military communication, navigation, and intelligence needs across the services in a holistic fashion.[70]

Most significant among these unconventional forms of warfare, however, is the problem of nuclear weapons. Although India's no-first-use doctrine remains in place, as indicated in the April 2017 joint forces doctrine, some Indian strategists are now advocating a reassessment.[71] Regardless of the fate of India's no-first-use pledge, technological changes over the next few years will alter the regional security environment. Pakistan's highly advertised development of tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons, progress by both

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[68] Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (India), "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces," 48–50.

[69] Rajat Pandit, "Govt Gets Cracking on Three New Tri-Service Commands," *Times of India*, August 20, 2015; and P. C. Katoch, "Special Operations Command—An Imperative for India," *Journal of the United Services Institution of India*, no. 603 (2016).

[70] Davinder Kumar, "India's Space Programme: The Need for a Techno-Military Orientation," in Kanwal, *The New Arthashastra*, 255–86; Davinder Kumar, "Cyber Security: Status and Imperatives," in ibid.; and Rajeswari Rajagopalan, "India's Space Program: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategic Concerns," NBR, Policy Q&A, February 2016, http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/outreach/NBR_IndiaCaucus_Feb2016.pdf.

[71] Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (India), "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces," 37; Vipin Narang, "Plenary: Beyond the Nuclear Threshold: Causes and Consequences of First Use" (presentation at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, Washington, D.C., March 20, 2017), https://fbfy83yid9j1dqsev3zq0w8n-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Vipin-Narang-Remarks-Carnegie-Nukefest-2017.pdf; Shashank Joshi, "India's Nuclear Doctrine Should No Longer Be Taken for Granted," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, March 22, 2017; and Dhruva Jaishankar, "Decoding India's Nuclear Status," *Wire* (India), April 3, 2017.

India and Pakistan on the deployment of sea-based weapons, India's possible purchase of a limited missile defense system, and the mutual pursuit of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle payload options all challenge the existing—albeit weak and ambiguous—network of nuclear norms. That is, as arsenal sizes, weapon types, and deployment options on both sides expand, the long-standing expectations associated with the India-Pakistan nuclear dynamic appear to be under stress, especially the notion that neither side needs anything beyond some unspecified "minimal" level of credible deterrence. India will thus not only have to address the complicated interrelationship of these components of its nuclear arsenal and the impact of missile defense. It will also have to determine how these evolving systems are integrated with conventional force planning. At the present time, it is not clear that this daunting set of strategic tasks is being approached comprehensively by the political leadership, the scientific community, the defense bureaucracy, and the armed services, or whether, as one Indian expert worries, "the bomb is in charge."[72]

Incremental Change in the Dominant Approach

Despite the changes in India's strategic circumstances and the institutional challenges outlined above, the dominant strategy remains doggedly durable. Pakistan remains the immediate and persistent threat, but India has few, if any, conventional military responses that would induce Pakistan to reduce its reliance on anti-Indian jihadi groups. So-called surgical strikes similar to the actions taken along the LOC in September 2016 may be the new first response to "terror provocations" as part of what the recent joint forces doctrine calls "the sub-conventional portion of the spectrum of conflict."[73] India's ability to conduct a series of shallow incursions with conventional ground forces in line with the Cold Start doctrine, however, remains largely aspirational, and it is not at all clear that such incursions or sub-conventional surgical strikes would bring the desired results even if successfully executed. Both options, of course, contain significant escalatory potential.

A renewed focus on China has certainly been evident since approximately 2009. India has raised two new mountain divisions, stationed additional air force assets in the northeast, and initiated a long-term program to improve the transportation infrastructure along the Himalayan frontier.[74] It is also

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[72] Author's discussion with a retired senior Indian officer, November 2016.

[73] Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (India), "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces," 14.

[74] Rajat Pandit, "Army Reworks War Doctrine for Pakistan, China," *Times of India*, December 30, 2009; and Monika Chansoria, "China's Infrastructure Development in Tibet: Evaluating Trendlines," Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Manekshaw Paper, no. 32, 2011.

developing ballistic missiles capable of placing much of China under threat of nuclear retaliation. Progress on the road projects in the northern border areas is torpid, however, and the creation of an offensive mountain strike corps with two more divisions is also moving slowly owing to budgetary deficiencies.[75] Largely spurred by concerns over Chinese influence, New Delhi is complementing these changes in force structure by proposing a defense agreement with Bangladesh.[76]

There are signs that India is beginning to pay greater attention to maritime security, particularly by strengthening defense ties with its Indian Ocean neighbors through capacity-building measures. Over the past four years, India provided patrol vessels to Mauritius and Seychelles (and gifted a patrol plane to the latter), signed agreements to construct coastal surveillance radar installations and other facilities, sent its P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft on goodwill visits, and created a loose security association with Maldives and Sri Lanka, to which it wants to invite other Indian Ocean countries. It also hopes to involve many of these island states in what could be a significant maritime domain awareness structure with more than 50 sites across the region.[77] How many of these ambitious projects will come to fruition, of course, remains a question. The Indian Navy, the pivotal service for such developments, is still third in priority in the most recent defense budget.

These evolutionary changes notwithstanding, India's dominant strategy is still continentally oriented, conservative, and founded on large, infantry-heavy ground forces. Given that the dangers on India's immediate borders have not evaporated, this outlook is unlikely to change in the near term. In addition to this practical consideration, there is little fresh thinking on mitigating either the Pakistani or the Chinese threat. As Hall and Rajagopalan point out, this traditional approach is both deeply rooted in India's strategic culture and dictated by the challenges New Delhi confronts trying to mobilize national resources.[78] The Modi government came into office in 2014 pledging to launch major defense reforms, but progress has been modest thus far. Entrenched tradition, inertia, and vested interests (both among the services and within the bureaucracy) militate against major reforms or changes in strategy, and many of the recommended reforms are likely to encroach on

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[75] "Expanding Forces Increase Risk of LAC Conflict," *IHS Jane's Daily*, September 29, 2016; and Sushant Singh, "Eye on China, India to Raise Second Division for Mountain Corps," *Indian Express*, March 17, 2017.

[76] Charu Sudan Kasturi, "Defence Pact with Bangladesh on Table," *Telegraph*, March 25, 2017.

[77] IISS, "India's New Maritime Strategies," *Strategic Comments* 21, no. 9–10 (2015); and Aditi Malhotra, "India Sees New Regional Role for Its Navy," *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2016.

[78] Hall, "The Persistence of Nehruvianism"; and Rajagopalan, "India's Unrealized Power."

venerated aspects of institutional cultures and traditional practices. As such, India's military strategy may only be susceptible to modification over the long haul. Some incremental changes may be in the offing in the wake of a 2016 reform committee report, but these are unlikely to produce substantially greater jointness or lead to force reductions to pay for modernization, as some have urged.[79] Effective modernization across the services is an expensive proposition, one that may require significant rethinking of defense allocations and possible tradeoffs with domestic programs. Moreover, in India's historical experience, major defense reforms have only been introduced in the wake of embarrassing crises such as the defeat at the hands of the PLA in 1962 or the surprise Pakistani intrusions that led to the Kargil War in 1999.[80] Barring such shocks to the system, meaningful alterations in current strategy and practice are likely to evolve only at a very slow pace.

If the engrained durability of the existing system suggests at best evolutionary modernization, then the old dominant strategy is unlikely to match India's *desiderata* for its regional and global roles in a time frame consistent with its ambitions. It could be difficult, for example, for India to serve as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, meet the growing security demands of its diaspora in West Asia, or have a more prominent voice in Asian affairs if it is not able to deploy at least a small subset of world-class formations with significant reach and endurance.[81] Likewise, New Delhi may find itself stressed to respond to "black swan" crises (such as drastic instability in a neighboring country) that might endanger its national interests or evoke pressure to intervene from elements of the Indian population.

Even absent major reforms and substantial new acquisitions, however, India will retain significant capabilities and will slowly enlarge those through the near to medium term. First, it will be able to defend itself against ground or air incursions by Pakistan or China, except in the improbable scenario of Beijing exerting itself in some truly extraordinary fashion. Second, if provoked, it will have a limited ability to conduct a conventional counteroffensive against Pakistan, though probably not the envisaged Cold Start or any other

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[79] Sushant Singh, "Defence Reforms: Shekatkar Panel Recommends Four-Star Rank for Top Military Adviser," *Indian Express*, January 11, 2017; and Singh, "After PM Modi Steps In." For several of the many proposals recommending significant personnel cuts to fund a smaller but more agile force that leverages technology, see Bhartendu Kumar Singh, "Rightsizing the Armed Forces: Problems and Prospects," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, June 28, 2016, http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/rightsizing-the-armed-forces-problems-and-prospects-5069.html; and Sheru Thapliyal, "Men and Machines," *FORCE*, August 2016.

[80] Anit Mukherjee, "In Need of a Crisis? India's Higher Defence Organisation at 75," in Singh and Das, *Defence Primer*, 31–34.

[81] Tellis, "Future Fire"; Walter C. Ladwig III, "India and Military Power Projection: Will the Land of Gandhi Become a Conventional Great Power?" *Asian Survey* 50, no. 6 (2010): 1171; and Anit Mukherjee, *Net Security Provider: India's Out-of-Area Contingency Operations* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2012).

operation sufficient to effect a change in Pakistan's behavior. In any such case, of course, India would be launching itself into unpredictable territory with the risk of nuclear escalation. It would also have some minimal capability for conventional counterattacks against China, but these would be constrained by the exigencies of the terrain and the minimal infrastructure on the Indian side of the border (technically the Line of Actual Control).[82] India might also possess some capacity to insert special operations forces into Tibet in the hopes of fomenting unrest or harassing Chinese logistics, but an operation along these lines would be extraordinarily difficult and would likely have severe repercussions.[83]

Third, as shown by its raid into northwestern Myanmar in June 2015 and its surgical strikes along the Kashmir LOC in September 2016, India has some ability to execute small special operations missions locally and, if pressed, could no doubt reprise the ad hoc mission that quashed the amateur coup in Maldives in 1988. It would hope to keep any such operations at the sub-conventional level. Fourth, India has also repeatedly demonstrated its ability to conduct effective humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and noncombatant evacuation operations in a wide variety of circumstances.[84] These will remain core tasks, especially for the air force and navy. Other expeditionary missions beyond India's borders, however, are likely to remain outside its reach, especially in nonpermissive environments. Fifth, India's capacity for monitoring foreign naval activity in the Indian Ocean (especially by the PLA Navy) is likely to increase steadily, and it will continue to be a potential contributor to counterpiracy and other law-enforcement tasks along the Indian Ocean littoral. The navy will thus be an important component of India's military diplomacy, and its capacity for extended deployments outside the Indian Ocean (into the Pacific Ocean or the Red Sea, for example) may grow over time but will be severely constrained for the near term. These naval activities, of course, will be greatly enhanced by, and at times dependent on, collaboration with foreign navies and access to overseas support facilities in areas such as the Persian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and East Africa.

Sixth, India will continue to expand its nuclear capability at a measured pace, including the gradual deployment of submarine-based delivery systems and land-based ballistic missiles with sufficient range to hold major Chinese targets at risk. As indicated in the April 2017 joint forces doctrine, India's

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[82] India has "no high-value target we could seize and hold" in China, according to one general. See Sandeep Unnithan, "The Mountain Is Now a Molehill," *India Today*, February 24, 2016.

[83] Iskander Rehman, "A Himalayan Challenge," *Naval War College Review* 70, no. 1 (2017): 104–42.

[84] For an excellent overview of India's experiences with noncombatant evacuation operations, see Constantino Xavier, "India's Expatriate Evacuation Operations: Bringing the Diaspora Home," Carnegie India, January 4, 2016.

commitment to a nuclear no-first-use policy will likely remain in place—lively debate notwithstanding—but Pakistan's pursuit of warheads and delivery systems at the lower, tactical end of the spectrum will make the bilateral nuclear dynamic more complex and dangerous.[85] Finally, India is likely to devote considerable attention to exploring the military uses of space, as well as to expanding its offensive and defensive cybercapabilities over the medium term. The country has a fairly robust launch capability and an existing array of satellites, but there are concerns that its limited number of space assets might be vulnerable to Chinese anti-satellite weapons. India also may be susceptible to cyberattack, especially from Chinese sources.

Implications for Regional Stability and U.S. Interests

Regional Implications

India's evolving military strategy and the growing but still constrained capabilities of its armed forces will have both beneficial and worrying implications for regional stability. On the favorable side, India's military assets will allow it to be a major player in countering piracy, terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other criminal activities throughout the Indian Ocean littoral. Employing deft diplomacy, it could be a reassuring presence to its island neighbors and might engage more vigorously with Southeast Asian nations as well, in accordance with Modi's Act East policy.[86] Similarly, India can contribute to sea-lane security in East Africa, the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the greater Middle East, where noncombatant evacuation is likely to be an ongoing possibility.[87] India's military will also continue to offer major resources for protecting the environment, monitoring fisheries, and responding to HADR situations throughout the region.

Many of the tasks associated with the assumption of this role of a net security provider will consist of actions under the broad rubric of "military diplomacy"—that is, ship and aircraft visits, presence patrols, capacity building (as in the recent initiatives with Seychelles and Mauritius), or training and exercises.[88] Such missions obviously will place a premium on the Indian Navy, underwritten in some cases by the air force and, to a lesser

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[85] Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (India), "Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces," 37.

[86] Anit Mukherjee, "India's Act East Policy: Embedding the Andamans," S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Commentary, May 31, 2016.

[87] Yogesh V. Athawale, "Towards Enhancing Maritime Capability in the Indian Ocean Rim," *Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 11, no. 2 (2015): 81–98.

[88] This is a central component of the Indian Navy's doctrine. See Syed Ata Hasnain, "Joint Training—How It Enhances Value of India's Military Diplomacy," *Defence and Security Alert*, June 2016, 27–31.

degree, by the army. Moreover, they imply what one retired Indian admiral terms "a truly Indian tri-service expeditionary capability," preferably with the support of the United States.[89] They also call for close and sustained collaboration between the armed forces and the Ministry of External Affairs.[90] Modi's emphasis on the maritime frontier as "one of my foremost policy priorities" notwithstanding, it is not yet clear that India will make the requisite financial investments or dedicate sufficient sustained policy attention to these offshore opportunities.[91]

In addition to these potential benefits, India's evolving military activism also presents risks for regional stability. These risks are likely to be most apparent in the Indian Ocean. Although some regional countries will welcome increased Indian engagement in the maritime domain, others will perceive threats to their own interests. Pakistan already views India with deep suspicion, and the Indian Navy's expanded presence could alarm Islamabad, especially if Sino-Pakistani development of the port at Gwadar truly takes off as part of CPEC.[92] The danger of a mishap or misunderstanding between the two navies is acute because they do not have a protocol on the prevention of incidents at sea. Pursuit of such an agreement was part of the Lahore Declaration in 1999, but no formal progress has been made. An incidents-at-sea agreement and closer communication between the Indian and Pakistani navies and coast guards might also help reduce the threat of seaborne terrorism and avert episodes such as the controversial destruction of a Pakistani fishing vessel in 2015. In addition, frictions could arise between the Indian Navy and the PLA Navy as the latter extends its presence west of the Strait of Malacca. Such situations could involve other littoral and island states as well (such as Sri Lanka), increasing the importance of Indian diplomatic-military coordination. As the PLA Navy is likely to be a routine feature of the Indian Ocean strategic arena, the two sides might work to mitigate future problems by initiating discussions on risk-avoidance procedures, perhaps along the lines of the recent agreements between the United States and China.

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89 Raja Menon, "The Strategic Imperative," *Indian Express*, April 13, 2016.

90 Satu Limaye argues that coordination is improving. See Satu Limaye, "Weighted West, Focused on the Indian Ocean and Cooperating across the Indo-Pacific: The Indian Navy's New Maritime Strategy, Capabilities, and Diplomacy," CNA, February 2017, 34–40. Others are skeptical of defense-diplomacy coordination. See C. Raja Mohan, "Beyond Non-Alignment: New Imperatives for Defence Diplomacy," in Kanwal, *The New Arthashastra*, 104.

91 Narendra Modi, "SAGAR Stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region: PM Modi at International Fleet Review in Vishakhapatnam," web log, February 7, 2016, http://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-at-the-international-fleet-review-2016-in-visakhapatnam-andhra-pradesh-413019.

92 Manpreet Singh Chawla, "CPEC Drives China-Pakistan Naval Cooperation," National Maritime Foundation, January 3, 2017.

The most challenging change in the Indian Ocean, however, will be the slow accretion of naval nuclear weapons platforms, both submarines and surface ships. With India having commissioned its first ballistic missile submarine in 2016 and Pakistan recently testing a nuclear-capable cruise missile intended for its Agosta-class diesel boats, the two sides are entering what one scholar terms the "murky waters" of what could be "a dangerously volatile maritime environment." By initiating bilateral discussions and perhaps applying relevant experiences from the Cold War, the rivals might be able "to shape, rather than be shaped by the emerging nuclear regime" in the region.[93]

India's land borders will remain sources of tension with both Pakistan and China. Although there have been several irritating Chinese incursions along the lengthy border in recent years (the summer 2017 standoff at Doklam being the latest), the slow increase in Indian force structure on the Himalayan frontier is unlikely to generate significant concern in Beijing. Political issues are fraught with far more potential for tension than Indian military deployments. These include the activities of the Tibetan exile community in India, the future of the Dalai Lama, and Indian apprehensions about China's Belt and Road Initiative projects (including CPEC). Most important from New Delhi's standpoint, however, are Chinese vocal and intrusive territorial claims to almost the entire Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast, such as publicly protesting Prime Minister Modi's visit there in 2015 and the Dalai Lama's trip to an important lamasery in 2017.

With respect to the border with Pakistan, the large-scale transportation infrastructure work connected with CPEC accentuates Indian concerns about Sino-Pakistani collusion, exacerbating animosity along the Kashmir LOC. New Delhi especially objects to the fact that CPEC will pass through Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan territory (part of the disputed Kashmir region) and is bringing large numbers of Chinese workers and possibly security personnel into the area. Likewise, India's strategic conundrum regarding the threat of infiltration and terrorist attacks emanating from Pakistan remains. Despite the Indian Army's so-called surgical strikes across the LOC in September 2016, none of the options available in India's dominant or evolving military strategy proffer strategic results, and all of them carry significant risk of escalation. The risk will be especially high if intelligence and policy are not closely integrated, and if the political leadership and military commanders are not functioning in complete harmony. Here at the intersection of internal and external threats, New Delhi is challenged to reconcile domestic policy for managing unrest on its side of the LOC with its international diplomatic and military choices

[93] Iskander Rehman, "Murky Waters: Naval Nuclear Dynamics in the Indian Ocean," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2015, 1, 49; and Yogesh Joshi and Frank O'Donnell, "India's Submarine Deterrent and Asian Nuclear Proliferation," *Survival* 56, no. 4 (2014): 156–74.

vis-à-vis Pakistan. Rather than one focused on military means, a strategy combining outreach to the disaffected local population with diplomatic steps on the international front would seem to be the most propitious means of reducing threats to India's security.[94]

Implications for the United States

For the United States, the evolution of India's military strategy outlined above offers significant opportunities and several policy imperatives. In the first place, the two sides will want to ensure that they lose no ground in military-to-military relations. Washington and New Delhi have constructed an unprecedented level of cooperation among their armed forces and across other security sectors over the past quarter of a century, including India's designation as a "major defense partner" in December 2016.[95] This progress, however, could stall or ebb away if not nurtured by a robust and sustained program of exercises and exchanges within the framework of a bilateral strategic dialogue and the extant array of counterterrorism and intelligence interactions.

In addition to expanding and deepening the rich menu of bilateral training that the two sides have explored previously, India and the United States could consider two new topics. One of these might be collaboration in support of India's capacity-building programs with the Indian Ocean island countries. As New Delhi may be more open to multilateral cooperation than it has been in the past, regional capacity-building initiatives might be a good venue for working with countries such as Australia, France, and the United Kingdom that have important interests in the Indian Ocean. Second, both India and the United States have considerable experience in planning for and executing noncombatant evacuations and both would encounter significant challenges in the event of a crisis or unrest in the Persian Gulf or elsewhere. Moving beyond HADR to cooperative discussion of noncombatant evacuation operations in bilateral training exercises would thus build a foundation of mutual understanding for future emergencies.[96] Such interaction would also offer an opportunity to create mutually beneficial linkages between the

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[94] Perkovich and Dalton, *Not War, Not Peace?* 266–80.

[95] "Joint India–United States Statement on the Visit of Secretary of Defense Carter to India," U.S. Department of Defense, Press Release, December 8, 2016, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1024228/joint-india-united-states-statement-on-the-visit-of-secretary-of-defense-carter.

[96] Nilanthi Samaranayake, Catherine Lea, and Dmitry Gorenburg, "Improving U.S.-India HA/DR Coordination in the Indian Ocean," CNA, July 2014.

Indian military and U.S. forces in the Gulf region, currently a significant gap.[97] Given the division of responsibilities between U.S. Central Command, Pacific Command, and Africa Command, cooperation of this nature will require close management by overarching U.S. bureaucratic structures at the Departments of State and Defense in Washington, D.C. Defense sales and technology exchange are additional avenues for bilateral interaction that could strengthen Indian capabilities while enhancing interoperability and familiarity. The current level of U.S.-India defense trade (around $14 billion) would have been unimaginable when military-to-military interchanges began in the mid-1990s. U.S. participation in signature Indian programs such as helicopter sales and the provision of technology for a third aircraft carrier will be key components of the broader bilateral relationship.[98]

India's military responses to its shifting strategic environment will also present several imperatives to Washington. The two most prominent of these are mitigating nascent India-Pakistan nuclear competition in the maritime domain and reducing the potential for Sino-Indian tensions in the Indian Ocean. The United States' leverage in the first instance is very limited, but sharing some experiences from the Cold War era may help both sides achieve acceptable deterrence goals without falling into the trap of open-ended arms racing. Regarding China, Washington could provide New Delhi with a U.S. perspective on the long process that culminated in the United States and China signing two memoranda of understanding concerning air and maritime safety and major military activities in 2014. The three countries might even seek opportunities to discuss these issues together on the margins of multilateral gatherings such as meetings of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Finally, as in other parts of the world, Washington will have to address Indian concerns about the United States' credibility, suspicion that U.S. policy under President Donald Trump will tend toward transactional rather than strategic interactions, and anxieties that the United States "may be less

[97] Manoj Joshi, "India, U.S. and an Eastward Tilt," *Indian Express*, May 23, 2016. India does participate in Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) conferences hosted by the Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain. See P.K. Ghosh, "Shared Awareness and Deconfliction Initiative: Can the Success Be Applied to Southeast Asia?" *India-Asia-Pacific Defense Forum*, February 23, 2016; and Nilanthi Samaranayake, Michael Connell, and Satu Limaye, "The Future of U.S.-India Naval Relations," CNA, February 2017.

[98] Amaani Lyle, "Carter, Indian Counterpart Champion Growing Trade, Technology, Security Ties," U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Media Activity, December 8, 2016; and Ashley J. Tellis, "Making Waves: Aiding India's Next-Generation Aircraft Carrier," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2015.

engaged in the region."[99] Early government-to-government interactions are reported to have produced "a very strong sense of optimism about the relationship."[100] However, an undercurrent of concern about enduring U.S. presence is evident among many Indian strategic observers, even after the U.S. administration reaffirmed India's status as a major defense partner in April 2017 and Prime Minister Modi's successful June 2017 visit to Washington.[101] If not bolstered by strong U.S. commitments, these concerns could generate pressures for New Delhi to recalibrate its thinking toward a new form of nonalignment or various irreversible accommodations with China or Russia. The uncertainties attendant on the arrival of the Trump administration and the lingering legacy of suspicion toward the United States harbored by many members of the Indian political elite will continue to demand considerable strategic patience from Washington. It will not always be easy to maintain this posture given that India's developmental infirmities and difficulties mobilizing national resources will hobble its ability to reciprocate. As Ashley Tellis notes, however, the United States will benefit from "a calculated altruism whereby Washington continually seeks to bolster India's national capabilities without any expectation of direct recompense."[102] That is, the strategic interests of the United States are best served by a long-term investment in the U.S.-India bilateral relationship within the context of a broader Asia policy, even if the dividends of that investment are not realized in the short term. The most lucrative approach will be one that combines a steady expansion of ties and persistent but patient nudging of New Delhi with sustained tolerance for policy timelines longer than most Americans either expect or prefer.

[99] Sanjeev Miglani and Tommy Wilkes, "India's Navy Spurns Homemade Warplane in a Blow to Asia's Push for Self Reliance," *Wire* (India), February 13, 2017; Monika Chansoria, "America First May Become America Alone," *Sunday Guardian*, February 12, 2017; Raj Chengappa, "How to Deal with Trump," *India Today*, March 2, 2017; and Shyam Saran, "Geopolitical Impact of Trump's Presidency," *Business Standard*, March 8, 2017.

[100] "Trump Administration Has Very Positive View of Indo-U.S. Ties: Jaishankar," *Economic Times*, March 4, 2017.

[101] See, for example, Ajai Shukla, "In the Era of Donald Trump, India-U.S. Defence Ties Change Tack," *Business Standard*, April 25, 2017; and Shyam Saran, "Read between the Lines," *Indian Express*, June 29, 2017.

[102] Ashley J. Tellis, "Avoiding the Labors of Sisyphus: Strengthening U.S.-India Relations in a Trump Administration," *Asia Policy*, no. 23 (2017): 43–48.