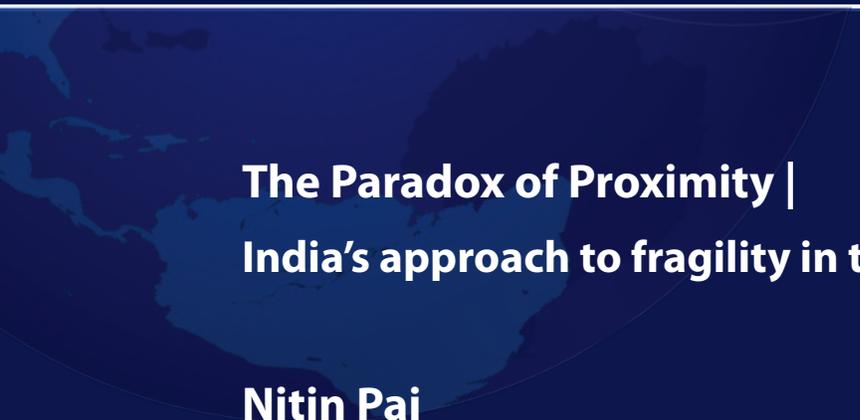NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Paradox of Proximity |
India's approach to fragility in the neighbourhood

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CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The world faces old and new security challenges that are more complex than our multilateral and national institutions are currently capable of managing. International cooperation is ever more necessary in meeting these challenges. The NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC) works to enhance international responses to conflict, insecurity, and scarcity through applied research and direct engagement with multilateral institutions and the wider policy community.

CIC's programs and research activities span the spectrum of conflict, insecurity and scarcity issues. This allows us to see critical inter-connections and highlight the coherence often necessary for effective response. We have a particular concentration on the UN and multilateral responses to conflict.

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Foreword

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Stabilizing and strengthening fragile states has become a global strategic imperative over the last decade. This is true not only for the United States and its traditional allies but for the emerging – or, more accurately, emerged – non-Western powers including China, India, Brazil and South Africa. In weak states from Haiti to Sudan and Timor-Leste, these new powers have taken on major peacekeeping responsibilities, helping the United Nations deploy record numbers of troops. Non-Western aid and investment are increasingly important to revitalizing post-conflict countries. In a period of strategic flux, efforts to assist fragile states have the potential to bring Western and non-Western powers together.

Yet, while Western strategists have recognized the importance of engaging their non-Western counterparts on this topic, this is often complicated by mutual misunderstandings. As Nitin Pai emphasizes in this paper, domestic politics plays a huge role in shaping a power like India's policies towards fragile states. So too does history: for decision-makers in Delhi, memories of the controversial and often painful Indian intervention in Sri Lanka in the 1980s remain resonant. Finally, as Pai underlines from the outset, geography is crucial: while officials in Washington still see Afghanistan and Pakistan through the lens of terrorism and counter-insurgency, India worries about its regional position.

If there is to be more effective international action to address fragile states, policy-makers in different capitals must develop a better grasp of the traditions, interests and insecurities that inform one another. In this context New York University's Center on International Cooperation (CIC) have commissioned a series of policy papers of which this is the first, on how non-Western powers view state fragility. We have asked our authors to look back at the political dynamics that have shaped current policies, and to look forward to how each power's "rise to globalism" may

affect its strategic choices in the future. In this paper, Nitin Pai highlights the extent to which India – although an extremely significant contributor to UN peacekeeping – has to prioritize managing the fragile states in its immediate surroundings. As he shows, there is no single Indian doctrine of how to deal with these states. Instead, he teases out seven different strategic approaches that Delhi has used in the past, with distinctly differing levels of success.

At the end of the paper, the author warns that "New Delhi is likely to continue on a conservative trajectory" when it comes to dealing with fragile states. If Western policy-makers hope that India can bail them out in Afghanistan and take on risky state-building operations in the Middle East, they are likely to be disappointed in the near term. Since this paper's completion, the Libyan crisis has tested India's attitudes: New Delhi has joined the chorus of condemnations of Colonel Gaddafi's behavior, but it has not thrown in its lot with NATO's intervention. This reinforces Mr. Pai's overall conclusion.

Nonetheless, the author believes that in future crises India's expanding economic reach will mean that it will have a growing role in crisis management, and that New Delhi should aim to make its armed forces inter-operable with those of the U.S. and potential East Asian allies. This paper provides a series of fascinating insights into the political, military and bureaucratic tensions at play in India as it adapts to a new global role. We hope that it will inform debate inside and outside India on this huge adaptation.

About the author

With this goal in mind, CIC has been particularly glad to work with Nitin Pai on this paper. Mr. Pai is the Founder and Fellow for Geopolitics at the Takshashila Institution, launched to promote an "India that has global interests." Further details of the Institution's work can be found on the opposite page.

Mr. Pai blogs regularly at http://acorn.nationalinterest.in/.

Acknowledgments

The Takshashila Institution

The Takshashila Institution—an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organisation—contributes towards building the intellectual foundations of an India that has global interests. It aims to establish itself as one of the most credible voices in India's public policy discourse, known for its unambiguous pursuit of the national interest, through consistent high-quality policy advisories. The Institution's publications, and blogs by fellows, can be accessed at http://takshashila.org.in/.

The Institution publishes Pragati – The Indian national Interest Review, available online at http://pragati.nationalinterest.in/.

1. Introduction

The risks posed by fragile states have moved to the centre-stage of Western security consciousness only in recent years, fundamentally as the result of globalisation and precipitously due to the 9/11 attacks on the United States.[1] The threats posed by fragile states to the Western countries are palpable and proximate—for instance, in the form of terrorist plots, influx of refugees and organised crime—but the origins of the threats are relatively remote. Western policymakers and publics, therefore, enjoy a certain geographical and temporal insulation, not only allowing for detached analysis but also allowing a broader range of policy options.

It is different for India. Both its immediate and its extended neighbourhoods consist of several states that are in the turbulence of transition, contending with institutional weaknesses, political fragility and governance failure. For India, history and proximity turn what might have been largely matters of foreign policy into a number of inter-connected issues of domestic politics.

It is nearly impossible for India's policymakers to detach its approach towards a nearby fragile state from a panoply of domestic political considerations. From a security perspective, the range and intensity of threats increases with proximity; but so too, the number of domestic political constituencies that have a stake in the game. Moreover, even within the Indian government, neighbourhood policy is shaped by a large number of agencies across federal, state and sometimes even district levels. Given that domestic policy outcomes in parliamentary democracies like India are the result of the complex interplay of political forces, there are limitations on the timeliness, coherence and effectiveness of India's response.

Therein lies the paradox of proximity: having a fragile state in the neighbourhood makes it important for you to intervene, but there are structural constraints that hinder your ability to do so.

This essay examines the motivations, constraints and processes that shape India's policy towards fragile states.

It aims to show that addressing state fragility in one's neighbourhood is a vastly more challenging project than managing risks emanating from distant ones. Shared history, non-contiguous boundaries, and a cultural affinity across borders add additional complexity. The essay begins with an overview of India's contemporary motivations for engagement and intervention in the turbulent geopolitics of southern Asia. It identifies the various types of interventions in which India has engaged, and attempts to derive the underlying features of India's approach. The policy process is discussed next, analysing how drivers, constraints and players affect decision-making. We conclude with a brief assessment of how India's policy towards fragile states, both proximate and distant, might change as India becomes a middle-income country with global interests.

2. Motivations

The single most important foreign policy objective of all Indian governments over the past two decades has been to sustain the economic growth that took off after the reforms of the early 1990s.[2] This has become the dominant prism through which policymakers view India's international relations. Whereas the Americas, Europe, Africa, Central Asia and East Asia are seen as sources of opportunity, the fragile and failing states in the immediate neighbourhood are seen as sources of risk. As Pratap Bhanu Mehta notes, "[o]ne of the odd lessons of the twentieth century has been the astonishing ability of weak states to subvert the objectives of more dominant ones."[3] For their part, India's neighbours know that their own weakness is a source of implicit and explicit bargaining power.[4]

Occupied with the project of sustaining robust economic development—the current debate is about how to make double-digit growth sustainable and equitable—Indian strategists see two main external geopolitical factors that might put the nation's future at risk. First, international terrorism emanating from the Pakistani military-jihadi complex; and second, the emergence of an unfavourable balance of power in Asia arising from the dynamics of China's rise as a great power.

2.1 The interest in growth

Rao's reorientation. P.V. Narasimha Rao's government is rightly famous for launching the economic reforms in the 1990s that set India on a new trajectory. It also reshaped India's foreign policy agenda through its Look East policy by seriously engaging the booming South East Asian countries. Even as the Rao government scaled up its economic engagement of countries in the ASEAN and East Asia, it adopted a hands-off approach towards countries of the subcontinent. This was in contrast to a series of major Indian interventions—the liberation of Bangladesh (1971), annexation of Sikkim (1975), defence of the Maldives (1988), punitive economic measures against Nepal (1989) and finally, coercion, peacekeeping and counter-insurgency in Sri Lanka (1986-1990)—in the two preceding decades. Before Rao, India's predominant foreign policy objective, under the Indira Doctrine[5] , was to prevent the neighbourhood from hosting and allying with outside powers (which, given the Cold War algebra, essentially meant the United States). Rao didn't repudiate the doctrine. He put neighbourhood policy on hold. [6]

Gujral's failed doctrine. The governments that followed Rao's were driven by the ideas of Inder Kumar Gujral, who was first foreign minister and then prime minister in short-lived coalitions. The Gujral Doctrine declared a policy of asymmetric concessions towards, and non-interference in, the affairs of India's smaller neighbours.[7] For their part, it required neighbours not to allow their territories to be used in a manner contrary to Indian interests, and settle all disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations. Despite its political weakness, the Gujral government backed up the doctrine with some tangible moves, but ultimately failed to achieve its grand vision. The Gujral Doctrine was visibly incongruous, as Pakistan used its territory, diplomatic resources and much else to pursue a proxy war against India. Moreover, freeing intra-regional trade—it could have created powerful incentives for bilateral and regional cooperation—did not register high on Gujral's priorities. In any event, the Gujral government did not last long enough to be able to sustain his policy.

Extended neighbourhood. The energies of the Vajpayee government that followed were, for a large part, focused on engaging the world's great powers. It continued to invest in the Look East policy and stated that it saw East Asia as its "extended neighbourhood." [8]

As far as the immediate neighbourhood was concerned, it did not turn away from the Gujral Doctrine, and even floated the idea of a South Asian Union following the European model.[9] However, the Vajpayee government was preoccupied with the challenging task of managing relations with Pakistan. Marking a departure from the traditional aversion to the United States's involvement in its neighbourhood, it leveraged India's budding strategic relationship with the United States, particularly after 9/11, into greater cooperation over the management of the political instability in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh.

For India, history and proximity turn foreign policy into issues of domestic politics

Vajpayee-Manmohan Doctrine. Dhruva Jaishankar suggests that Indian foreign policy over the last decade has been guided by a Vajpayee-Manmohan Doctrine, the essential elements of which are "a prioritisation of the country's economic development, an emphasis on diplomacy, a strict maintenance of Indian sovereignty, a distrust of alliances, a consideration of balances of power, an abstention from direct interference in the internal affairs of other states, and a willingness to bilaterally engage all states, including those with competing interests." [10]

By the time the Manmohan Singh government took office, India was on a new growth trajectory, with deepening economic links to the United States, China and South East Asia. The Look East policy had succeeded in positioning India as an essential part of the East Asian regional architecture, as a dialogue partner of ASEAN, as a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and as a member of the East Asia Summit. Nearer home, the Manmohan Singh government attempted to accelerate the formation of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), declaring its readiness to accept asymmetrical responsibilities in freeing trade.

SAFTA envisages a common market in the subcontinent by 2016, with India and Pakistan eliminating all tariffs by 2012, Sri Lanka by 2013 and Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal by 2015. However, it is circumscribed both by their insistence on retaining long exclusion lists and by Pakistan's blocking any move that it perceives as benefiting India.

The rise of Chinese power in East Asia is the source of another set of risks

Moreover, political instability in almost every one of India's neighbours—with the exception of Bhutan—has prevented any determined push towards regional economic integration or a regional security arrangement. Given the sluggishness of multilateralism in the subcontinent, both the Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh governments chose the bilateral route for meaningful initiatives. In April 2010 India supported the creation of a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Development Fund (SDF) voluntarily contributing $100 million over and above the $90 million that it is required to.[11] The emphasis on bilateral initiatives can be discerned when this is seen against the $1 billion credit facility that the Indian government provided Bangladesh in August 2010 for infrastructure development and major river-dredging projects in Bangladesh.[12]

2.2 Terrorism

Turbulence in the India's neighbourhood, as indeed anywhere else in the world, has often been conducive for the planning, training and organising of acts of international terrorism. For instance, the terrorists who hijacked Indian Airlines flight IC814 on the eve of the dawn of the new millennium originated in Pakistan, had support in Nepal and Bangladesh and were allowed to escape by Mullah Omar's Taliban regime that then controlled much of Afghanistan.[13] While such a trans-national conspiracy could well be executed in the best of circumstances, the weakness, instability or capture of state institutions in the countries concerned was no doubt a contributing factor to its eventual success.

So far, even the most brazen of terrorist attacks—like the one on India's financial capital on November 26th, 2008—have not significantly affected India's economic growth prospects.[14] Nor have they triggered social disturbances in the form of communal riots. Yet the risk that terrorist strikes can damage the economy and society is one that India's policymakers cannot ignore. National security considerations, therefore, suggest that it is in India's interest to intervene in places which are or are likely to increase the risks of terrorist attacks against India.

2.3 China

Unlike in the Cold War era, where the Indira Doctrine saw the subcontinent as a zone of India's exclusive influence, India no longer begrudges its neighbours developing multi-dimensional relationships with outside powers. For its part, India is now firmly engaged in the extended neighbourhood to its east, with extensive economic and strategic relationships with countries of ASEAN, Japan, South Korea and Australia. The balance of power in the two regions has not adversely affected India's growth process over the last two decades. China's rise is changing this. While nuclear deterrence raises the threshold of bilateral tensions erupting into direct military conflict, India-China competition is likely to manifest itself in and around the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. China is using its lead over India to shape the political and security environment in the weak and fragile states in the neighbourhood to effectively 'contain' India.[15] India is resisting this in two ways: first, it is strengthening bilateral relationships to counter China's influence to the extent that it can. Second, while not showing any interest in becoming a US ally in the 20th century pattern, New Delhi is showing some interest in balancing China's power in East Asia.[16]

The need to influence the balance of power in Asia, therefore, constitutes an important factor in the way New Delhi approaches relations with countries in its immediate and extended neighbourhoods. This approach is guided more by a desire for peace and stability in the region, without political entanglements involved in changing the internal dynamics of neighbouring countries to determine outcomes.

3. Approaches

How has India responded to turbulence in its neighbourhood in the post-Cold War era? It is possible to discern seven broad approaches: cautious prudence, strategic investment, unilateral reassurance, physical insulation, non-interference, humanitarian assistance and maritime security.

3.1 Cautious prudence

A quiet northern alliance. In contrast to the activist Indian approach of the 1970s and 80s, where India attempted to drive political change in its neighbourhood, the leitmotif of Indian policy in the post-Cold War era has been what Mehta calls cautious prudence.[17] During a period where politics became an affair for the masses in many countries of southern Asia, and which often directly affected India's strategic interests, New Delhi's dominant response was an attempt to shape outcomes, not construct them. Before the US toppled the Taliban regime in October 2001, India's role was restricted to a quiet and limited support for the groups fighting Mullah Omar's Taliban regime. Despite evidence that there was a continuum between the Pakistani military establishment, the Taliban regime, al-Qaeda, numerous Pakistani jihadi groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and militants operating in Jammu & Kashmir, India did not strongly support attempts to prevent or reverse the Taliban takeover of Kabul.

For king and country. Although Nepal's Maoists declared a "people's war" against the monarchy in early 1996, the insurgency was largely ignored by New Delhi until 2001, when they launched a massive offensive against police and Royal Nepalese Army outposts in 42 districts.[18] Even then, Indian leaders called upon King Gyanendra to arrive at a grand consensus with democratic political parties—a conservative policy that did not wish to see the end of the monarchy.

New Delhi had reservations on the US assistance to the Nepalese army against the Maoist insurgency. However, it did not seek to prevent either the United States or the United Nations from intervening in Nepal's civil war. Concerns of Nepalese Maoists linking up with their ideological counterparts operating on the Indian side of the border did not cause New Delhi to consider a military intervention. And, despite its preference for retaining the monarchy, New Delhi did not prevent its overthrow. India's emphasis has been to use diplomacy and multi-pronged political engagement aimed at ensuring that a regime ill-disposed towards India's interests does not dominate Nepal's political landscape. The current political impasse in the new Himalayan republic remains a work-in-progress of cautious prudence: the Maoists are out of the woods, but not quite inside the palace.

Intervention by non-intervention. It has been essentially the same story with respect to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Pakistan—all of which went through difficult political transitions—and Bhutan, where the political transition was smooth.[19]

The leitmotif of Indian policy in the post-Cold War era has been cautious prudence

India did not intervene when the Bangladeshi army under General Moeen U Ahmed "recalled democracy" and placed the country under quasi-military rule. Despite overtures by both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers, New Delhi refrained from direct engagement in the island's civil war. Popular politics in the Maldives unseated the old regime of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, receiving the barest amount of attention from New Delhi. Bhutan's royal succession and transition into constitutional monarchy was uncontroversial and had India's support. New Delhi complemented Bhutan's domestic political development by concluding a new treaty liberating Thimphu's foreign and defence policies from India's 'guidance.' This practically "hands-off" policy would have been unthinkable in the heydays of the Indira Doctrine.

Cautious prudence has been apparent in India's dealings with Pakistan too, where both Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh conducted negotiations with General Musharraf's regime, ignoring his role as the architect of the Kargil War of 1999. New Delhi was largely a bystander during the

tumult of General Musharraf's downfall, President Asif Ali Zardari's rise and his subsequent marginalisation at the hands of General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

Has cautious prudence worked? From the Indian perspective, the results have to be assessed against the primary motivation of achieving outcomes conducive to India's developmental goals. Supporting the Northern Alliance provided a useful counter to the Taliban and negated Pakistan's plans of achieving complete "strategic depth" in Afghanistan. This was effective to the extent that it prevented the Pakistani military-jihadi complex from escalating attacks against India in Kashmir and elsewhere. While Pakistan has cited India's friendly relations with the Karzai government in Kabul as a 'legitimate' reason for animosity towards India, it does not stand up to scrutiny. Over the last two decades, Pakistan's strategic use of exporting terrorism to Kashmir and other parts of India has remained consistent while the reasons offered by it have varied over time. In any case, the al-Qaeda organised attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 changed the geopolitical landscape, not least by compelling the Pakistani government to act against its own surrogates.

New Delhi's cautious prudence has failed in Pakistan

Early indications suggest Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan have not only been more successful in managing their own political transitions, but have set out on a course that is consistent with India's own expectations. It is unclear, though, if cautious prudence will succeed in Nepal and the Maldives. The difficulty of integrating the Maoists into the Nepalese state means that stability is still some distance away. Maldives is of minor economic importance to India, and is now beset with rising Islamic radicalism. But New Delhi's cautious prudence has failed in Pakistan. Whatever 'back-channel' agreements (near-agreements, to be precise) that were concluded with General Musharraf's regime have been repudiated by its successors. The openly expressed belief of the Pakistani army developing a 'vested interest in the peace process' with India has been proven to be false: in April 2010, General Kayani openly admitted

that the Pakistani army remains invested in confrontation with India.[20]

3.2 Strategic investment

Economic growth has equipped India with an instrument of foreign policy that was unavailable to it even during the mid-1990s. The foreign ministry now has an annual foreign aid budget of about $500 million: half of it allocated to Bhutan, and around a fifth to Afghanistan.[21] In both cases, India's developmental assistance can be described as strategic investment in building state capacity, institutions and infrastructure.

The Afghan example. Shanthie Mariet D'Souza notes that most of the international aid to Afghanistan is directed at short-term high-visibility projects that are implemented by bypassing the Afghan government.[22] In contrast, Indian projects maintain low-visibility and involve active Afghan participation. "Hard infrastructure" projects—like the Zaranj-Delaram highway that provides the land-locked country with onward connectivity to the Iranian port of Chahbahar—were completed despite attacks on Indian construction crew and reconstruction workers. India is also engaged in "soft infrastructure" projects—investments in human capital—that includes scholarships, skills development and training programmes for Afghan parliamentarians, bureaucrats and professionals.

Double-benefit. Such a strategy is indicated by proximity and is essentially based on a long term calculation of the benefits of having competent states and robust institutions in the neighbourhood. Infrastructure projects—from hydro-electric power projects in Bhutan, roads connecting Afghanistan to Iranian ports, to river-dredging in Bangladesh—are calculated to benefit both the local and Indian economies.

There is an element of strategic investment behind proposals to build international oil & gas transport infrastructure in the region: the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) and the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India (MBI) pipelines. These projects provide the exporting and transit countries with a direct stake in India's development by creating long-term

revenue streams. Paradoxically though, they languish on the drawing board because they are blocked by the very problems New Delhi expects them to solve. The insurgency in Balochistan, the hostility of Pakistan's military-jihadi complex and political dysfunction in Bangladesh are the fundamental intra-regional factors that have scuttled IPI and MBI projects.

How has strategic investment fared? Very well in Bhutan. Indian development assistance has allowed the tiny Himalayan kingdom to exploit its hydroelectric potential to export electricity to energy-deficient India, attract Indian investment in energy-intensive manufacturing industries and deliver electricity to its population at very low tariffs.[23]   Partnership with India has provided the Bhutanese government with the opportunity to avoid the acute trade-offs faced by countries at similar stages of development, making it easier to accomplish one of the smoothest political transitions in region. Thimphu has remained sensitive to India's security interests, conducting a military operation in December 2003 to expel militants from India's Assam and West Bengal states.

India's projects in Afghanistan have perhaps become victims of their own relative success. The results of almost a decade of India's involvement have alarmed the Pakistani military establishment, which remains paranoid of New Delhi's influence in what it perceives as its zone of influence. Since 2008, there has been an upsurge in attacks on Indian targets—the attack on India's embassy in Kabul in July 2008 and on Indian nationals in a guesthouse in February 2010 being the most high-profile ones—aimed at compelling India to roll back its presence.[24] Whether or not India's strategic investment will give it a say in shaping Afghanistan's political future remains to be seen.

Strategic investment could not take off in Bangladesh until 2010 mainly because the Khaleda Zia government in Dhaka was not predisposed to improving relations with India. This might change with the announcement of the development credit package and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's commitment to permit land transit across Bangladesh. With regard to Pakistan, negotiations over the IPI pipeline notwithstanding, it is unlikely that the Pakistani military establishment will permit Indian public or private investment in the country.

3.3 Unilateral reassurance

It might appear paradoxical to describe India's contemporary policy towards Pakistan as one of "unilateral reassurance" yet that is what it amounts to. Conventional analysis sees the "peace process" comprising of a formal composite dialogue, secret back-channel negotiations, several Track-2 initiatives and people-to-people contacts. None of this directly engages the military establishment, the centre of power that actually matters as far as bilateral relations go.[25]

Infrastructure projects are calculated to benefit both the local and Indian economies

The army's control of the nuclear arsenal, several militant groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and of key segments of the bureaucracy mean that India cannot afford to neglect this all-important player but—in yet another paradox—finds itself without direct channels of communication with the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. How then does India engage this player? As Satyabrata Pal puts it: "though the Army does not talk, it listens. It is the audience before which the dialogue between its government and India plays out; the actors speak to each other in the limelight, but it is the khaki darkness they address. If we want to give the Army reasons to change its mind on India, we can only do it through the reassurances we convey in a sustained dialogue."[26]

Other than the brief period in 2002 when India mobilised troops along the border in response to the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001, India's political leadership has consistently sought to reassure its neighbour about its peaceful intent. Pakistan's declared readiness to use nuclear weapons first, to ameliorate its relative weakness in the conventional domain, perhaps weighs on the minds of leaders in New Delhi, who, regardless of political persuasion, are extremely unlikely to risk a nuclear escalation. Vajpayee's bus trip to Lahore

in 1999, his invitation to General Musharraf in 2001 and initiation of the peace process in 2004, and Manmohan Singh's steady restraint in the face of a series of provocative terrorist attacks on Indian cities since then, seek to reassure the Pakistani military leadership that India will not use the military option. Pakistani officials have often cited the Indian army's "Cold Start" doctrine—that seeks to conduct lightning strikes under the nuclear threshold—as evidence to the contrary. This argument ignores the fact that "Cold Start" has neither been accepted by the defence ministry nor has India invested in military capacity to operationalise it.[27]

India has sought to physically insulate itself

Reassurance extends to other major sources of Pakistani insecurity: India has desisted from supporting the insurgency in Balochistan or indeed condemning the Pakistani army's brutal campaign to suppress the rebellion. New Delhi has studiously abided by the terms of the Indus Waters Treaty even during times when relations with Pakistan were at their worst. Short of unilateral concessions on water sharing or indeed renegotiating the treaty itself, there is little more that India can do to further reassure Pakistan that it does not see water as an instrument of coercion. Though it has not materialised so far, one motivation behind the IPI gas pipeline was to reassure Pakistan by creating "mutual inter-dependence" by placing a vital component of India's energy security in the hands of the Pakistani military establishment.[28]

Has unilateral reassurance worked? Only to the extent that it has reduced risks of a nuclear exchange. It has, however, been largely counterproductive. The Pakistani military establishment perceives Indian moves as arising from weakness, an assessment that emboldens it to instigate acts of terrorism against India. Pakistan's nuclear weapons now serve the effective purpose of protecting its terrorists from punishment.

3.4 Physical insulation

The infiltration of militants and terrorists from Pakistan, mass migration from Bangladesh, the smuggling of consumer goods and fake Indian currency from Nepal, the operations of ULFA militants from safe hideouts in Bhutan and the sanctuaries available to the insurgent groups of the north-eastern states in Myanmar and Bangladesh, have raised the importance of border management as a component of internal security.

With neighbouring governments unwilling or unable to prevent illicit cross-border activity, India has sought to physically insulate itself. Construction of the first border fence began in the 1980s in Punjab and Rajasthan, which abut Pakistan, to prevent the smuggling of arms across the border. At the time, India was fighting a Pakistan-backed insurgency in Punjab and wanted to stem the flow of weapons and training to the insurgents. Fencing began in Jammu and Kashmir in the mid-1990s. In 2004, India completed the fencing of the Line of Control (LoC)—the de facto border separating Indian- and Pakistan-administered parts of the state—to prevent the infiltration of militants from the Pakistani side. Stephen Cohen has argued that India should have constructed the fence on the LoC much earlier.[29] However, its construction was made possible only due to the ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan signed in 2003.

The fence runs on India's side of the border and at some places is several kilometres inside Indian territory. This is unlike Israel's high-tech barrier, which criss-crosses the West Bank and eats into several parts of it. The Indian border fence, in comparison, is a relatively simple 3-metre high structure based on barbed wire and concertina coils supported by a framework of steel and concrete pillars. The efficacy of the fence is thus vastly dependent on the vigilance maintained by the border outposts and regular patrolling along the fence by Indian security forces.

On the Bangladesh border, India plans to complete a nearly 2500 km long border fence by the end of 2010. The fence aims to throttle illegal immigration, smuggling and terrorist infiltration. It will also delineate the populations of the two countries who live alongside it. Progress on the fence has been patchy due to strong opposition from Bangladesh and the existence of enclaves.

Have fences insulated India from cross-border threats? We believe that the physical barrier on the India-Pakistan frontier has been effective. It has reduced the inflow of arms, currency and militants, making it nearly impossible for Pakistan to support another Punjab-like insurgency in the border-states. In Jammu & Kashmir, the decline in militancy in the state—where the number of militants has fallen from an estimated 3000 in 2004 to around 500 in 2010—can be attributed in part to the existence of the fence.[30] Once built, the India-Bangladesh fence is likely to reduce unseemly clashes between the two countries' border guards that have risen in frequency over the last decade.

3.5 Non-interference

Buddhist monks rose up against the military junta ruling Myanmar in September 2007, Tibetans agitated against China's Communist rulers in March 2008, Xinjiang's Uighurs rioted against the ethnic Han Chinese majority in July 2009 and the Baloch struggle for autonomy and independence entered a new phase in 2005. India did not interfere in any of these cases.[31] Indeed, Myanmar's junta has received some financial and military assistance from New Delhi, and in turn has at times co-operated in battling anti-India militants along the India-Myanmar border. Indian firms have also secured some oil and gas exploration contracts off the coast of Myanmar. On the whole though, New Delhi has remained passive with respect to the junta's oppression of its own people.

India hosts the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile and accepts refugees fleeing Chinese rule in Tibet. But it neither interferes in Tibet nor plays any role in mediating between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. India is not involved in the Uighur issue, and appears to want to keep it that way, judging from its decision not to host Rebiya Kadeer, the international face of the Uighur struggle, in July 2009. And notwithstanding widespread Pakistani belief of Indian involvement, New Delhi does not appear to be interested in Balochistan.

Has non-interference worked? New Delhi's policies have not ameliorated the suffering of the people in Myanmar,

Tibet, Xinjiang or Balochistan. It can reasonably be argued that India's abetment of the Myanmarese junta has made it more convenient for the latter's ASEAN neighbours to similarly duck the issue, and vice versa. India's reluctance to interfere has been interpreted by some South East Asian states as evidence of a disinterest in balancing the rise of Chinese power in the region. For its part, the junta has done the minimum required to keep on India's right side.

3.6 Humanitarian assistance

Within hours of the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 26th, 2004, the Indian Navy had deployed 19 ships, 4 aircraft and 14 helicopters on rescue and relief missions. Airborne medical teams landed in Sri Lanka on the same day and the first Indian ship reached the Maldives within 48 hours of the first shock. Indian naval medical teams reached Indonesia's Aceh coast by January 4th, 2010. At its peak, the Indian Navy mobilised 38 ships, 21 helicopters, 8 fixed-wing aircraft and 5500 personnel over three foreign theatres and three domestic ones.[32]

New Delhi does not appear to be interested in Balochistan

India and the United States shaped a "'humanitarian coalition of the willing'" bringing together their naval assets along with those from Japan and Australia into what C. Raja Mohan calls "one of the biggest multilateral relief efforts the world has ever seen."[33] The Indian Navy not only went in after receiving specific requests for assistance from foreign governments but also placed its units under the operational control of the host nation.

Similarly, the first relief ships to arrive in Myanmar in the wake of the natural disaster caused by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 were those of the Indian Navy. The Indian Air Force flew relief sorties and the Army sent medical teams to help the affected population. New Delhi played a less visible role in parallel: it persuaded the obdurate ruling junta to allow the flow of international assistance to the disaster victims, at one point even offering to physically transport relief material on Indian ships.

There is a clear sense that New Delhi sees humanitarian assistance, especially not exclusively in its neighbourhood, as an important part of its geopolitical agenda. In recent years, the Indian government has offered aid to relief efforts in Pakistan (2005 Kashmir earthquake and 2010 flood disaster), Haiti, the United States (in the wake of Hurricane Katrina) and China (2008 Sichuan earthquake). India's role in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami demonstrated its maritime capacity, the willingness to use it to assist states in the Indian Ocean littoral and more importantly, the consultative and co-operative "style" of use. It also alerted India's political leadership and the public of the need to invest in maritime, amphibious and air-lift capacity to carry out such missions in the future.

New Delhi sees humanitarian assistance as an important part of its geopolitical agenda

Humanitarian interventions have political consequences. The 2004 tsunami undermined the naval capacity of the Tamil Tiger insurgency in Sri Lanka. Although they used the aftermath to acquire rudimentary 'air force', the tsunami and its aftermath benefited the Sri Lankan government relatively more (India's aid, for instance, was channelled through Colombo). The insurgency in Indonesia's Aceh province came to an end, with the rebels reaching political accommodation with Jakarta through provincial autonomy. Neither the cyclone nor its aftermath changed the attitudes and behaviour of Myanmar's junta. In Pakistan, radical Islamist militants like those linked to the Lashkar-e-Taiba acquired greater legitimacy, and benefited from serving as conduits of international assistance. [34]

3.7 Safeguarding the maritime domain

Another more recent development is India's deployment of naval ships in the Gulf of Aden to protect merchant ships from Somali pirates. The Manmohan Singh government agreed to deploy ships reluctantly and only after the kidnapping of Indian crew members captured media attention. When ships were deployed the Indian government refused to permit hot pursuit of pirates,

limiting the navy's role to defending ships against attacks. Later, after acquiring more comfort with an operation of this nature, did New Delhi allow the ships to carry out hot pursuit. [35] It also bolstered the naval force in the theatre. India sees this as its "contribution to keeping the global commons safe" as over a 1000 ships from 50 countries have benefited in the first 18 months of deployment. [36]

According to Mohan, since the 1990s, the Indian navy "began to reach out to both the major naval powers in the Indian Ocean as well as the smaller countries in the littoral. Moving away from the traditional notions of sea-denial and its diplomatic component of keeping other naval powers out of its neighbourhood, India began to value cooperation and contract with other navies." [37] India, he argues "has already begun to move away from the past emphases on sovereignty." This has been viewed in some quarters as India's counter to China's naval expansion in the Indian Ocean. However, officials like Shivshankar Menon, Manmohan Singh's national security advisor, believe that India has a role to play in securing the global commons— sea, air, space, and cyberspace. [38] Mohan believes that there is a convergence of interests between India and the United States in ensuring freedom of access to the global commons. It appears that some US officials agree. [39]

India's naval deployment to the Gulf of Aden limits itself to maritime security and New Delhi does not purport to get involved in stabilising the deeply dysfunctional Somalian state that lies at the root of the piracy problem. Other countries, including China, have since gotten involved in anti-piracy missions in this theatre, but other than the United States and some of Somalia's neighbours, few external actors have sought to tackle the complex onshore challenge. This suggests that while a number of powers might step up to manage the global commons, the more unpleasant task of intervening in the sovereign states at the source of the associated problems will have fewer takers.

3.8 Features of India's approach

What can we say about the key features of India's approach towards political turbulence in its neighbourhood?

First, India's foreign policy has been consistent with the Gujral Doctrine's respect for sovereignty, requiring and depending for its effectiveness on the employment of diplomatic resources.

Second, there has been a greater acceptance of the role of international actors across its borders. The last decade has seen Western governments and the United Nations involved in attempts to stabilise Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and of course Pakistan and Afghanistan. This has not been frictionless, but by and large, India has seen the role of the international community as consistent with its own interests. The exception is China, whose role is viewed with some suspicion.

Third, India has shown an increasing willingness to intervene in the extended neighbourhood, especially in the maritime domain. Here too, it has shown a readiness to engage in multilateral cooperation, both ad hoc and structured. India's approach in the air, space and cyberspace domains of the global commons is likely to be similar.

Finally, foreign aid is now an integral part of the foreign policy toolkit and is used as a strategic instrument. Military assistance, barring in Bhutan, is more tactical in nature.

Equally interesting is what is missing from this: direct military intervention of the kind witnessed between the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 and withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka in 1990.

4. The Policy Process

How does the proximity factor interact with India's foreign policy-making process and influence New Delhi's decisions? In four ways: by influencing the political resultant, by evoking the fear of overreach, through bureaucratic pre-determination and through the absence of international frameworks.

4.1 A product of domestic politics

Perhaps the single most important factor that determines whether and how India intervenes in a neighbouring country is domestic politics. With increasing proximity, the number of domestic stakeholders and the size of their stakes both increase. India's federal structure and the contemporary reality of coalition governments ensures that decisions are not outcomes of a rational calculation by the Indian government, but political resultants of the interplay of stakeholders' interests.

India has a role to play in securing the global commons

Consider two examples. India found itself unable to fully support the Sri Lankan government against the Tamil Tigers despite the latter having assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. Even if much of the sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause dwindled after the assassination there were enough political forces both in Tamil Nadu and in New Delhi that ensured that India's hardline stance did not translate into untrammelled support for Colombo. Even more quotidian issues—say involving positions over water projects with Nepal—involve politicians, influential landowners and environmentalists across the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal.[40] The political process in the states interacts with the political process at the central level to produce the eventual outcome. An added level of complexity arises when decisions are challenged in court, which is not an infrequent occurrence.

Unless a prime minister is prepared to push a policy by investing his political capital, it is impossible to predict what position India will take on a particular issue. India's political leaders are unlikely to invest their political capital on issues that are 'minor' to India, but—like in the case of hydro-electric projects with Nepal—are not so minor across the border.[41]

4.2 Fear of overreach

If the Indira Doctrine was overambitious in its goals given India's military capabilities at that time, the Vajpayee-Manmohan Doctrine underplays India's military strength. To understand why India's policymakers are extremely reluctant to use military force overseas, it is important to examine the consequences of India's disastrous military intervention in Sri Lanka's civil war in the late 1980s.

The political aims of the military intervention were uncertain, wavering and poorly articulated to the armed forces. The internal political position of the Rajiv Gandhi government in New Delhi during the second half of its term did not allow it to invest sufficient political capital into the counter-insurgency effort. There was a gap between the strategic intent of the political leadership and India's military capacity for an expeditionary counterinsurgency mission. The mission's failure was rightly attributed to a case of military overreach—non-existent higher defence organisation, lack of coordination with the intelligence agencies, lack of jointness in operations of the three services, poor training, improper equipping and inadequate logistics.

India's policymakers are extremely reluctant to use military force overseas

The IPKF experience had four major consequences for the Indian policy process. First, it convinced India's political leadership to never again consider an expeditionary military operation, except outside of the UN peacekeeping umbrella. Second, there was mutual distrust between the diplomatic corps, the armed forces and the intelligence agencies. This continues to affect decision-making despite the subsequent institution of a National Security Council and the appointment of a National Security Advisor to provide consolidated advice to the political leadership.

Third, the failure of the IPKF not only led to politicians distrusting the armed forces but it also made the armed forces wary of the politicians. Finally, the reputation of the armed forces suffered in the political crossfire between Rajiv Gandhi and his political detractors led by V P Singh.

A dogmatic fear of overreach exercises a near veto on any proposal to deploy troops abroad. Unfortunately, given the shortcomings in the structure of the armed forces, the military leadership is unable to convince the political leadership of India's expeditionary capabilities. Military expeditions have thus been effectively ruled out as instruments of foreign policy. This has left the armed forces with little influence in shaping India's policies towards regions other than the countries with whom India shares a border. A partial exception to this is the navy, but only to the extent that it is involved in non-combat roles. As noted earlier, the Indian government was reluctant to permit the navy to engage in hot pursuit of Somali pirates.

4.3 Bureaucratic pre-determination

The Intelligence Bureau, India's domestic intelligence agency, was raised by the British colonial government to fight communism. This legacy continues to shape its organisational culture, influencing its assessments and reflected in the advice it offers to the political leadership. Sukh Deo Muni argues that the IB's anti-Communist organisational culture is a key factor in India's approach towards the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Similarly, the Indian army has a culture of fraternal links with its Nepalese counterparts—India's army chiefs are usually conferred the honorary rank of General of the Nepal Army—that too constrains New Delhi's policies. These examples show how policy can be pre-determined by bureaucratic culture and operating procedures. This is not particular to India—however, because the proximity factor is itself a determinant of bureaucratic culture, the net effect is one of a powerful resistance to policy changes.

The external affairs, defence and home ministries not only have vastly different objectives and culture, but are staffed by different cadre systems. State bureaucracies have their own cadre, competencies and culture that influence the positions India takes with respect to issues concerning the respective neighbouring country. A powerful political executive can overcome the bureaucratic factor and effect change—however, there have been few such leaders in the post-Cold War era.

There is also the question of capacity. Daniel Markey argues that there are an insufficient number of foreign service officers, a mere 700 deployed to 119 diplomatic missions, passport offices across Indian cities and the headquarters in New Delhi.[43] The IFS admits around 20 new entrants into its cadre each year. Although the government has approved a scheme to admit talented individuals from the private sector, the scheme has yet to be implemented. For their part, the armed forces have complained of a shortage of officers, and an inability to find sufficient numbers of qualified recruits.[44] Part of this is due to a shortage of skilled personnel in a booming Indian economy, where a career in the private sector is more lucrative and prestigious. The capacity problem reinforces the culture factor, in that officials simply do not have the time for anything more than defending or making incremental changes to the status quo.

4.4 Absent international frameworks

India's post-independence leaders shared personal rapport and often fraternal relationships with their counterparts in their neighbourhood. These social networks served as useful platforms for informal consultation and negotiations, and informed India's own policy positions. These do not survive today. SAARC, the formal regional construct that has taken their place has been ineffective in serving as a platform for effective multilateral solutioning. India has been criticised for not doing enough to strengthen multilateral instruments like SAARC. To a considerable extent, the interplay of bilateral relationships between various member-countries of SAARC and New Delhi's own experience with the organisation explain India's lukewarm attention. Meanwhile, India appears content with observer status in the SCO, despite Russia's backing for a full membership for India in the organisation. In the extended neighbourhood, ASEAN's policy of non-interference undermines its potential to serve as a forum to cooperate over Myanmar. Only the ASEAN Regional Forum has been relatively more useful as a forum for security cooperation. However, its focus tends to be on East Asia.

The absence of external, multilateral determinants leaves India's neighbourhood policy very much to domestic considerations. Furthermore, India's non-membership on the UN Security Council reduces New Delhi's incentives to incur the political costs to engage in risky overseas intervention projects.

4.5 The answer, almost always, is "cautious prudence"

Taken together it is clear why India's policy towards transitions, turbulence and upheaval in its neighbourhood is predominantly one of cautious prudence. Domestic politics, fear of military overreach and bureaucratic factors moderate boldness and circumscribe policy innovation. They have also forced New Delhi into a pattern of reacting to developments. Other than the peace process with Pakistan, India's political leaders have shown little interest in stewarding bold departures from extant neighbourhood policy. Changes in New Delhi's policies have been incremental even in the face of momentous changes in the countries of the region.

Policy can be pre-determined by bureaucratic culture

At the same time, the same factors tend to support policy continuity despite changes in the political leadership. Such continuity helps sustain policies like strategic investment, physical insulation and even unilateral reassurance that are effective only in the long term. External impetus has either been weak or reinforcing of careful prudence and non-intervention. It is only in the maritime domain of the Indian Ocean, to the extent that it does not inveigle New Delhi into onshore political dynamics, that there has been some boldness and innovation.

5. Prospects

5.1 How might India's policy change in the medium-term?

Our analysis shows that the way post-Cold War governments have defined India's strategic interests and the nature of India's policy-making process indicates that

New Delhi is likely to continue on a conservative trajectory. That said, it is germane to question what might cause India's political leaders to depart from this course, change approaches, or consider bold new ones. In the medium-term there are three factors that could compel India to act differently: first, the outcome of the war in Afghanistan-Pakistan; second, China's moves in southern and East Asia; and third, the possibility and nature of political upheaval in the countries of the region.

Northwestern vectors. The outcome of the military and political conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan creates two broad risks: First, the resulting balance of power in the region might embolden the Pakistani military-jihadi complex to consider escalating the proxy war through cross-border terrorism and insurgency in India. To the extent that provocative terrorist attacks are spread out in time and space, India's leaders will be able to sustain the policy of restraint and reassurance in a bid to contain the problem. If terrorist attacks traced to Pakistan become more frequent, it is possible that domestic politics will demand a different approach.

New Delhi is likely to continue on a conservative trajectory

Second, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan might "spill-over" to India in various ways, not least by causing the large-scale migration of refugees into India. While this risk has received relatively little attention compared to that of cross-border terrorism, it is nevertheless a significant one. It may be recalled that one of the key factors that persuaded Indira Gandhi to go to war in East Pakistan in 1971 was the refugee crisis and its impact on India's socio-economic stability. Spill-over risks in the contemporary context will almost certainly have to be managed within an international framework, perhaps—but not necessarily—involving the United Nations.

Southeastern vectors. The rise of Chinese power in East Asia and its securing of strategic footholds in India's immediate neighbourhood is the source of another set of risks. By itself, this is unlikely to cause New Delhi to move away from caution or prudence. However, if Chinese

involvement in the domestic politics of the countries of the subcontinent manifests itself in a situation that is consistently detrimental to India's strategic interests, then New Delhi's approach might change. Such a change might even be led by bureaucratic factors ahead of a political consensus.

Political upheavals. Unlikely as it may be, it is possible to conceive of scenarios where New Delhi might decide to use military power, unilaterally or in cooperation with international partners, to intervene in the neighbourhood. Unilateral actions would only be taken when there is an imminent or present threat to national security and where the neighbouring state is unwilling or unable to co-operate; or where a neighbouring state initiates or connives in genocide; or indeed when a neighbouring state formally requests India to intervene militarily.

Both the Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh governments have shown a reluctance to send Indian troops to Iraq and Afghanistan respectively. However, New Delhi might be less averse to contributing troops to Afghanistan or elsewhere in the extended neighbourhood as part of a politically acceptable multilateral initiative, or under a United Nations peacekeeping remit.

5.2 Preparing for the rough ride

"The intersection of the domestic environment for national development and the state of health of our neighbourhood relationships has never been as sharply defined as it is today. How do we align our foreign policy objectives with the country's fundamental security and developmental priorities? How do we combine a firm commitment to our core national values with dynamic, flexible, adaptation to changes in the international environment? How do we ensure that our periphery remains peaceful and free from tension so that our economy can grow even more rapidly? How do we deal with the threats of transnational terrorism especially that which emanates in our close neighbourhood? How can the Ministry of External Affairs best adjust to the exponential increase in demands on its expertise,

experience, time and resources?" - *Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao*[45]

We propose four key policy recommendations: expand the foreign service through higher intakes, lateral entry and inter-service secondments; conduct an inter-ministerial policy review on overseas military deployments; implement the long-delayed reform of India's higher military set-up; and make sustained investments in military expeditionary capacity.

5.3 Expand foreign policy capacity

Daniel Markey has offered a set of comprehensive recommendations to improve India's foreign policy capacity, the most important being the expansion, reform, remuneration and training of the IFS so that it can attract and retain the best talent. As Nirupama Rao's question to her colleagues suggests, this is an issue that the foreign service is acutely aware of. The Indian government has approved a doubling of intake for five years, but the programme is yet to be implemented. The importance of having an adequate number and quality of human resources cannot be overemphasised. If New Delhi's foreign policy is to be more effective, it must urgently add new capacity to its foreign service. Markey's recommendation of bringing in non-career officers into the foreign service establishment on secondment or as term-limited fellows is one of the better ways of exploiting the resident and non-resident Indian talent base.

5.4 Review overseas military deployment policy

As we have argued elsewhere, the very mention of an overseas military deployment runs into a dogmatic wall of domestic opposition. The IPKF experience should not cause India to forever foreswear the use of its armed forces beyond its borders. Apart from the significant differences in context, the Indian army has accumulated two decades of counter-insurgency experience in Kashmir and elsewhere that makes it a qualitatively different force from what it was before the Sri Lankan intervention. The Indian Navy has demonstrated its capacity to project power in the Indian Ocean littoral. India's economic and geopolitical profile

has changed since the 1990s. Yet the Indian government, and the wider strategic affairs establishment, has not reviewed its policy approach towards overseas military deployments. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic insistence on limiting foreign deployments to those under the UN flag constrains policy options and prevents investment in matching military capacity. It is an appropriate time for India to conduct a broad inter-ministerial policy review, involving the ministries of external affairs, defence, finance, home, commerce and petroleum as well as the intelligence agencies, to be chaired by a senior cabinet member. The advantage of explicitly stating such a policy is that it offers the political leadership the flexibility to shape the political outcome.

The Indian army has accumulated two decades of counter-insurgency experience

5.5 Complete reform of higher defence set-up

India is perhaps the only major democracy where the Armed Forces Headquarters are outside the apex governmental structure. The Chiefs of Staff have assumed the role of operational commanders of their respective forces rather than that of Chiefs of Staffs to the Prime Minister and Defence Minister. They simultaneously discharge the roles of operational commanders and national security planners/managers, especially in relation to future equipment and force postures. Most of their time, is, however, devoted to the operational role, as is bound to happen. This has led to a number of negative results. Future-oriented long term planning suffers. - *Kargil Review Committee*[46]

A glaring anomaly in the security decision-making structure is the absence of a military high command in decisions of war and peace. The missing link is the lack of co-ordination between the three service chiefs, leading to inter-service rivalry between the Army, Navy and Air Force. The single point politico-military dialogue, which is required to establish a coherent national strategy is thus lacking in the present setup. The vacuum created by this

missing link has been filled by the civilian bureaucratic setup in the defence ministry. In practice, the defence secretary acts as the 'referee' between the three service chiefs and also as the conduit between the military and the political decision makers.

Establishing a CDS appears to be the most viable option. The CDS is likely to improve 'jointness', synergy and coordination between the three services. It will also be able to rationalise planning, optimize defence expenditure, strengthen the higher defence management and expedite politico–military decision making. However, the recommendation has been kept in abeyance due to a lack of political consensus and opposition from the smaller services—the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force.

India must make sustained investments in military expeditionary capacity

Yet, the CDS model addresses the bureaucratic elements, not India's contemporary and future strategic environment. As Subrahmanyam argues, joint theatre commands and a Chairman of Joint Chief of Staffs Committee, modelled on the US system, are more suited to India.[47] However, because it marks a radical change from the status quo, this proposal suffers even more from inter-service rivalry, bureaucratic inertia and political cautiousness. Subrahmanyam has called for a Blue Ribbon Commission to examine various proposals and recommend a holistic reform of the defence services.

5.6 Expeditionary capability, cooperation capital

Finally, India must make sustained investments in military expeditionary capacity—including airlift, sea-lift, amphibious operations, logistics and resupply. The Indian government is currently examining a proposal to raise an independent brigade of 5000 personnel consisting of infantry and special forces. This is a good first step. In addition, a greater number of Army, Navy and Air Force units must be trained for joint expeditionary operations.

Qualitatively, India's expeditionary capacity must be developed such that it is inter-operable with the armed forces of the United States, Indonesia, Singapore, Australia, Japan and other East Asian countries. This not only involves instituting deeper operational co-operation arrangements but also requires India to factor international inter-operability in its procurement policies platforms, systems and equipment.

6. Conclusion: Transcending the Paradox of Proximity

How will India address the paradox of proximity in the coming years? Conventional wisdom has it that India cannot escape its neighbourhood and that its great power ambitions will be constrained by instability in that neighbourhood. It is argued that India's inability to solve long-standing disputes with its smaller neighbours will hamstring its global influence and limit it to being a 'South Asian' power. There are good reasons for India to prefer a more stable neighbourhood, but to the extent that the political turbulence in the countries of the region is endogenous, there is only so much that Indian concessions can achieve. Dhruva Jaishankar points to 18th century European powers, Meiji Japan and above all, contemporary China as examples of states that have all managed to 'escape' their neighbourhoods.[48] India's geographic size, favourable demographics and domestic market make it unique in many ways, defying simple templates and constructs.

It is what India makes of its unprecedented growth opportunity that will determine whether or not it will be limited by its proximity to weak, fragile and failing states in the neighbourhood. The evidence of the last two decades suggests that the growth juggernaut will continue over the next decade, along with powerful political pressures to redistribute wealth as fast as it is created. Globalisation has integrated the Indian economy deeply with both the West and the East with its neighbourhood being of limited significance.

The question for India's neighbours is whether or not they want to benefit from India's growth process. Bhutan, Sri Lanka and now Bangladesh appear to have embarked on trajectories that make the most out of opportunities

provided by both India and China. Pakistan—perhaps because its unaccountable elite are buttressed by liberal Western aid—is unconcerned with improving the lot of its own people. This does not mean it is not in India's interests to improve trade with its crisis-ridden neighbour. It only means that it won't hurt the Indian economy much if the bilateral trade doesn't materialise.

Once the Indian economy exhausts all the potential from the necessary next wave of domestic reforms, the condition of its neighbourhood might begin to impose constraints on its further growth. That point is at least two decades away. It is by no means certain that it will matter even then, for it is possible that India's neighbourhood will matter even less.

Footnotes

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