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From Isolation to Partnership: The Evolution of India's Military Diplomacy

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Introduction

On the face of it, 'military' and 'diplomacy' belong to two very different realms. Diplomacy is peaceful interaction between nations aimed at resolving differences and promoting cooperation. If diplomacy is the first line of engagement between states, military is seen as the last and involves use of force. The connection between diplomacy and use of force, however, should not be seen as two ends of a spectrum. States have long used demonstration of military capabilities and threats of use of force as instruments to boost negotiating leverage with other states. 'Gunboat diplomacy' is a well-established tradition in modern statecraft.

Military diplomacy, as a term, has gained currency in recent years, especially after the Cold War, when Western powers began to more frequently deploy armed forces for a range of new missions—from peace-keeping and peace-building to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The practice of military diplomacy must also be seen in the context of Western countries attempting to reform the security sector in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union and in the developing world after the Cold War. With the prospect of a conventional conflict with other major powers ruled out for all practical purposes and the

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focus shifting to internal conflicts and civil wars in the developing world, military diplomacy has emerged as a new international priority.

One simple definition of military diplomacy is the ‘use of armed forces in operations other than war, building on their trained expertise and discipline to achieve national and foreign objectives abroad’. The phrases military and defence diplomacy are often used interchangeably. While the term ‘military’ denotes exchanges and interactions between uniformed services, ‘defence diplomacy’ could be used to identify activities undertaken by the entire defence establishment, including its civilian bureaucracy and the research and development establishments.² While military diplomacy has acquired a special political connotation in the post-cold war environment, many of the activities involved are not different from the great power practice of using armed forces for a range of political and humanitarian missions. This tradition has included the projection of force into a conflict situation, responding to humanitarian crises and natural disasters, protecting sea lines of communication, ability to assist other military forces through training, and local capacity building through arms transfer and intelligence support. These functions have been largely performed by the Western powers until now.

As their military capabilities grow rising powers like China and India are beginning to join the older powers in the arena of military diplomacy. ‘As the global reach of their interests grows—as trading nations, strategic powers and mother countries to massive diasporas—and as they accumulate capabilities for power projection, so too will increase their willingness and ability to use conventional military instruments to provide simultaneously for their own interests and the common weal.’³ While there have been some studies of Chinese military diplomacy,⁴ academic literature on India’s defence diplomacy remains scarce.

This paper does not undertake a comprehensive review of India’s growing use of military instruments to promote its national security and foreign policy objectives in recent years. The paper is an attempt at gauging the dimensions of India’s military diplomacy that has included the signing of a large number of military cooperation agreements and defence memoranda of understanding with other nations and significant expansion of joint military exercises with major powers and regional actors in the Indian Ocean and East Asia. The paper is the first cut at developing an analytical framework to assess the dynamics and consequences of India’s military diplomacy. It will identify some of the current limitations that constrain India’s military diplomacy and evaluate its future prospects. The paper will examine the enduring

² For a discussion of the definitions see, K.A. Muthanna, ‘Military Diplomacy’, *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 2011, pp. 1-15.

³ Rory Medcalf, ‘Unselfish Giants? Understanding China and India as Security Providers’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, July 2011, DOI:10.1080/10357718.2011.570244.

⁴ See for example, Bates Gill, *Rising Star: China’s New Security Diplomacy*, Revised Paperback Edition (Washington DC: Brookings, 2010).

political tensions in India's world view between the traditional ideas of nonalignment and the new imperatives of a rising power.

Nonalignment and Military Isolation

As India became independent in 1947, the Cold War divisions were beginning to congeal in Europe and expand into Asia. As India sought to insulate itself from the impact of Cold War, Delhi was deliberate in its choice of 'military isolationism'. Independent India's isolationist impulse was, in part, a reaction to the expansive external use of Indian armed forces during the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. As the Indian nationalist movement gathered strength after the First World War, it rejected the use of Indian military manpower for imperial purposes and without the consent of the Indian people.⁵ At the end of the Second World War, many Asian nationalist leaders complained to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was heading the interim government in Delhi, about the use of the Indian army to protect British and European interests rather than the national liberation forces. Given his strong solidarity with the anti-colonial struggles everywhere in Asia, Nehru was not going to accept the use of the Indian army for repressing the liberation movements.

Once the Indian army came under the full control of the new nation, Nehru explicitly rejected its use for expeditionary operations. As Cold War military blocs confronted India, Nehru declared that India will not align with either the East or the West and will pursue an independent foreign policy. Besides defining the national orientation as non-alignment, India moved towards the construction of a broader forum of solidarity among the newly liberated nations. What began as the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi (1947), the effort moved towards the organisation of Afro-Asian conference in Bandung (1955) and the eventual formation of the Nonaligned Movement which met at the summit level, for the first time, in 1961. If rejecting bloc politics was central to India's national perception of nonalignment, the NAM membership was limited to those countries which did not have foreign military bases on their soil.

In the years after independence, India slowly wound down its external military links with Great Britain forged over a period of nearly 200 years of colonial rule. While London and Washington would have preferred to see a measure of coordination among the armies of the Commonwealth against the emerging global Communist threat, India's new approach of nonalignment ran counter to it. Nehru chose to remain a part of the Commonwealth, but only after making it clear that India will have nothing to do with the Western military alliances.

⁵ For a discussion, see Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 88-113.

The Indian Navy did participate in the Joint Exercises off Trincomalee of the Commonwealth until 1964, but those links too got severed after that.

To be sure, Great Britain was a major source of arms supplies to independent India, but little more than that in the first years after independence. Other European arms suppliers like France were eager to enter the Indian market. But it was the Soviet Union that eventually became the main defence partner for India in the Cold War period. If non-aligned India disentangled itself from the military relationship with Britain, it was not going to allow itself to be tied down by the new partnership with Soviet Union. As it sought weapons from the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1960s, India was careful to circumscribe its military engagement with Moscow. Despite being bound to the Soviet Union, through the friendship treaty of 1971, India carefully avoided undertaking joint exercises or other service to service contacts with Moscow.⁶

India was also reluctant to offer military cooperation and support to friendly countries that sought them. The case of Singapore in the mid 1960s easily comes to mind. That India signed a defence cooperation agreement with Singapore in 2003 underlines the unfolding transformation in India's defence diplomacy.

India's Peace-keeping Preference

One major exception to India's military isolationism in the Cold War period was Delhi's active participation in the international peace-keeping operations authorised by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This would seem to be a continuation of the Raj legacy of expeditionary operations in a different form after decolonisation. The huge 'military surplus' of the Subcontinent created during the British rule seemed to endure despite all the political changes of the past six decades: partition, permanent Indo-Pak conflict, the occupation of Tibet by China and the resultant Sino-Indian military tensions on the Indo-Tibetan border. Despite these challenges, the now-separate armies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are among the major contributors to the United Nations peace-keeping forces.⁷ But this extraordinary role is widely overlooked in international debates on peace-keeping, particularly in India's case.

⁶ P.R. Chari, "Indo-Soviet Military Cooperation: A Review", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No.3, March 1979, pp. 230-244; see also, S. Nihal Singh, *The Yogi and the Bear: The Story of Indo-Soviet Relations* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1986).

⁷ See for example, David Axe, "Why South Asia Loves Peacekeeping", *The Diplomat*, December 20, 2010, available at <http://the-diplomat.com/2010/12/20/why-south-asia-loves-peacekeeping/?all=true>. Accessed on February 14, 2012.

While China's more recent contributions to international peace-keeping are widely noted and assessed, there is less appreciation of India's sustained and significant participation in the UN military operations. After the domestic political controversy over the participation in the UN intervention forces in Korea backed by the West, India carefully avoided joining great powers in their military activity during the Cold War period. Delhi squared its new commitment to international peace-keeping with the policy of non-alignment by conspicuously limiting its participation to only those operations which had the mandate of the UNSC. India became one of the biggest contributors to international peace-keeping from the 1950s.⁸

A second and equally important exception to India's military isolationism during the Cold War was New Delhi's continuing role after independence as a security provider to the smaller states of the Subcontinent. In the colonial era, the British Raj was the preeminent power in the Indian Ocean and was the guarantor of security for a number of states abutting the Subcontinent. This primacy of the Raj has been described as the 'India Centre' in the system of British imperial defence. Yet, the Raj was not merely an extension of London's policies in the Indian Ocean littoral. It devised and implemented policies that arose out of the geographic and political imperatives of securing India.⁹ Partition had ruptured the strategic unity of the Subcontinent and enormously weakened the so-called "India Centre" in Asian security affairs. The Cold War between the United States and Soviet Russia, and the re-emergence of a centralised China in control of Tibet and Xinjiang, likewise chipped away at the presumed primacy of New Delhi in the region. Yet India sought to preserve all it could of its once impressive glaxis in the Subcontinent.

Independent India revived the British Raj's protectorate arrangements with Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim in 1949–50. Sikkim was eventually integrated into India, and New Delhi saw itself as responsible for both the external and internal security of the Himalayan kingdoms.¹⁰ While military diplomacy was an important component of India's engagement with Nepal and Bhutan, Delhi also used coercive diplomacy as well as military force in its immediate neighbourhood. India's military interventions in East Pakistan and Sri Lanka and other use of force, however, are not part of the discussion here. Like the Raj, independent India claimed an exclusive sphere of influence in South Asia. An Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine for the Subcontinent, aimed at preventing other major powers from intervening in the region, became an integral element of India's policy, although not always a successful one. It also argued that its own conflicts with neighbours should be managed in a bilateral rather than a multilateral context and viewed with great suspicion the interests of major powers in its

⁸ Satish Nambiar, *For the Honour of India: A History of Indian Peacekeeping* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2009).

⁹ For a discussion of the concept of the 'India Center' see, Peter John Brobst, *The Future of the Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India's Independence and the Defence of Asia* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Srikant Dutt, "India and the Himalayan States", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 11, no. 1, 1980.

neighbourhood. To the extent it could, New Delhi also sought to prevent its neighbours from granting military bases and facilities to great powers.¹¹

After the Cold War

After the Cold War, as India reconfigured her economic and foreign policies, it was inevitable that it would take a fresh look at its military isolation of the previous decades. The logic of economic globalisation as well as the need to reconfigure its relations with the major powers after the collapse of the Soviet Union were imperatives that India had to deal – with a measure of urgency. Soon after the demise of the Soviet Union, India launched a military engagement with the United States (US). The basis for the interaction between the Indian and US armed forces was provided by the so-called ‘Kickleighter’ proposals of the early 1990s.¹² Named after the then US commander of the Pacific Armies, they provided a framework for service to service interaction between the armed forces. After that the floodgates of India’s defence diplomacy opened up. Although it was subject to many hiccups, political and bureaucratic, the vector of India’s military engagement with the rest of the world has been on a rapid upward trajectory. India has bilateral defence cooperation agreements with more than 40 countries from Brazil in Latin America to Australia in the Pacific and from Mozambique in Africa to Mongolia in inner Asia.¹³ These agreements, which vary greatly in their scope and intensity, can be grouped into three categories—major powers, immediate neighbours, and other actors of interest to India in the Indian Ocean littoral and beyond.

Starting with the major powers, India’s defence cooperation with the United States is probably the most expansive in terms of the areas covered. It has also, not surprisingly, been the most politically controversial at home and of special interest to the world. For a country which had little defence interaction with India since independence, except for a brief period between the late 1950s to early 1960s that was marked by Sino-Indian tensions, Washington has emerged as a major defence partner of India.

The US now conducts more military exercises with India than with any other partner. After a period of stop and go interaction between the armed services, they have taken off since the Bush Administration came to power in 2001. India which never bought a single weapons platform from the United States in the Cold War period, has acquired since 2005 a number of

¹¹ Devin T. Hagerty, ‘India’s Regional Security Doctrine’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 4, April 1991, pp. 351-63.

¹² For a review see John H. Gill, “U.S.-India Military-to-Military Interaction”, in Sumit Ganguly, Brian Shoup, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Beyond Words: U.S.-Indian Strategic Cooperation into the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 113-30.

¹³ For a broad survey, see Brian K. Hendrick, *India’s Strategic Defence Transformation: Expanding Global Relationships* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).

systems including the LPD ship *Trenton*, C-130 and C-17 military transport aircraft, and has ordered P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft in the last few years. Starting from a zero base at the turn of 2000s, India's FMS purchases from US have reached nearly \$6 billion at the end of 2011.¹⁴ Even more significant has been the 2005 framework agreement that defines a number of political missions, including peace-keeping, humanitarian relief and maritime security, for operational cooperation. The agreement was a clear departure from the tradition of India's defence engagement in one important sense. None of independent India's defence cooperation agreements with other powers in the past identify explicit political missions. The agreement also calls for greater defence industrial collaboration.¹⁵

While India and the United States have made much progress on defence cooperation in the 2000s, its trajectory has not always been along predicted lines and is moving ahead only in fits and starts. India's forward movement on defence engagement with the United States has opened the door for a similar, but on a much lower scale, interaction with Great Britain, France and Russia. The new relationship with Washington has been absolutely instrumental in deepening defence ties with the US allies in Asia like Japan, South Korea and Australia.¹⁶ India has also begun tentative military exchanges with China that includes high level exchanges, port calls and joint exercises. Larger political mistrust, however, continues to limit the Sino-Indian military exchanges.¹⁷

Security Diplomacy

India's security diplomacy with the neighbours falls into a separate category of its own. If inherited political legacies make Delhi a hesitant partner for defence cooperation with great powers, India's smaller neighbours have had problems of their own in drawing close to India in the military arena. In the case of Pakistan, there are additional problems with great significance of their own. Since the end of the Cold War and amidst their emerging nuclear capabilities, India and Pakistan have been encouraged by great powers to embark on greater military and nuclear confidence-building measures (CBMs). The international community was deeply concerned about the prospect of a conventional military conflict escalating to the nuclear level and the inadequate arrangements for crisis management in South Asia. From the

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Report to Congress on U.S.-India Security Cooperation*, November 2011.

¹⁵ For the text of the agreement, see Embassy of India, 'New Framework for the U.S.-India Defence Relationship', Washington DC, June 28, 2005, available at http://www.indianembassy.org/press_release/2005/June/31.htm. Accessed on February 14, 2012.

¹⁶ For a review, see David Brewster, *India as a Pacific Power* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁷ See R. N. Das, 'The Sino-Indian Defence Dialogue: Addressing the Persistent Security Dilemma', *IDS Comment* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses), December 7, 2011, available at, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomment/TheSinoIndianDefenceDialogue_rndas_071211. Accessed on February 10, 2012.

late 1980s to the end of 2000s, the two countries negotiated a range of nuclear and military CBMs.¹⁸ But Delhi and Islamabad have found it hard to institutionalise any contact between the two military establishments outside of hot line that operates between the two headquarters.¹⁹ One problem is the reluctance of the Pakistan Army for service to service interaction with its Indian counterpart. Given its exalted position in Pakistan's political system, Rawalpindi does not see Indian Army as an equivalent. Not surprisingly, the Pakistan Army has been reluctant to embark on even the simplest military CBMs, like exchange of military bands or visiting each other's staff colleges. The military CBMs between the two sides are negotiated by the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries.

India's military engagement with the armed forces of Bangladesh too had been virtually non-existent until the late 2000s. With the cooling of the relationship since the mid 1970s, Delhi too did not make much of an effort at military diplomacy in Dhaka. That has changed in the last few years. India has recognised the importance of engaging the army as an institution and has actively sought to intensify its ties since 2008. The broad framework agreement for cooperation signed by Manmohan Singh and Sheikh Hasina in 2011 has provisions for substantive military and security cooperation.

In an interesting development in 2011, India signed a strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan that includes the option of substantive Indian military support to Kabul.²⁰ The agreement came amidst the impending US withdrawal from Afghanistan and unresolved tensions between Kabul and Islamabad. While the agreement might have considerable geopolitical possibilities, the military cooperation between Delhi and Kabul is constrained by geography and the hostility of Pakistan. India's military ties with the smaller states too have begun to acquire some traction.

After the failed intervention in the Sri Lankan civil war in the late 1980s, Delhi has returned to engage the armed forces of Lanka. While Colombo has responded positively, Delhi is constrained by the opposition of the Tamil Nadu state government in India. Colombo's inability to resolve the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic question after its victory in the civil war had made it difficult for Delhi to be seen as extending military cooperation. In Nepal, while India maintains close relationship with the national army, there is widespread political opposition to the 1950 India-Nepal treaty, seen in Kathmandu as unequal and hegemonic, that provides the political basis for a close military partnership. Delhi has been willing to revise the treaty, but is yet to find a stable interlocutor that can change the terms of the pact. Meanwhile, India

¹⁸ For a review see, Michael Krepon, 'Prospects for Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 33, No.3, 2009, pp. 426-32

¹⁹ For a discussion see, Ali Ahmed, 'India-Pakistan Relations: Military Diplomacy vs. Strategic Engagement', *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 2011, pp. 147-54

²⁰ For a review of these agreements, see C. Raja Mohan, 'Modernising the Raj Legacy', *Seminar*, No. 629, January 2012.

has revised its 1949 treaty with Bhutan in 2007 to make it more in tune with contemporary realities but retaining the essence of the security partnership between a large state and its tiny partner. In 2011, India also signed a new partnership agreement with Maldives that focuses on deepening maritime security cooperation. Despite the many difficulties, Delhi is on the road to modernising its security ties with most of its neighbours, except Pakistan.²¹

Unlike the major powers and immediate neighbours, where political issues limit the possibilities for military diplomacy, the context has been far more welcoming for Delhi's defence diplomacy towards major regional actors and critically located small states in the Indian Ocean littoral that India considers its extended neighbourhood. The enthusiasm for defence cooperation with India has been widespread in Africa, the Indian Ocean littoral, East Asia and the Pacific.²² In fact the early focus of India's defence diplomacy after the Cold War was Southeast Asia. The objective was to reverse the mistrust that had accumulated during the 1980s, when India was seen as a proxy of the Soviet Union and hence a threat to the region. In the last two decades, India has gone way beyond that initial objective to establish substantive defence cooperation and military exchanges with all the major Southeast Asian countries including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam. Indian Navy has been at the forefront of lending a military dimension to India's Look East policy unveiled in the 1990s.²³ Over the years, India's military diplomacy has expanded to cover Mongolia in inner Asia, Northeast Asia and the South Pacific. Some have characterised this engagement as an effort to counter-balance China, Delhi is a long way from becoming a challenger to Beijing in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.²⁴ India's current focus is on establishing itself as a player of some relevance over the longer term in the East Asia and the Pacific. Delhi is acutely conscious of its severe limitations in projecting power into the Pacific littoral.

Indian Ocean Focus

The Indian Ocean, however, is another matter. It has attracted much attention from India's defence diplomacy in recent years.²⁵ Given its geographic centrality to the Indian Ocean, Delhi is determined to consolidate its strategic advantages in the littoral. The entry of China into the Indian Ocean has added yet another incentive for India to step up the pace and intensity of its defence diplomacy. In recent years, India has concentrated on deepening

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² For a brief overview, see David Scott, 'India's 'Extended Neighbourhood' Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power, *India Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April-June 2009, pp. 107-43.

²³ Pankaj Kumar Jha, 'India's Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia', *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 5. No. 1, January 2011, pp. 47-61.

²⁴ Iskander Rahman, 'Keeping the Dragon at Bay: India's Counter Containment of China in Asia', *Asian Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2, May 2009, pp. 114-43.

²⁵ See David Brewster, 'An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?', *Security Challenges*, Vol. 6. No.3, Spring 2010, pp. 1-20.

security cooperation with Mauritius, Seychelles, Mozambique and Madagascar in the Western littoral, Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates in the Arabian Sea, and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal. India's security diplomacy is not confined to the nations on the littoral. India has sought to develop military cooperation with Central Asia, and there has been much speculation about an Indian military base in Ayni, Tajikistan. But the reports have never been confirmed.²⁶ India has also sought to develop military cooperation with medium powers outside its extended neighbourhood. These are largely middle powers such as Brazil and Poland outside India's extended neighbourhood.

After the Cold War, India's military diplomacy has not been limited to bilateral engagement. India began to shed some of its earlier political hostility to multilateral security initiatives. Much of its traditional suspicion of multilateral security arrangements arose from its opposition to US alliances like the SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation) that were set up in the 1950s. India was also deeply sceptical of collective security proposals that emanated from the Soviet Union. India did not welcome Brezhnev's 1969 proposal for Asian collective security and was not willing to see its own bilateral treaty of 1971 as part of such a system.²⁷ India also remained ambivalent of the Soviet leader Gorbachev's proposal for Asian collective security in 1988.²⁸

India's traditional preference for defence bilateralism was slowly complemented by a number of new multilateral initiatives. In its outreach to the Southeast Asian countries in the 1990s, Delhi unveiled the *Milan* multilateral exercises in 1995. It has now been institutionalised as a biennial event that draws in a large number of countries in the Indo-Pacific littoral.²⁹ In 2008, India took another initiative by convening the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium that brought together all the navy chiefs from the Indian Ocean area.³⁰ In 1996 India joined the security forum of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) – the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum). In 2005, the ASEAN leaders invited India to join the East Asia Summit process that was to focus on broader political and security issues facing Asia. In 2010, India participated in the first expanded gathering of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting that was dubbed ADMM Plus.³¹

In assessing India's new security multilateralism, it is difficult to miss one paradox. While India has been eager to join the new Asian multilateral institutions, its participation in

²⁶ Sudha Ramachandran, 'India Airbase Grounded in Tajikistan', *Asia Times Online*, December 10, 2010.

²⁷ R.V.R. Chandrasekhara Rao, 'The Brezhnev Plan and the Indo-Soviet Treaty', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 8, No. 46, November 17, 1973, pp. 2059-65.

²⁸ Elizabeth Wishnick, 'Soviet Asian Collective Security Policy From Brezhnev to Gorbachev', *East Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1988, pp. 3-28.

²⁹ Jha, *op. cit.*, n. 23.

³⁰ For a discussion, see Yogesh V. Athawale, 'The IONS Initiative and the Prospects for Security Cooperation within the IOR', *Maritime Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2010, pp. 98-115.

³¹ Jha, *op. Ibid.*

these forums has been quiet and low-key. Many leaders of the ASEAN have often complained about India's lack-lustre performance in the East Asian multilateral institutions. Yet, India has also shown leadership in creating new institutional mechanisms like the Milan and the IONS. Delhi seems far more comfortable in multilateral military institutions set up under its leadership rather than those where the agenda and direction are set by the others. India has also begun to let its military forces occasionally participate in multilateral coalition operations. In the Tsunami relief operations at the end of 2004, Indian Navy joined the forces from the United States, Japan and Australia. This was probably the first time that India was participating in a military coalition. But the enduring opposition to any multilateral military activity came to the fore in September 2007, when India conducted joint naval exercises with the United States, Japan, Australia and Singapore. Amidst the Chinese objection to these exercises and the protests by communist parties at home, the political leadership of the defence ministry sought to step back from multilateral defence diplomacy.

Constraints: Organisational and Political

The scale and scope of India's defence diplomacy has steadily expanded since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless a number of factors—including organisational and political—continue to constrain the reach and effectiveness. At the organisational level the shortage of staff in the headquarters of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) remains a major impediment. While India's defence engagement with other countries has grown manifold in the last two decades, the number of officers servicing it in the two headquarters remains virtually the same. Second, the MEA and the MoD do not appear to be on the same page when it comes to defining the objectives of India's military diplomacy. While the leadership of the Foreign Office has come to value the possibilities of military diplomacy, the MoD remains deeply conservative and has been reluctant to plunge deep into military diplomacy. Linked to this is a third problem that is rooted in the peculiar structure of India's civil-military relations.

Few democracies have the kind of overwhelming dominance by the civilian bureaucracy over the military services that have been institutionalised in India. Not surprisingly, the civilian bureaucracy is none too enthusiastic about giving the military services greater room for international engagement. If India needs a new tool kit for military diplomacy that is in tune with its rise on the world stage, Delhi is some distance away from developing effective policy instruments and institutions. While there is growing demand for security assistance from India, Delhi is yet to put in place adequate domestic capacities for military training and arms production. While India has large training establishments that can be ramped up to service the new global demand, India's capacity to supply arms has been severely constrained by the absence of a domestic defence industrial base. While India has been a major importer of

weapons system on the world market, it is yet to develop domestic capacities to export them to other countries and leverage it as part of the nation's defence diplomacy.

Beyond the organisational challenges, Delhi will need to resolve a number of political and strategic ambiguities to strengthen its military diplomacy. We identify here at least three contentious issues in India's national security debate that constrain its defence engagement with other nations. The first is the tension between India's notions of 'strategic autonomy' and 'military partnership' with great powers, especially the United States. Since limiting military entanglement with other powers was central to the conception of India's nonalignment, India's expanding defence diplomacy with the United States has repeatedly run into political roadblocks from the left and right of the political spectrum. India's UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government and its main constituent, the Congress party, themselves, have not been united in their understanding on how far to go with the United States in the military sphere. The idea of 'interoperability' with the US armed forces remains a taboo for the political establishment. Many in Delhi associate this with the danger of becoming a military subaltern to the United States. Part of the problem also stems from the entrenched suspicion of the US intentions towards India. While the political mistrust in the United States has significantly come down, there is enough residue that limits India's military diplomacy. It is interesting to note that the many political objections raised in relation to the United States are rarely put forward in dealing with other powers.

The second tension is between the traditional imperative of territorial defence and the new logic of securing India's growing interests far from its shores. The Indian political and bureaucratic leadership continues to recoil at the ideas of 'power projection' and or developing 'expeditionary capabilities' for the Indian armed forces. Yet, they frequently call upon security forces to cope with emergencies in distant lands. The Indian Navy had to evacuate thousands from Lebanon during 2006 and Libya during 2011. While the logic of a widening security perimeter for a globalising India begins to impinge on Delhi, the Indian security debate tends to be reticent about acquiring and deploying the instruments of power projection.

The third tension is between the logic of India's own forward military presence amidst expanding global interests and the traditional opposition to foreign military bases. To be able to operate in distant waters, the Indian Navy will need what might be called 'turn-around' facilities around the Indo-Pacific littoral. To acquire such facilities, India will have to develop a range of special political relationships and military partnerships. It was precisely these arrangements of the superpowers that the Indian security discourse had rejected outright during the Cold War. The Indian strategic community now objects to China's efforts to develop maritime access in the Indian Ocean. While India's ideology of nonalignment prevents it from accepting a junior partnership with a larger power, the logic of Delhi's expanding interests demands developing military presence in and security cooperation with

smaller countries. In fact many smaller nations which face threats from other powers are beseeching India to contribute more to their security. The logic of this universe is indeed very different from the one that India is coming from and its national security debate will be under pressure to adapt.

Looking ahead, it is indeed reasonable to assert that Delhi's military diplomacy will acquire greater traction in the coming years. There will be greater regional and international demand for India's military services, support and cooperation. Besides the pull factor, there is also the push factor in India's defence diplomacy. As its interests expand and India will have to secure them far from its shores, Delhi will reach out and build defence partnerships with countries big and small. India's defence diplomacy is a rewarding area of academic inquiry. Investigations into India's defence diplomacy will throw much light on India's new self-perception as a rising power and its contribution to the security of others and the international system as a whole. As Delhi resolves the tension between the new national security imperatives and the inherited ideology of nonalignment, it should reveal the emerging relationship between military power and political purpose in India's global strategy.

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