

## INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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**Abstract.** The paper endeavours to selectively present some of the new 'challenges and threats' that India's foreign policy is likely to face in the next few decades. Section I critically examines the transformations that altered the content and trajectory of India's foreign policy since independence. Section II deals with the challenges that have plagued the foreign policy in the contemporary era. Section III deals with the threat posed by China in the region and beyond. The last section discusses the possibility of a paradigm shift from hard to soft power and discusses the viability of it as an option for the practitioners of foreign policy in India.

**Key words:** India, foreign policy, China

### INTRODUCTION

'Emerging India' is the most popular leitmotif informing a wide array of discourses among academics, policy-makers and the intelligent lay public. The almost predestined, though belated, emergence of India as a global superpower has come to animate both scholarly analyses and popular commentaries. Most of these accounts of India's newfound glory in the comity of nations allude to the attendant re-orientation of India's foreign policy in the post-liberalization era. The decade of the 1990s is seen as a watershed which not only ushered India into economic reforms but also brought about marked shifts in its foreign policy. India was no longer a prisoner to the historical legacy of non-alignment, socialism, and 'third world solidarity'. It attempted to change its traditional course, shedding much of the past baggage to respond to the rapid and monumental changes that international affairs were going through. In a way, the need for departing from its traditional core values in the domain of foreign policy was as much an outcome of pulls and pressures of the newly emerging global realities as of changes in the internal political dynamic. India has had to seek new partners, allies and friends in order to deal with the *realpolitik* of international politics. While negotiating numerous challenges since then, India's foreign policy has to contend with the rising aspirations that epithets like 'emerging power', 'rising power', 'great power' necessarily give rise to. As a matter of fact, there are diverse ways of understanding the changes in orientations of India's foreign poli-

cy. Scholars have perceived these changes in different ways. For instance, while discussing the ambiguities of its past, Subrata K. Mitra, comments: “The Gandhian legacy, nostalgia for the halcyon days of Nehru’s *panchasheela* and, most of all, the political anchor of foreign policy in the larger project of nation-building, explain the ambiguities that characterize India’s foreign policy (....) closer inspection of ground reality reveals clear, effective and determined action that holds the potential to be woven into a coherent doctrine, on the lines of a ‘third way’ in international politics”<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, the existential realities of the region – its location in an insecure South Asian region, being surrounded on all sides by unstable democracies, conflict-ridden countries, militant activity, authoritarian leaders or weak governments persuaded India to move forward to imbibe historic changes in its foreign policy. India’s Look East policy, efforts at cooperation with specific individual and regional partners, proactiveness at the various international fora, among others pressurized India to reinvent its foreign policy. In a nutshell, failures within the region alongside domestic and international compulsions led to the re-examination of India’s policy in international affairs. Reacting to India’s recent ‘proactive’ foreign policy behavior, C. Raja Mohan writes, “after more than a half century of false starts and unrealized potential, India is now emerging as the swing state in the global balance of power. In the coming years, it will have an opportunity to shape outcomes on the most critical issues of the twenty-first century: the construction of Asian stability, the political modernization of the greater Middle East, and the management of globalization”<sup>2</sup>.

Traditionally India’s foreign policy has been explained as India’s grand strategy that divides the world into three concentric circles. The first, which encompasses the immediate neighbourhood – where India has sought to consolidate its position and has attempted, though in a limited manner – to keep the ‘outside powers’ from direct influence or interference within region. The second encompasses the so-called extended neighbourhood stretching across Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral, India has sought to balance the influence of other powers and attempted to prevent them from undercutting its own national interests. The third, which includes the entire globe, India has endeavoured to make its place as one of the great powers – a key player in international peace and security<sup>3</sup>. It is in each of these concentric circles that a transformation is seen in terms of policy postures. These changes in the past two decades are yet to withstand the test of time and thus cannot be qualified as a success.

<sup>1</sup> See: Subrata K. Mitra, *Novelty of Europe as seen from the Periphery: Indian Perceptions of the “New Europe” in a Multi-polar World*, Heidelberg Papers in Comparative and South Asian Politics, 2005, available at <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/archiv/6387> (accessed 24 July 2007).

<sup>2</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *India and the Balance of Power*, “Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 85, No. 4, 2006, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

India's attempted struggles for great power status seem to be still a distant dream. A dichotomy in policy making is emerging – on the one hand, the current focus of the policy makers is on specific countries and themes, while on the other there seems to be a lackadaisical attitude towards cultivating new and willing allies as well as a surprising diffidence towards engaging purposefully in areas of influence. This selective variance in policy making could be detrimental to its interests in the long run and does not augur well in the face of future challenges and threats to the current foreign policy paradigm. The absence of an insightful strategic formulation in foreign policy is going to be perturbing in future if not addressed perspicaciously<sup>4</sup>.

#### IDEALISM VERSUS REALPOLITIK: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 1947 India's foreign policy makers had to deal with a host of challenges: the partition of the country, creation of Pakistan, extreme poverty, military weakness, underdevelopment, backwardness in the core sectors of Indian industries, simmering religious and regional tensions<sup>5</sup>. However, a deep belief in Third World solidarity and cooperation encouraged independent India to establish relations with all of its neighbours and the other newly independent countries of the developing world. Nehru and others believed that the countries of the Third World had a common destiny because of a common past. This belief motivated the Nehruvian policy which rapidly developed and India established diplomatic relations with almost all the countries around the world. Nehru's and India's deep rooted belief in *Panchsheela* guided India's foreign policy in the early years of India's independence<sup>6</sup>. Amitabh Matto and Happymon Jacob in their book, *Shaping India's Foreign Policy: People, Politics and Places* state that "post-independence [relations with the world] grew rapidly and in somewhat exuberant manner"<sup>7</sup>. In fact, accordingly the success of independence movement was reflected in the buoyancy of Nehru's interactions and India sought cooperation and friendship with the newly decolonized and independent countries of Asia and Africa.

<sup>4</sup> The absence of a strategy would mean that India would remain ignorant of the fact that threats and challenges could emerge from areas which it continues to neglect or oversee now.

<sup>5</sup> S.K. Mitra, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Panchasheela*, a term derived from Buddhist scriptures, encapsulated the "five principles of peaceful coexistence" as enshrined in the 1954 agreement between India and China, which were supposed to frame Sino-Indian relations as well as India's foreign policy more generally. The five principles referred to: 1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2) mutual non-aggression; 3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; 4) equality and mutual benefit; and 5) peaceful coexistence.

<sup>7</sup> Amitabh Matto, Happymon Jacob, "Foreign Relations of India: The Federal Challenge", in: *eadem* (eds), *Shaping India's Foreign Policy: People, Politics and Places*, New Delhi, Har-Anand Publications, 2010, p. 26.

Nehru virtually single-handedly defined the main contours of India's foreign policy in the first decades of independence. Nehru's ideas had a lasting impact on the country's foreign policy – the *grand strategy* rested on two pillars – self-reliance and non-alignment. In a real sense, non-alignment was far from neutrality – India was active in the movement for disarmament, in decolonization, in the campaign for more equitable international economic development, the UN peace-keeping forces, etc.<sup>8</sup> India's post-independence foreign policy was viewed as a severe critic against colonialism and racism, undemocratic and unequal distribution of international power. India had also argued that nuclear weapons and excessive military spending were the prime source of global insecurities – all themes that curried favour with the newly emerging independent states of Asia and Africa.

However, India's shocking military defeat during Sino-India War of 1962 hauled Indian policymakers out of their Nehruvian "idealism". The absence of *realpolitik* in the policymaking as well as the limits of Nehruvian idealism was apparent. However, the Nehruvian legacy survived in many other ways despite the injection of power politics into Indian policymaking<sup>9</sup>.

The visible change in India's foreign policy was apparent from the early 1970s with Indira Gandhi coming to power. Dramatic changes like the first nuclear tests in Pokhran in 1974, India's role in East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, close and friendly relations with the Soviet Union were the highlights of this period's foreign policy. The 1974 nuclear test ushered in a new phase in India's foreign policy. The test was the first step towards beginning of a realist phase in Indian foreign policy and justifying the *raison d'être*. Itty Abraham wrote, "the rationale [that] reiterated India's size, regional importance and new found military clout while sidelining the post-colonial considerations of earlier times"<sup>10</sup>. The initiation of the period of liberalization from the early 1990s not only commenced a new period in India's political and economic growth and development, but the foreign policy sector too witnessed extensive transformations. By the mid 1980s *realpolitik* became the defining feature of India's foreign policy. The second round of nuclear tests in Pokhran in May 1998, in fact, could be the beginning of this pragmatism and proactive materialization of India's foreign policy. Matto and Jacob state that the 1998 tests were, "defying traditional assumptions, analytical predictions, and international opinion... conducted a series of nuclear bomb tests... a new phase of Realism in India's foreign policy"<sup>11</sup>. Thus in an attempt to retain its autonomy in key areas of decision making and to continue its increased interface with the world, India

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Itty Abraham, *The Future of Indian Foreign Policy*, "Economic and Political Weekly", Vol. 42, No. 42, 20 October, 2007, p. 4209.

<sup>11</sup> A. Matto, H. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

persevered to avoid capitulating to international pressure and has been dealing dexterously with the pressures of globalization<sup>12</sup>.

#### CURRENT CORNERSTONES OF INDIAN FOREIGN: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

In the recent past the challenges and contestations that the India's foreign policy has faced are varied. This section attempts to bring forth and identify some of the challenges that have persisted over time and also some of the potential threats that may emerge in the near future. In the last two decades the Indian policy establishment has been confronting multiple existential issues and threats: the inevitable rise of China and the intensified US-China competition in the Asia-Pacific, the revival and reconsideration of India's relations with Africa and the power volatility of the Middle East in the context of sustained energy supply and energy security, expanding and consolidating relations with South East Asia and Japan, dealing with the nuclear issues etc. In addition to these issues, conventional threats persist like the Kashmir issue, India's ambivalent politics of anti-terrorism, India and South Asia and the larger Asia-Pacific. On the other, the Indo-US civil nuclear deal put India on the map of nuclear states recognizing its potential and immense capabilities. Moreover, India's entry into the Nuclear Supplier's Group also consolidated its position and provided it due recognition. In keeping with that quest, India's multilateral relations with countries around the world have gained tremendous momentum, and in the last decade, India has become a member of a wide array of multilateral bodies in economic and other spheres. India's participation is visible in a number of such bodies like G-20, BRICS, IBSA, as well as with those fora with pronounced thrust towards economic cooperation like ASEAN, EAS, WTO, BIMSTEC etc.

In the extended region too, India is seeking new friends and partners to strengthen its linkages with other states. For instance, India has, fostered a long-standing relationship with the Northern Alliance and Prime Minister Hamid Karzai to support stability and growth in Afghanistan, including providing over \$750 million in assistance and infrastructure support<sup>13</sup>. India has made notable strides in the humanitarian arena as well, when in December 2004, India was one of the founding four nations of the Asian Tsunami Core Group, formed within twenty-four hours of the catastrophe. Despite being impacted themselves, India provided more aid and assistance than any country except the United States. Perhaps most importantly today, India's military has a strong peace-building role. As

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that India's interest in Afghanistan is not just historical: lying as it does on Pakistan's western border, close relations with Afghanistan which constitutes a significant strategic asset to India.

of March 2007, India was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest provider of peacekeeping forces to the United Nations (UN). In contrast, India's role in its neighbourhood of South Asia continues in a state of stalemate with very negligible improvement in its relations with countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives. India's relations with Pakistan and the Kashmir issue continues to overwhelm all such bilateral and regional dialogues. India had deliberately decided to disengage itself from conflict areas and issues, encouraging its neighbours to seek solutions on their own to such crises.

Among one of the most crucial challenges emanating out of India's need for securitization is the need for a sustained supply of energy. In order to maintain economic growth at around 10 per cent, energy and energy security are one of the major areas of focus of India's foreign policy. India currently imports 70 per cent of its oil and 50 per cent of its gas; by 2025 it is projected that India will import 80 per cent of its energy<sup>14</sup>. India is one of the largest consumers of energy, consuming more than the other developing countries. India has come under serious criticism, because of its lack of commitment towards a serious environment policy. India's traditional suppliers of energy resources have been the Middle-East and Africa. In an attempt to widen its network of suppliers India has sought partnerships in Latin America between the ONGC Videsh and other oil companies in the region. India is also seeking to bring on board the countries of Central Asia which are large depositories of natural resources and can help in sustaining India's growth and development.

In an effort to ensure access to energy resources, India will need to continue its focus on the Middle East region (which supplies two-thirds of their oil), and particularly on countries like Iran. Iran currently provides 10 per cent of India's oil (its fourth largest provider after Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Kuwait)<sup>15</sup>. In an effort to have a sustained supply of oil, India along with Iran had initiated the work on a proposed pipeline from Iran through Pakistan to India. However, a number of impediments including the tensions between India and Pakistan and Iran's recent tryst with countries of the West over its nuclear programme made it impossible for such a pipeline to become a reality. In addition to the Gulf, India has expanded its search for energy resources beyond its immediate neighbourhood into Africa and Latin America. For instance, in Africa and in Latin America, India has competed with China for bids where India was most often than not, the loser. However, on number of occasions India and China have jointly proposed bids that have often been successful like in the case in Sudan.

The other 'feasible' source of energy that has tremendous potential is nuclear energy. However controversial, India today only gets 3 per cent of its electricity generation from nuclear power (compared to 30 per cent in Japan and 78 per cent in France); it wants to expand its nuclear energy production by 9 per

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<sup>14</sup> S.K. Mitra, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem.*

cent a year through to 2050. This current low level of production was one of the driving factors behind the July 2005 civilian nuclear agreement between India and the United States<sup>16</sup>. While progress in this agreement has been unsteady recently, as soon as it is complete, ensuring a good supply of fissile material to India to power its civilian reactors and new technologies to ensure their safety and efficiency is going to be a principal objective of India's government. The other sources of energy that could be harvested are hydro-electricity, but this will require better coordination and cooperation from India's neighbours on sharing of river waters. Solar energy and wind energy are still in their incipient stages and are not yet considered as viable sources of India need for energy.

Securitization of energy is closely associated with the securitization of the ocean ways and sea ways that have in the recent years seen increased instances of piracy. Sea piracy has played a very significant role in the Indian Ocean region and Indian cargo ships and personnel have suffered tremendously making India vulnerable to threats. As over half of all global oil shipments go through the Malacca Straits annually, and as the region is very susceptible to piracy, and given India's sizable and capable Navy, it has a major role to play in helping to ensure this security, both for its own needs and in so doing ensure broader energy security (and stable prices). There are some concerns from others in the neighbourhood regarding India's more assertive maritime forces, with veiled accusations of India's hegemonic role in the region. Related to the energy issue has been the question of sustainable development and environmental safety. But the scenario is very murky with the entry of China in the Indian Ocean be it to help in the construction of ports in Myanmar, Sri Lanka or in Pakistan. The 'strings of pearl' theory is widely acceptable in the foreign policy making circles in India.

India is working with China, Brazil and other developing countries with a similar agenda desirous of carving out an international environmental regime that also considers the serious developmental agendas of the non-Western countries. Thus, India is joining the Asian Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate and more recently creating a Council on Climate Change, because more than half of the Indian people considered global warming a critical threat. The attack on Mumbai on 26/11 has also brought forth better management of the territorial waters and increased protection against terrorist attacks from the sea, important given the fact that India has a huge coastline.

India's regional successes have been limited, however. India's success rate is better in the various multilateral organisations. India's multilateral relations with countries around the world have gained tremendous momentum and in the last decade India has become a member of a wide array of multilateral bodies in economic and other spheres. India's participation is visible in a number of bodies,

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

such as G-20, BRICs, IBSA, WTO, as well as with those like ASEAN, EAS, BIMSTEC etc. Although many of these regional blocs do not suffer from the inconsistencies of their predecessors, many have yet to achieve their goals. Many critics feel that multilateral bodies such as IBSA, BRICs, AU, EAS and others cannot still be considered as viable alternative institutions in the current trading system or global decision-making forums.

In fact, India's participation in the various bodies in East Asia and South East Asia appears more nominal than substantive. India continues to be outside the APEC arrangement, having tried on numerous occasions to seek entry but being denied so on "China's" insistence. India's Look East policy culminated in the facilitation of a political and security dialogue between India and East Asian nations. Meanwhile, India is taking part in the annual summits with ASEAN and the EAS meetings and also playing a key bilateral role under a system providing for regular annual dialogue both at summit level and that of foreign ministers. On security matters, India is getting increasingly integrated with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to promote regional cooperation in matters like the maintenance of security of sea-lanes of communication. India's goal has been stated as setting up a polycentric security order, based on the need for a cooperative approach, especially necessary considering the East Asian diversity. India's Look East policy has been often considered a remarkably successful policy since its inception given that India has been relatively successful in harnessing relations with countries like Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam etc. However, any analysis of India's Look East policy would be incomplete without seriously considering the other 'hegemonic' nation-China and its position and views on such a policy. China's role in the region is unparalleled, and its presence overwhelming.

Sino-India relations are not only complicated and multifaceted but exist at various levels. Apart from the regional emphasis, border issues, trade issues, India-China power struggles have surfaced in various issues related to South East Asia and East. India's Look East policy has brought forth mixed reactions from China which sees it as an attempt not only to extend its own regional influence both multilaterally through various regional groups (ASEAN, EAS) and bilaterally (agreements with Japan, Singapore, Vietnam) but also to enter basically what China assumes as its own region of influence. On one hand, China has publicly concurred with India that "there is enough space in the world for the development of both India and China and (...) enough areas for the two to cooperate and that relations among them now go beyond their bilateral scope and have acquired global and strategic significance", while on the other, the government and the media in China has called the Look East Policy a covert "containment of China" policy and have severely criticised the port calls by Indian naval vessels to countries like Vietnam and the Philippines.



## THE CHINA QUESTION

India and China have a long, turbulent, bitter history with numerous unresolved issues, including the border issue between the two largest states in Asia. This section deals with India-China relations in the context of regionalism in Asia, aiming to venture beyond those conventional issues that overshadow the bilateral relations between the two. Both New Delhi and Beijing are supportive of the membership of non-East Asian countries like India, Australia and New Zealand in the East Asian Summit, noting that they have fulfilled the three conditions. There is however a subtle difference between the positions adopted by the two countries. While India believes that in the context of Pan Asian community, countries like India and others should be part of regional integration initiatives, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stated, "regional integration should be promoted by the countries in the region, with characteristics of the region and suited to the needs of the region", while simultaneously giving "full consideration to reasonable interests in the region of non-East Asian countries"<sup>17</sup>. The term "full consideration" implied a secondary status to the three EAS partners from outside the region. At the beginning of 2005, China was diplomatically active in dissuading nations in the region from lobbying for India's membership; this received no support from regional nations, which was interpreted as reflecting in general the keenness of East Asian powers to have India as a balance against China's growing profile in the region<sup>18</sup>. Consequently, Beijing settled for the next best option for building an 'East Asian Community', by attempting to divide the EAS membership into two blocs-'core' states with China leading inside the 10 plus 3, and the three peripheral states of India, Australia and New Zealand, being described by the Chinese as 'outsiders'<sup>19</sup>.

In the context of ASEAN, both India and China recognise the 'centrality' of ASEAN in the process of East Asian cooperation. Beijing for its part has added a rider to this by saying that existing mechanisms like China-ASEAN summit (10 + 1), ASEAN-China-Japan-ROK (10 + 3) Summit, and the China-Japan-ROK Summit should play a central role in the process. It makes no mention of ASEAN plus 6, which includes India and has stressed on the role of 10 + 3 mechanism with China providing 'long term and strategic guidance' and acting as the 'main channel' for East Asian cooperation<sup>20</sup>. In the context of the ASEAN Community to be formed by 2015, the ASEAN-India dialogue partnership has

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<sup>17</sup> D.S. Rajan, *East Asia Integration – China's Reservations on India Playing a Leading Role*, South Asia Analysis Group, No. 4377, 14 March 2011, [www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers44%5Cpaper-4377.html](http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers44%5Cpaper-4377.html) (accessed on 24 February 2012).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

been viewed positively in the matter with China expressing its full support to this plan<sup>21</sup>.

In the larger context of the East Asia FTA, China continues to emphasise the leadership of the ASEAN plus 3 grouping which includes PRC, in realising the target of a Free Trade Area (FTA) for East Asia. It has asked for a dialogue between the concerned nations with no indications that Beijing is keen on involving ASEAN plus 6 grouping, which includes India, in this matter. India, on the other side, is enthusiastic about the future realisation of the Asian Economic Community (AEC), which would mark the formation of an 'arc of advantage' spanning from the Himalayas to Pacific Ocean and providing for large scale movements of peoples, ideas and connectivity. China continues to be silent on this issue<sup>22</sup>. China and India's views on a desirable security order in East Asia often clash. India's prescribes a 'polycentric' security concept for East Asia, which implies its opposition to any country dominating the regional security architecture when set up. China, on the other hand, talks about a 'regional security environment of mutual trust, guaranteeing stability by bridging differences through dialogue on an equal footing'<sup>23</sup>. In addition, India also opposes the creation of any 'ineffective sub-regional security arrangements', while China prefers security mechanisms at different levels and in different areas<sup>24</sup>.

China's perception about the Asia-Pacific geopolitical scenario will determine to a certain level India's success in that region in the near future. For instance, China is deeply suspicious of the anti-China directions of the developing India-Japan security relations. The emerging larger geo-political picture points to China having undiminished fears of a US strategy to 'contain' it with the help of its allies like Japan and partners like India. Such thinking definitely has a bearing on China's position regarding its acceptance of India as a partner in the regional integration process. China has reservations on giving leading roles in the East Asia integration process to 'outsiders' and India is familiar with this Chinese outlook, and it appears to be well aware of the existing limitations to the regional integration. Thus, while remaining keen to nourish economic partnership at regional levels, India is also moving ahead with strengthening cooperation with East Asian nations bilaterally. India's conclusion of several FTAs and promotion of trade ties with individual regional nations may prove this point. Most importantly, such bilateral engagements are no longer merely of economic nature but are gradually becoming multi-dimensional encompassing political and military aspects which cause worries to China. India is conscious of the reality that is still not in a position to match China's deeper bilateral engagements with regional nations of Asia-Pacific.

India is simultaneously working towards building partnership with the US, in addition to getting closer to other regional powers with clout, like Japan, Sin-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem.*

gapore, and groups like the ASEAN, while also taking care that it is not seen as belonging to any anti-China grouping. Wary of entangling itself in the complex issues of the South China Sea, India currently keeps itself out of this contested territory. There is no doubt that the trade ties between India and China are on the upswing, but the process towards signing a Comprehensive Economic cooperation agreement with China has not yet been speeded up by India. In this way, China would be prepared for offering *quid pro quo* to India in the matter of consolidating its connectivity to East Asia, regardless of any other issues. India should also take advantage of the sentiments of countries like Japan, which may like to leverage friendship with India to balance a 'rising' China. The more support India gets from the ASEAN, China's neighbours, and Japan, stronger will be the position of India to neutralise China's apparent doubts about its Look East policy<sup>25</sup>. China has noted with apprehension that both India and Japan have comprehensively boosted regional cooperation in the economic and security realms in recent years. Relations between the two countries have moved to a multilateral level and have become much more broad-based with the inclusion of the US and Australia in the often called 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'. China sees the *Arc of Freedom and Prosperity* concept as a strategy to join its allies to contain China's rise in the Asia-Pacific region. It views it as a game plan by both India and Japan to limit Chinese power in that region. The conclusion of the first round of India-Japan-US trilateral talks in Washington on December 19, 2011 and the India-Japan Defence Ministers' meeting in Tokyo in November 2011 have confirmed the Chinese misgivings<sup>26</sup>.

Apart from the larger countries of the region, India needs to boost its relations with South Korea and Taiwan in the economic and trade sectors as well as strengthen bilateral ties in political and security fields. "Strategic partnerships" should be concluded with long term planning and with a convergence and complementarity of goals and objectives of their respective foreign policy aims. Bilateralism will need to be strengthened with each and every country in the Asia-Pacific region, something that may make India's venture into multilateralism in the region a success. Meanwhile, India's endeavours to carve a niche for itself in the region and the resultant rivalry and competition with China may intensify in the coming years as each attempts to spread influence and consolidate its position regionally.

#### THE ROAD AHEAD: INDIA'S SOFT POWER?

Much of current foreign policy literature makes reference to the need to harness India's potential as a soft power in the global arena. The idea of soft

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

power is a concept developed by Joseph Nye where power is described as the ability to alter the behaviour of others to achieve the set goals. Nye has described power in three ways: coercion (sticks), inducements (carrots), attraction (soft power)<sup>27</sup>. Most contemporary scholars on foreign policy agree that hard power is no longer the only viable instrument for achieving the national interests of states today. They put forward the concept of soft power to be a very powerful instrument in influencing other states or people. Itty Abraham writes, "The apparent choice facing India today is covered in terms of greater or lesser autonomy from existing power structures (....) India's foreign policy has not changed much. It continues to remain, primarily India's search for security and stability in South Asia and quest for influence in international politics – beyond the immediate neighbourhood – through growing 'hard' and 'soft' power that forms the mainstay of New Delhi's foreign policy"<sup>28</sup>.

Other scholars like Shashi Tharoor have stated, "If there is one independent India to which increasing attention should now be paid around the globe, its not economic or military or nuclear strength, but the quality that India is already displaying in ample measure today and that is its 'soft power'"<sup>29</sup>. In other words, such an approach would mean highlighting the rich culture and other aspects of the Indian society which could attract worldwide attention, that is not to say, directly influence other to support India but enhance India's stature and position in the eyes of other states and societies<sup>30</sup>.

India's foreign policy continues to grow and develop on the firm plank of strategic independence. Despite some of the most transformative changes and the beginning of a "new phase" since the 1990s, India's foreign policy has not changed much. "Real power may not yet be India's, but its weight is incontestable and its international influence is already being exercised in creative new ways"<sup>31</sup>. Accordingly, Tharoor writes, the mantra should no longer be non-alignment but what he calls "Multi-Alignment," which constitutes an effective strategy to new transnational challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where neither autonomy nor alliance offer adequate answers<sup>32</sup>.

Be that as it may, India's foreign policy has acquired a new sense of direction. It is pragmatic. Moreover, it is imbued with a serious dose of realism seeking to make multi-directional engagements in global politics. Yet, there seems to be an unfinished agenda when it comes to India's relations with Asia. Likewise, the issue of Pakistan and the 'deficit of thrust' related to it continue to plague India-

<sup>27</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *India as a Soft Power*, "India International Centre Quarterly", Vol. 35, No. 1, 2008, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> I. Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 4210.

<sup>29</sup> S. Tharoor, *India as a Soft Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> S. Tharoor, *PaxIndica: India and the World in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, New Delhi, Allen Lane, 2012, p. 422.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 427.

China relations. Strengthening relations with Africa, South America, and Central Asia must be undertaken with similar vigour. On the whole, India's foreign policy continues to suffer from a studied fatigue: the agenda and themes are much better defined than before and with a sense of strategic planning. However, there still seems to be apathy to move out of this 'comfort zone' and identify potential threats and challenges, or even possible partners and allies break this sentence into two. A recent document on the future trajectory of India's foreign policy *Nonalignment 2.0* delineates, "It is therefore imperative that we have a clear map of the terrain which we shall have to navigate in coming years – and, equally, that we have a definite sense of the national goals, values and interests that we need to pursue with consistency and vigour"<sup>33</sup> – the map still seems rather fuzzy and the road not clear.

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<sup>33</sup> Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century, [http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0\\_1.pdf](http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf) (accessed on 14 September 2012).