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India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

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Abstract: India has upheld extremely rich practices of national security since its founding as a republic because of its unique geo-environmental features, historical legacies, and traditional cultures, which reflect a type of national security strategy that has distinct Indian characteristics. Generally, successive governments in India have followed the basic principles articulated in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and various security practices adopted during the British Raj. India's national security strategies are based on an internal logic of geopolitical rivalry and changes in international scenarios, and they are strongly influenced by Hindu traditions and the "Sad-Dharma" purported by King Ashoka. The objective is to create an India-dominated security order in the South Asian subcontinent, which persistently builds its capacity and system as a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean Rim. Moreover, India is vigorously expanding its network of influence in the Pacific region in an effort to become a world leading power that enjoys a high level of strategic autonomy.

Keywords: India, national security strategy, strategic autonomy

To date, unlike the United States and Russia, the Indian government has not published any report on its national security strategy or other similar official documents. However, in over 70 years since its independence and nation building, India has formulated a set of unique national security strategies and practices.

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Fundamental Pursuits of India's National Security Strategy

Based on the specific practices of successive governments since India became a republic, the national security strategy of India has, to a certain degree, demonstrated a general pattern. In other words, the Indian national security strategy has been unfolded and laid out in circles called “mandala.”¹ The pursuit and practice of each circle in terms of security strategy are distinctly emphasized and adapted to the conditions of the times.

The inner circle is India, and its security strategy focuses on enhancing strategic autonomy and maintaining the balance of power among major powers, which makes it “count for a great deal,” according to founding Prime Minister Nehru, or the “world-leading force,” which was pursued during the Modi era.² The second circle mainly covers the South Asian subcontinent, especially India's South Asian neighbors. In this circle, India's security strategy focuses on building a monopolistic regional security order, wherein India holds the capacity to maintain and the power to veto the intervention of extraterritorial powers,³ thereby eliminating or restraining any internal and external conspiracies to create a balance of power in South Asia. The third circle mainly refers to the Indian Ocean Rim region, which is called the “Extended Neighborhood.”⁴ Over the last 10 years, especially through the implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy, India has extended this circle to the Western Pacific region. In this circle, New Delhi's security strategy focuses on building India's “net security pro-

¹ *Mandala* is a Sanskrit term for “circle.” It was originally a simple Buddhist interpretation of the world order. In his “Theory of Political Affairs” (also known as “The Theory of Profit,” which focuses on the king's statecraft), Kautilya applied the concept of “mandala” to interstate relations or the state's foreign strategy for the first time. According to Kautilya, the state and its neighbors are similar to a series of circles in a “mandala.” A country's most immediate neighbors are always considered enemies, whereas the immediate outer circle, that is the enemy's neighbors, is considered friends, and so on.

² C. Raja Mohan, *Modi's World-Expanding India's Sphere of Influence* (Harper Collins Publishers India, 2015), 178-179.

³ C. Raja Mohan, “India and the Balance of Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4, July/August 2006, 2.

⁴ David Scott, “India's ‘Extended Neighborhood’ Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power,” *Indian Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April/June, 2009, 107-143.

vision capability”¹ to make it a key and even leading builder of regional security order. The fourth circle refers to the rest of the world. In this circle, India focuses on actively participating in international security cooperation and strives to play a role in terms of agenda setting and leading in the field of global security governance.

Although India’s national security strategy pursues various national security interests and goals across circles, its common thread is to maintain strategic autonomy. Former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon defined strategic autonomy as the bedrock of the national security strategy of the country. Regarding the nature of strategic autonomy, in Menon’s view, it is substantially a form of flexible realism. “Strategy is not just about outdoing an adversary who is trying to do the same to you. It is also about finding cooperative solutions and creating outcomes in non-zero-sum situations, even when others are motivated by self-interest and not benevolence.”²

Presently, the national security strategy of the Modi government is formed with the Indo-Pacific strategy as the main platform, in-depth strategic cooperation with the United States (and the West) as an important starting point, and geopolitical rivalry between the United States (and the West) and China as a strategic opportunity to advance the continuous building of strategic autonomy. Thus, India has the most optimal strategic choices, benign security environment, and ample space for national emergence.

Three Origins of India’s National Security Strategy

The security strategy of any country has its origins. As far as India is concerned, the geographical environment (facing oceans with mountains in the background), historical latitude and longitude (especially its colonial history), and cultural heritage (especially the Hindu traditions) have jointly shaped the thought behind and practice of the national security strategy of India since its founding as a republic.

¹ Xie Feifei, *Towards the Far Seas: A Study on the Construction of Contemporary Indian Maritime Power* (International Culture Publishing Company, 2022), 123.

² Indrani Bagchi, “Why India Does Not Have a Vibrant Strategic Culture,” *Economic Times*, August 10, 2012.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

I. Geographical origin

The security strategy of any country is a product of its geopolitical environment, and India is no exception. Its geography and topography are the basic elements of its national security strategy. First, it is a geographically stand-alone country. Blocked by the Qinghai–Tibet Plateau and Indian Ocean, the stretch of the continent where India is located is relatively independent and is, therefore, known as the Indian subcontinent. With mountain ranges that stretch from west to east across the subcontinent and water that surrounds it on three sides, India is distinctly separated from Eurasia and is relatively self-contained. Because of the extremely special geographical structure, any king who possessed the land will possess a strong complex of “being the center of the universe” and ambition of a great power.

Second, India occupies a strategic position that controls the surrounding seas. The country faces the Indian Ocean to the south, Bay of Bengal to the east, and Arabian Sea to the west. The length of the continental coastline is 5,560 km. The land extends 1,600 km into the Indian Ocean like a wedge. With the southernmost Comorin Cape as the central point and with a radius of 1,800 km, the Strait of Malacca lies in the east near the arc, the mouth of the Gulf of Aden and Strait of Mandeb in the west, and the Strait of Hormuz, which is the only outlet of the Persian Gulf (the “world oil depot”), in the northwest. India is capable of projecting its power freely in the east, south, and west directions. Moreover, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are far from the Indian mainland, provide a 1,400-km-long defense and impose a stranglehold on the Strait of Malacca, which is the busiest sea channel in the world. Naturally, whoever controls this peninsula-like subcontinent will have the stranglehold on the Indian Ocean. Under the Indo-Pacific strategy, the Modi government is rapidly pushing India on the journey of becoming a great power on land and sea.

Third, India controls its neighborhood geopolitically. Its influence on its South Asian neighbors is enormous in terms of breadth and depth for several reasons: the divide-and-rule colonial strategy implemented by the British, military conflicts after India became a republic, India's location in the center of the subcontinent while other countries on the subcontinent are scattered around India but are not adjacent to each other, and its pervasive historical and cultural bonds. In South Asia, India influences the domestic and foreign affairs of all countries, except Pakistan. In this regard, Pakistan relatively plays a role of

strategic balance against India due to its nuclear capabilities. Bhutan is India's protectorate, and India essentially provides the security guarantee of the Maldives. Lastly, the domestic and foreign policies of Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, especially their security policies, can hardly escape India's control or even suppression.

II. Historical origin

Historically speaking, since India became a republic, its national security strategies have had three major pillars, namely, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, "Sad-Dharma" in Ashoka's "internal sagehood and external kingship" thought, and several security concepts and practices during the British colonial rule. The first pillar is Kautilya and his *Arthashastra*. Kautilya was a chief advisor to Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire (324–187 BC). The *Arthashastra* describes the multiple relations of confrontation, union, and conquest of 16 small kingdoms from the Great Kingdom (Magadha) to Chandragupta's establishment of the Maurya dynasty. Covering daily life, state governance, art of war, and foreign policy, later generations praise the *Arthashastra* as the "King's Benefit Handbook." In his book *World Order*, Henry Kissinger claims that *Arthashastra* is a combination of Machiavelli and Clausewitz.

The core of *Arthashastra* is to strive to construct a security system within the framework of the "mandala" in a world that follows Matsya-nyaya (the principle of the Law of Fish). The book emphasizes the real-world Law of Fish. Kautilya explicitly states that in the real world, big fish eat little fish. Thus, the only way for a king to survive is to become a conqueror with supreme power, and a monarch who desires to manage an empire effectively is not bound by morality or law (i.e., "Moral principles must be subordinate to national interests"). In a world governed by the Law of Fish, six types of interactions occur among countries as follows:

- when your national strength is weak, one should pursue "peaceful coexistence (Sandhi)" and not throw straws against the wind;
- when your strength is superior, you should take the initiative to attack or "fight (Vigraha)";
- remain "neutral (Asana)" when you are becoming strong but are not sufficiently strong yet;
- use coercive policies, such as "pressing, preparing for war, and waging a war (Yana)," so your enemy will be defeated without

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

a fight, dragged into an arms race to your interest, or you will take advantage of chaos to harm your enemy;

- seek protection by means of an “alliance (Sumshraya)”;
- implement the “dual policy (Dvaidhibhava),” that is, befriend one country while waging war with another.

Additionally, the *Arthashastra* stresses the “mandala” circle structure in geopolitics. The “mandala” theory is the best explained element in relation to interstate diplomatic and security relations. Kautilya framed the “mandala” circle structure, wherein a king with “good virtues, the best allocation of monarchy and a flood of tactics” is called a conqueror who dominates the center of the system. Alternatively, the neighboring kings around the territory of the conqueror are called his natural enemies, and the neighbors of the enemy are natural allies. In the “mandala” system, countries are grouped under five categories, namely, conqueror, enemy, ally, mediator, and neutral. The mediator is the king whose territory borders that of the conqueror and most urgent enemy of the conqueror and has the ability to help or resist both. The neutral country is located outside any of the abovementioned territories and is very powerful; it is capable of simultaneously or separately helping or resisting the enemy, conqueror, and mediator. By emphasizing geopolitics and centering on the conqueror, Kautilya constructed a dynamic, infinite balance of power circle, which is mainly composed of enemy, ally, and neutral countries. Therefore, the “mandala” system can also be understood as concentric circle theory and system theory. The “mandala” theory provides not only a basic criterion for judging friends and enemies but also a holistic and systematic concept of security. In fact, the British colonists and Indian strategists and rulers since the founding of the Republic of India basically used the “mandala” framework to build a national security strategic system with India at the core. Other closely related examples are a series of security concepts, diplomatic views, and related practices, such as “India-centered theory,” “befriending the distant enemy while attacking the nearby enemy,” “beggar-thy-neighbor,” “sphere of influence,” and “buffer zone.”

The second pillar is Ashoka and Sad-Dharma in his thought of “internal sagehood and external kingship.” As the third king of the Mauryan Dynasty, Ashoka (273–232 BC) achieved the first unification of India, excluding the southernmost tip of the subcontinent. Ashoka, who was ruthless in his early age,

repented after the tragic war wherein he conquered Kalinga in the south in 264–261 BC. Moreover, he renounced armed conquest, ended the expedition, and gave up the readily available southernmost land. From then on, he embraced Buddhism, promoted politics through religion, and realized the transformation from armed conquest to rule by compassion. Following the example of Persian rulers, Ashoka carved his edicts on rocks, caves, and specially built pillars, which became known as *Ashoka's Rock Edicts* and *Ashoka's Pillar Edicts*. Consequently, Ashoka's thoughts of Dharma were passed on to the world. Sad-Dharma refers to the true Dharma, that is, Buddha's teachings. Approximately half of Ashoka's inscriptions about Dharma focus on the "six virtues," namely, avoiding misdeeds, increasing charity, compassion, generosity, sincerity, and purity.

Ashoka promoted Sad-Dharma to make gains internally (to govern the country and establish public order and positive customs) and externally (to go on expeditions abroad to convince people with virtue). According to Ashoka, nonviolent, peaceful governance is the first choice of the country, and military conquest is a means of punishment only when necessary. Moreover, war is avoidable, conflicts can be reconciled, and force is not an effective means for addressing threats. Thus, one can infer that Ashoka tried to deviate from the stark power politics advocated by Kautilya. Instead, he aimed for a more profound legitimacy of rule.¹ Buddhism, which emerged at that time, coincidentally catered to Ashoka's political needs such that it became the spiritual pillar of his Sad-Dharma theory.

Ashoka's thoughts of Sad-Dharma were promoted more widely, lastingly, and vividly in the subcontinent due to the views on peace and war embodied by two well-known epics in India, namely, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The greatest influence of the thoughts of Sad-Dharma and views on peace and war on later generations in India was the belief that ends and means should follow the principle of Dharma, that is, pursuing legitimate ends using appropriate means. The "non-violence and non-cooperation" approach adopted by Mahatma Gandhi to help India break free from the colonial rule was precisely the great-

¹ However, Ashoka did not completely renounce force or violence; several subsequent kings were even more belligerent. In fact, of the discovered inscriptions, which were made during Ashoka's reign, only 25 words explain and promote nonviolence, whereas the remaining thousands of Sanskrit words attest to the kingdom's stubborn military expansionism.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

est continuation of the thoughts of Dharma. After India became a republic, the thoughts of Sad-Dharma also exerted a profound impact on the foreign and security policy of India throughout the Nehru period.

The third pillar is the security concepts and practices of the British Indian Empire in the subcontinent. Nearly 200 years of British colonial rule, especially the history of building an India-centered colonial empire, has significantly enriched the thoughts and practices of India in terms of security strategy in modern times.

First, George Curzon highlighted and adopted the concept and practice of “buffer zones” when he was the Viceroy of India (1899–1905). Curzon was stimulated to establish buffer zones through the fierce collision between the colonial expansion of tsarist Russia and the British Empire in Central and West Asia at the end of the 19th century. To curb such persistent conflicts, Curzon considered it necessary to formulate strategic buffer zones around the edges of the Indian subcontinent. In 1899, Curzon formulated a defense strategy called the “three buffer zones” composed of Tibet, Afghanistan, and Burma. In particular, the Tibetan buffer zone was aimed at preventing the geo-conflicts between Britain and Russia and between China and Britain. Lobbied by Curzon, the British government set a goal on the Tibet issue in 1903 as follows: “We should exclude other great powers, and keep Tibet isolated: the kind of isolation from which until recently there was no expression of willingness to break away, and the kind of isolation which we do not have to worry about while keeping it outside our borders.”¹

As a result, from 1903 to 1904, the British launched a second war against Tibet in the most severe violation of the political status of Tibet. Later, without China’s knowledge, Britain signed an Anglo-Russian Entente with tsarist Russia in 1907, which is also known as the Anglo-Russian Convention of Saint Petersburg. This agreement not only claimed that the two countries only recognized China’s “suzerainty” over Tibet but also regarded Tibet as a “de facto buffer zone” between Russia and Britain. The Afghan buffer zone focused on preventing the threat posed by the southward access of tsarist Russia to the

¹ This is the remark by Hamilton, the then British Secretary of State for Indian Affairs. Quoted in *Collection of Local Historical Materials in Tibet*, edited by Literature and History Research Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in Tibet Autonomous Region, and published by SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1963, 220–221.

mouth of the Indian Ocean and the impact of the Islamic world of Central Asia on the subcontinent. Through three wars in Afghanistan (1838–1842, 1878–1880, and 1919), the British finally turned Afghanistan into a veritable buffer state between Britain and Russia. The Burmese buffer zone was to prevent Myanmar from becoming a bridgehead for the French attack on India and ensure the security of the northeast frontier of the Anglo-Indian colonial empire. After three Anglo-Burmese wars in 1824, 1852, and 1885, the British finally fully integrated Myanmar into their colonial empire.

The defense concept of the “three buffer zones” was designed to defend British colonial rule in the subcontinent. After India became a republic, the “three buffer zones” became the prototype of the national security strategy of India as colonial heritage. Thus, Curzon became an important historical figure who was highly respected and worshiped by Indian strategic circles.

Second is the theory and practice of the Scientific Frontier Scheme of the British Indian government, which began in the 1850s to assist British colonists in establishing a “safer” and “more defensive” colonial empire in the subcontinent.¹ After colonizing the subcontinent by sea, the British, with their status as a maritime power, were not concerned that other maritime powers would threaten their colonial interests. Instead, they focused on the establishment of border security in the northern mountains of the South Asian subcontinent, particularly to guard against threats from Russia and China. To this end, Britain established the “ring line” system, which was composed of an inner and outer ring. The inner ring consisted of the small Himalayan states and tribal areas of northeast India; the outer ring was composed of the Persian Gulf, Iran, Afghanistan, and Thailand. According to the British colonial strategy, security in the inner ring was achieved by creating a “scientific frontier,” whereas that in the outer ring was achieved by building a buffer zone. Both approaches aimed to keep the entire region free from manipulation or infiltration by outside powers. Under the Scientific Frontier Scheme and through a series of military campaigns, the British Indian Empire pushed the boundaries of the colonial rule from the foothills of the Hindu Kush–Karakoram–Himalayas to the higher ridges. In this process, British India not only realized the encroachment and control of Nepal, Bhutan,

¹ Stuart Sweeney, *Financing India's Imperial Railways (1875-1914)* (Routledge, 2011), 84.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

Sikkim, and other mountain states but also successfully turned China's Tibet and Afghanistan into buffer zones between Britain and Russia and managed to minimize the security gap of the borders of the subcontinent.

However, the policy of the Scientific Frontier Scheme remains a source of trouble to this day. It has laid the roots for current boundary disputes between China and India, the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan, and the Pakistan–Afghanistan Durand Line dispute. Furthermore, this policy triggered boundary frictions and conflicts between China and India because after becoming a republic, India transformed this policy into the Forward Policy, which continuously eroded the disputed border areas between China and India.

Third is the concept and practice of making India Britain's geostrategic center. Given the abundant and evident geographical advantage of India, constructing an international order and world pattern around India under British rule would naturally become an important colonial policy of the British Empire. In his book entitled *Problems of the Far East*, published in 1894, Curzon accurately summarized India's position and role in the strategic planning of the British Empire: "India's central dominance is unmatched in its political influence on the fates of its neighbors, both near and far, and in the extent to which their rise and fall are tied to this axis: India."¹ During the nearly 200 years of colonial rule, the British Empire fully utilized the geographical advantages of India to continuously expand the British colonial sphere of influence. Moreover, the British Empire connected this extremely vast land and sea by "linking Britain with India" through "Punjab, Indus, and Ganges rivers, reaching the Red Sea and Malta Island." History proved that India was not only the east political and economic center of the British Empire's colonial system but also a strategic base for Britain's colonial expansion to Asia and the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean.²

After becoming a republic, India has pursued foreign and security policies such as "Monroe Doctrine for South Asia" and "India First," which were consistent with the "India-centric theory" of Curzon and other British colonialists. The United States wants to repeat the pattern of the "empire on which the sun never sets," that is, to court India strategically and continue the century-old

¹ Jiang Zhaohong and Yang Pingxue, *Indian Military Strategic Studies* (Military Science Publishing House, 1993), 104.

² Du De, *Today's India* (World Affairs Press, 1954), 240.

global hegemony of the United States.

III. Cultural origin

Although the subcontinent has been historically plagued by misfortune, the Hindu civilization, which was gradually established after the Aryan invasion of the subcontinent in 1500 BC, remained intact. The Muslim invasion, Mughal rule, infiltration by French and Portuguese adventurers and missionaries, and long colonial rule of the British have been unable to annihilate or interrupt the basic values and worldviews of Hinduism. Thus, Hinduism has remained a source of nourishment for the strategic cultures that emerged in the subcontinent. In particular, the Hindu view of hierarchical order has exerted the most profound influence on the national strategic thought and practice of India after it became a republic.

The first is the hierarchy view, which is based on caste differences. The most prominent feature of the Hindu culture is the caste system, which emphasizes the categorization of Hindus under four main categories from high to low, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra. People perform duties according to their order but assume obligations to each other. Given this most basic feature of the caste system, the ruling elites in India tend to assume that other countries also employ this categorization. In the international community, India naturally belongs to the highest caste, that is, Brahmin, must justifiably belong to the highest world class, and never accept a second class role. Regarding the subcontinent, Nehru was straightforward: "India's international standing is comparable not with that of South Asian countries like Pakistan, but with that of the US, the Soviet Union or China."¹ Therefore, India has required its neighbors to follow the principle of "India First" when formulating its foreign policies, that is, prioritizing the national interests and concerns of India. Furthermore, it has adhered to the principle of "India handling South Asian affairs" and has exerted all efforts to exclude external countries from interfering in regional affairs.

The second one is the fatalistic view that fate is doomed by heaven. According to Hinduism, one's earthly destiny is the result of performing Dharma in one's previous life. In other words, one's earthly destiny is preordained and cannot be changed in this life. This view has given Indians a unique understand-

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, "A Tryst with Destiny," Inaugural Address on India's Independence, August 14, 1947, accessed August 20, 2022, http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125396/1154_trystnehru.pdf.

ing of state-to-state relations: India's status as a "first-class power" in the world is innate instead of acquired through effort or given by others who need to acknowledge this status. Thus, small neighboring countries should be subordinate to India as a central power, whereas other regional powers should respect India as a central power in the subcontinent. The Hindu doctrine of destiny is the starting point of the Indian elites' perspective regarding the world. Therefore, one can easily understand why in March 2005, President George W. Bush was ridiculed by the Indian mainstream media for announcing that the United States would "help India become a major world power in the 21st century."¹ India is a first-class power in its own right and does not need help from others. Thus, Indian politicians and strategic elites have gone as far as to argue that "India's destiny" entitles it to the same "exceptional" arrangements and "special" favors as the United States.

The third is the responsibility theory, which is based on occupational inheritance. The traditional Hindu social order is largely maintained by the caste system of occupational inheritance. Princes and generals are born with destiny, and "the rise and fall of the world" is not the responsibility of every person but is dependent on one's caste and occupation. Among them, the full-time job of Kshatriya as is to defend the country. At the national level, this culture is reflected in the fact that the security of the vast majority of the people is entrusted to a warrior caste, such as the Kshatriya, through the caste system. At a higher level, that is, regional security governance, the security responsibilities of its South Asian neighbors should be delegated to India, which is a first-class power. Given this cultural psychology, Nehru's government quickly established itself through a series of treaties as the security guardian of its South Asian neighbors soon after India became a republic. Currently, that role is expanding to the Indian Ocean Rim.

The fourth refers to the theory of autonomy based on the village community culture. In the subcontinent, the village community is the strongest bulwark, which ensures that a change in the ruling class does not erode or interrupt the Hindu cultural heritage. Max Weber states that "India has always been a country of villages" after examining the eastern culture in depth, especially Hinduism.² In his study on India, Karl Marx attaches great importance to the village

¹ Ren Yan, "The U.S. Woos India to Contain China," *Global Times*, March 25, 2005.

² Max Weber, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. Kang Le and Jian Huimei (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005), 3.

community and proposes that the village community is the key to understanding Indian society. In the process of colonizing India, the British experienced difficulty in disrupting the tightly knit village communities and exerted substantial effort to deconstruct the village community system as the primary task after conquering India by force. The fundamental reason for the long-term prosperity of the village community lies in its highly autonomous political culture. Even now, the traditional Indian village is a self-contained, self-operated political entity due to the caste order and abundance of resources.

This highly autonomous political culture of the village community naturally evolved into the national psychology of “give us autonomy, or give us death.” In addition to the 17 provinces directly administered by the British Queen, the subcontinent was composed of 563 native states, all of which established a de facto alliance with the British colonial empire as “independent political entities” during the British colonial period. Under the influence of this strong autonomous culture and after becoming a republic, India attached great importance to strategic autonomy, which was reflected not only in the design of “federalism” at the level of domestic political order construction but also in the concept and practice of non-alignment at the level of international political order construction.

The Concrete Practice of Indian National Security Strategy

Although the Indian government has not issued a formal document on its national security strategy, it has addressed its national security issues by following a clear pattern, that is, following the “mandala” circle structure after becoming a republic. India has been adhering to the internal logic of geopolitical rivalry and actual changes in international scenarios and focusing on major challenges and threats to its strategic autonomy. Its goal has been to establish itself as a dynamic world power that can dominate South Asia, control the Indian Ocean, and influence the Pacific.

I. In the core circle, India has balanced between major powers

The founding of India as a republic and the start of the Iron Curtain of the Cold War happened nearly simultaneously. Therefore, realizing the parity between the “born power” of India and existing global powers and adhering to and

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

strengthening strategic autonomy in the increasingly fierce game between major powers became the core goal of the effort exerted by India to promote the practice of its national security strategy in the core circle. Strategic autonomy originated from the policy of “non-alignment,” which was proposed by the Nehru government at the beginning of the Cold War. However, India did not adhere to the literal meaning of non-alignment in the practice of pursuing strategic autonomy. Instead, it followed the major principle of a concept that Menon called “flexible realism.”

During the early and middle periods of the Cold War (1947–1971), India enjoyed courtship from two superpowers, namely, the United States and Soviet Union, when it pursued the policy of non-alignment. India was happy to be the showcase of Western democracy that the United States intended to establish. Alternatively, India did not object to becoming the “model of socialism” that the Soviet Union wanted to establish. This two-sided approach enabled Nehru (1956–1964) and his daughter, Indira Gandhi (1966–1970), to promote efforts to construct a country that will “count for a great deal” and maintain the strategic autonomy of India by not taking sides in the international political arena, where the United States and Soviet Union competed for hegemony.

From the middle and late periods of the Cold War to the end of the Cold War (1971–1991), China, the United States, and Pakistan became strategically closer, and the Soviet Union was becoming more assertive than the United States. Given this international political struggle, India resolutely implemented the policy of forming an alliance with the Soviet Union and managed to maintain its strategic autonomy to the largest extent possible by giving up a part of the benefits of its strategic autonomy. In particular, by partitioning Pakistan at the end of 1971 with Soviet support, India successfully dispelled Pakistan’s strategic expectation that it would share dominance of the regional order with India. During this period, although India’s great power balance diplomacy focused on the Soviet Union to counter the United States and, simultaneously, to contain China and Pakistan, it did not turn entirely hostile to the United States. In fact, the two sides continued to maintain limited military interaction. At the end of 1988, India took the initiative to normalize its relations with China.

From the end of the Cold War to the time when Narendra Modi came to power (1992–2014), India faced a “unipolar” world dominated by the United

States. India, which had lost the Soviet “umbrella,” perceived the need to return to the policy of “non-alignment.” By adopting a security policy characterized by relative neutrality and embracing economic globalization, India repaired its fence of strategic autonomy, which was evidently relatively broken. During this period, India endeavored to implement the strategy of balance between the great powers, especially the equidistant diplomacy among China, the United States, and Russia. It focused on development, cooperation, and security precautions, especially against the unilateralism and preemptive security and foreign policy of the United States.¹

After the Modi government came to power (from 2014 to the present), it has vigorously pursued the multi-alignment² policy. The reason is the rising global trend of multi-polarization, especially the increasingly apparent international situation of the “two superpowers and many powers” in recent years. His government emphasizes security-oriented development cooperation and strategic alignment by avoiding “taking sides” as much as possible and jointly promoting “reformed multilateralism”³ with China and Russia. Furthermore, India is working with the United States and other Western nations to promote value diplomacy and establish democratic alliance mechanisms. Additionally, India is actively participating in regional and global governance with other middle powers. In recent years, however, the multi-alignment policy of the Modi government has displayed a growing trend; it is “becoming close to the United States” and “seeking allies” to contain China. In this great geopolitical game, the Modi

¹ At this stage, India’s strategic suspicion of the United States was greater than its suspicion against other major powers. For example, “Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the 21st Century,” which was released in 2012, explicitly stated that “powers that form formal alliances with it (the U.S.) have tended to see an erosion of their strategic autonomy. Both India and the U.S. may be better served by being friends rather than allies ... the prospect that India is a potential partner can give it leverage, both with the country courting it and with potential rivals. India must leverage to the full extent possible this dual diplomatic potential.” See Sunil Khilnani et al., “Nonalignment 2.0 : A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the 21st Century,” accessed August 20, 2022, <https://www.cprindia.org/research/reports/nonalignment-20-foreign-and-strategic-policy-india-twenty-first-century>.

² C. Raja Mohan and ParagKhanna, “Getting India Right,” *Policy Review* (quarterly), March, 2006.

³ Lou Chunhao, “Don’t Let India’s ‘Reformed Multilateralism’ Take the Wrong Path,” *Global Times*, November 9, 2020.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

government would opt for order led by the United States instead of building a new one with China. The reason is that in India's view, the immediate and urgent challenge to its strategic autonomy stems less from the hegemony of the United States and more from the competition for regional order between China and India.

II. In the second circle, India has established monopoly over the security order of the subcontinent

In India's view, it is the natural leader of the South Asian subcontinent; therefore, it should address South Asian affairs, especially security affairs, and no challenge from any internal or external forces is allowed. To this end, the national security policy pursued by India in the South Asian subcontinent is "regarding neighboring countries as enemies, or making them obey, or befriending the far and attacking the near" to establish its role as the "watcher of safety" in the second circle to the maximum possible extent.

Firstly, India has practiced the concept of buffer zones. It views Tibet as a buffer zone between China and India. In December 1946, before the British left the subcontinent, the provisional government formed by Nehru invited the representatives of Tibet to attend the Pan-Asian Conference on an equal footing with the representatives of other Asian countries. This is the first attempt by the new India at adopting the British concept of buffer zones. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Nehru government acted more frequently and recklessly in an effort to make Tibet the buffer zone between China and India. In 1950, India opposed Chinese troops trying to liberate Tibet. In 1956, India abetted the visiting Dalai Lama's independence.¹ In March 1959, during the Lhasa riots, India acted as the sounding board for separatist forces in Tibet, accommodated the Dalai clique and exiled Tibetans, helped build a government-in-exile, and supported the armed harassment in Tibetan areas by the remaining Tibetan bandits. In 1963, India formally established the Special Frontier Force (to be used as an armed force for Tibetan independence in the future). Even after the normalization of China–India relations in December 1988, successive Indian governments continued their adherence to the buffer zone view and provide living spaces, arenas for activities, and political support

¹ Yang Gongsu and Zhang Zhirong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy Theory and Practice* (Peking University Press, 2009), 90; Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile* (London: Abacus, 1990), 161.

to Tibetan independence forces and their supporters and sympathizers. In fact, only in June 2003 did the Indian government officially recognize that “the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China” in the *Declaration on Principles and Comprehensive Cooperation of China–India Relations*. During the drafting of the declaration, the Indian side exerted all means possible to oppose China’s proposal that “the Tibet Autonomous Region is an inalienable part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China.” Moreover, India claimed that if the Chinese side insisted on adding the term “inalienable,” India would refuse to sign the declaration.¹ This scenario demonstrated the depth of India’s obsession with the Tibet buffer zone.

In recent years, because conservative forces have emerged robustly in the domestic political ecology of India, the idea of designating Tibet as the buffer zone between China and India was revisited during the Modi administration. The intensity and frequency of “playing the Tibet card” by the Modi government are greater than those of previous governments since 1988. For example, the administrative chief of the Dalai clique was invited to attend Prime Minister Modi’s inauguration ceremony. The incumbent president was allowed to officially meet the Dalai Lama and attend public events together. Moreover, a new “Tibetan Resettlement Plan” was launched. Prime Minister Modi publicly congratulated the Dalai Lama on his birthday, and India and the United States jointly implemented a plan to support Tibet’s independence in the post-Dalai period.

Furthermore, India accelerated the construction of a buffer zone in the northern mountain countries. After realizing that the will and pace of the peaceful liberation of Tibet by New China were irresistible, the Nehru government quickly tightened the Himalayan Fence. In 1949, when a local uprising occurred in Sikkim to resist the Maharaja, Indian troops went into Sikkim and designated the country as an Indian protectorate. On August 8, 1949, India signed the *Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship* with Bhutan and took over the power from Britain to direct foreign relations in Bhutan, which has prevented it from establishing diplomatic relations with China to date. In 1950, India and Nepal signed the *Treaty of Peace and Friendship*, whereby India gained

¹ Tang Lu, “Disclosing the Inside Story of China-India Negotiations on Tibet in 2003,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 30, 2003.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

control of the military and security affairs of Nepal. During this period, India also signed friendship treaties with Afghanistan and Myanmar. The abovementioned treaties incorporated all northern mountain countries into the Strategic Unity of South Asia¹ by building a legal support system for the construction of a buffer zone. Since then, successive Indian governments have continuously strengthened their security control over these northern mountain countries. In 1974, India was invited to dispatch troops to pacify the chaos in Sikkim and formally annexed Sikkim the following year. Since then, India has isolated and controlled all surrounding South Asian countries. In 1989, dissatisfied with the purchase of arms from China by Nepal, India blocked Nepal for 13 months until it abandoned the arms purchase. In 2017, under the pretext of upholding justice for Bhutan, India brazenly dispatched troops to the Doklam area, which led to a border confrontation between India and China.

Second, India has established a natural barrier in the Himalayas. The crackdown of the Chinese government on the Lhasa riot on March 10 and subsequent two brief, bloody conflicts on the Sino-Indian border eventually prompted the Nehru government to seek “absolutely safe borders.”² Following the security logic of “you snooze, you lose,” on November 2, 1961, the Nehru government officially instructed a mandate at a high-level meeting to fully implement the Forward Policy into Chinese territories by force. The mandate included building the Himalayas–Karakoram Mountains as a natural barrier between China and India to geographically block the possible geo-threat imposed by China on India. The unilateral military action from India was met with a firm response from China. Consequently, war broke out between the two countries. India restrained itself only for a short period of time after it lost the border war with China in 1962. However, it seized the opportunity of the domestic chaos

¹ Indian policymakers and strategic circles believe that South Asia is a strategic unity that is clearly geographically distinct from other regions. For example, former Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh claimed that “it is strategically unreasonable for some to exclude Tibet, Afghanistan, Myanmar, etc. from South Asia in a purely political definition.... India’s territories in a geographical sense are inconsistent with their strategic boundaries.” See Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1998), 146.

² This refers to the border clashes at Longju (eastern section of the Sino-Indian border) in August 1959 and Kongka Pass (western section of the Sino-Indian border) in October 1959.

in China and continued to push the Forward Policy by constantly strengthening border patrols and building fortifications. The China Research Group, which was established in 1976, specifically revised the implementation details of the Forward Policy of the Indian troops, including patrol routes, modes of establishing presence in border areas, and coping strategies when contacting Chinese patrols.¹ As a result of the Salami-slicing tactics for over 50 years by pursuing the Forward Policy, the Indian troops have basically controlled all commanding heights in the eastern and middle sections of the Sino-Indian border.

After Modi came to power, the domestic political ecology of India quickly transformed into a right-wing one, and Indian border troops began seeking a commanding height in the western section of the Sino-Indian border. For example, in 2019, Indian soldiers crossed the line of actual control 1,581 times, 94% of which occurred on the western frontier. This habitual crossing of the line was the main reason for the frequent occurrence of border confrontations between the two countries, which were concentrated in the western sector since Modi's ascendancy to power. Moreover, this background explains the bloody face-off in the Galwan Valley in 2020.

Notably, from the Nehru to the Modi government, front-line border defense infrastructure has been the most powerful tool in implementing the Forward Policy. In many places, Indian border roads were built close to, on, or even across the control lines claimed by the Chinese side, which resulted in the continuous encroachment and penetration of areas that were controlled by the Chinese side.

India was greatly shocked when the Qinghai–Tibet Railway opened in 2006. The Cabinet Committee on the Security of India passed a formal resolution that required the Indian government to build 73 strategic pathways along the China–India Line of Actual Control. Since then, India's border defense infrastructure grew rapidly, which was further accelerated since Prime Minister Modi came to power. From 2008 to 2014, India had built border roads totaling 3,610 km in length; from 2014 to 2020, the length of the border road construction by India reached 4,764 km.² In the 21st century, especially since Modi took office, nearly all major border face-offs and conflicts between China and

¹ Shishir Gupta, "Behind Galwan's Bloody Face-off, China's Plan to Interdict Gateway to Karakoram," *Hindustan Times*, June 18, 2020.

² Anil Dhasmana, "India's Infra Push behind Chinese Aggression," *Hindustan Times*, June 22, 2020.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

India have been closely related to border defense infrastructure, especially the rushed construction of roads from the Indian side. This type of construction was provocative and military-related; thus, a few people have termed it the Border Infrastructure War.¹

Third, India has pursued the Monroe Doctrine for South Asia. In fact, in 1947, on the eve of India's independence, Nehru pointed out that "the Monroe Doctrine proposed by President Monroe has secured the Americas from foreign aggression for nearly a century, and it is time to apply the same Monroe Doctrine to Asian countries."² Shortly after the founding of India as a republic, the Nehru government maximized control over Kashmir valley and upper Indus River region by launching a military conflict (the first India-Pak war). Thus, the country realized the first effective control of the northwest frontier in its history. Afterward, India concluded a series of friendship treaties with Nepal Bhutan, and Sikkim, thereby incorporating them into the Strategic Unity of South Asia, which was viewed as the policy boundary for the implementation of the "Monroe Doctrine for South Asia" by India.

However, India began to publicly announce its Monroe Doctrine policy in South Asia during the later period of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government. In 1983, Indira Gandhi proposed the Indira Doctrine, which was the Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine and was called "Indianism." According to the Indira Doctrine, "India will not interfere in the internal affairs of any country in this region unless asked to do so. In doing so, such interference by foreign powers will not be tolerated; if external assistance is needed to deal with internal crises, assistance should be sought from within the region first."³ Since then, India has become assertive on several fronts. It demanded that its neighbors in South Asia adopt the foreign and security policies of "India First." Furthermore, India intended to build itself as the security manager of South Asia.⁴ The typical practices of the Monroe Doctrine policy during this period included deploying

¹ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "India Is Still Losing to China in the Border Infrastructure War," *Diplomat*, September 21, 2018.

² Tarik Jan ed., *Pakistan's Security and the Nuclear Option* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1995), 153.

³ Li Zhonglin, "A Review of India's Monroe Doctrine," *Asia & Africa Review*, No. 4, 2013, 16.

⁴ P. Venkateshwar Rao, "Ethnic Conflict In Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception," *Asian Survey*, No. 4, 1988, 419.

troops in Sri Lanka for peacekeeping in 1987–1991, sending troops to Maldives to pacify the coup in 1988, and blocking Nepal in 1989 because of its dissatisfaction with Nepal's independent arms purchase policy.

After the end of the Cold War, India adjusted its domestic and foreign policies. It intended to avoid the difficulty of development through economic reforms, strengthen its military capacity through nuclear tests, and create a balance of great powers with equidistant diplomacy. For some time, it replaced its assertive Monroe Doctrine with conciliatory "Gujralism."¹ However, since Modi came to power, the tough South Asian Monroe Doctrine has returned because India came to believe that its monopoly in South Asia has encountered the most serious erosion since the end of the Cold War. The reason is that its South Asian neighbors actively participated in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative by China, especially the Maritime Silk Road for the 21st Century. Therefore, it resorted to forceful interventions using aggressive policies that led to political instability in neighboring countries. Examples of such interventions by India include blocking the Nepalese borders from September 2015 to January 2016, splitting the pro-China Sri Lankan government from December 2014 to January 2015, intervening in the electoral process in Bhutan in 2013² and 2018 to forcefully prevent a China-friendly political party from coming to power, and subverting the China-friendly government in the Maldives in 2019. Moreover, it helped a pro-India Congress Party to gain power by boosting the redivision of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal in 2020. The above mentioned behaviors by India aimed to reestablish the exclusive and monopolistic

¹ In May 1991, to change the image of "bullying neighboring countries," then Indian Prime Minister Gujral proposed a good-neighborly policy later called "Gujral Doctrine." The essence of the doctrine was that India would provide unilateral favors to its neighbors without seeking reciprocal returns and bring the South Asian region to a state of healthy mutual trust. For over 10 years since then, in the unipolar era after the end of the Cold War, India has maintained a conciliatory policy of good-neighborliness. However, the nature of the "Gujral Doctrine" remains an attempt to prevent external forces from intervening in South Asian affairs and is a variant of the "Monroe Doctrine for South Asia."

² At that time, the Manmohan Singh government of the Congress Party was in power. Whether it was due to the policy considerations of the "Monroe Doctrine for South Asia" or the political pressures of the general election in the following year, the Congress Party government prevented a China-friendly government in Bhutan from coming to power.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

order led by India in South Asia.

Fourth, India has suppressed Pakistan in all directions. Pakistan is the sole South Asian country that has exhibited the willingness and capability to challenge the monopolistic security order built by India in South Asia. When managing the second circle of its national security strategy, Pakistan became the key target of suppression by India. During the Cold War, with the three India–Pak wars, India completely ruined Pakistan's plan to militarily seek an equal position with India. After the end of the Cold War, India adopted a three-pronged approach to suppress comprehensive threats from Pakistan. First, India has effectively suppressed the Pakistani nuclear threat and impulse through nuclear tests and the continuous construction of a “trinity” nuclear strike capability. Second, India has maintained its overwhelming military advantage over Pakistan through the modernization of its conventional military forces. Since Modi came to power, the Indian military has also formulated the limited war principle called the “cold start,” which allows a preemptive military strike¹ to suppress or eliminate security threats that originate from Pakistan as quickly as possible to ensure that no nuclear war is triggered. In September 2016, after a terrorist attack on the Uri barracks in Indian-controlled Kashmir, the Indian military claimed that it had implemented a surgical strike in Pakistan. In February 2019, the Indian military conducted cross-border air strikes in Pakistan after accusing it of condoning cross-border terrorist attacks. Third, at the international level, India spared no efforts in portraying Pakistan as a terrorism-sponsoring state. Based on the strange phenomenon of the sharp decrease in support from Muslim countries to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, India's propaganda has achieved remarkable effects. The all-round suppression policy of the Modi government has stabilized India–Pakistan relations and considerably assuaged overall security in South Asia. An evident example is that the border areas between India and Pakistan have remained peaceful since India and Pakistan implemented ceasefire on the midnight of February 24, 2021, which is unprecedented in the history of their bilateral relations.²

¹ Harsh V. Pant ed., *Handbook of India Defense Policy: Themes, Structures and Doctrines* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 89.

² For example, in 2019 and 2020, the military forces of the two countries exchanged fire with unprecedented frequency and intensity, with the annual exchange of fires occurring 3,000–5,000 times.

III. In the third circle, India has built the capacity to develop a new ocean order

Between the start of the Cold War and the arrival of the 21st century, land security had overwhelmingly occupied India's security agenda, which left its oceanic advantage underutilized. However, in the last 10 years, stimulated by the China-initiated Maritime Silk Road for the 21st Century, encouraged by the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy, and supported by its own emerging national strength, India has stepped up its agenda of building itself as a sea-land power. India's national security strategy and practice have also shifted from land to sea power to finally realize its security pursuit of controlling the Indian Ocean and influencing the Pacific Ocean.

India released a series of strategic reports on naval construction and maritime security. In 1988, on the eve of the end of the Cold War, India published its first maritime strategy document titled *A Maritime Military Strategy for India 1989-2014*, which would guide the construction of the Indian Navy. After the end of the Cold War, India frequently released documents and reports on maritime economic strategies and naval construction, which gradually formed its naval strategy and maritime strategy system.

In 1998, the Indian Navy released the first document that focused on navy construction, the *Strategic Defense Review: The Maritime Dimension—A Naval Vision*, which focused on building naval offshore defense and regional deterrence capabilities.

In 2004, the *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, which was published by the Indian Navy, systematically proposed a navy strategic concept for the first time. Its core task was building a three-tier strategic frontier. According to importance and geographical distance, the navy has established three sea control areas, namely, a depth control area of the sea ranging from the coast to 500 km, a moderately controlled area ranging from 500 km to 1,000 km, and a soft control area ranging beyond 1,000 km. *The Indian Maritime Doctrine* of 2004 constitutes the cornerstone of the Indian Navy's strategy after the Cold War, which highlights the construction of the ocean-going offensive capabilities of the Indian Navy. Furthermore, it gradually extended India's strategic interests to the Persian Gulf to the west, the South China Sea to the east, and Africa to the south.

In 2007, the Indian Navy issued *The Freedom to Use the Seas: India's*

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

Maritime Military Strategy, which divided India's oceanic interests into primary and secondary for the first time.¹ The document also emphasized that with existing resources and strength, India's current maritime security strategy mainly focuses on its core areas of interest. The most striking aspect of the *Indian Maritime Military Strategy* of 2007 is that it officially revealed the development prospects of India's maritime strategy, which extends eastward to the Western Pacific. Once again, this vision was elucidated in the *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, which was updated in 2009. It made a strategic, ideological preparation for India's resolute embrace of the Indo-Pacific strategy 10 years later.

In January 2015, the Indian Navy released a report entitled *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, which provided a comprehensive exposition of India's new concept of regarding maritime security. The report listed many countries and regions in the Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean island countries, southwest Indian Ocean, and east coast of Africa as areas of interest for the Indian Navy. Moreover, it viewed the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Western Pacific Ocean and their littoral countries as subpriority areas of concern for the Indian Navy. The greatest highlight of the strategy document was that it clarified the definition of "net security provider" for the first time in official strategy, that is, "maintaining the actual security of the area, offsetting the actual threats, potential risks and increasing challenges, and continuing to monitor, contain and counteract the above-mentioned security risks." Since then, the Indian Navy has been officially empowered with the specific responsibilities of the net security provider of the Indian Ocean. The Obama administration originally designated this role to India in the Indian Ocean. Under the Indo-Pacific strategy, the Trump and Biden administrations were increasingly straightforward in helping India attain various roles such as net security provider and regional leader.

¹ The primary areas of interest include the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, mainly including the following: India's exclusive economic zone, islands, and island extensions; strategic fulcrums for entering and leaving the Indian Ocean, mainly including the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Mande, and Cape of Good Hope; Indian Ocean island countries; the Persian Gulf, which is the main source of India's oil supply; and the main international sea route in the Indian Ocean region. Secondary areas of interest include the Southern Indian Ocean, Red Sea, South China Sea, and Eastern Pacific.

In June 2018, Prime Minister Modi presented India's vision of the Indo-Pacific in a keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue. The maritime strategy document was atypical. However, given that the central concern of the Indo-Pacific strategy is the issue of maritime order in the Indo-Pacific, the vision elaborated by Modi partially reflected India's view regarding maritime order for over a decade. According to this vision, India expects to establish a free, open, and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific region and emphasizes that the Indo-Pacific is a natural region. Therefore, it is neither considered a club for limited members nor directed against any country. Evidently, India intends to use its vision of the Indo-Pacific to build a maritime order characterized by inclusivity, sharing, cooperation, and prosperity.¹

Furthermore, India has been vigorously advancing the establishment of a maritime power. Guided by a series of marine doctrines or security strategies, the Indian government, especially under Modi, has vigorously advanced its strategy for the Indian Ocean and surrounding waters but has been unable to make significant progress.

First, India has significantly adjusted sea-related mechanisms, including preparing for the establishment of the National Maritime Committee and the Marine Theater Command, coordinating the management of maritime affairs, solving the serious problems of fragmentation and internal friction, promoting military reform, integrating the existing three major war zones of the Navy, taking the lead in establishing the Andaman–Nicobar Combined Forces Command, strengthening the flexible combat capabilities of the Navy, focusing on maritime threats, and strengthening the construction of naval forces to ensure that the Indian Navy can maintain two aircraft carrier battle groups in the Indian Ocean at any time.²

¹ “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue,” June 1, 2018, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime_Ministers_Keynote_Address_at_Shangri_La_Dialogue_June_01_2018.

² On December 3, 2018, Indian Navy Chief of Staff, Admiral Sunil Lamba, announced India's plans to further expand the scale of naval equipment in the next 10 years. Under the plan, the Indian Navy will add 56 warships and 6 submarines to the current basis of 140 warships and 220 fighter aircraft. After the completion of the new military expansion plan, the Indian Navy will have three aircraft carriers to ensure that it can maintain two aircraft carrier battle groups in the Indian Ocean at any time so as to achieve complete control over the Indian Ocean.

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

Second, India has enhanced comprehensive military capacity building in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and its adjacent waters and taken advantage of geographical advantages to strengthen control over the Malacca passage. The measures used include the expansion of two airport runways on North Andaman Island and Greater Nicobar Island; addition of advanced equipment, such as patrol aircraft and surface-to-air missiles on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; deployment of submarine sensor monitoring networks and electronic intelligence reconnaissance facilities in nearby waters to monitor ships; and increased frequency and scale of military exercises in nearby waters, and a test fire of the BrahMos cruise missile.

Third, India has established an Indian Ocean security cooperation network and enhanced its capacity building as the net security provider. (1) India has cooperated with key island countries, accelerated the Coastal Surveillance Radar System plan in the Indian Ocean, and improved anti-submarine and maritime monitoring capabilities in the Indian Ocean waters, especially in important sea passages. Currently, India has deployed coastal surveillance radar systems in Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Maldives and has been actively persuading Bangladesh and Myanmar to join the Indian coastal radar network. Furthermore, it has sought to establish radar stations in Thailand. (2) India has restarted the India–Sri Lanka–Maldives Indian Ocean Security Cooperation Mechanism, which was suspended for six years. Moreover, it has taken in Bangladesh, Seychelles, and Mauritius as observers.¹ The mechanism's objective has been to strengthen cooperation in various fields such as maritime situational awareness and intelligence sharing. (3) India has held consultations with over 30 countries to sign the White Shipping Agreement to promote the construction of an information integration center in the Indian Ocean region. Additionally, it has aimed to strengthen the search and monitoring of merchant ships in the Indian Ocean. (4) India has established military facilities in some island countries, such as the construction of a wharf in the West Favaru Atoll in the Maldives and the construction of a runway and hangar for the P8-I anti-submarine aircraft to take off, land, and stay on Agalega Island in Mauritius. Moreover, India has provided

¹ In August 2021, the mechanism was officially renamed the Colombo Security Conference at the deputy national security advisor level, which is held every six months.

patrol boats, reconnaissance aircraft, and radar equipment, among others, to improve the activities of the Indian Navy.

Fourth, India has promoted the integration of the Indian Ocean Strategy and Pacific Ocean Strategy under the framework of the Indo-Pacific strategy. (1) India has deeply integrated the quadrilateral security architecture, which comprises India, Australia, Japan, and the United States and has signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum Agreement, Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation with the United States. Furthermore, it signed a logistics exchange agreement with Japan and Australia and a naval cooperation document with Australia and established a maritime security cooperation mechanism and “2+2” ministerial dialogs with the United States, Japan, and Australia. It has regularly held joint exercises and training in strategically important places to improve tactical coordination and interoperability through the Malabar military exercise. It has pushed the India-led Indian Ocean Information Integration Center, the Singapore Information Integration Center, and the Pacific Information Integration Center for jointly building databases to strengthen information sharing and network connection and has built a cross-border Indo-Pacific network monitoring, maritime situational awareness data chain integration, and intelligence information sharing. Alternatively, it allowed US warplanes to dock and refuel at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and conducted joint exercises with US aircraft carriers in the waters near the islands. Moreover, it allowed Japan to invest in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. (2) India has interacted with western European powers on Indo-Pacific strategies. For example, it held the first maritime security dialog with the European Union, signed an agreement with France to jointly develop a satellite monitoring system for the Indian Ocean region, conducted joint patrols in the southwest Indian Ocean, held large-scale military exercises with the United Kingdom, France, and Germany in the Indian Ocean, and initiated negotiations on a logistics support agreement with the United Kingdom, among others. (3) India has sought mutual reinforcement between the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean to interfere in the South China Sea issue. In recent years, the Indian government has repeatedly stressed that India will join hands with the United States and the West to defend the “rule-based” and “free and open” maritime order in the South China

India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice

Sea. Additionally, the Indian government has continuously deepened its defense cooperation with countries in the region, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, to gain visibility in the South China Sea issue.

Reviewing India's national security strategy practice since its founding as a republic, one can infer that although the policies of different circles and periods vary in form and content, the central pursuit for strategic autonomy remains unchanged. Therefore, the study concludes that the approaching strategic relationship between India and the United States has a ceiling. Similarly, a safety valve exists for the strategic conflict between China and India. The criterion is whether maintaining and consolidating its strategic autonomy is in India's interest because these aspects form the core and cornerstone of its national security strategy.