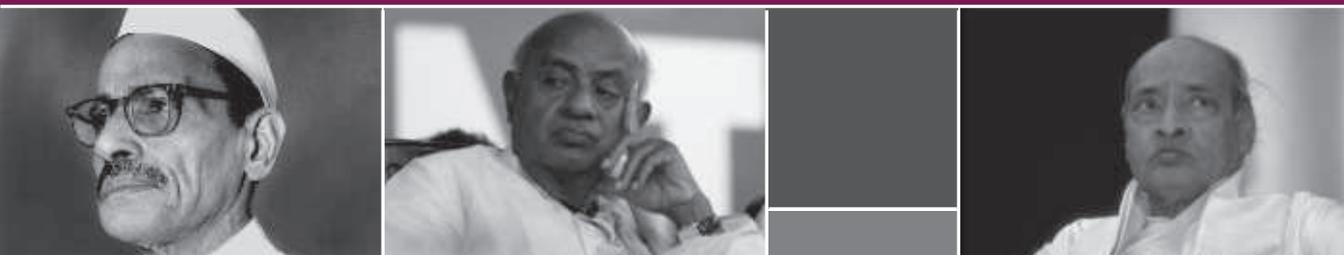




ASHLEY J. TELLIS

NONALIGNMENT REDUX

THE PERILS OF OLD WINE IN NEW SKINS



CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is deeply grateful to George Perkovich and Daniel Twining for their close reading and thoughtful comments, and to Sean Mirski for his detailed critique and incredible help on this paper. Thanks are also due to Rebecca White for her superb editorial improvements.

SUMMARY

Since the Cold War ended, India has been persistently criticized for lacking a grand strategy. Like many other complaints about India, this one, too, is curious because the country has been nothing if not the exemplar of excessive planning for much of its modern history. In fact, ever since India was incarnated as an independent state in 1947, it has always had a clear and arguably defensible grand strategy—even if it lacked a summary document that articulated its national aims.

Now, some six decades after independence, a group of Indian strategists has attempted to fill this gap by authoring *Nonalignment 2.0*, a report that offers a grand strategy for India in the coming years. There has been a surfeit of criticism surrounding the report, much of it misplaced: *Nonalignment 2.0* is a refreshing effort to lay down a strategic path for India, and should be commended for that reason. Its critics, unfortunately, have failed to appreciate many of the document's virtues, not least of which is its largely accurate portrayal of India's strategic environment. And that perceptive analysis serves as the sure foundation for the development of an appropriate grand strategy.

But in light of its own reading of India's strategic circumstances, the report's key recommendation—that India should remain “nonaligned” well into the future and refrain from cementing strong strategic “alliances” with other actors—is deeply misguided and potentially even dangerous. If New Delhi followed the report's core advice, India would be left perilously vulnerable.

The report fails to recognize that when economic interdependence coexists with interstate competition—as it does today—a country must maximize its relative gains through tightened affiliations with a small number of friends and allies. Instead of avoiding coalitions, New Delhi should thus enter into *preferential* strategic partnerships taking the form of high-quality trading ties, robust defense cooperation, and strong diplomatic collaboration. To be successful, India needs these economic, political, and military ties with key friendly powers—especially the United States—because neither its example as a successful democracy nor its efforts at internal balancing are likely to produce the security necessary to its well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Cold War ended, India has been persistently criticized for lacking a grand strategy. George Tanham, in his now widely cited essay *Indian Strategic Thought*, captured this sentiment when he asserted that “Indian elites show little evidence of having thought coherently and systematically about national strategy.”¹ Like many other complaints about India, this one, too, is curious because India was nothing if not the exemplar of excessive planning for much of its modern history. When viewed in retrospect, such criticisms are clearly exaggerated. Ever since India was incarnated as an independent state in 1947, it has always had a clear and arguably defensible grand strategy.

This fact notwithstanding, there now exists a cottage industry claiming that India has never possessed a grand strategy—when it is perhaps more accurate to say that what the nation traditionally lacked was mainly a *document* that formally enunciated its plans for achieving its overall aims. In any event, now, some six decades after independence, a group of Indian strategists has attempted to fill this vacuum by authoring *Nonalignment 2.0*, a report that offers a grand strategy for India in the coming years.² There has been a surfeit of criticism surrounding the report, much of it misplaced: *Nonalignment 2.0* is a refreshing effort to lay down a strategic path for India and should be commended for that reason. Its critics, unfortunately, have failed to appreciate many of the document’s virtues, not least of which is its largely accurate portrayal of India’s strategic environment. But in light of its own reading of India’s strategic circumstances, the report’s key recommendation—captured by its title—is also deeply misguided and potentially even dangerous.

The hope here is to make a modest contribution to the prevailing debate about India’s grand strategy spurred by the publication of *Nonalignment 2.0*, first by setting the stage for the larger discussion with a brief assessment of the

importunate criticism that India has lacked a grand strategy, a lacuna that, in the eyes of its critics, accounts for the country’s strategic failures during the Cold War. Then, a survey of the debate surrounding the release of *Nonalignment 2.0* leads to the argument that the

Ever since India was incarnated as an independent state in 1947, it has always had a clear and arguably defensible grand strategy.

report ought to be assessed seriously both because it reflects the views of important constituencies in India and because of its intrinsic merits. A close look at the architectonic structure of *Nonalignment 2.0* suggests that the report's perceptive analysis of India's strategic environment serves as the sure foundation for the development of an appropriate grand strategy. Yet, there is reason for critique: The report's geopolitical counsel is at odds with its own analysis of the strategic threats confronting India and, accordingly, leaves the country perilously vulnerable if its core advice—that India should remain “nonaligned” well into the future—were to be adopted as the nation's preferred grand strategy.

GRAND STRATEGY AND ITS REPRESENTATION

The historian Paul Kennedy usefully defined grand strategy as consisting of policies that reflect “the capacity of [a] nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of [a] nation's long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests.”³ If having a grand strategy therefore entails possessing the intent and the capacity to order a country's political, economic, and societal resources toward the attainment of certain desired goals, then independent India has always possessed a grand strategy. New Delhi may have been unsuccessful in realizing its most ambitious aims, and it may have settled for flawed instruments in their pursuit, but that is a far cry from claiming that India has consistently lacked a real grand strategy.

From the moment it gained liberty from the Raj, India pursued a grand strategy focused on preserving political unity amid its bewildering diversities and potential rifts, protecting the nation's territory from internal and external threats, and realizing the economic development that would transform the country into a genuinely great power. The first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, believed this was India's true destiny because of its ancient history, its advantageous geography, its unique civilizational ethos, and its vast power potential. Toward that end, Nehru and the leaders following him settled on three complementary stratagems that were intended to underwrite the rebuilding of the Indian state, renew India's material capabilities and strength, and restore the international eminence that various Indian empires enjoyed before the advent of colonialism.

First and most significant was the Indian adoption of democracy as a system of self-rule. Democracy was established not simply out of ideological predilection—which was

undoubtedly strong—but equally for instrumental reasons: Given India’s gigantic, complex, and sometimes frightening diversity, liberal democracy was judged to be the most effective device for preserving political unity. India’s leaders set up a political system based on the rule of law, guaranteed individual rights, a federal system that incorporated both a separation of powers at the center and limits on the central government’s authority over the states, secularism or state neutrality toward established religions, and an evolving ideology of cosmopolitan nationalism. Democracy, in this comprehensive sense, was self-consciously intended to hold India together against its centrifugal tendencies because its citizens, enjoying an assured “voice” in governance, would have no reason to contemplate secessionism or “exit” from the Indian state as an alternative to freely bestowed “loyalty”—as the development economist Albert Hirschman would later frame these choices.⁴

India settled for an economic strategy of “self-reliance”—a thinly disguised version of autarky—that incorporated a heavy emphasis on industrialization and was overseen by a statist system of centralized planning.

Second, and as a complement to political democracy, India sought to attack urgently and determinedly the debilitating challenges of mass poverty and pervasive underdevelopment. To do so, India settled for an economic strategy of “self-reliance”—a thinly disguised version of autarky—that incorporated a heavy emphasis on industrialization and was overseen by a statist system of centralized planning. Borrowing from the experience of the Soviet Union, contemporary leaders saw “self-reliance” as the quickest path to technological modernization, rapid economic growth, and the defeat of immiseration.

Third and finally, India recognized that the success of its nation- and state-building projects required a favorable international environment. Consequently, Indian policymakers struggled to create the requisite breathing room in the highly charged circumstances of the Cold War. In an effort to steer clear of the two hostile blocs that dominated global politics during this period, India charted a new path—“nonalignment”—which at its core involved renouncing membership in all formal alliances. Nevertheless, New Delhi continued to rely freely on both the United States and the Soviet Union for various forms of geopolitical, military, and economic assistance whenever necessary or appropriate.

In retrospect, this three-pronged grand strategy turned out to be only partially successful. By the end of the Cold War, India had indeed effectively overcome the basic challenges of maintaining a unified country, despite its mind-numbing diversity. To the surprise of many, India had also managed to preserve its democratic system intact, even though the quality of

Indian democracy was always challenged by both institutional weaknesses and occasional armed revolts in different parts of the country's periphery.

The Indian doctrine of nonalignment and favorable geopolitical circumstances combined to permit New Delhi to at least survive the Cold War without succumbing to formal membership in any of the competing global alliances.

India had also done reasonably well in preserving its freedom from entangling international alliances. While India's nonalignment was resolute in its official rejection of alliance membership, it proved to be highly flexible in practice, to the extent that it sometimes approached the antipode of what its vision portrayed. India's opportunistic behavior was particularly on display first in 1962, when India sought alliance benefits from

the United States to counter China, and later in 1971, when it sought strategic protection from the Soviet Union against the threat of Chinese intervention in its looming war with Pakistan. In any event, the Indian doctrine of nonalignment—what might be dubbed “non-alignment 1.0”—and favorable geopolitical circumstances combined to permit New Delhi to at least survive the Cold War without succumbing to formal membership in any of the competing global alliances, even as they also enabled India to exploit both superpower rivals for various forms of political and material support.

In contrast to these successes, India's internal economic weaknesses were glaring. The flaws in its statist and autarkic economic strategies prevented it from increasing its growth rates and modernizing its economy in a way that would have defeated poverty and consolidated its military prowess. By comparison, many other Asian states were undergoing exactly that metamorphosis as India was bogged down by its infamous “Hindu rate of growth.”

Whatever the reasons for India's economic failures, no one could credibly accuse New Delhi of *not* having a grand strategy. India's Cold War policies were imperfect and deficient in many ways—and they did undermine India's desire for rapid and comprehensive economic development—but this lacuna does not in any way repudiate the fact that India possessed a coherent approach to marshalling its national resources in order to realize certain geopolitical aims. The strategies adopted by New Delhi were faulty for many reasons—some derived from imperfect information about the success of Soviet central planning, others from optimistic assumptions about the effectiveness of state institutions in India, whereas others simply failed to account for how national creativity would be stifled by an overbearing dirigisme. Nevertheless, India's state managers took a calculated approach to marrying means to

ends. This was reflected most clearly—even depressingly—in the country’s numerous political and economic institutions, where India’s “best and brightest” administrators diligently undertook the task of consciously developing and implementing various national plans.

What India lacked throughout this era was more complex. It lacked a formal grand strategy *document* that articulated—in a single text—the country’s national vision, its derivative objectives, and how these were to be satisfied. It lacked strong institutional structures for strategic planning that could undertake complex policy analysis as well as a national security council that could integrate information from different ministries and agencies of the Indian government in order to prepare alternative options for decisionmakers. It lacked an impressive record of program implementation, especially in the national security arena, in part because neither appropriate monitoring bodies nor skilled national security specialists existed at the highest level of political and bureaucratic decisionmaking in India. And it lacked an effective system of directive control over the Indian military, in part thanks to the disasters of the 1962 Sino-Indian War when civilian micro-management contributed to India’s dramatic defeat. That experience produced an overreaction, congealing a rigid demarcation between the civilian and military domains that prevents the armed forces from becoming effective instruments of national policy.

India lacked a formal grand strategy *document* that articulated—in a single text—the country’s national vision, its derivative objectives, and how these were to be satisfied.

These complex, and sometimes consequential, limitations are often conflated in the oft-heard indictment that “India lacks a grand strategy.”⁵ What is actually meant is that either a strategy document is missing or that the institutions and practices pertaining to national security are weak or ineffective. Too much can be made of the dearth of a strategy document—and often is—due to a lack of recognition that the United States is perhaps the only great power in history that self-consciously articulates its national aims in publicly available texts. No other imperial entity historically followed a similar practice, and it would be hard to contend that their successes or failures (and America’s, for that matter) were in any way linked to either the presence or the want of such an instrument. The Indian case, in fact, confirms that the absence of a grand strategy document does not imply the absence of a grand strategy, the articulation of which could at any rate be found scattered among various ministerial reports, parliamentary debates, speeches by key Indian leaders in various national and international fora, and other official documents.

RENOVATING GRAND STRATEGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Given the complex challenges facing India today and in the future, a group of distinguished Indian thinkers (see box 1) recently attempted to remedy the much-complained-about absence of a formal document on India's grand strategy. This seventy-page paper, titled *Nonalignment 2.0*, was drafted with the blessings of senior national security officials in the current government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and it was released in New Delhi on February 28, 2012. Its express objective is to promote a national consensus in support of a new version of nonalignment as the optimum grand strategy for a rising India.

THE DEBATE OVER NONALIGNMENT 2.0

Not surprisingly, the document has already provoked considerable debate in India. Its provocative title harks back to a previous era and has proven to be quite the lightning rod, evoking either admiration or opprobrium depending on the political sensibilities of the

BOX 1. THE AUTHORS

<i>Sunil Khilnani</i>	professor and director of the King's India Institute, King's College London
<i>Rajiv Kumar</i>	secretary general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
<i>Pratap Bhanu Mehta</i>	president of the Centre for Policy Research
<i>Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Prakash Menon</i>	military adviser in India's National Security Council Secretariat
<i>Nandan Nilekani</i>	chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India
<i>Srinath Raghavan</i>	senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research
<i>Shyam Saran</i>	former foreign secretary, senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research
<i>Siddharth Varadarajan</i>	editor of the <i>Hindu</i>

commentator. For example, one Indian journalist, Seema Mustafa, fearful about the recent shift in official Indian attitudes toward the West, and the United States in particular, lauded the document as reflecting the “need of the hour.”⁶

Not surprisingly, the document has already provoked considerable debate in India.

She read it as affirming the “realization that India needs to be more subtle and non-partisan in her foreign policy, rebuild relations with old friends in West Asia and Africa, and instead of relying just on hard power and economic growth, look at classical diplomacy based on old-fashioned values to strengthen relations with the world.”⁷ Other analysts, such as the former Indian diplomat Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, were more cautious in their endorsement, raising questions about the logic of the notion of “strategic autonomy,” and noting that the term “nonalignment” sounded “backward looking, not forward looking, as [was] the intention of the authors.”⁸ On the whole, though, he commended the paper as “lucid, readable and deal[ing] comprehensively with foreign policy challenges,” and as such, “deserving of wide debate.”⁹

A noted American scholar of India, Sumit Ganguly, offered even more qualified approval. Acknowledging that the document had many merits, he nevertheless argued:

Thanks to its unevenness, its odd policy prescriptions and its sweeping exhortations, the document falls short in its attempt to provide a novel and practical blueprint for India’s policymakers as they seek to navigate new shoals and currents in the international arena. Their [the authors’] failure to provide a more cogent and feasible set of policy prescriptions for the challenges confronting the country represents a lost opportunity. Indeed the report’s proclivity in many areas to resurrect tired and tiresome ideas, such as the compelling need for global nuclear disarmament, is a disturbing commentary of how unready India’s foreign and security policy communities remain in dealing with the vital challenges of a state that seeks to claim what it deems to be its rightful place in the global order.¹⁰

Many more analysts in India and abroad were critical, even scathing, in their judgment of *Nonalignment 2.0*. One Indian commentator, Ravi Shanker Kapoor, caustically labeled the document “Claptrap 2.0,” declaring that it was little other than “a revivalist endeavor” that was intended “to bring back th[e] golden age” that “nonalignment 1.0” was imagined to be.¹¹ Asserting that the current document was “a hodgepodge of dangerous shibboleths, worn-out clichés, commonplace remarks, irritating pomposity, and wishful thinking,” he suggested that many of its weaknesses derived from the socialist worldview animating India’s ruling Congress Party, especially its president, Sonia Gandhi, and those around her.¹² Another prominent Indian columnist viewed as sympathetic to the opposition Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP), Swapan Dasgupta, echoed the charge. Viewing the document as a reaction provoked by the “misgivings” of those who fear the current “pro-US tilt in [India’s] foreign policy,” Dasgupta noted that *Nonalignment 2.0* was being openly discussed in New Delhi as an effort “to provide an intellectual foundation for a post-Manmohan Singh approach to foreign policy by the Congress establishment,” and as such, “it was, to put it bluntly, aimed as a policy primer for the Congress’ designated heir apparent, an attempt to inject his candidature with a cerebral gloss.”¹³

Without similarly focusing on the motivations of the exercise, an American analyst, Sadanand Dhume, was just as critical as his Indian counterparts. He characterized the document as “Failure 2.0” because of its attempted replication of what he judged to be the previous disaster of Nehru’s nonalignment. Arguing that “Nehru’s ghost continues to cast a shadow over India’s foreign policy instincts,”¹⁴ he noted that the proposed doctrine would be deeply disappointing to India’s strategic partners, such as the United States. More importantly, however, Dhume emphasized that *Nonalignment 2.0* was dangerously problematic for India itself because the report’s obsession with leftist abstractions blinded it to the need for stronger affiliations with the West in face of the emerging threats posed by regional authoritarian adversaries and jihadi terrorism.

A STEP FORWARD

Although many of the criticisms offered by the report’s detractors are persuasive, they are sometimes overwrought. To be sure, *Nonalignment 2.0* is a disconcerting title, and critics are rightly peeved by the course of action the analysis suggests. However, few have attempted

***Nonalignment 2.0* represents a genuinely attentive effort to think through many of the complex strategic dilemmas that India faces as it emerges into the post–Cold War environment.**

to demonstrate why nonalignment as a strategy might be singularly unsuited to aid India’s realization of its own strategic goals. That fact notwithstanding, *Nonalignment 2.0* deserves careful scrutiny for a number of reasons.

First and most important, it represents a genuinely attentive effort to think through many of the complex strategic dilemmas that India

faces as it emerges into the post–Cold War environment of international politics. Although it is certain that all will reject one or another of its prescriptions—something that is inevitable, given the complexity of the issues and the wide terrain covered in the document—the attempt to carefully analyze the strategic challenges facing India at multiple levels is not

simply admirable but exceptionally praiseworthy, in large part because it is undertaken so cogently and without obfuscation or evasion. In this context, even the authors themselves do not necessarily agree with every prescription in the report: As the preface notes, the text

should not be seen as one with whose every line all members of the group would agree. Rather than offer bland consensus, we have preferred a document that we hope will prompt further discussion and elaboration. It is the case, however, that all members of the group fully endorse the basic principles and perspectives embodied in *Nonalignment 2.0*.

The substantive core of the document contains all the components for a sensible Indian grand strategy, one that can force clarity of objectives, provide a metric for judging trade-offs, and offer a yardstick for assessing success of implementation. Whatever the reservations about some of its many recommendations may be—and there are so many, and in such diverse issue areas, that it is simply impossible to be either uniformly approving or evenly dismissive—the analysis underlying those suggestions deserves much more approbation than the report has received.

Second, *Nonalignment 2.0* is worthy of closer scrutiny because its recommendations, and to a much lesser degree its analysis, represent the distinctive view of the liberal and left-of-center segment of Indian political opinion. Although the dominance of this group has waned in recent decades and its appeal to younger Indians is increasingly questionable, the liberal-left worldview is still influential in Indian politics and is most clearly embodied in the Congress Party. Additionally, it must be understood in order to appreciate the newer nationalist and conservative articulations of India's national interest, since they are, after all, partly a reaction to the older vision.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that there are a large number of new regional political parties in India, which in many cases are offshoots of the original Congress

Party; their dominance is limited to key states—meaning that they do not have a national presence—but they have become critical to forming the coalition governments that India is likely to see at the center in the years to come. Their views on foreign and strategic policy are not yet clear, but their origins in the Congress system suggest that they might be far more sympathetic to the worldview articulated in *Nonalignment 2.0* than is generally acknowledged, thus providing even more reason for purposefully addressing its arguments.

***Nonalignment 2.0* must be understood in order to appreciate the newer nationalist and conservative articulations of India's national interest, since they are, after all, partly a reaction to the older vision.**

Third and finally, the grand strategy proposed in *Nonalignment 2.0* should be taken seriously because it enjoys the tacit endorsement of many national security managers in the current Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government of Prime Minister Singh. That the current national security adviser, Shivshankar Menon, and several of his deputies collaborated with the working group that produced the report suggests at least qualified endorsement, if not tacit acceptance, of its fundamental approach and its principal recommendations.

There has been at least one previous example of such an approach to shaping policy: The BJP-dominated National Democratic Alliance, for example, commissioned the National Security Advisory Board to produce a draft nuclear doctrine in the aftermath of India's 1998 nuclear tests. Although elements of that document proved to be similarly controversial, and its text was never "formally" adopted as India's official strategic guidance, several components of its recommendations quietly made their way into Indian force planning, strategic architecture, and declaratory doctrine. Although *Nonalignment 2.0* similarly does not enjoy any standing as a government document, its analytical framework and many of its recommendations are likely to migrate into official Indian policy, at least so long as the Singh government and any successors of similar political stripe are in power. Sincerely engaging its textual arguments is therefore sensible for pragmatic reasons as well.

NONALIGNMENT 2.0: THE ARCHITECTONIC AND CENTRAL ARGUMENTS

Any summary assessment of *Nonalignment 2.0* will necessarily fail to do justice to the scope and detail of its arguments as they appear in 309 numbered paragraphs distributed between seven substantive chapters and its preface, introduction, and conclusion. The overview provided in this section, therefore, cannot focus on the minutiae of the document—there is much to commend and to criticize with regard to its finer points—but only on its structure and its key arguments. Accordingly, there is no substitute for a critical reading of the original document in its entirety in order to fully appreciate its breadth and nuance.

AN INTERNAL FOCUS

Many international observers now view India as a rising global power. On November 8, 2010, President Barack Obama went further in his historic speech to India's parliament and plainly declared, "in Asia and around the world, India is not simply emerging; India has emerged."¹⁵ Still, the perceptions inside the country are markedly different. Reflecting the judgments of both Indian policymakers and most elites, *Nonalignment 2.0* begins its analysis by declaring that an effective grand strategy for India would be one that maximized the prospects for "the success of India's own internal development," which in turn would "depend decisively on how effectively we manage our global opportunities in order to maximize our choices—thereby enlarging our domestic options to the benefit of all Indians" (Preface). This theme is emphatically reaffirmed later on in the document, when the paper asserts that "the *core objective of a strategic approach* should be to give India maximum options in its relations with the outside world—that is, to enhance India's strategic space and capacity for independent agency—which in turn will give it maximum options for its own internal development" (Para 9, emphasis added).

This relentless focus on "internal development" as the necessary and appropriate object of Indian grand strategy is striking because it reflects the perceptions of a state that is conscious, first and foremost, of its own weaknesses. Hence, the authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* see India as contemplating its external engagement principally from the viewpoint of how it ought to maneuver in order to protect itself while it remedies its infirmities. As the document emphasizes, "we must seek to achieve a situation where no other state is in a position to exercise undue influence on us—or make us act against our better judgment and will" (Para 19). If India can do this, the report contends, it will have strengthened the conditions that enable the country to develop rapidly. This inward orientation, which permeates the analysis, is worth underscoring because unlike the casual assumptions made abroad about India's rise, most Indian policymakers still see their country—though admittedly ascending—as a poor, developing nation that, far from being a true great power, is in actuality a vulnerable state.

The authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* see India as contemplating its external engagement principally from the viewpoint of how it ought to maneuver in order to protect itself while it remedies its infirmities.

A former Indian foreign secretary and one of the members of the task force that drafted the document, Shyam Saran, noted in a perceptive article published before the report's release

that “India’s [growth in] relative power globally has outstripped the indices of personal and social well-being, unlike in the established industrialized powers, where they have historically moved in sync.”¹⁶ Given this reality, he held that India is in fact a “premature power” and, consequently, “a seat at the high table should be sought not as an end in itself, but as an opportunity to negotiate arrangements conducive to our economic and social development, and the overall welfare of our people.”¹⁷

The overall content of *Nonalignment 2.0* reflects this premise: The document conveys the weltanschauung of a still-frail rather than confident state, a country that seeks to exploit the evolving international system primarily in order to benefit itself and its development demands, and only through doing so, to shape it in some distinctive way. Not surprisingly, then, the fundamental emphasis in *Nonalignment 2.0* centers, defensively, on protecting

The fundamental emphasis in *Nonalignment 2.0* centers, defensively, on protecting India’s freedom of maneuver in a complex world rather than reconfiguring the world to advantage Indian interests.

India’s freedom of maneuver in a complex world rather than reconfiguring the world to advantage Indian interests—the latter, something that a comparable report authored in the United States might have emphasized.

Against this backdrop of self-conscious acceptance of India’s absolute and relative weaknesses, the report’s authors engage what they judge to be, essentially, the three

central strategic tasks facing India: sustaining high levels of economic growth, strengthening democratic consolidation, and enhancing national security. In each of these issue areas, the report offers a careful diagnosis of the problems afflicting India, and in response, a core solution that is further decomposed into numerous and often detailed implications at the policy level.

SUSTAINING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Given the pervasive constraints of India’s present debility, it is not surprising that *Nonalignment 2.0* focuses considerable attention on the critical objective of maintaining high levels of economic growth over the long term. Sustained economic growth is seen correctly as indispensable because it provides the material wherewithal for India’s power-political aspirations, which can be realized only to the degree that the country is able to improve the quality of life of its large and still-growing population.

The aim of successfully promoting comprehensive human well-being, then, animates *Nonalignment 2.0* in a way that is rarely mirrored in other countries' documents on grand strategy. But in a dramatic and striking departure from the core economic policy that defined "nonalignment 1.0," the report resoundingly comes out against renewed autarky and self-reliance and in favor of deepened interdependence and globalization. This unabashed endorsement of continued economic liberalization at home and abroad is important, particularly because India's economic reforms have currently all but stalled. Oddly, this critical affirmation of liberal economic policy appears to have escaped the attention of most of the report's critics. Yet, more than any other, this component holds the key to whether India will realize both its developmental and its strategic aspirations in the decades ahead.

***Nonalignment 2.0* resoundingly comes out against renewed autarky and self-reliance and in favor of deepened interdependence and globalization.**

The intensity of the document's approbation of globalization is in fact surprising, given both the country's traditional suspicion of market society and the center-left intellectual leanings of many of the authors. The report maintains that India's "economic growth requires deepened economic engagement with the outside world at all levels—trade, labor, technology and ideas." The country, therefore, "has to strive to maintain an open global order at many different levels" (Para 11). This argument signifies both the hegemonic triumph of market solutions in Indian policymaking today and a shrewd recognition that the urgency of India's developmental needs and strategic aspirations justifies latching on to exactly the answer that past Indian leaders rejected because of poor information and ideological blinkers. Consistent with these motivations, *Nonalignment 2.0* boldly declares that "India has to realize that globalization presents it with more opportunities than risks" (Para 91) and that consequently, "India's primary strategic interest is to ensure an open economic order" (Para 99).

In fact, the report may go too far in this regard: It somewhat breathtakingly asserts that "while India has often been accused of being protectionist in the past, current events have left India on the better side of liberalization arguments" (Para 99). This hyperbole is justified by India's increasing support for more liberal access to technology, more open labor flows, and greater emphasis on the mobility of capital and services, but it obviously obscures the still highly restrictive economic and trade practices that disfigure the Indian economy. As the report itself admits, "on questions of the mobility of goods, services, capital and labor, at present India's restrictions greatly exceed those seen in the median G-20 nations" (Para 105). When particular sectors—agriculture, retail, banking, insurance, and defense—and India's negotiating record in multilateral trade negotiations are closely examined, the claim that New Delhi is positioned "on the better side of liberalization arguments" rings hollow.

There are obviously good reasons why India has not liberalized as rapidly and comprehensively as the report's rhetoric suggests. In every case where economic restrictions still persist, Indian policymakers have been prevented from implementing the reforms that they clearly recognize would improve the country's growth prospects in the long term by the apprehension of what an open trading regime would mean either for economic volatility or the immediate welfare of India's large marginalized populations. Fearing the political consequences of short-term structural dislocations and the constraining power of various veto groups opposed to change, India's leaders have failed to liberalize as rapidly as is necessary to elevate India's growth rates. Their counterparts in the developed world, too, are victims of similar pathologies.

But the comparative openness of India's economy falls well short of the West's economies. Indeed, India comes up so short that it seems peculiar that the biggest challenges to continued globalization are assessed in the report as emerging from the developed economies—which “may not continue to view globalization as a non-zero sum game” (Para 97)—rather than from, for example, India's own overly restrictive economic regime. This myopic assessment remains a critical weakness in what is otherwise a refreshingly welcome—and important—endorsement of continued Indian participation in globalization.

The report also has much to contribute to the examination of the drivers of India's domestic growth. Noting that the benefits of global integration will accrue most to states “that have put their own house in order” (Para 91), the report urges the creation of appropriate social safety nets so as to sustain continued openness to the global economy at minimal social cost. Further, it urges the government to maintain India's current growth trajectory through continued domestic consumption—a praiseworthy approach that improves the domestic quality of life even as it avoids exacerbating the current global trade imbalances. Most importantly, however, it recognizes that India's capacity to sustain the desired high rates of growth will require secure access to a range of resources—especially energy, which receives extensive treatment in the report (Paras 212–230).

Somewhat strangely, however, the document fails to engage the single most important energy challenge facing India: the functioning of its domestic market. As the first report to advocate the U.S.-Indian civilian nuclear cooperation agreement argued almost a decade ago, “the biggest unilateral contribution India can make to address its energy problems is to develop pricing mechanisms that better reflect relative scarcity.”¹⁸ Instead of engaging in “a serious discussion about the value of introducing market mechanisms into all the core sectors of India's energy economy,”¹⁹ *Nonalignment 2.0* unfortunately lapses into the much easier—and oft-repeated and otherwise well understood—analysis of how the supply of various Indian energy sources ought to be augmented.

Thankfully, that weakness is not replicated when discussing the more crucial issue of sustaining India's capacity to innovate and produce knowledge as a means of competing in

the global economy. Noting that economic growth “will depend ever more completely on scientific and technological progress, on developing human capital, and on disseminating skills and expertise across the working citizenry,” the report emphasizes the importance of transforming “India’s research and educational infrastructure, right from the apex pure research institutes down to the access points for effectively imparting primary education and vocational skills to [the] wider citizenry” (Para 13). The more extended elaboration of this theme, which occurs in Paras 246–258, provides a cogent analysis of India’s current weaknesses and offers some thoughtful ideas on how they might be fixed.

The emphasis in *Nonalignment 2.0* on accelerating economic growth as the solution to overcoming India’s developmental deficits is noteworthy. But its endorsement of deeper Indian integration into the global economy as the means of elevating growth rates is even more commendable.

Altogether, the emphasis in *Nonalignment 2.0* on accelerating economic growth as the solution to overcoming India’s developmental deficits is noteworthy. But its endorsement of deeper Indian integration into the global economy as the means of elevating growth rates is even more commendable because, whatever its analytical lacunae in this area, it decisively rejects the still-strong autarkic impulses in the Indian body politic and instead provides a justification for the tighter Indian embrace of the world. This contribution has enormous implications for the ongoing war with the *Dirigiste Dogma*²⁰ that still hobbles India. It is unfortunate that many of the critics of *Nonalignment 2.0*, who have castigated it for many otherwise good reasons, have failed to compliment it for this decisive break with its similarly named predecessor. In fact, that rupture provides a critical foundation for an enduring strategic partnership with the United States in the years ahead.

STRENGTHENING INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Where the second strategic task of strengthening democratic consolidation is concerned, the report does not similarly break new ground in its core recommendation—renewing India’s public institutions and strengthening the capacity of the Indian state—so much as it does in the quality of its analysis. For starters, it is important to recognize that, in what is otherwise explicitly a document on grand strategy, the authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* give considerable attention to what appears entirely like an internal issue: the quality of Indian democracy.

Yet this concentration on democracy, its worth, and its protection derives from three different roots that find resonance in various parts of the report: Democracy as a system of rule is deeply valued because of its capacity to both advance the self-actualization of India's citizenry and preserve the unity of a complex and heterogeneous country. Indian democracy is increasingly challenged because of its location in a globalized international system where "domestic power and legitimacy will have to be maintained in more competitive and stringent conditions" (Para 22). And Indian democracy is synergistically stressed by both success and weakness, which together fuel rising popular expectations about the state's capacity to "effectively deliver public goods and services and to discharge its law and security responsibilities" (Para 22) precisely when many national institutions are in atrophy or disrepair.

For these reasons, regenerating India's democratic system becomes a valuable grand strategic object in its own right. The recent growth of the Indian economy, which has expanded

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at high single-digit rates since the latest reforms were initiated in 1991, provides new opportunities for refurbishing Indian democracy and accordingly requires an honest and penetrating assessment of its condition, which *Nonalignment 2.0*—again to its less-acknowledged

credit—provides. Indian democracy, as the document highlights, is hobbled by three serious—and potentially dangerous—weaknesses.

To begin with, and for all the complaints about its overbearing quality, the Indian state penetrates its own society far more poorly and imperfectly than is commonly recognized. Since the beginnings of modernity, it has been amply recognized that the growth of all great powers has been preceded by a qualitative improvement in the character of the state's penetration of society, an expansion that not only yields increased extraction of resources but also consequential gains in national cohesion. In India, however, there are vast swaths—spatially, psychologically, and materially—where the Indian state is simply not present to its own people. Hence, far from empowering democracy, it actually undermines it.

Further, when the state's presence is palpable, encounters with the state often turn out to be estranging. As the report forthrightly acknowledges, "most citizens still find it difficult to access the state without feeling alienated and subject to unpredictable responses from the state and its agents" (Para 284). This disaffection is rooted in the reality that receiving even the simplest state services often involves frustrating levels of petty corruption. Even when rent seeking of this kind is not at issue, popular antipathy toward the state may nonetheless arise because of the cumbersome and enervating procedures that citizens must endure for no rhyme or reason other than the fact that these routines have been ossified by long and unchallenged tradition. As *Nonalignment 2.0* summarizes it in a searing indictment, "the

state seems to be riddled with all kinds of perverse internal incentives that hinder decision-making. The identity of the state is driven more by adherence to archaic processes than producing outcomes” (Para 284).

Finally, the Indian state, despite its apparently vast absolute size and scale, is often simply not responsive to the needs and demands of its timorous masses. In part, this weakness arises from the fact that the country’s landmass is huge and its population large, heterogeneous, and unevenly distributed. The traditional Indian shortage of resources implied that the Indian state could not simply surmount the challenges of political geography through the use of capital and technology, as the United States has done since the

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nineteenth century. The acute diversity of India’s population also constrains the character of its substate units, with both their size and their configuration undergoing considerable evolution in response to popular demands as well as national efforts to increase efficiency. As the report frankly acknowledges, “the Indian state is still searching for the most effective scale and size at which to operate. While much of the attention of economic reform focused on getting the state out of certain areas, there was much less attention to areas where the state needed to get in—to expand its presence” (Para 285).

These limitations have collectively impaired the quality of Indian democracy, which the authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* correctly fear bodes ill for India’s success if left unaddressed. The problem is particularly grave in an era of globalization, when rising inequalities are likely to accompany economic growth at exactly the same time that greater connectivity with the outside world exposes India to new normative constraints from abroad, even as it is squeezed by new pressures for political remediation from within. In such an environment, the renewal of Indian democracy becomes a national security imperative because better “accountability, adherence to norms, and a capacity to enable pluralism to flourish, all will be essential to enabling states to command domestic legitimacy, and thus also to possess global credibility” (Para 22).

Given these considerations, the report endorses the efforts being pursued by the current Singh government to create “a rights-based welfare state—that promises its citizens full nutrition, education, health and housing” (Para 282). Unfortunately, however, it does not address the critical issue of whether the costs of creating such a welfare state could actually end up undermining the larger economic growth that is critical for India’s success. It also does not discuss whether the effort to provide basic necessities for the country’s large and impoverished population can in fact be accommodated in a framework of constitutional guarantees,

given that economic “rights” of the kind now being promulgated in India are fundamentally rivalrous in a way that political rights are not. Instead of taking these questions head on, the report somewhat lamely declares that if the country “can deliver these public goods adequately, there is no stopping India” (Para 282)—an anodyne conclusion that evades the real issue of whether India can in fact produce such goods without undermining its economic equilibrium and, by implication, its larger developmental and security goals.

On a more welcome note, *Nonalignment 2.0* squarely takes on the necessity of reforming India’s higher decisionmaking institutions in a variety of issue areas ranging from the Planning Commission to the Prime Minister’s Office. Recognizing that India’s administrative weakness often derives not from bureaucratic control per se but rather from excessive or misguided control, the report emphasizes the need to incorporate more resources, technology, and institutional experimentation in order to improve state capacity in India. Acknowledging that “there is still considerable skepticism about whether the Indian state

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will be able to take full advantage of this unprecedented historical opportunity” (Para 284), it nonetheless exhorts Indian policymakers to recognize that knowledge is the fulcrum on which the modern state’s effectiveness is grounded.

National leaders can no longer pretend to have a monopoly on knowledge, given the rapidity of its increase, its complexity, and its

cross-disciplinary character (insofar as it bears on decisionmaking). Consequently, policymakers must engage a wider spectrum of civil society if their decisions are to be better informed. In the past, state-society relations were characterized by a variety of asymmetries: States could maintain high degrees of secrecy in regard to their functioning vis-à-vis society, power would remain hierarchically ordered both within the state and in society, and centralized state power was more effective in contrast to various distributed alternatives relative to society. Now, however, these traditional asymmetries are breaking down in the face of new technologies, a better educated population, and rising political demands (Paras 289–297). The authors have not missed this fact.

As *Nonalignment 2.0* masterfully summarizes, “the next generation challenge for Indian democracy will be to move forward from a view of legitimacy as simply based on electoral efficacy to a view of legitimacy based on impartiality: impartiality both in regard to the hearing of all interests and in their composition into workable consensus on matters of national interest” (Para 296). In confronting this challenge, reforms of various sorts will undoubtedly be critical, but the most demanding ingredient will be the quality of political

leadership. And in a ringing desideratum—which almost reads like an indictment of the current Indian government (although it was emphatically not intended to be)—the report asserts, “democracies elect leaders, and ultimately there can be no getting away from the fact that the political leadership has to take responsibility. In a democracy only a political leadership can have the authority to mobilize genuine consent. The administrative apparatus of the state takes its cues from the example of the political leadership. No amount of structural reform of the state, or continuous economic growth, will yield the necessary dividends if political leadership is indecisive, irresponsible or indifferent” (Para 300).

PROTECTING NATIONAL SECURITY

For a document proposing an Indian grand strategy, it should not be surprising that the third strategic task—enhancing national security—receives enormous and detailed attention in *Nonalignment 2.0*. In one sense, the entire document is about national security writ large because the authors correctly conceive of economic transformation, democratic renewal, and reformed foreign and security policies as seamlessly contributing to enhancing the safety of the Indian nation in a competitive international system. But understood even in the narrower sense, where national security is viewed as the end product of adroit diplomacy, military effectiveness, and stable internal conditions, the report makes enormous contributions both in its analysis and its recommendations, which are, despite some critical shortcomings, sagacious and creative.

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In general, *Nonalignment 2.0* argues that enhancing India’s national security in the decades to come will require paying the closest attention to Asia, the emerging fulcrum of global power. In that context, a new approach to South Asia and the Indian Ocean is called for, given their critical significance as geographic spaces abutting India’s own borders. In the face of direct external threats, personified most clearly today by China and Pakistan, the report urges a comprehensive modernization of the nation’s conventional military capabilities. More importantly, it calls for a renovation of India’s extant military strategies supplemented by a modest consolidation of its nuclear capabilities to deter strategic coercion and the emerging menace of nuclear terrorism. And, given the abiding importance of internal security for India, the report emphasizes the centrality of increasing state penetration and effectiveness,

promoting social justice, and improving national integration through better political and economic participation even more than improving the coercive applications of force.

India's Strategic Environment

The discussion of national security in *Nonalignment 2.0* sensibly begins with a survey of the strategic context conditioning the most important Indian decisions about foreign and security policy. The analysis here is obviously not intended to scrutinize every aspect of global politics in detail, but only to highlight key geopolitical structural features and flag the most important strategic relationships for India. In the post–Cold War era, the report emphasizes what all in the West have by now internalized, but which has special

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meaning for India: that Asia is the emerging geopolitical core of the international system for economic, political, ideological, and strategic reasons simultaneously.

But because this development is linked to China's enormous "economic and strategic footprint" (Para 26), its import for India is

especially significant given the threats that Beijing poses to Indian security. The border disputes between the two countries, China's problematic relationship with Pakistan and occasionally with the smaller South Asian states, its suspicions about India's role in Tibet, its growing nuclear capabilities (including capabilities that have been directed at India since 1974), and now its gradual emergence as an Indian Ocean power, all combine to intensify the geopolitical pressures on India at a time when China also happens to be India's fastest growing trade partner.

The two countries' burgeoning bilateral economic relationship, while obviously beneficial, is not without its problems: It has generated a growing Chinese trade surplus, enabled dangerous Chinese penetrations into India's strategic sectors, including telecommunications, and is sustained by preferential Chinese governmental support to its companies. While growing Sino-Indian trade ties offer opportunities for India with regard to technology transfer and infrastructure modernization, they increasingly represent for India the same dilemma that the United States has now wrestled with vis-à-vis Beijing for some two decades: How does one balance a geopolitical competitor that also happens to be a key commercial partner?

India's responses to this challenge will be no less discomfited than those of the United States, yet they are just as important for Indian security. As *Nonalignment 2.0* declares plainly,

“China will, for the foreseeable future, remain a significant foreign policy and security challenge for India. It is the one major power which impinges directly on India’s geopolitical space. As its economic and military capabilities expand, its power differential with India is likely to widen” (Para 26). Given this prognosis, the report soberly concludes that “India’s China strategy has to strike a careful balance between cooperation and competition, economic and political interests, bilateral and regional contexts. Given the current and future asymmetries in capabilities and influence between India and China, it is imperative that we get this balance right. *This is perhaps the single most important challenge for Indian strategy in the years ahead*” (Para 41, emphasis added).

For a conclusion that is so dead on the mark, it is indeed unfortunate that the report fails to define with similar clarity what the essence of the appropriate Indian response ought to be other than suggesting “nonalignment” in the context of affirming that “our posture towards China must be carefully nuanced and constantly calibrated in response to changing global and regional developments” (Para 33). This call for a “calibrated” management of China then results in the demand that India “develop a diversified network of relations with several major powers to compel China to exercise restraint in its dealings with India, while simultaneously avoiding relationships that go beyond conveying a certain threat threshold in Chinese perceptions” (Para 34). The need for such a delicate pas de deux leads inevitably to the conclusion—as becomes manifest later in the report’s discussion of the triangular U.S.-China-India relationship—that “it is undoubtedly in India’s best interests to have a deep and wide engagement with as many powers as are willing to engage with it” (Para 136), even as “it has to recognize that its core security challenges are ones that it has to meet alone” (Para 137). Though that approach, of course, is not without problems.

If China poses a challenge to India because of its strength, Pakistan is viewed in the report—again correctly—as posing dangers to India because of a peculiar combination of increasing state weakness married to a propensity for perilous risk taking. There is little doubt that the Pakistani “deep state” is viscerally anti-Indian for historical, ideological, and institutional reasons, but, despite its growing enervation, it still finds it necessary to needle India through subconventional violence—often state supported—as an instrument of strategic compellence. Thanks to the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides, Indian policymakers are acutely aware of the risks of conventional military responses to Pakistani provocations and, hence, have oscillated historically between high-profile peace initiatives and chagrined disengagement.

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In contrast to its inadequate treatment of the China problem, *Nonalignment 2.0*'s suggestions for managing Pakistan are both creative and astute. Although the report somewhat erroneously assumes that "there may [be] differences of emphasis, but there is no fundamental gap in the perception and attitudes among different sections of the Pakistani elite" (Para 55) toward India, it goes on to advocate a policy of continuous "normal diplomacy" (Para 69) between New Delhi and Islamabad, irrespective of what provocations may be unleashed by various jihadi groups along the way. While such a low-key but sustained process could help mitigate any misunderstandings, it would nevertheless serve as a device for signaling Pakistan "that the actual pace [and presumably the fruit] of negotiations would be [implicitly] contingent on its behavior" (Para 70). By so divesting the bilateral conversation of any extraordinary significance while at the same time eliminating the hitherto dramatic oscillations in engagement, the strategy outlined in the report seeks to buttress "the aim of our Pakistan strategy," which *Nonalignment 2.0* argues "must be to impart stability to our relationship" (Para 61).

Because an effective Indian policy toward Pakistan must "simultaneously work towards achieving a degree of normality in [the] relationship and ... cope with present and potential threats posed by Pakistan" (Para 54), the latter goal evokes diverse recommendations in the report. The document begins with the need to engage the international community, especially Washington and Beijing, in restraining Islamabad (despite the expected low utility of such entreaties). It then moves on to emphasize the all-important necessity of protecting the Indian nation against terrorist attacks through better intelligence gathering and law enforcement. It also urges the Indian state to work toward building the necessary "confidence and trust [required] to tackle the more deep-seated and thorny outstanding disputes" (Para 61) with Pakistan. This process can be supported by a comprehensive deepening of economic relations, greater collaboration on energy and water issues, an expansion of intersocietal links through a more liberal visa regime, and a new effort at military-to-military exchanges.

These "positive levers" are complemented by "negative levers," the most important of which include preparing to mount diplomatic offensives against Pakistan in international fora when required, reasserting India's traditional claims to "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir" (more as a declaratory policy for bargaining leverage than anything else), and most significantly, developing the capacity to mount discrete punitive military operations against Pakistan when required in retaliation for conspicuous terrorism. In this context, the report also advocates that the Indian state prudently prepare for the contingencies of nuclear terrorism and catastrophic state failure in Pakistan.

The assessment of national security challenges posed by China and Pakistan is balanced by a detailed survey of South Asia proper because "within the Asian theater, no region is more vital for India" (Para 42). The details of the review are less important for the analysis here, except to note that it reflects several intense convictions among Indian policymakers today. New Delhi believes that South Asia is an all-too-poorly integrated region. The destiny of

the area is deeply tied together by geography, economics, and the environment, but the intersecting domestic politics of each of the region's states, as well as larger continental competition, have combined to limit expanded cooperation. Finally, India's decisionmakers see India, the dominant power in South Asia, as confronted by both opportunities and constraints in its own immediate vicinity.

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The entire discussion on South Asia is suffused with a critical premise that is often controversial among Indian strategists—that “India cannot hope to arrive as a great power if it is unable to manage relationships within South Asia” (Para 42). Many commentators in New Delhi contend that India, too, like the United States, Great Britain, and Germany before it, can rise despite being situated in an unsettled neighborhood. But the authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* clearly believe otherwise—and they frame their recommendations accordingly. Noting that India's overwhelming size and presence dominates the consciousness of all its neighbors, thereby making the region “a strategic challenge because it falls in the realm of collective moral psychology as much as conventional strategy” (Para 45), they sensibly advocate that India “constantly go the extra mile to reassure its neighbors, particularly the smaller ones.” Although India cannot afford to be duped in this process, it must nonetheless be prepared to offer these partners “many more unilateral concessions on trade, investment and aid,” and “rather than insist[ing] on reciprocity or short-term equivalence, [it] will have to focus on longer-term goals” (Para 46).

This wise recommendation constitutes the leitmotif of the report's approach to managing India's periphery. The strategy aims to “single-mindedly focus on whatever it takes to make regional economic integration—via trade, investment, movement of people—a reality” (Para 46) in order to advance the development of India's own border regions while concurrently making South Asia a pathway to deeper globalization. On this score too, the policy discontinuity between *Nonalignment 2.0* and “nonalignment 1.0” cannot be overemphasized. Whereas “nonalignment 1.0” sought insistently, as a matter of practice if not doctrine, to insulate the subcontinent from the rest of the world in order to protect Indian security, its renovated successor now explicitly recognizes the benefits of greater connectivity with the international system. While the report acknowledges that South Asia will remain “a region where other great powers, particularly China, are trying to expand their influence” and that India will need a “strategy to counter this [penetration],” it also recognizes that not all external encounters are threatening. Some may in fact be an opportunity. In any case though, success will accrue only to the degree that India too learns to play the same game—positive engagement with its neighbors—and its gains will emerge, the report notes, as “a consequence of what we do, not what we say” (Para 48).

The contextual discussion of national security then concludes with an extended analysis of West Asia, the traditional Indian term for the Greater Middle East. Its significance derives from a multiplicity of factors: its energy resources (which are critical for India's continued economic growth), its location as a cockpit for Saudi and Iranian rivalries, the transformations in state-society relations currently occurring in the region, and the opportunities those create for Western intervention, including the challenges of protecting state sovereignty while simultaneously supporting internal demands for representation and reform.

Much of the discussion here is consistent with long-standing Indian policies. While there are no surprises—though the omission of any discussion (or even a mention) of Israel is peculiar given its critical importance for Indian defense—there appears, tucked innocuously in this particular section, a critical proposition: “The... key principle that should guide our strategic engagement with West Asia is the avoidance of sharp choices” (Para 88). If the phrase “with West Asia” is deleted, this pericope could well be *the* theme for the entire report—including its controversial title.

Military Requirements

While the strategic context of India's foreign policy commands attention in the discussion on national security, the military requirements necessary to support that policy receive just as much attention in *Nonalignment 2.0*. The discussion here, however, does not concentrate on weaponry but rather on strategy. Directed principally at the key external threats, China and Pakistan, the analysis is admirable and the recommendations have a clarity that would make them inappropriate for any official document on defense issued by the government of India.

Given India's still-dangerous external security environment, the broad theme that *Nonalignment 2.0* reiterates in the area of national defense is that “hard power”—a synonym for potent military capabilities—has enduring relevance. The fact that both China and Pakistan have significant conventional and nuclear forces, however, limits India's freedom of action in significant ways. Protecting Indian interests in the face of these constraints, therefore, requires a careful understanding of the limits of the possible, the changing comparative

importance of various combat arms, and the necessity of developing new strategies that permit military force to be applied purposefully but without undue risks of escalation.

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importance of various combat arms, and the necessity of developing new strategies that permit military force to be applied purposefully but without undue risks of escalation.

The nuclearization of the greater South Asian region essentially implies that large-scale wars intended to capture significant territory are a thing of the past. Any Indian effort to take territory from Pakistan, which admittedly does possess strategically important terrain in close proximity to the border, could trigger unacceptable nuclear retaliation. In the case of China, not only are its vital spaces far from its disputed border with India, but the terrain along the frontier does not support quick and rapid penetrations even by well-equipped and highly motivated forces. India's land forces, which presently constitute the core of its offensive military power, therefore stand relatively devalued because as currently configured, they have reduced utility in the context of the evolving strategic environment. Although a capable Indian Army will nonetheless be required for many reasons, including frontier defense and internal security, its existing force structure will have to be altered to enable more likely missions than the seizure and holding of enemy territory.

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While *Nonalignment 2.0* argues this point persuasively, it contends less-than-convincingly that the stalemate along India's terrestrial borders can be altered by a "leveraging of potential opportunities that flow from peninsular India's location in the Indian Ocean" (Para 164). There are good reasons why India ought to invest in modernizing its naval capabilities, but expecting that maritime power can provide countervailing offsets to a continental impasse should not be among them (or at least not the principal driver). Naval forces can do little to hold at risk Pakistan's homeland or its land forces (which, like India's, constitute its main arm of defense), and there is little likelihood in the foreseeable future that amphibious operations or conventional deep strikes from the sea can remedy the current standoff on land produced by the deterrent power of nuclear weapons. Naval forces can do even less with regard to China, whether it be contributing to success in a Himalayan war or holding at risk China's maritime trade in the Indian Ocean during a crisis (which is harder than is often supposed). Admittedly, India ought to make the investments necessary "to emerge as a maritime power" (Para 164), as *Nonalignment 2.0* correctly advocates. Those capabilities will expand the repertoire of its limited war options against Pakistan, provide a war-fighting potential that limits China's ability to range freely in the Indian Ocean, serve as a source of political reassurance for many of the smaller Indian Ocean states, and contribute to the provision of various public goods in the regional oceanic space. But naval forces are unlikely to be able to transform the current continental stalemate along India's land borders.

The strategic paralysis characterizing land wars requires creative solutions in terms of military strategy, which in turn will demand new operational instruments. If the presence of nuclear weapons and the hostility of terrain requires a shift from "the paradigm focused on

capture of territory to a paradigm based on destructive ability” (Para 170)—especially in the compressed timeframes defining the subcontinent’s wars—then, as the report correctly notes, greater investments will have to be made in instruments such as “air power, missiles and long range guns” (Para 170) and in substantially upgrading India’s special forces, an important capability that oddly escapes attention in this part of the report. In other words, land-bound sources of firepower and high-value, small-unit components supported by complementary elements such as space, cyber, and electronic warfare—all capable of inflicting potent but discrete punishment—hold the promise of recovering some Indian freedom of action in the otherwise paralyzing presence of nuclear weapons.

These types of capabilities will matter more than ever before in India’s military strategy, and the document correctly highlights their significance because they can be employed rapidly and metered in scale to the offense, and are useful for both signaling and substantive interdiction. The report, however, could have done a better job by insisting on greater investment in these tools, even at the cost of some of the traditional priorities, rather than simply presuming that continued economic growth will permit India to acquire more of everything.

In any event, the shifts in military strategy recommended in *Nonalignment 2.0* are indeed eye-catching. The discussion pertaining to Pakistan endorses what the Indian armed forces have already begun to do with varying degrees of visibility: planning for operations that emphasize “the employment of cyber and/or air power in a punitive mode” (Para 170) at the lower end of the war-fighting spectrum as well as “shallow thrusts [by land forces] that are defensible in as many areas as feasible along the International Border and the LoC [Line of Control]” (Para 169) at the higher end.

But the report’s suggestions in regard to China are both novel and creative. On the assumption that China’s military advantages over India along the Himalayas will continue to grow, the document reiterates that New Delhi’s strategy should aim solely at “the restoration of [the] status quo ante” (Para 173) in the event of conflict. However, in a sharp departure from the current strategy of forward defense simpliciter, the report advocates a more complex concept of operations that is centered on “limited tactical offensives” intended to underwrite local “land-grabs” for purposes of securing an advantageous position in post-conflict negotiations. This “strategy of quid pro quo” would require the Indian military to support insurgencies in Indian territories overrun by Chinese forces as a means of wearing them down, to interdict the Chinese logistics and operational infrastructure in Tibet through direct and standoff means, and “to dominate the Indian Ocean region” through naval power as the final prong in an “asymmetric strategy” (Paras 174–177) toward China. Although some of these elements may seem overly provocative—for example, the report is ambiguous about whether India should support anti-Chinese insurgencies only in its lost territories or in Tibet proper as well—they represent in their totality a new way of thinking about the challenges of securing the Sino-Indian border, in contrast to most traditional discussions, which are sterile and uninspired.

Implementing the innovations suggested with regard to both Pakistan and China will require not just improvements in material capability, but also larger transformations in military and higher defense organization paired with fundamental changes in strategic culture. The report summarizes some of the major changes necessary in regard to organization, such as the need for a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, integrated theater and functional commands, and reforms in the Ministry of Defense. These have been much discussed in India in recent years.

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What has not received focused attention, however, are the changes necessary in India's nuclear capabilities and posture in the face of the growing threats posed by China and Pakistan. *Nonalignment 2.0* engages this problem at length, even if at the cost of depth, by emphasizing the need for "hardening and survivability of [the] arsenal," ensuring "an assured second-strike capability" through "the development of the maritime leg of [India's] nuclear capability and the accompanying command and control systems," and "work[ing] towards the operationalization of [the country's] missile defense capabilities" (Para 238). The report's most important contribution, however, can be found in its discussion of the Indian response to nuclear terrorism. Here, it argues that the currently "stated nuclear doctrine needs to be amended to affirm [both] the responsibility of the state from which nuclear weapons or material[s] [originate or] may be stolen" and India's willingness "to act on strong but less than perfect information." Such a modification of standing policy is held to be desirable because it "would help [to] disabuse any state of the notion that it can claim helplessness in preventing theft of material or warheads" (Para 240).

The discussion of nuclear policy extends to other issues pertaining to nonproliferation, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the necessity for an international agreement on "no first use," and it includes a strong reaffirmation of India's traditional desire for "complete nuclear disarmament" (Para 243). While this endorsement of "global zero" has been panned by some analysts, the obsession with disarmament should not be surprising given its deep roots in modern Indian history. What is more significant about the nuclear policy discussion in the report is the still-strong fear of India being victimized by various global trends, including desirable ones, such as nuclear arms reductions, which the authors of the document fear could represent "merely the pursuit of traditional non-proliferation objectives by other means" (Para 237). There is perhaps no better proof that being at the receiving end of global nonproliferation policy for close to forty years has indeed taken its toll.

While *Nonalignment 2.0*, on balance, thus makes vital contributions to the ongoing Indian debate about national security and offers many cogent ideas for better protecting the state, it shies away from frontally addressing the crucial challenge of India's strategic culture: namely, whether the country possesses the appropriate "substantive rationality" necessary to prosper in a competitive global system. Whether India possesses "a corporatist commitment to the production of wealth and power" and, by implication, can "respond successfully to the structural constraints to dominate in international politics"²¹ is still an open question. On this vexed issue, the report reflects the ambivalence still pervasive in India and offers the mystifying notion that India's "power has often been the power of its example" (Para 20)—a claim that, even if true, offers little insight into how India ought to attempt to shape the world to suit its interests.

Internal Security

The discussion of national security in *Nonalignment 2.0* concludes with a brutally honest assessment of internal problems. Since domestic threats remain almost as demanding as external challenges, it is not surprising that the report devotes an entire chapter to this issue. What will be startling to even the most casual reader, however, is the incredibly

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candid discussion of India's failings as a democratic polity, and of the contribution these shortcomings have made toward subverting Indian security. While many discussions of internal security in India are quick to place blame at the feet of its troublesome neighbors—and there is plenty of culpability that can be attributed to Pakistan today and to China in the past—*Nonalignment 2.0* chooses to cast its gaze resolutely inward,

focusing on how the deficits of Indian democracy have created many of the conditions that provoke internal instability, some of which are then exploited by ill-intentioned bystanders.

Emphasizing that internal security in India is compromised by a trifecta of problems centering on state inadequacy—manifested through missing presence, predation, and partiality—the report argues that the resulting damage to democracy breeds conditions that stimulate secessionism, violence, and illegitimate challenges to authority. Unsurprisingly, India must cope with a wide variety of domestic challenges, including the political unrest in Jammu and Kashmir and in the Indian northeast, as well as the Naxalite movement in tribal India.

While dealing with these problems will require the effective, but discriminate, use of hard power on occasion, many of India's domestic problems can be mitigated by

a commitment to practices and procedures of democratic incorporation of all citizens via the federal architecture. In this context, both human rights and political and civil liberties cannot be seen as discretionary grants from the political authorities, or as optional values that can be rescinded in pursuit of internal security. They have to be the bedrock of our federal democracy (Para 188).

Admitting that the complexity of India's internal security problems precludes redress through any simple, cookie-cutter solutions, the report argues that even otherwise sensible instruments such as economic development are too blunt to provide universal fixes. Rather, each case requires textured solutions that integrate a good understanding of the specific grievances at play and evince a willingness to deal with the dissident mainstream while isolating the fringes. Accommodating solutions must be developed through a process of negotiation and dialogue that transcends the formal mechanisms in the constitution. Coercion must be employed only in extreme circumstances, and always through "locally raised and well-trained police forces operating responsibly, without the culture of impunity which has often led to large-scale rights violations and generally exacerbated the conflict" (Para 209). While none of these ingredients is amenable to mechanistic employment, the key point emphasized by *Nonalignment 2.0* is that "in the long run, the greatest hope for dealing with internal security problems remains the strength of [Indian] democracy. So long as citizens have the belief that they are genuinely being heard, the incentives to violence will come down" (Para 188). A finer bookend to the discussion of Indian national security cannot be found.

A PRAISEWORTHY EFFORT

For all the criticisms of *Nonalignment 2.0*, a close perusal of its text suggests that it contains all the building blocks for a sensible Indian grand strategy. Given the circumstances that India faces and the opportunities it has available thanks to two decades of economic reform, it is indeed fitting that the report focuses overwhelmingly on the need for India to defeat its developmental problems if it is to realize its dream of taking a place at the high table of international politics. Soaring and sustained levels of economic growth for a long period of time—as China has demonstrated since 1978—remain the only instrument by which India will be inexorably transformed into a great power. Only then can New Delhi position itself as an effective pole in the Asian geopolitical balance and receive international attention as a strategic entity of global significance. That *Nonalignment 2.0* issues a clarion call for such performance to be attained through deepened interdependence and globalization—rather than through any attempt at refurbishing the failed autarky of the past—deserves clear and unstinting praise.

The report's emphasis on strengthening Indian democracy underscores the proposition that enhancing a country's wartime *and* peacetime interests involves not simply material elements, but the character of the state's political order as well.

The report's emphasis on strengthening Indian democracy both because of its intrinsic worth for India and because of its benefits for the global community is also meritorious, especially in a document on grand strategy. It underscores the proposition that enhancing a country's wartime *and* peacetime interests involves not simply material elements, but the character of the state's political order as well.

The report's appropriately expansive treatment of national security covers a vast terrain that includes engaging the key strategic arenas that most impact India's well-being, building its military capabilities to cope with both external and internal threats, and addressing the disfigurements of Indian democracy that breed its internal security problems. It should not be surprising that in a report covering such diverse issues, some of the analysis and recommendations will be queried, contested, and even opposed. But the overall effort, because of its cogency and its internal logic, deserves the commendation that its critics have failed to bestow.

FALLING SHORT: THINKING ABOUT INDIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

As a proposed grand strategy for India, *Nonalignment 2.0* clearly has many often-underappreciated strengths. It provides a penetrating analysis of India's current circumstances and its three main strategic challenges: the necessity of expanding national power through economic growth achieved via intensified global integration; the imperative of remedying India's internal weaknesses through both economic instruments and democratic renewal; and, finally, the need to prepare seriously for the divergent threats posed by China and Pakistan. With regard to these virtues, however, the document still falls short—less in its understanding of how the emerging global milieu affects India, and more in its prescriptions

for how India ought to conduct itself in order to be successful in that environment. For a document on grand strategy, this is indeed a major shortcoming.

THE IMPOTENCE OF EXAMPLE

The report's assessment of the emerging global system is on balance fairly conventional, though some of its details may be contested. To begin with, it notes that

in contrast to the twentieth century, the twenty-first century is unlikely to be characterized by a world bifurcated between two dominant powers. While China and the United States will undoubtedly remain superpowers, it is unlikely that they will be able to exercise the kind of consistent, full-spectrum global dominance that superpowers exercised during the mid-twentieth century Cold War (Para 17).

At the highest level of generalization, this description is probably correct, though a more fine-grained analysis would suggest that even as China grows during the next few decades, it is unlikely to become a true peer of the United States, given what will still be significant limitations on its national power. Further, it is possible to contend that during the Cold War neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was able to exercise the “consistent, full-spectrum global dominance” that the report imagines those superpowers did—the rise of the nonaligned bloc is good proof of that fact. And irrespective of the structural configuration that emerges at the core of the global system in the new century, the United States is likely to be at least as influential as it was in the previous era if measured by its power-projection capabilities or its share of the global product.

But these are mere quibbles. The report is right, in any case, that the global system will witness some measure of power diffusion in addition to the oft-discussed prospect of a power transition. The former is manifested both by the emergence of new significant regional entities and the growing capacity of substate groups to threaten even powerful states; the latter is reflected in the possibility that a rising China might catch up with, or even overtake, the United States in power-political terms. The most important—and utterly correct—conclusion that *Nonalignment 2.0* affirms, however, is that despite the dramatic changes occurring in international politics, of which growing economic interdependence may be only the most conspicuous, India cannot shut its eyes to the fact that “great power competition of a classical kind will continue to define aspects of the global order” (Para 19).

Since the veracity of this conclusion cannot be contested, the key burden imposed on India is thus the maximization of its own power. Regardless of whether that power is intended to support domestic uplift or to buffer India from outside pressures, the strategic objective of Indian policy must be to increase its “comprehensive national strength” in order to be able to shape the international environment to its advantage.

The realist dimensions of the report’s understanding of world politics, therefore, compel it to consider the possibility that India may be forced to behave like other great powers as it becomes one. But for all the insight of its analysis, *Nonalignment 2.0* first flounders on this

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count. It accepts the proposition that India must grow in capabilities for multiple reasons, but when it comes to applying those capabilities concertedly toward fashioning the world to its benefit, the report suddenly becomes shy, arguing somewhat counterintuitively that “the fundamental source of India’s power in the world is going to be the power of its example” (Para 2).

The reasons for this hesitation are not hard to appreciate. Throughout the report, its authors appear to be struggling to reconcile competing strands of idealism and realism.

India’s idealism is rooted in its traditional vision of “build[ing its] national power as the foundation for creating a more just and equitable global order” (Para 9), a perspective that made sense when India was a weak and relatively inconsequential state in international politics. As India grows in capability relative to other states, however, it will end up mitigating the disadvantages it previously faced vis-à-vis more powerful entities. But its growing ascendancy will also create new and different kinds of inequalities that affect, and even undermine, other countries in the international system. In other words, India’s recent growth is slowly moving it across the old divide between the “developed and developing world” (Para 18), but this shift will not produce the “just and equitable world order” that India yearned for at its founding; rather, it only reconfigures the extant global inequalities in a different way and raises anew the question of the purposes to which India’s newfound power will be applied.

Since the mere fact of India’s rise will not ipso facto improve international politics, India’s behavior becomes critical to determining whether the global system can be forged into a more just and perfect order than it was before. But how should India behave as it grows in strength? *Nonalignment 2.0* answers this query with a coruscating idealism that is completely at odds with its expectation that great-power competition will be alive and well in the future global system. It admits that “as India ascends the world stage, the question will be asked: Will India be like great powers of the past? Or will it set new standards in moral and ideological leadership? In many ways the paradox is that precisely at the moment nations become powerful, they are vulnerable to being blindsided by their own ambition. Precisely at the moment they have an ability to shape the world, they shape it according to imperatives of power” (Para 307). Having discerned this pressure for structural conformity—and

despite its previous expectations of continued interstate rivalry—the report nonetheless contends that “India must remain true to its aspiration of creating *a new and alternative universality*” (Para 307, emphasis added).

But what exactly does that mean? Does it imply that India, when it is finally at the height of its power globally (or en route to it), can simply cease to behave like other states trapped in a competitive international system? That the “new and alternative universality” that India promotes will have liberated it from making the debased choices that otherwise characterize political behavior in the global realm?

Because these questions implicate difficult problems of both ethics and politics, *Nonalignment 2.0* fudges the answer not out of civility but because it is straining to come to terms with a universe where a gradually more powerful India may be compelled to act in exactly the way that other great powers have in the past, taking actions that would have previously elicited ready denunciations from New Delhi. In an effort to resist this fate, *Nonalignment 2.0* warns its readers that “in international relations, idealism not backed by power can be self-defeating. But equally, power not backed by the power of ideas can be blind. . . . [India] should, as it rises, [therefore,] be clear about what values it stands for” (Para 308). After all, “India’s adherence to values will be a great source of legitimacy in the international system” (Para 308).

Throughout the report, its authors appear to be struggling to reconcile competing strands of idealism and realism.

And what values are these? Although the document insists that India must “stand for the highest human and universal values” (Para 305), concrete examples of such values are indeed hard to come by. To the degree that they are specified, the discussion focuses mainly on liberating India’s citizens from the bondage of poverty as part of the “commitment to a liberal, secular, constitutional democracy” (Para 303).

This focus on India’s developmental model constitutes the essence of what makes India estimable—and different—and which, accordingly, must be protected if India’s rise is to be historically unique. The report affirms that if India’s “developmental model is successful, it will give [the country] still greater legitimacy in the world—and it will enhance [India’s] capacity to act for [itself], in pursuit of [Indian] values and interests, in the international arena” (Paras 2–3). Moreover, because “there are few ‘natural’ groupings—whether defined by political vision, economic profile and interests, or geopolitical security challenges—into which India can seamlessly fit,” the country’s “diverse identity and the multiple interests” are actually its “greatest strategic assets at the global level. For it means that India can be a unique bridge between different worlds. Indeed, India’s bridging potential is one we must leverage and turn to our active benefit” (Para 124).

This lofty vision, centering primarily on the importance of the Indian example manifested through the uplift of its citizenry solely through peaceful means and secondarily on the country's capacity to bridge different international constituencies—because of India's own complex evolution from being powerless to becoming powerful—then becomes *Nonalignment 2.0's* solution for squaring the circle. The report does not argue for power maximization in the conventional sense, in which classical realists believe all states are condemned in competitive international politics, but instead holds that India's developmental and democratic success within, coupled with the ability to forge new solidarities abroad, will provide it with the exemplary power that erases the most consequential “limits to India's global role and influence” (Para 2).

There are several elements of ambiguity and tension in this ambitious claim. To begin with, there is little doubt that if India can, in Nehru's famous words, “build a *just society* by just means,”²² it would considerably increase its prestige throughout the international system and serve as resounding proof of the virtues of liberal democracy in the face of other competitors, such as Chinese communism. But even if this validation occurs, it is not clear how success here contributes to the enhancement of India's physical security and decisional autonomy beyond the increases in material capability engendered as a result. If the latter is what finally matters in competitive international relations, the exemplary dimension of Indian success, however important, could end up being relatively less significant.

To be sure, India will have proved the superiority of democracy even in a developing society—and democracy undoubtedly has enormous benefits for India's large and diverse population itself—but it is unclear if this accomplishment would spur emulation globally and evoke greater support for Indian interests (especially when New Delhi as a matter of principle continues to eschew any desire to actively promote democracy internationally). If the proof of Indian success were to create favorable regional or global bandwagoning effects, the Indian example will have paid off in ways that transcend its raw achievements: It will have contributed to improving India's security and easing its geopolitical trajectory beyond what mere economic growth would have yielded. But this is by no means certain, and the probative power of India's example—as opposed to its engendered material achievements—could therefore be less relevant to New Delhi's international success than the authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* believe.

Furthermore, although most Indians, like most Americans, view their own country as exemplary, this perception is often not shared by others in the international system—even when their material achievements are otherwise admired. The competitive dimensions of international politics often create situations where no matter how inspiring a particular country's way of life may be, that admiration rarely evokes a universal rush to imitate its character or support its policies. There is no doubt that international approbation is inextricably linked in the first instance to the success of certain national exemplars and not to their virtue, ideology, worldview, or uniqueness. But even sovereign accomplishments by

themselves often do not suffice to assure foreign support, much less emulation or loyalty. Therefore, *Nonalignment 2.0*'s dramatic claim that India's "power has often been the power of its example" may be irrelevant even if true, because there is no evidence that it has paid off concretely in the international arena by buttressing either India's economic development or its rise in power.

The authors might contest that conclusion. In the report, they assert that "India's great advantage is that, barring certain perceptions in our immediate neighborhood, it is not seen as a threatening power" (Para 20). While this judgment is indeed accurate, it is entirely rooted in India's past material weaknesses rather than in some scintillating characteristic of the Indian example. As India grows in power, there is no assurance that this benign perception of the country will survive. And while India must expand its material capabilities if it is to secure both developmental and power-political success, it ought to remember that even these achievements may ultimately not suffice to enthrone it as a paragon worthy of imitation and support in international politics.

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Finally, India's desire to blaze a unique path in the international system because of the heritage of its independence movement, its experience in peacefully accommodating complex demands domestically, and its traditional advocacy of equity and justice globally are deeply reminiscent of the ambitions of another major power—the United States. From the moment of its founding, the American nation was entranced by both Enlightenment and republican ideals and sought to promote a *novus ordo seclorum* that would permit the country to preserve its exceptionalism in the face of all the pressures toward conformity brought about by competitive international politics. Although Americans today would still like to believe that the United States is unique in its global behavior, the truth is that the country behaves more or less like the great powers that preceded it.

The tyranny of anarchic international politics will ensure that India suffers the same fate: Although all states differ in the details of how they conduct themselves—with their history, their domestic politics, and their strategic culture accounting for much of the variance—there is little doubt that India too, despite its present desire to remain the unique example of a righteous state, will eventually succumb to protecting its own interests, if it does not do so already. If the demands of national power ever come into conflict with the obligations of principle—as they increasingly could in the face of India's steady success internationally—it is unlikely that New Delhi would be willing to sacrifice tangible gains in order to secure the status benefits that come from "stand[ing] for the highest human and universal values" (Para 305).

For that reason, *Nonalignment 2.0*'s own understanding of the international system urges India to rethink how it approaches both standing international norms and evolving conventions such as “the responsibility to protect,” which challenge long-standing Indian positions on sovereignty, nonintervention, and the rejection of force. Despite their own analysis, however, the report's authors cannot bring themselves to simply cut off all India's ideational moorings with its past and exhort the country to behave just like any other great power—in part because India is not yet one, but more importantly, because they still struggle to protect their vision of Indian exceptionalism in the face of what will be its slow but inevitable demise as New Delhi gains in strength.

In any event, and irrespective of how India finally comes out on such issues, it is highly likely that as its power grows, New Delhi will become ever more conscious of what needs to be done in order to protect its growing interests. It will likely act in accordance with such necessities rather than taking its bearings from, as the report demands, the deontological demands of some “new and alternative universality.” To that degree, India—far from being exemplary—is on its way to becoming just another state in the competitive world of international politics.

THE EMPTY PROMISE OF “NONALIGNMENT”

While the suggestion that India's international influence would derive primarily from its example is perhaps overstated, the second and more problematic conclusion in *Nonalignment 2.0* is that “nonalignment” remains the best organizing principle for India's relations with the world in the years ahead. The resurrection of this term has obviously raised many hackles, but the problems associated with nonalignment go beyond the semantic issues that most Indian and foreign commentators have latched onto thus far. Indeed, the term is

anachronistic, but even worse, it is fundamentally misconceived and downright dangerous, even in its new guise of “strategic autonomy.”

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The authors of the report defend their choice of “nonalignment” as a strategic solution by arguing that it merely represents “a re-working for present times of the fundamental

principle that has defined India's international engagements since Independence” (Para 9). This fundamental principle, they aver, consists of “maintaining strategic autonomy; protecting core national interests; and, as far as possible, maintaining India's position as an

object of great power agreement” (Para 123). Understood more broadly, nonalignment thus becomes little other than an effort to prevent India’s “national interest or approach to world politics” from being defined “elsewhere”—in any capital other than New Delhi—while remaining, in substantive terms, an attempt “to enhance India’s strategic space and capacity for independent agency” (Para 9). Since nonalignment in this sense was never discarded by any political leadership in India even after the Cold War, co-author Shyam Saran, in a newspaper column written after the publication of the report, asked its critics, “How do you stand guilty of resurrecting something that has not quite been pronounced dead by those who run India’s foreign policy?”²³

The report’s defense of nonalignment as an enduring solution to India’s strategic predicament is awkward because it not only conflates ends and means, but also excises from the original idea of nonalignment that which was most distinctive about its content. A simple analysis of state aims in international politics will establish

this fact. In the competitive arena of interstate relations, all constituent entities invariably pursue—at a minimum—two vital but interrelated aims: protecting physical security and safeguarding decisional autonomy. The goal of protecting physical security becomes the essential precondition for achieving all other objectives because the international political environment is characterized by the absence of any overarching authority and the prospect of ever-present harm. Consequently, all states seek to protect their territory, resources, and population from predation by near and distant enemies. But they also seek to preserve their political autonomy just as zealously, because if they did not, they might end up protecting their physical security by foregoing their freedom. Because this trade-off is ordinarily unacceptable to any state, every entity in a competitive international system seeks, to the degree it can, to safeguard both its physical security and its decisional autonomy simultaneously.

This reality implies that there is nothing unique about India’s quest for preserving “strategic autonomy.” All states do likewise, using the means appropriate to their circumstances. To define nonalignment as synonymous with preventing the loss of agency, therefore, confuses ends and means. If nonalignment were primarily about states seeking to avoid strategic policies that were defined “elsewhere” and not in their own capitals, then all states would necessarily be “nonaligned.”

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What was unique, however, about nonalignment in its original guise—“nonalignment 1.0”—was not the ends it sought to realize, which are common to all states, but the manner in which it sought to attain them. As Ambassador K. Shankar Bajpai summarized, “non-alignment was not a policy but an instrument of policy for handling a particular set of

circumstances—two alliances seeking more satellites, with attendant risks that heightened polarization would heighten dangers of world war.”²⁴ Nonalignment, in other words, represented unique means devised for unique circumstances: Its essence consisted of the formal decision to reject joining one or the other of the two geopolitical blocs that dominated the Cold War. Unfortunately, as Bajpai notes, “a means to an end peculiar to its

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times got inflated [over time] into a grand philosophy for saving the world.”²⁵ With the passing of the bipolar era, nonalignment by definition became anachronistic as its originating conditions evaporated. That is the only reason why successive Indian leaders after 1991 never felt compelled to formally reject the strategy.

Because nonalignment is fundamentally about particular means—steering clear of opposing blocs—and because that strategy is meaningless in the current global environment since “the twenty-first century is unlikely to be characterized by a world bifurcated between two dominant powers” (Para 17), *Nonalignment 2.0* can justify resuscitating the concept only by defining it in such an amorphous way as to eliminate its most unique meaning. But even then, its greatest weakness is not linguistic equivocation but rather the peril inherent in the concept which centers on “the avoidance of sharp choices” when it comes to strategic affiliations with key states.

An Unexpected Recommendation

The desirability of nonalignment as a strategic policy for India is particularly unsettling because it runs counter to exactly the conclusion that stems from the analysis in *Nonalignment 2.0* if the report is taken at face value. The document clearly describes the present international system as one where high and growing levels of economic interdependence coexist with continuing strategic competition among key states. One such entity, China, is not only benefiting dramatically from its deeper integration with the global economy, but is also using this assimilation to directly expand its military capabilities and widen its power differential vis-à-vis India. Beijing, as the report transparently acknowledges, poses a dangerous

security threat to New Delhi—a challenge that will only intensify because China’s continuing higher growth rates will provide it with greater resources for military purposes than India’s economy will in comparison.

As it turns out, China’s impressive economic performance also poses significant threats to the United States for the same reasons it threatens India. To China, the United States—and, to a much lesser degree, India—poses unsettling hazards to its security and standing. The United States perceives the same emerging threats in the Asia-Pacific and globally as does India. But in contrast to its relationship with China, the United States not only views India as embodying no dangers to its own interests, it actually seeks to build Indian power as part of a larger strategy of mitigating the Chinese challenge. In such circumstances, “given that India has more interests in ‘direct’ competition with China, and less with the United States,” it might be reasonable to conclude that Washington would be the more desirable and “likely alliance partner” for New Delhi. But, in a surprising twist, *Nonalignment 2.0* declares that “this conclusion would be premature” (Para 131). It steers away from an affiliation, counseling that “both India and the United States may be better served by being friends rather than allies,” at least for now (Para 133).

This verdict is at odds with the report’s own analysis of the challenge. Clearly, the strategic threats posed by a fast-growing Chinese economy arise because the globalized economic system in which China is embedded produces differential returns for each of its participants. In the purely economic realm, these variations in returns do not matter because security competition is not at issue and any absolute gains accruing to trading states—no matter how varied their level—are better than foregoing those gains by eschewing trade. However, even trading states are embedded in a competitive political universe, so the variations in the gains from economic cooperation become significant. States that enjoy superior returns could apply those resources to producing military instruments, enabling them to threaten the security of other countries, including their trading partners. The potential victims could respond to this danger by opting out of economic cooperation with their geopolitical

The only sure recipe for strategic success in any environment where economic interdependence coexists with political competition is to forge tightly nested partnerships among friends and allies so as to enable these states to maximize their gains relative to the rest of the system, including their adversaries.

rivals or by attempting to prevent their rivals from participating in the generalized system of economic cooperation. Opting out is often self-defeating, since it may depress the growth rates of the potential victims without constraining the growth of the potential assailants

who could continue to trade with others. Attempting to limit rivals' participation is difficult because it could wreck the larger rules-based trading regime. Thus, the only sure recipe for strategic success in any environment where economic interdependence coexists with political competition is to forge tightly nested partnerships among friends and allies so as to enable these states to maximize their gains relative to the rest of the system, including their adversaries.

Nonalignment 2.0's analysis of India's strategic circumstances, therefore, should lead New Delhi directly into *preferential* strategic partnerships with the "enemies of its enemies." Such affiliations, manifested through high-quality trading ties, robust defense cooperation, and strong (even if only tacit) diplomatic collaboration, could limit the dangers posed by India's challengers, such as China. Alternatively, such partnerships could force challengers into enhanced cooperation with New Delhi because of the challengers' fear that India's partnerships with others might impose greater constraints on them than they would prefer.

Oddly, however, the report goes in exactly the opposite direction, running away from preferential partnerships in a chimerical quest for strategic autonomy. The obsession with nonalignment thus arises from a fundamental misreading of what success requires when political competition coexists with economic interdependence. By so doing, *Nonalignment 2.0* fails to appreciate the central paradox of our times: Strategic autonomy is best achieved through a set of deep strategic partnerships among friends and allies.

The Importance of Strategic Partnerships

The problem with nonalignment as a solution, therefore, is not so much semantic—though the term is admittedly grating to many in India and abroad—but rather that it is an inadequate, even misconceived, device for protecting Indian security in exactly those circumstances that are otherwise so well described in *Nonalignment 2.0*. Because it does not recognize this

fact, the report ends up tying itself in knots when discussing India's strategic relationships.

The problem with nonalignment as a solution is that it is an inadequate, even misconceived, device for protecting Indian security in exactly those circumstances that are otherwise so well described in *Nonalignment 2.0*.

It begins by arguing that "the structures of competition in the global system will present India with a range of partnership choices" (Para 123) but fails to affirm that if the competitive environment described by the report is true, India will not have a choice of *whether* to pursue meaningful strategic partnerships.

In other words, India will lack the luxury of “allying with none.”²⁶ More to the point, however, the assessment that India will confront “a range of partnership choices” obscures the reality that not all these alternatives will in fact be equal. For example, in choosing between the United States and China—the great binary that dominates the discussion in the “Partnerships in a Global Context” section of the report (Paras 122–137)—India will find its interests better served by a closer compact with Washington than with Beijing, simply on the strength of the report’s own analysis of the threats confronting New Delhi. In fact, a special partnership with the United States would likely open up a wider array of con-sociational possibilities for India, especially in East Asia and in Europe, both because friendship with Washington increases the comfort of many allies with New Delhi and because American support will assist India in consolidating its own power and autonomy.

Nonalignment 2.0 finds it difficult to affirm these conclusions transparently, even if it occasionally lurches toward them. This is partly because of the deep Indian psychological attachment to being geopolitically unfettered, but it is also due to a faulty and incomplete analytical framework in the document. For example, the report does not start by asking the key question of whether India needs strategic partnerships for the success of its political aims and who the best cohorts for that purpose might be given the threat environment detailed in various parts of the document. Instead, it chooses to begin with the contention that the critical challenge for India consists of how to leverage the interests of various rivals “because India will be sought after in great-power competition” (Para 123).

There is no doubt that the American, and in different ways the more modest Chinese, interest in India provides New Delhi with opportunities to play one against the other. That, however, is emphatically *not* the only game in town, something the report gives no sign of acknowledging. By presuming that the competition for partnership is primarily about a Sino-American rivalry for India’s favor, instead of being a more demanding challenge also revolving around India’s own need for strategic partners, the analysis ends up falsely exaggerating both India’s geopolitical relevance and its bargaining capacity relative to its stronger friends and adversaries.

This problem, which finds many echoes in popular Indian commentaries about security, reflects a solipsism that is both counterproductive and dangerous: counterproductive, because it embodies a smugness that prevents the consummation of genuine cooperation between New Delhi and Washington, and dangerous, because it presumes that the United States needs India more than India would need the United States if a genuinely aggressive China were to emerge in Asia. *Nonalignment 2.0* raised many eyebrows among U.S. policy-makers—although they have been discreet in expressing their reservations—because of the conceit reflected in its argumentation. For example, while the report plainly declares that “India holds a special attraction for the United States because it is the biggest of the new powers (apart from China itself)” (Para 130), it does not make any effort to affirm that the United States might hold a similar appeal for India, even though it goes to great lengths to

describe a strategic environment that would easily justify such a claim. In contrast, several official U.S. national security documents in recent years have described India and its strategic importance in highly enthusiastic terms. Most damningly, however, even the Indian government in its official statements about U.S.-Indian relations has been far more enthusiastic about the United States as an anchor of Indian security than *Nonalignment 2.0* is—despite it being a non-official report drafted by many individuals who are in fact champions of a stronger bilateral relationship with Washington.

At the end of the day, however, the dangerous belief about India's disproportionate value to the United States may turn out to be far more consequential. Neither Indian nor American security will be advanced by a China that turns out to be assertive in Asia. However, if any acute forcefulness beyond what has already been witnessed were to materialize, India's and China's other neighbors could face the greatest brunt because of their proximity to China, although Beijing would undoubtedly attempt to defuse any unified balancing among these states by manipulating various threats and blandishments directed at each of them individually. The great margins of advantage in power that the United States still enjoys over China further immunize Washington in the event that the United States were to become an object of concerted Chinese aggression.

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For India, therefore, the best way to avert the contingency of future Chinese belligerence is to build a sturdy ring of cooperative security partnerships with countries around China's near and distant peripheries. This remedy is not directed toward containing Beijing—China cannot be constricted in the manner that the Soviet Union previously was, in part because it already enjoys strong economic

links with all its neighbors, including New Delhi—but rather toward creating objective constraints on China's misuse of power. *Nonalignment 2.0* appreciates this strategic logic, which both the Bush and the Obama administrations have sought to institutionalize, as is evident by its remarks:

The retention of strong U.S. maritime deployments in the Asia-Pacific theatre, a more proactive and assertive Japanese naval force projection, and a build-up of the naval capabilities of such key littoral states as Indonesia, Australia and Vietnam: all may help delay, if not deter, the projection of Chinese naval power in the Indian Ocean. We need to use this window of opportunity to build

up our own naval capabilities. Our regional diplomacy should support this approach by fostering closer relations with these ‘countervailing’ powers. This should include a network of security cooperation agreements with these states and regular naval exercises with them (Para 33).

Yet, in the same breath, it subverts the strength of this recommendation by suggesting that the optimal course for India politically is not to balance China in concert with the United States but rather to play those states against each other through nuanced policies centered on “careful management” of “the triangular relationship between India, China and America” (Para 134). This effort at “avoiding [some] relationships that go beyond conveying a certain threat threshold in Chinese perceptions” (Para 34) is justified in part by the uncertainties about Beijing’s future course. It also stems from other fears about the prospect of American decline and the threats posed by a possible U.S.-China condominium. The anxieties of being entrapped by American conflicts with other states in which India might have few equities also play a part, as do reservations about “how the United States might actually respond if China posed a threat to India’s interests” (Para 132). Finally, another important concern is that a strong U.S.-Indian affiliation “could prematurely antagonize China” (Para 132).

These issues are serious, but they can be addressed. The fears about American decline are a fashion of the times and are highly exaggerated, as is evident to anyone who chooses to compare the structural sources of Chinese and American power. The dangers of any meaningful Sino-American collusion are similarly overstated, given the transparent American history of “self-regarding” behavior that leads to brooking no international rivals. The risks of being ensnared in other American wars are also inflated because they underestimate India’s capacity to resist being drawn into conflicts that are irrelevant to its interests while simultaneously overplaying Washington’s supposed expectation of India’s involvement irrespective of its value or the larger context.

The uncertainties about whether the United States would support India in a Sino-Indian conflict and the unease about provoking Chinese belligerence by a precipitate compact with Washington are more significant problems that cannot be easily dismissed. Yet, they, too, ultimately do not undermine the case for a deep engagement between New Delhi and Washington. The idea that the United States might be ambivalent about constraining China if Beijing posed a serious threat to India arises only if New Delhi chooses a priori to eschew developing a meaningful strategic partnership with Washington. If that is the case, the United States has no incentive to take on any burdensome obligations to deter China. However, should a prior strategic affiliation exist between Washington and New Delhi, U.S. support for India would be all but guaranteed. The high costs of indifference in such a situation would fundamentally undermine American credibility, its deterrence effectiveness in other strategic locales, and the balance of power in Asia.

Much of the report's ambivalence about a compact with Washington derives from the dangers of aggravating China's security dilemmas and pushing Beijing into a more aggressive stance toward India. These fears cause its authors to not transparently endorse deterring China—even though that is exactly what the success of India's transformation would end up doing—but rather to only advocate a middle course centered on striking “a careful balance between cooperation and competition,” which by extension requires “avoiding [those] relationships that go beyond conveying a certain threat threshold in Chinese perceptions” (Paras 34, 41). However understandable this calculation may be, the policy conclusion is not persuasive, not least because it runs counter to the challenges China already poses to India—and which are meticulously detailed in *Nonalignment 2.0*.

Most problematically, the document sets up a false strategic choice for India: an alliance with the United States, which presumably would be alarming to China, or mere friendship, which presumably would be more reassuring. This dichotomy is fundamentally misleading. Neither Washington nor New Delhi today seeks a mutual alliance against China because a deep partnership between the two centered on “strategic coordination”²⁷ would provide all the benefits that a formal security treaty would bring to both without any of its liabilities.

In the economic realm, a consequential collaboration of this kind would require increased trade and investment between India and the United States, coupled with expanded exchanges of capital, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship, so as to produce heightened gains that compare favorably with the returns accruing to each country from its bilateral trade with China. In the strategic milieu, a deepened partnership would lead India to procure increased numbers of advanced American weapons systems as well as to engage in enhanced training and exercises that hone key functional skills and war-fighting competencies while increasing interoperability. It would foster the development of U.S.-Indian contingency plans for possible cooperative responses to certain eventualities. In addition, information and intelligence on a range of critical dangers confronting both countries would be shared, and regular high-level consultations by U.S. and Indian national security managers and military officers on all issues of mutual concern would be held. In the diplomatic arena, such a collaboration would necessitate frequent discussions by policymakers at all levels so that both sides appreciate the objectives and the constraints governing their respective national policies, avoid any surprises that may undercut the other's core interests, and engage in policy synchronization—tacit or explicit—to the degree that such is judged to be appropriate and desirable.

A meaningful partnership along these lines does not require an official alliance of any kind and would not constrain either the United States or India in the conduct of its larger foreign policies. Both countries would be free to engage China and others—as they already do—on a wide range of issues, and to deepen their respective ties with Beijing and others as they saw fit. While the two countries will likely continue to differ on a host of issues, they

will nonetheless be united by, in the reassuring words of India's foreign secretary, Ranjan Mathai, "a fundamental stake in each other's success, because in succeeding individually, [they] can advance [their] common interests and inspire a world mirrored in [their] ideals."²⁸ Such a preferential partnership would therefore preserve the "strategic autonomy" cherished by both capitals while simultaneously protecting each against the threats posed by a rising China.

It is indeed unfortunate that *Nonalignment 2.0* fails to endorse this course of action as a grand strategic option for India. As Rajesh Rajagopalan aptly commented, "the report does a disservice by creating a straw man called 'alliance' to knock down without seriously considering India's choices" when "India and the United States have common strategic interests regarding China that could lead to much closer U.S.-Indian strategic cooperation short of a formal alliance."²⁹ Many of the authors of *Nonalignment 2.0* would admit to this proposition, but their analysis in the document does not reflect this insight. Instead, they compound the problem by engaging in an extended discussion of how India ought to play the United States and China off each other so as to secure the requisite "leverage," even as they admit that in an emergency, India may be forced to cleave to one or the other of the two competitors.

The report's fundamental flaw, therefore, consists of its underlying assumption that somehow the United States and China both pose different kinds of hazards to Indian security and, hence, a strategy of avoiding sharp alignment choices is justified until one or the other becomes the more salient, clear, and present danger. This unfortunate premise lies at the root of *Nonalignment 2.0*'s discussion about India's strategic partnership with the United States, a position that is confirmed by the admonition that "India must be prepared for a contingency where, for instance, threatening behavior by one of the major powers could encourage or even force it to be closer to another" (Para 137). The premise is not only manifestly questionable—after all, China seeks to encircle India and limit its reach, while the United States supports India's rise and champions its arrival as a global power—but, from an analytical point of view, it is refuted abundantly by the larger discussion about the Chinese threat in the report itself. In fact, quite apart from the China challenge, India should understand that the power it seeks to realize would be more easily achieved in an international system where the United States is preeminent than in almost any other.

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simple methodological shortcomings. If the government of India chooses to follow *Nonalignment 2.0's* recommendations, it could end up undermining Indian security vis-à-vis China by creating exactly the space that Beijing could exploit to play India against the United States. If China embodies the threat to India that the report contends, then the absence of a strong U.S.-Indian security

partnership not only increases the opportunities for greater Chinese assertiveness but also weakens India's capacity to respond because the failure to create institutional habits of cooperation in peacetime will undermine the effectiveness of any balancing that may arise in an emergency. Even more importantly, however, there is no assurance such balancing will occur when India may need it the most. The presumption that India will be able to readily find an ally in Washington during a bilateral crisis with China, irrespective of what its commitment to a strategic partnership with the United States has been in the interim, is therefore highly risky.

Consequently, the report's claim that "the partnership game, if played delicately, can yield real benefits" (Para 135) is only half true, because it could also end up with India falling on its face, forlorn and scrambling for support in its moment of greatest danger—as happened once before in 1962. That "India as a potential partner can give it leverage, both with the country courting it and with potential rivals" (Para 135) is correct, but this leverage can be a decaying asset if the affiliation with the friendlier power remains forever prospective and is never actualized. It could also end up being a phony asset if, after all the attempts at straddling two stools, India ends up squarely between them. After all, delicately walking the tightrope only works well so long as the rope holds, as Machiavelli understood clearly when he warned, "to steer a middle course ... is very harmful."³⁰

As New Delhi navigates this predicament, it ought to remember that even the United States has a choice of strategic partners beyond India, some of which are better positioned geographically vis-à-vis China. It also already has a successful history of coping with far more formidable threats, such as the Soviet Union once was, without relying on Indian support. There is no reason, therefore, why it could not choose to pursue a similar approach to China again, if Indian hesitation about a preferential strategic partnership now compels it to look for other cohorts who might be more willing. That outcome would be regrettable from the

viewpoint of consummating the U.S.-Indian relationship—given India’s own perceptions of the threat, not to mention America’s—because it could end up being more expensive for New Delhi and Washington alike.

THE IMPROBABILITY OF INTERNAL BALANCING

The strategy of dangling between the United States and China, which *Nonalignment 2.0* contends is the optimal course for India presently, makes sense only if it is believed that the perils posed by Beijing will attenuate over time, or that India will be able to muster the necessary resources to cope with the Chinese challenge, among others, independently. Clearly, the first possibility is nowhere on the horizon, as the report makes abundantly clear.

But what about the second opportunity? Obviously, the document has been authored in part to exhort the country to make the necessary decisions to increase its national power and, accordingly, underwrite the report’s preferred strategy of nonalignment. The preface transparently conveys this intention:

The necessity of such a document is driven by a sense of urgency among all its authors that we have a limited window of opportunity in which to seize our chances. Further, the decisions and choices we make in coming years will have long-term effects upon our future development and will set us down paths that will determine the range of subsequent future choices. It is therefore imperative that we have a clear map of the terrain which we shall have to navigate in coming years—and, equally, that we have a definite sense of the national goals, values and interests that we need to pursue with consistency and vigor.

Later in the text, the document amplifies this theme by declaring that “while the underlying trends [for India’s growth] are propitious, time is of the essence” as “the basic structures and dynamics necessary to achieve this prosperity will have to be put in place in the next 10 to 15 years” since “the underlying factors that are propitious for [India’s] growth may not

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last very long” (Para 6). Therefore, the report correctly concludes “that rather than imagining that growth can allow [India] to postpone hard decisions, [it] need[s] to take exactly the opposite tack. If [it] do[es] not take the opportunities provided by a relatively benign environment, [it] will not get a second chance to correct [its] mistakes” (Para 7).

The argument is impeccably logical and the urgency of action demanded in *Nonalignment 2.0* is utterly commendable, but the third and final weakness discussed here consists of its failure to assess whether the transformative reforms necessary to build India’s comprehensive national power can in fact be undertaken in the current circumstances of India’s domestic politics. Any grand strategy of value must address this basic question because,

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no matter how sensible its recommendations may otherwise be, it is condemned to irrelevance if the courses of action suggested cannot be implemented.

There are many reasons today to be skeptical about India’s ability to pursue the ambitious reform agenda outlined in *Nonalignment*

2.0. First, there are only two national parties in India, the Congress Party and the BJP, which could execute a broad reform agenda with lesser difficulty in principle, because these parties possess greater capacities for public mobilization as well as ideologies reflecting the country’s ambitions as a whole. Yet both parties are in considerable disarray, and for the foreseeable future, they are likely to come to power only as part of complex and shifting coalitions.

While some coalition governments dominated by each party have proved to be exceptional in regard to advancing India’s national purposes, others have been less inspiring because the demands of satisfying the interests of their members often prevent them from directing their energies fully to making the “hard decisions” that are necessary for the successful generation of national power. The current ruling coalition, the UPA, is a good example of this problem.

A second phenomenon creates further uncertainties about whether the country as a whole can move in certain clear and demanding directions. India has recently seen the rise of regional parties as the new arbiters of the contest over national power. Generally speaking, these regional parties have relatively narrow interests revolving around the welfare of their particular states of origin. While they certainly appreciate the importance of those policies that affect India as a whole, they have a much weaker inclination to invest political capital in producing change on these issues in comparison to those that directly affect their own local base.

Moreover, the regional parties find themselves caught in the still-acute tensions between the challenges animating mass politics, such as the distribution of material benefits and the quality of governance, and elite politics, such as international partnerships and grand strategy. Their constituencies are likely to be less animated by debates about national security and economic reform—even though these concerns ultimately affect the lives of millions of Indians. Issues of elite politics will be engaged by the regional parties first and foremost in terms of how they affect their individual states. The changes in national policy that may be desirable, then, come about—when they do—much more slowly or, just as often, more haphazardly, as a result of India’s federal system.

Third, the intensity of political competition in India, which is in part a product of the success of Indian democracy, has resulted in leaders increasingly focusing on short-term gains intended to cement their lock on office. In recent years, and especially since 2009 when the present UPA government took power, this emphasis has resulted in a resurrection of policies that prioritize economic redistribution over economic growth. Such policies traditionally were manifested in vast state subsidies as well as pre-election giveaways such as free electricity, television sets, power generators, and cable television connections.

The present government in India, however, has taken populism to radically new heights with the old petty inducements now mutating into gigantic state welfare programs that seek to guarantee food and rural employment across the country at large. Whatever the social value of these initiatives, they threaten to wreck the nation’s fiscal stability at a time when the government has been unable to raise the revenues to pay for them and when it seems completely paralyzed with respect to continued reform. India’s redistributionist addiction, driven predominantly by the demands of political mobilization in the face of unremitting electoral competition, has consequently revived fears that the country “will revert to the much-scorned ‘Hindu rate of growth’ which characterized it for the first half century of its independent existence and which [it] hope[d] ha[d] been relegated to its quasi-socialist past.”³¹

These realities suggest that the successful “internal balancing” required for the realization of genuine strategic autonomy—the goal held out by *Nonalignment 2.0*—will likely fall on hard times in the foreseeable future. If this outcome

is plausible because of current trends in Indian domestic politics, India’s national security managers ought to treat the report’s exhortation to eschew preferential strategic partnerships with friendly great powers like the United States with some caution—especially if, as the document suggests, the external threats facing India are unlikely to dissipate and

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China's own power advantages over India, in particular, are "likely to widen" (Para 29). The United States, like India, also faces domestic political challenges in regard to mobilizing its national power, though the constraints in Washington are far fewer because it already has huge advantages relative to its peers where state penetration and extraction of societal

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resources are concerned. Still, the United States cheerfully concedes the need for strong and favored partners in its efforts to manage the rise of Chinese power. Given India's extant and prospective weaknesses, there is no reason why New Delhi should not do the same.

Conventional realist theories of international politics suggest that if the success of internal balancing is uncertain, external balancing becomes a necessity. If there is a

reasonable chance that India's own resources may turn out to be inadequate to handling a growing Chinese threat—because, among other things, its domestic politics undermine its capacity for resource mobilization—then New Delhi ought to consider how best to secure the assistance of others in meeting its external challenge. Obtaining this support does not require entering into a formal alliance with the United States or with others, although that may be desirable in specific circumstances. In the past, India has not shied away from institutionalizing strong affiliations with both the United States and the Soviet Union that burst the bounds of nonalignment, even as it held fast to the rhetoric of neutralism. *Nonalignment 2.0* concedes that a return to geopolitical intimacy of this sort may be necessary again, but if so, India ought to make a special effort to ensure that the building blocks necessary to consummate such a joint venture are put in place well before they become necessary.

While the United States would undoubtedly value such cooperation—and, in fact, craves it—India's ideational affection for "nonalignment," the political inability of its leaders and elites to forge a consensus in favor of a stronger association with the United States despite their intellectual acknowledgement of its necessity, and the failure of the current Indian government to pursue consistent and coherent policies vis-à-vis Washington all end up exposing India to greater strategic risk in the face of rising Chinese power. *Nonalignment 2.0's* willingness to discount the benefits of tighter coordination with the United States could end up leaving New Delhi in a situation where it lacks the resources within and without to cope with the worst depredations of Chinese power.

The lead-up to the 1962 Sino-Indian War is a vivid demonstration of this danger. To be sure, India is much stronger today than it was in 1962, and it will only get stronger

over time. But the essence of its predicament is still the same—and shows no signs of easing. Power in the international system is always relative and, for the moment at least, Chinese power appears to be outpacing India's in almost every way—and in some cases, by orders of magnitude.

The Indian calculus elaborated in *Nonalignment 2.0* may over time, however, prove correct. New Delhi's quest to preserve its strategic autonomy and avoid unnecessary entanglements with the United States may be justified if, as many Indian analysts argue, Indian growth rates begin to approximate China's current pace while China's own future growth rates begin to flag, and the Indian economy begins to rival China's in technological capacity, if not in size.

If such an outcome materializes, India's desire to stay “nonaligned” in the interim will have paid off. But much can happen in that interim, and not all of it good for either India or the United States. And the interregnum itself could prove to be extended and drawn out. In such circumstances, not only would India find itself potentially adrift, but the United States would also be hard-pressed to justify its favored support for India at a time when U.S. relations with China—however problematic they might be on many counts—are deeper, more encompassing, and, at least where the production of wealth is concerned, more fruitful.

CONCLUSION

Mark Twain was fond of quipping that “Wagner's music is better than it sounds.” *Nonalignment 2.0*, too, is better than it appears at first sight. Better than any other recent effort in India, it represents a remarkable attempt at marrying the liberal-idealist strands of Indian strategic thought with the grim realities of India's internal challenges and its dangerous external environment. There is perhaps no better national security document available that so masterfully surveys the key strategic tasks facing India: sustaining high levels of economic growth, strengthening democratic consolidation, and enhancing national security writ large.

Better than any other recent effort in India, *Nonalignment 2.0* represents a remarkable attempt at marrying the liberal-idealist strands of Indian strategic thought with the grim realities of India's internal challenges and its dangerous external environment.

In contrast to the failed past policies, the report boldly endorses deepened Indian integration with the global economy to raise national growth rates. It calls for the renewal of India's institutional edifice and the strengthening of state capacity in order to reinvigorate Indian democracy. And it urges the Indian nation to modernize and reorient its military capabilities

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to better deal with external threats. All the while, the Indian state should work to increase its penetration into society and its effectiveness, to better promote social justice, and to improve national integration as a way to defuse internal dangers.

The great strengths of the report, then, consist of its resolute emphasis on building India's national strength through setting its economic

foundations right, its honest and penetrating analysis of current Indian weaknesses, and its accurate appreciation of the serious external threats posed by China and Pakistan in the context of a dramatically changing international system. For all these strengths however—and these are by no means inconsequential—*Nonalignment 2.0* betrays weaknesses in its understanding of the emerging global environment and, most importantly, falls short in its prescriptions for how India should maximize its power under those circumstances.

The title of the document itself signals its most important limitation. Although most of its critics have excoriated the report for adopting an anachronistic label, its fundamental shortcomings are not simply semantic. Rather, they extend to the heart of the strategic solution that its authors believe is optimal for Indian interests in the emerging international order: a refusal to settle for any preferential partnerships in favor of a continued quest for nonalignment.

However attractive this answer may appear at first sight, it is deeply flawed not only on logical grounds but also, and more importantly, on substantive grounds. *Nonalignment 2.0* fails to recognize that when economic interdependence coexists with interstate competition, the recipe for strategic success cannot consist of anything other than maximizing relative gains through tightened partnerships among a small number of friends and allies. Instead of internalizing this insight, it proffers a spurious and empty formalism called “strategic autonomy,” which far from serving as a viable alternative, is both misconceived and downright dangerous because it prevents India from accumulating exactly those resources it will most need to ensure its success and its security. One Indian diplomat, Ambassador T. P. Sreenivasan, succinctly summarized this point by declaring, “Strategic autonomy comes

automatically to the powerful. In the pursuit of power, selective alignments are more crucial than nonalignment.”³²

To make matters worse, the report overlooks the sharp constraints imposed by India’s burdensome domestic politics on New Delhi’s ability to pursue the onerous transformation that would be necessary if the country were to truly attempt going it alone in the face of rising threats. However inspiring such a quest might be, the notion that Indian exceptionalism can survive by sheer force of example in a world of beasts could turn out to be excessively optimistic if not simply naive. After all, India’s capacity to lead by example will be, in the final analysis, largely a function of its material success, and this accomplishment will not come to pass without strong economic, political, and military ties with key friendly powers, especially the United States. Notably, Washington has also already committed itself to buttressing India’s rise in the face of the common challenge posed by growing Chinese strength. A sturdy U.S.-Indian strategic partnership thus remains the quintessential example of desirable joint gains for both countries.

The discussion in *Nonalignment 2.0* itself shows that India’s strategic challenges are grave and increasing. Given this reality, and the fact that the success of its internal balancing is still uncertain, the strategic solution to India’s predicament cannot consist of resurrecting nonalignment in some new numerical iteration, but rather of India’s decision to solder a deeper and closer engagement with the world in general, and with its most capable friends and allies in particular. The alternative offered in the report fails to provide a rational solution to the problems of security competition amid economic interdependence, and it consequently turns out to be a perilous example of old wine in new skins.

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