

India's Emerging Security Policy

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INDIA'S SECURITY POLICY HAS EVOLVED considerably since the country achieved its independence from Britain in 1947. Today, India faces several internal threats and two compelling external threats. The internal threats stem from the resurgence of neophyte Maoist guerilla violence in parts of northern and central India, an unsettled ethnic/secessionist movement in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, continuing discontent in parts of India's northeast, and growing radicalization of a small but significant segment of the Muslim community in the country. Finally, India also suffers from an antiquated and cumbrous defense acquisition system—one that has ill-served its armed forces and that has left the country increasingly vulnerable to external threats. What India appears to lack is a discernible grand strategy that could provide the necessary guidance to its national security policies. Instead, the government seems to be both reactive and idiosyncratic, with a minimal overarching strategic design.

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The external security threats that India faces have dogged its policymakers from the country's founding. The first external threat, from Pakistan, erupted within months of the partition of the British Indian Empire and the creation of the two states. Despite its material weakness vis-à-vis India, Pakistan chose to initiate a war to wrest the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir on the basis of an irredentist claim. Though the salience of this dispute has waxed and waned over the last seven decades, it still remains unresolved.¹ In a related

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vein, India also faces a continuing threat from Pakistan's use of various proxy terrorist forces, both in Kashmir and elsewhere. Finally, in the last decade, as Afghanistan has found itself caught in the vortex of a civil war, Pakistan has relied on the Afghan Taliban to attack Indian assets and investments in the country. Consequently, the country has now become another arena for the Indo-Pakistani rivalry.

Another threat, one which most Indian policymakers—notably Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru—initially failed to anticipate, emerged from the People's

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Republic of China (PRC). The PRC saw India as the principal inheritor of the British colonial legacy in South Asia and questioned the legitimacy of significant segments of its colonially demarcated Himalayan border. This dispute, despite multiple rounds of

negotiations, is presently no closer to a settlement.² Indeed it is far from clear that any government in New Delhi has formulated a coherent strategy to reach an end game in these talks.

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The central problem that seems to vex Indian national security policy is the absence of long-term strategic planning. India's national security policy, for the most part, tends to be reactive, ad hoc, and subject to the vagaries of particular regimes. Resource constraints have also periodically hobbled the pursuit of a stable, coherent set of policies. Even the current regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which has emphasized the need for a robust defense policy, has dithered on key weapons acquisitions, hesitated to firm up existing military partnerships, and reacted unevenly to significant provocations from Pakistan and the PRC.

This essay will discuss how these threats have evolved, how India's policymakers have sought to deal with them, and the prospects and shortcomings of the strategies that have been adopted to address them.

COPING WITH AND RESPONDING TO INTERNAL THREATS

RESURGENT MAOIST VIOLENCE

What are the sources of the internal threats that the country is currently contending with? The first, Maoist violence, has long-standing antecedents. It initially erupted in the early 1970s in the state of West Bengal. A group of ideologues,

imbued with Maoist ideology and given material support by the PRC, launched the movement in the district of Naxalbari, located in the northern part of the state. Subsequently, it evolved into a brutal urban guerilla movement. The Indian state adopted a harsh and uncompromising urban counterinsurgency strategy and crushed the movement.³ However, the movement has been resuscitated in the past decade or so for a complex array of reasons. The most common explanation cites the persistence of rural poverty and deprivation.⁴ This argument, while seemingly compelling, has its limitations.

Since rural deprivation has been a constant, it alone cannot explain the revival of the movement. The revival of the movement can be attributed in considerable part to mobilization around the grievances of significant parts of India's rural population that have largely not benefited from the dramatic economic growth of the last few decades. Today, a number of Indian states, with varying degrees of competence, are trying to suppress the Maoist rebels. Despite the threat that the Maoists pose to the political order, the central (national) government has limited options available for dealing with these insurgents. Even when state governments have faced difficulties in coping with the threat from the Maoists, they have been loath to seek police reinforcements from the central government for fear of a loss of their autonomy.⁵ More to the point, since police jurisdictions end at state borders, insurgents faced with pressures in a particular area have often fled into neighboring states lacking similar policing capabilities.

The structure of Indian federalism limits the ability of the central government to play any routine role in the maintenance of internal order. State governments, of course, are at liberty to call on the central government for assistance in dealing with any issue of law and order. Alternatively, if the state becomes virtually ungovernable, the central government may dismiss the state government under its constitutional authority and rule the area directly from New Delhi for up to six months before calling new elections, a circumstance referred to as "President's Rule."⁶ Despite the mayhem that the insurgents have caused, no central government has deemed it necessary to dismiss any state government due to this. It has refrained from doing so largely because law and order has to reach a point of virtual collapse before the central government can declare President's Rule. Nevertheless, the Maoist insurgency does constitute a significant internal threat in particular parts of the country. Maoist activities have inhibited investment, diverted scarce resources to enhanced policing, and ironically, prevented the state from improving existing economic conditions.⁷

The problem of ethno-religious violence has also long troubled India. In the past, India has fueled major ethno-religious insurgencies in Assam, as well as in other northeastern parts of the country, in Punjab, and the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir. Within the past decade in particular, small segments of India's Muslim minority have started to heed the siren call of global jihad. One of the key manifestations of this growth of radical Islam is the genesis of an indigenous militant organization called the Indian Mujahideen (IM).⁸ The organization has been implicated in a number of violent incidents across India, the most dramatic of which was a bomb attack on the German Bakery in Pune in the western state of Maharashtra in 2010.⁹ The IM's operations have belied the popular belief that India's democracy, with all its flaws, serves as a bulwark against the growth of violent Muslim extremism. This shibboleth has to be questioned because obviously a growing segment of India's Muslim population does not repose sufficient faith in mere electoral mechanisms to express their discontent therein.

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The roots of Muslim militancy in India are tangled; however, a handful of factors help explain its rise in recent years. In considerable part, the rise of Muslim militancy can be seen as a response to the rise of Hindu fanaticism and bigotry. Segments of the Muslim community have felt increasingly marginalized as a consequence of various forms of routine discrimination that they have confronted in the arenas of employment, education, and housing.¹⁰ Furthermore, though

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it is difficult to adduce specific evidence to this end, it can be inferred that an anti-Muslim pogrom (i.e., the onset of mass violence when the state is at least tacitly complicit),

which took place in the western state of Gujarat in 2002, further contributed to the alienation of Muslims from India's political mainstream.¹¹ The violence in Gujarat can indeed be deemed a pogrom due to sufficient evidence of state complicity in what transpired.¹²

Unless the Indian central government and states with substantial Muslim populations pay heed to the increasingly marginalized status of Muslims, it is likely that more members of the community will respond to the call of radical Islam. Unfortunately, recent developments across India suggest that various state

governments, as well as the central government, are paying little attention to the concerns Muslims in particular are having. For example, certain developments have probably contributed to greater misgivings among the Muslim community. Among other matters, the imposition of a ban on the consumption of beef, which has disproportionate adverse consequences for poor Muslims as this inexpensive meat is often an important component of their diet, has further alienated significant members of the community. Other evidence of discrimination against and harassment of Muslims can also be adduced. For instance, in March 2015, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Subramanian Swamy questioned the holy status of mosques, stating in a public speech that, unlike temples, they are not holy sites and can therefore be demolished. Shortly thereafter, the BJP chief minister of the northern state of Haryana asserted that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Hindu text, would become mandatory in state schools.¹³

The growth of disaffection among Muslims might not only lead to radicalization, but also render them more susceptible to Pakistani efforts to court them to act against the Indian state. Young Muslim men may gravitate toward terrorist organizations, be enticed to collect intelligence for Pakistan, and even be persuaded to carry out acts of terror on Indian soil. Given the evidence of Pakistani influence among the perpetrators of some dramatic attacks, including a highly coordinated set of bombings in Mumbai, such fears are hardly chimerical.¹⁴

India also faces renewed disorder in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The primarily indigenous ethno-religious insurgency that erupted there in 1989 was mostly quelled through an amalgam of coercion and political concessions in the early part of the last decade. The origins of the insurgency have been discussed elsewhere and can be traced to a process of the growth of political mobilization against a backdrop of institutional decay.¹⁵ However, over the past several years the state has witnessed a resurgence of local violence; some Indian analysts are prone to attribute this recrudescence of violence to Pakistan's instigation.¹⁶ There is little question that Pakistan, which has long supported a range of terrorist organizations, remains keen on fomenting discord within the state through the use of various proxy terrorist forces.

However, the recent unrest that has gripped the state has little or nothing to do with Pakistani malfeasance. Instead, much of it stems from the frustrations of local youth who do not repose much faith in the existing political dispensation of the state. From their standpoint, local politicians have not been able to address long-standing grievances related to years of police repression and other abuses during the worst years of the insurgency.

Despite the existence of a freely elected government, many young Kashmiris harbor grievances that have remained unaddressed. Among other matters, they deeply resent the large-scale presence of the Indian military, continued long after the insurgency had been quelled. The overweening military deployment in the state contributes to a milieu perceived as oppressive. Soldiers drawn from other parts of the country are unfamiliar with local customs and mores and thus are prone to treat young men with suspicion and hostility in a manner that frequently leads to violence. Any indiscriminate use of force, in turn, proves provocative and leads to an escalation of street violence, resulting in yet another cycle of repression.

The Maoist insurgency, the insurrection in Kashmir, and the radicalization of a segment of the Muslim community have had sandbagging effects on the country's social cohesion, political stability, and even economic growth. Unless their underlying sources are addressed, these issues will continue apace and will require the diversion of scarce resources to contain them.

SEPERATISM IN THE NORTHEAST

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This model of counterinsurgency and political dialogue, though fitfully attempted in other parts of the northeast, has not yielded similar results. The lack of success stems from a complex set of reasons. Multiple insurgent organizations have competing agendas, are involved in internecine quarrels, and policies toward the region have changed depending on the regime in New Delhi. Not surprisingly, the country still faces discontent in the northeastern states of Assam and Nagaland from the Bodo rebels and from factions of Naga insurgents, respectively.

Several factors, internal and external, have hobbled India's ability to successfully end these ethno-religious uprisings. First, several parts of the northeast were only loosely integrated into the colonial Indian state. Not surprisingly, in the wake of independence, numerous ethnic groups harbored visions of independence and sought to assert such claims through a resort to force, given the prior autonomy of many individual communities.¹⁹ New Delhi met such resistance with considerable force for fear that any such challenge could contribute to the eventual unraveling of the nascent state. Harsh repression, in turn, only hardened the stance of many of these groups and thereby contributed to a spiraling of violence. Second, the PRC, in its phase of revolutionary fervor, actively aided and abetted these movements until the late 1970s.²⁰ The PRC's support for these insurgencies contributed significantly to their continuation in the modern day.

WEAPONS ACQUISITIONS CHALLENGES

From the standpoint of its overall national security strategy, India also suffers from an archaic and cumbersome weapons acquisitions process. The problems with this system afflict both its indigenous weapons industry and its purchases from abroad. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to provide a complete account of the issue. Instead, two examples may be usefully highlighted. The first involves India's quest to manufacture a light combat aircraft, a project that originated in 1984 and was launched with a view toward providing the Indian Air Force with a replacement for its workhorse, the Soviet MiG-21. However, after 32 years and an investment of \$2.6 billion, a mere two aircraft have been inducted into the Indian Air Force as of 2016.²¹

The country's attempt to acquire a medium, multi-role combat aircraft from abroad has met an almost equally dismal fate. After extensive and protracted negotiations with a number of possible vendors, in 2012 India chose the French Dassault Aviation Rafale aircraft. Initially, India had planned to purchase as many as 126 aircraft. However, differences over questions of the transfer of technology led the government to scale back the purchase, at least initially, to 36 "off the shelf" aircraft following Prime Minister Modi's visit to France in January 2016. Since that decision, though, the final terms of purchase have become mired in complex and tortured negotiations.²² The failure to develop a reliable defense industrial base and the inability to acquire weaponry from abroad in a timely and efficient fashion has left the country increasingly vulnerable to external threats.²³

ON THE HIMALAYAN BORDER

How has India sought to cope with and respond to various external threats? After the shock of the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, in which poorly armed and ill-equipped Indian forces were routed, India belatedly embarked on a substantial program of military modernization. Since then, it has seen two significant border incidents, the first in 1967 and the second in 1986, and has subsequently witnessed a series of minor incursions and skirmishes. Most of these border incidents have stemmed from “limited probes”—small, reversible incursions made with the goal of testing Indian readiness and resolve.²⁴ In order to deal with the PRC’s increasing assertiveness along the Sino-Indian border, India’s Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) authorized the creation of a new mountain strike corps composed of 40,000 troops in 2013.²⁵

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Recent events along the border have added a degree of urgency to the raising of this military formation. Specifically, to the shock and dismay of his Indian hosts, the People’s Republic Army (PLA) made a series of forays across the Line of Actual Control (the de facto border) in Ladakh in the state of Jammu and Kashmir during Prime Minister Xi Jinping’s September 2014 visit to India.²⁶ The strategy that India has adopted to deal with the Chinese threat along the Sino-Indian border has been classified as “deterrence by denial”—designed to simply raise the costs of a Chinese attack anywhere along the border.²⁷ Such a strategy, if suitably implemented, would make the PRC reconsider any significant intrusions, as their price in blood and treasure would vastly exceed their benefits.

TO THE INDIAN OCEAN

Beyond the border dispute, the Sino-Indian rivalry has spilled over into naval competition in the Indian Ocean. India’s naval strategists fear that the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is in the midst of expanding its reach into the Indian Ocean. These concerns have stemmed from a number of events. At one level, they have arisen from PLAN’s involvement, to varying degrees, in India’s principal littoral states: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. Of these various endeavors, the PLAN’s presence in Sittwe in Myanmar and involvement in the construction of a port at Gwadar in Pakistan’s Balochistan province have attracted the most attention from India’s naval authorities. At another level, these concerns have stemmed from the capacity of the PLAN to

operate within the Indian Ocean. In 2014, for example, Indian policymakers expressed public misgivings about the visit of a PLAN submarine to the port of Colombo.²⁸ These events are of considerable importance because they represent the steady expansion of the reach of the PLAN in areas that are of considerable strategic interest to India.

To counter what it perceives to be a potential threat to its freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean littoral, India has embarked upon three courses of action. It has sought to build up its security infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; it is helping Iran construct a port at Chabahar on the Persian Gulf; and it has aggressively expanded the scope of naval cooperation with the United States, Japan, and Australia. Additionally, after much vacillation, India is now slowly but surely forging a closer defense partnership with the United States, particularly in the maritime arena.²⁹ Indian policymakers have taken these decisions largely as a hedging strategy against Chinese behavior. A closer military relationship with the United States provides India with a margin of safety against possible future hostile actions on the part of the PRC.

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Each of these initiatives deserves brief discussion. India has long had limited naval facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. However, in 2001, it chose to create a tri-services command at Port Blair, the administrative headquarters of the island chain.³⁰ Subsequently, the facilities were expanded and have given the country the capability to project naval power across a wider swath of the Indian Ocean. India has also, albeit erratically, broadened and deepened the scope of its naval cooperation with a number of key states. After the Cold War's end, starting in 1992, India very tentatively began a limited set of naval exercises with the United States. These have, however, been widened in the last several years and have now come to include Japan and may soon be expanded to include Australia.³¹ Finally, given that PLAN will likely enjoy considerable access to the port that is being constructed in Gwadar, Indian policymakers chose to commit significant resources to the development of the Iranian port of Chabahar. Furthermore, the port at Chabahar will give India access to Afghanistan, thereby bypassing Pakistan, which refuses to grant India trade and transit rights to Afghanistan.

The threat that the PRC poses to India both along the Himalayan border and now in the Indian Ocean is easily the most compelling external security challenge that the Indian state confronts both presently and in the immediate future. Nonetheless, despite its significantly smaller size and limited conventional capabilities, Pakistan also poses ongoing security challenges to India. These challenges are twofold and inextricably intertwined. Owing to its conventional inferiority vis-à-vis India, the Pakistani military establishment has, for several decades, pursued an asymmetric war strategy against India that relies on terrorist proxies.³² It has also increasingly relied on its nuclear weapons as an instrument of blackmail because of its relative weakness.

Despite various efforts, India has yet to devise a sound, reliable, and effective conventional strategy to deal with Pakistan's use of terrorist proxy forces. In the wake of the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament on 13 December 2001, India undertook a massive military mobilization designed to coerce Pakistan into ending its support for a range of terrorist organizations. This exercise in coercive diplomacy, Operation Parakram, produced a mostly Pyrrhic victory. In considerable part, India felt unable to exercise actual use of force because of the fear of nuclear escalation.³³ After this episode, India's policymakers concluded that they needed to formulate a new doctrine that would enable them to retaliate against Pakistani-sponsored terrorism without leading Pakistan to cross the nuclear threshold. This quest, however, has been mostly futile because Pakistan has continued to use terrorist proxies with impunity.

The inability to fashion a viable conventional strategy to cope with Pakistan's asymmetric war strategy has led Indian military planners to pursue technolo-

gies that might enable them to achieve escalation dominance in a future conflict. To that end they have started to invest in ballistic missile defenses (BMD). A robust BMD capability could en-

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able India, in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, to use its conventional forces to retaliate against Pakistan despite the country's threat to use nuclear weapons. Even if Pakistan were to resort to nuclear use, India's BMD capabilities would degrade such an attack, and its own nuclear forces could then launch a devastating strike on Pakistan's nuclear and conventional assets.

From New Delhi's standpoint, this search for a vigorous BMD capability appears to be a panacea to a strategic dilemma. However, from the perspective of Islamabad, the strategy appears to be an attempt on India's part to seek first-strike advantages. Unfortunately, careless statements on the part of senior defense scientists in India about the apparent robustness of India's BMD capabilities have provoked Pakistani anxieties. In turn, Pakistan has sought to expand, disperse, and enhance the mobility of its nuclear arsenal. None of these developments portend well for the future of strategic stability in South Asia.³⁴

India's concerns about Pakistan's use of terrorist proxies are understandable. However, the pursuit of BMD as a possible solution to this conundrum is problematic. A more effective and far less technologically ambitious strategy might involve the development of a doctrine of deterrence by denial. To that end, India should bolster the security of its ports, military installations, and critical infrastructure, and above all, secure its borders with Pakistan. Such a strategy, while hardly foolproof, could significantly hobble Pakistan's capacity to inflict costs on India through its reliance on terrorist proxies.

A FRAUGHT FUTURE IN AFGHANISTAN

In the past decade and a half, following the United States' overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, India has sought to renew its ties with the country. To that end, it has provided Afghanistan with substantial economic assistance.³⁵ India's leadership had one compelling strategic imperative in the country: to prevent the return of a hostile Afghan regime. Under the Taliban, a number of Pakistan-based terrorist organizations had found safe haven in Afghanistan. Worse still, it is widely believed that the Taliban was complicit in allowing the hijackers of an Indian Airlines aircraft to flee after it had been taken to Kandahar in December 1999.³⁶

The United States, reliant upon Pakistan for stabilizing Afghanistan, initially looked askance at the Indian presence in the country. For the most part, American policymakers uncritically accepted Pakistan's assertion that the Indian involvement in Afghanistan was inimical to Pakistan's security interests.³⁷ It is only in the past several years, as a drawdown of U.S. forces approached and as Pakistan's ties to the Haqqani network have become apparent, that U.S. policymakers have shifted their views. However, as U.S. forces steadily leave the country, there is every reason to believe that Pakistan's security establishment will fling a loose rein to its terrorist proxies in the country and enable them to attack Indian assets with impunity. Already there is evidence that the Pakistan-

based Haqqani network has targeted Indian workers and diplomatic personnel in Afghanistan.³⁸

A final security threat that India faces is the renewed Pakistan-PRC strategic nexus. This alliance, of course, is long-standing. However, in recent years both sides have deemed it useful to strengthen existing links. These are actually quite wide-ranging and extend to increased economic and military assistance to Pakistan from the PRC. The logic of this relationship is quite straightforward: Pakistan wants a closer relationship with the PRC, especially in the military sphere, in order to balance Indian power. The PRC, in turn, quite apart from its extant border dispute with India, sees India as the only significant competitor for influence in Asia. Consequently, a close politico-security link with Pakistan helps provoke India's security concerns.

Unfortunately, India's policymakers have no simple or easy options to cope with the implications of this strategic nexus. This link, which has been in the making for decades, has enabled the PRC to make Pakistan a virtual strategic surrogate in South Asia. At best, India can seek to improve ties with other states in Asia that are wary of the PRC, improve bilateral contacts with Pakistan's other supporters and benefactors, notably Saudi Arabia, and try to outflank Pakistan with a closer relationship with Iran. Faced with the increasing closeness between Pakistan and the PRC, India has steadily pursued all these options and is likely to persist with them.

CONCLUSION

Can India cope with the range of internal and external security challenges that it currently confronts? In all likelihood it will be able to manage, but not successfully eliminate, these threats. More to the point, owing to a number of domestic institutional shortcomings, it will bear significant costs both in terms of blood and treasure as it seeks to deal with them. These shortcomings, which have been discussed in this article, stem from the dilatory weapons acquisitions process, the failure to develop a sustained strategy to deal with the sources of discord in Kashmir and the northeast, and the inability to force an endgame in the interminable border negotiations with the PRC. It may also be reasonable to surmise that these problems are likely to persist regardless of regime. Despite differing ideological persuasions, no regime in India has demonstrated any particular capacity for forthrightly tackling these seemingly endemic problems that have plagued its defense policy formulation and implementation. 

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38. Jack Healy and Alissa J. Rubin, "U.S. Blames Pakistan-Based Group for Attack on Embassy in Kabul," *New York Times*, September 14, 2011.

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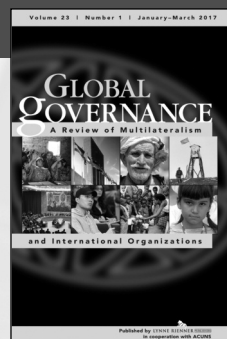
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