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India as a Security Provider: Reconsidering the Raj Legacy

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Introduction

That India has become a ‘net provider of security’ in the Indian Ocean and beyond is now a widely stated proposition. Policy makers in Delhi as well as outside have come to emphasise this new Indian role. Addressing the naval commanders at the end of 2011, India’s Defence Minister A. K. Antony said the Indian Navy has been ‘mandated to be a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region’. He added: ‘Most of the major international shipping lanes are located along our island territories. This bestows on us the ability to be a potent and stabilising force in the region.’² While India has been somewhat slow in claiming this role, the rest of the world has watched India’s military capabilities grow and have assessed the potential consequences. The 2010 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review sums up the current American view of India’s role: ‘India’s military capabilities are rapidly improving through increased defence acquisitions, and they now include long-range maritime surveillance, maritime interdiction and patrolling, air interdiction, and strategic airlift. India has already established its worldwide military influence through counter-piracy, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. As its military capabilities grow, India will contribute to Asia as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond.’³

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² ‘Navy to safeguard Indian Ocean Islands: Antony’, *Indian Express*, 13 October, 2011, p. 8.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010* (Washington DC: February 2010), p. 60.

Throughout the Cold War period, when the principles of non-alignment and self-imposed military isolation dominated India's world view, there was little interest in New Delhi in providing security to other nations beyond the subcontinent. It might be recalled that India refused to respond when Singapore sought military support in the mid 1960s. It might also be noted that India's defence cooperation agreement with Singapore (2003) has now become emblematic of Delhi's new military diplomacy that is gathering momentum.⁴ India's new military engagement with the world marks an important transition from the isolation and non-alignment of the 1960s to expanded partnership with neighbours, regional actors and major powers.⁵ The emerging shift in India's security role is the result of a number of factors. These include the rapid economic growth of India, the steady expansion of its military capabilities, and Delhi's willingness to leverage its military strength in the pursuit of larger foreign policy objectives.

This paper argues that Delhi's role as a regional security provider is not new. From the late 18th century to the mid 20th century, the subcontinent was at the heart of regional security system in the Indian Ocean, dominated by Great Britain. The Raj was the principal provider of security in the region stretching from Aden to Malacca and Southern Africa to South China Sea. If the Royal Navy established total dominance over the waters of the Indian Ocean and its approaches, the Indian Army was the sword arm of the Raj in ensuring stability in the vast littoral. As the Raj epoch came to a close in the 20th century, there was mounting nationalist opposition in the subcontinent to the use of Indian armed forces for the pursuit of regional primacy. The emergence of independent India and its emphasis on anti-colonial solidarity, opposition to imperialism and its quest for an area of peace in Asia and the Indian Ocean have been widely seen as marking a definitive break from the Raj legacy as the principal provider of regional security. This paper examines these two conflicting political legacies from the years of the British Raj.

The Protectorate System

As it consolidated its early footholds in India and began to expand its territorial control in the subcontinent through the 18th Century, the East India Company had to constantly fend off European rival forces from poaching into its newly acquired possessions. Fears of French invasion of India in the early 19th century, followed by concerns about Russian threat to the subcontinent through the 19th century and the concerns about German advances towards the

⁴ See David Brewster, 'India's security partnership with Singapore', *Pacific Review*, Vol. 22, No. 5, 2009, pp. 597-618.

⁵ For a broad discussion of this theme see, C. Raja Mohan, 'India's Military Diplomacy: From Isolation to Partnership', *ISAS Working Paper*, No. 144 (Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies, February 2012).

subcontinent in early 20th century defined the so-called Great Game on the fringes of India.⁶ While there were different schools in the Raj on how best to defend India, they all agreed on the need to secure India as far away from its subcontinental frontiers as possible. Some saw it best done in Afghanistan and Central Asia and others focused on the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. In practice, this meant cultivating special political relationships and developing military influence in all the regions abutting India. What this process led to was a massive sphere of influence of the British Raj that was far more extensive than the territories it directly controlled.

The central strategic motive of the Raj in building up wide-ranging security relationships in its neighbourhood was to establish a *cordon sanitaire* around India. 'To protect its northern and eastern borders from invasion, British India established spheres of influence in Siam, Tibet and Chinese Turkistan, and convinced the Amir of Afghanistan to enter into exclusive treaty relations with the British Crown, turning his country into a British-protected state. To protect its trade and communication route through the Persian Gulf and prevent the establishment of a foreign naval base there, British India established spheres of influence in Persia and Ottoman Iraq, and offered a series of treaties through which it became increasingly responsible for the protection of the coastal Eastern Arabia and the island of Bahrain'.⁷ The purpose of these treaties was to get local chieftains to collaborate with the Raj in the pacification of the Persian Gulf and the exclusion of foreign influence threatening British Indian interests. 'To protect its shipping routes through the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, British India annexed the port of Aden and established consulates and agencies in Western Arabia, Ottoman Egypt, and Zanzibar. After Aden became a vital port, British India signed protective treaties with rulers of the Aden Protectorate and the tribes of the British Somaliland Protectorate to safeguard the port.'⁸

The massive protectorate system fused with the creation of a complex territorial structure for British India. The British were not satisfied with drawing a single line that separated sovereignty of the Raj from the surrounding regions. Instead the Raj created a three-fold frontier. 'One frontier was the administrative boundary up to which the Government of India exercised full authority enforcing its own legal and political systems as standards for society. Beyond this was a zone claimed as Indian Territory, but in which the Government made no attempt to impose its laws or territorial jurisdiction. Beyond this zone was the third area, the protectorate, the independent kingdom, but tied by special treaties of friendship and

⁶ Edward Ingram, *In Defence of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East 1775-1842* (London: Frank Cass, 1984).

⁷ James Onley, 'The Raj Reconsidered: British India's Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence in Asia and Africa', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. XL, no. 1, March 2009, pp. 44-45.

⁸ *Ibid.*

obligation to the Government of India.’⁹ The maintenance of this ring fence was a dynamic process requiring constant projection of military power and exercise of political and diplomatic influence to maintain the integrity of the glacis. As Lord Curzon, the Viceroy to India at the turn of the 20th century, put it: ‘Spheres of Interest (the lowest form of buffer) tend to become Spheres of Influence; temporary Leases to become perpetual; Spheres of Influence tend to become protectorates; Protectorates to be the forerunners of complete incorporation.’¹⁰

At the heart of the system was the imperative of ensuring that the regimes around the subcontinent were friendly to the Raj and kept away from rival European powers. ‘The basic principle was to identify the integrity and independence of the weak border states with the security of India and to afford them protection against encroachment by any strong European imperial power. Their foreign relations were wholly controlled and determined by the Government of India (GoI), and they were not free to either entertain missions from the Western powers to alienate their territory to them or grant them any concessions. But once their unequivocal subordination in the matter of external policies was assured, no attempt was made to intervene in their internal affairs.’¹¹ The need for this *cordon sanitaire* around India, however, was driven not merely by considerations of external threats from European imperial powers, but by the internal challenges as well. ‘Almost always, border policies and foreign policies in general had as a very important component a concern for internal security, as well as for defence from external enemies. Peace on the frontier was related to internal peace. The fear of Russia was not primarily fear of a Russian invasion of India; what was taken seriously in Calcutta all through the 19th century was the fear of internal uprisings that might be triggered by unrest on the frontier.’¹²

The Indian Army

The Indian Army’s history dates back to the turn of the 17th century and its military engagement with the rest of the world to the late 18th century.¹³ To understand how India’s role as a security provider might be headed, it is important to recall its inherited military

⁹ Ainslee T. Embree, ‘The British Concept of South Asian Borders’, Peter Gaeffke and David A. Utz, eds., *The Countries of South Asia: Boundaries, Extensions, and Interrelations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988) p. 98.

¹⁰ George N. Curzon, *Frontiers: The Romanes Lecture 1907* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 20.

¹¹ Bisheshwar Prasad, *Our Foreign Policy Legacy: A Study of British Indian Foreign Policy* (Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1965), p. 57.

¹² Embree, *op. cit.* n.9, p. 94.

¹³ For a useful history, see T. A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India: The Development of British Land Forces in South Asia, 1600-1947* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

diplomatic traditions, especially the expansive expeditionary role of the Indian army. Under the East India Company and the British Crown, the Indian army served three broad functions. One was to protect the ever expanding frontiers of the Raj; the second was the domestic constabulary function. It is the third function of the Indian Army as the ‘imperial military reserve’ of Great Britain that is of interest here. The Indian Army was deployed in an expeditionary mode from the Eastern Mediterranean to the South China Sea starting from the late 18th century. The first expeditionary operation was mounted in 1762 from Madras in southern India to the Philippines. Through the 19th century, Indian troops saw action in theaters ranging from Egypt to Japan, from Southern Africa to Southern China.¹⁴ Military historians assess that the British primacy in the Indian Ocean was rooted in the Royal Navy’s command of the seas and the role of the Indian Army in acquiring and stabilising the empire:

‘The extraordinary organisation known as the Indian army was as important to Britain’s domination of the Indian Ocean region as was trade and the warships of the Royal Navy and the Bombay Marine, the East India Company’s private fleet. The Indian Army was a unique establishment, an Oriental expeditionary force that the British Governor-General in Calcutta, acting on his own authority, could hurl across the seas to intervene in Africa, Arabia, the East Indies, the Mediterranean, or South-east Asia...

No rival power came close to creating and mastering such an institution and, coupled with British sea power, the Indian Army gave Britain the military edge that took it to the top of imperial tree and enabled it to withstand even the sternest challenge to its mastery of east of Suez. With the power of the Indian Army at its command, the Government of India was always quick to respond to regional threats to India’s security, usually leading to imperial gains.’¹⁵

Besides conquest of new territories and gun-boat diplomacy, the Indian manpower was also useful for the British in developing internal security in parts of the empire that were outside India. The Raj developed the tradition of recruiting soldiers in India for service in special local forces in colonies and protectorates both in Asia and Africa. Sikh contingents, for example, saw service in the African protectorates, and the Malay States Guides regiment was largely recruited in India.¹⁶ Britain’s heavy global foot print in the 19th century, secured by

¹⁴ For a comprehensive account of all Indian expeditionary operations from the late 18th to the end of the 19th century in theatres as diverse as the Mediterranean and China, see, Intelligence Branch, Army Headquarters, *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India*, Vol. VI (Simla: Government of India, 1907), Reissued by Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1983.

¹⁵ Ashley Jackson, ‘Britain in the Indian Ocean Region’, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2011, pp.145-60.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive account of the Sikh recruitment, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 102-35.

the Indian armed forces and tribal levies, generated enormous military activity across a diverse terrain—from mountains to deserts and jungles—that provided the basis for the emergence of Special Forces in the Second World War adept at irregular warfare.¹⁷

The Indian expeditionary operations took on a dramatically larger role during the two World Wars, as London turned to its imperial military reserve in India. During the First World War, nearly 1.2 million Indians were recruited for service in the army. When it ended, about 950,000 Indian troops were serving overseas. According to the official count, between 62,000 and 65,000 Indian soldiers were killed in that war. India provided a critical contingent of trained troops during the emergency of 1914 and after that made a large scale effort, especially in the Middle East, through the war. India also became an important resource for the British war economy.¹⁸ In World War II, the Indian army saw action on fronts ranging from Italy and North Africa to East Africa, the Middle East and the Far East. In South-East Asia alone, 700,000 Indian troops joined the effort to oust Japanese armies from Burma, Malaya and Indo-China. By the time the war ended, the Indian army numbered a massive 2.5 million men, the largest all-volunteer force the world had ever seen. Through the war, the Indian army continued to maintain its traditional duties of territorial defence in the North-Western frontier of the subcontinent and aiding the civil powers.¹⁹

Nationalist Opposition

As it gathered political momentum after the First World War, the Indian national movement began to oppose the use of the army by the British for imperial purposes without the consent of the Indian people. As a consequence, tension began to mount between the conceptions of British imperial interests and the national interests of India. Well before the First World War, the first signs of Indian opposition to the use of Indian Army began to emerge. The very first session in 1885 of the Indian National Congress (INC), which would become the principal vehicle of Indian nationalist movement passed a resolution questioning the Government of India's annexation of upper Burma. The INC suggested that if the Government of India proceeded with the annexation, the whole of Burma should be separated from the Indian

¹⁷ Ashley Jackson, 'The Imperial Antecedents of British Special Forces', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 154, No. 3, 2009, pp. 62-68; see also, T.R. Moreman, 'Small Wars' and 'Imperial Policing': The British army and the theory and practice of colonial warfare in the British empire, 1919-39', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 19, No.4, 1996, pp. 105-31.

¹⁸ David Omissi, 'The Indian Army in the First World War, 1914-1918', in Daniel P. Marston and Chandar S. Sundaram, eds., *A Military History of India and South Asia: From the East India Company to the Nuclear Era* (London: Praeger, 2007), pp. 74-87.

¹⁹ See, Daniel Marston, 'A Force Transformed: The Indian Army and the Second World War', *Ibid.*, pp. 102-22.

Administration and constituted as a separate colony.²⁰ The main ground of opposition to annexation was the fear that it would lead to increased taxation in India, but there was also an implicit wariness at the Raj's policy of conquering alien lands. By the eighth session in 1892, the INC had initiated a new approach to the question of rising military expenditure. It declared that this increase had been caused mainly by the military activity - in pursuit of imperial interests - beyond India's 'natural lines' of defence. The INC demanded that the Government of India be relieved of at least part of the defence expenditure. The INC renewed this demand in 1899, when the Indian troops were sent to South Africa and China.

The initial emphasis on the revenue argument steadily began to acquire a political dimension. The INC began to question the Government's characterisation of the Russian threat to the Indian frontiers and blamed London and Calcutta for initiating the first moves in the rivalry with Moscow in the so-called Great Game. While downplaying the Russian threat, the nationalists reaffirmed their support to the Government of India in the unlikely event of a Russian attack against India. Besides challenging the premises of the Russian threat, the nationalists also began to oppose intervention in and domination of India's neighbours by the Raj. When the First World War broke out, some radical nationalists based abroad sought to incite rebellion in India. But the leadership of the INC unambiguously supported the British war effort against Germany. The emerging leader of the nationalist movement, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, volunteered to serve in the Great War and advised Indian compatriots in London, 'to think imperially in the best sense of the word and do their duty'. Congress used its support for Britain in the war to bolster its demand for greater Indian participation in the higher ranks of the defence forces and in general for the abolition of all discrimination against Indians in military affairs. It pressed for the Indianisation of the officer corps and the establishment of military schools and colleges within the subcontinent to facilitate local recruitment.

The end of the Great War saw a dramatic deterioration of the relations between the INC and the British Raj. As the country became increasingly restive and the colonial oppression mounted, nationalist sentiment surged. The world view of the INC, which launched the non-cooperation movement at home, began to diverge rapidly and widely from that of the Government of India. In May 1921, Gandhi declared that if war broke out between Britain and Afghanistan, he would openly tell the people that it would be a crime to help the British government as it had lost the confidence of the Indian nation. Soon after the Congress formally dissociated itself from the British foreign policy. In November 1921, the INC issued the first statement on the kind of foreign policy that a free India would pursue. The INC declared that the Government of India in no way represented Indian opinion and that the

²⁰ The following discussion borrows from Bimal Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy: The Indian National Congress and World Affairs* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1962), pp. 38-78, and Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, n. 11, pp. 41-63.

policies of the Raj had been guided by considerations of holding India in subjection rather than of protecting her borders. As a self-governing country in the future, the INC said, India would have nothing to fear from neighbouring states or have designs on any of them. It declared that the GoI's treaties with the neighbouring states were designed to perpetuate the imperial exploitation of India.

As its world view began to crystallise, the INC began to express solidarity with others under colonial subjugation. There was special attention to the Middle East and China. 'In 1925, Gandhi received a cable from the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs of the National Government of China (Canton), describing the use of Indian soldiers for shooting the Chinese people. Gandhi called it a humiliating and degrading spectacle, if true, and declared that if Indians had any voice in the management of their country, they would not have tolerated such a thing.'²¹ In 1927, the Madras session of Congress demanded withdrawal of Indian troops from China, Mesopotamia, Persia and from all British colonies and foreign countries wherever they might be.

The divergence between the national movement and the GoI began to deepen in the 1930s in the run-up to the Second World War. In 1938, the INC declared that it would not be a party to a new European War and would oppose the Britain use of Indian resources and men. As Europe drifted to war, INC leader Jawaharlal Nehru declared on 18 April, 1939: 'Our path is clear. It is one of complete opposition to the fascists; it is also one of opposition to imperialism. We are not going to throw in our resources in defence of empire. But we would gladly offer those very resources for the defence of democracy, the democracy of free India lined up with other free countries.' The INC vehemently challenged the Raj's massive mobilisation for the Second World War on the grounds that the new provincial assemblies in British India were not consulted on the decision. Some of its leaders emphasised the 'right of the Indian people' to refuse to participate in the 'imperialist war'. While a section of the nationalists, led by Subhas Chandra Bose, made the case for taking advantage of the inter-imperialist contradictions to promote early Indian independence, such a course was seen as opportunistic and rejected by the INC leadership. Given its principled opposition to fascism, the INC offered to cooperate with Great Britain if it agreed to Indian independence. The suggestion was that a free India would gladly associate itself with other world democracies to fight aggression. A British declaration on granting independence, however, was not forthcoming. In September 1939, the INC insisted that war-time collaborations between India and Britain 'must be between equals by mutual consent' and questioned the sincerity of the Allied declaration that the war was being fought to preserve freedom. Despite the INC's refusal to support the war effort, India's contribution to the Second World War turned out to be massive. But the absence of political cooperation between the national movement and the

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

Raj during the Second World War resulted in independent India developing a collective amnesia about the contributions of the Indian army to the allied victory.

The Dual Legacy

Colonial rule saw the emergence of two very different streams of India's external security orientation. In order to ensure the security of India, the Raj adopted a policy of dominating the weak states on its frontiers and subordinating their foreign relations. This was 'an extension of the policy of Subsidiary Alliances which had been practised towards the Indian (princely) States. The Indian government had reacted strongly to the emergence of any great or powerful state in Asia that might disturb the equilibrium of power and therefore endanger India's safety. The formation of a belt of friendly supported states along the Indian borders was the mode adopted to ensure India's safety'. The nationalist attitude, that gained coherence in the inter-war period, in contrast, was critical of imperialism and favoured 'the emergence of independent Asian states, free from imperialist domination of whatever variety. It stood for peace, international cooperation and goodwill and supported the growth of nationalism in Asia and Africa'.²² If the difference between these two world views was clear as daylight, the fact is that both these traditions had an impact on independent India's attitude to external security.

The internationalism of the INC that emerged in the inter-war period laid the foundations for independent India's policies of non-alignment, anti-colonial solidarity, and the democratisation of international relations. During the inter-war years, the nationalist movement became increasingly alienated from the policies of Western powers. 'As a consequence, there was on the eve of independence a natural reluctance to become involved in the political commitments to those states whose policies Indians had so recently and vigorously repudiated. As theretofore they had sought to dissociate themselves from international disputes incited by the policies of European powers, with the attainment of independence and with fresh memories of the horror of war perpetrated by Western states Indians now readily embraced the policy of non-alignment'.²³ India's rejection of military blocs in the post independence period, opposition to use of military force in resolving disputes, promotion of Asian solidarity, and mobilisation of newly liberated colonies through the non-aligned movement flowed naturally from the nationalist world view that emerged in the final decades of colonial rule. This is not the place to go into the problems that this

²² Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, n. 11, p. 62.

²³ T.A. Keenlyside, 'Prelude to Power: The Meaning of Non-Alignment Before Indian Independence', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 3, Autumn 1980, pp. 467; for a more recent discussion of pre-independence roots of non-alignment, see William Kuracina, 'Colonial India and External Affairs: Relating Indian Nationalism to Global Politics', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6, 2007, pp. 517-532.

approach to international affairs generated for the leaders of independent India. For all its limitations, the vision of non-alignment has retained its huge political appeal to the Indian elites even as it rises on the world stage in the 21st century.²⁴

While the idea of non-alignment continues to thrive, especially in the discussion of international issues, it never had much salience for India's policy towards its immediate neighbourhood. Unacknowledged though it is, the Raj policy towards the region, that came under intense criticism from the national movement, survived in a recognisable form, in India's strategic thinking after independence. Although Nehru was critical of alliances and military pacts by the great powers, he signed security agreements with smaller Himalayan neighbours - Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal - during 1949-50. All three were based on the treaty arrangements that the Raj had instituted with the smaller Himalayan kingdoms. The germane question here is not about the apparent inconsistency of Nehru's world view. It is about the reality that independent India accepted its inheritance as the protector and provider of security to the smaller states on its periphery.²⁵ Equally significant was the Indian opposition, much like that of the Raj, to the intervention of great powers in its periphery. India's opposition to the 1954 US military pact with Pakistan and China's rising security profile in its neighbourhood over the decades, underlined the enduring relevance of the notion of an exclusive sphere of influence that the Raj had pursued.²⁶ Like the Raj, India did use force in its immediate neighbourhood - in East Pakistan and Sri Lanka for example - and made frequent political interventions to stabilise its periphery. The Indian policy, some have argued, is rooted in the framework of territoriality and security structures constructed under the Raj.²⁷ While the INC strongly criticised the regional hegemony of the Raj, it could not avoid the responsibilities that came with statehood. Central to that burden was the imperative of pacifying its periphery and keeping other powers out of it to the extent possible. This policy is not unique to India. The United States has long sought to maintain its primacy in the Western hemisphere, Russia in its 'near abroad', and China, more recently, is seeking to reduce the dominance of the United States in its East Asian periphery.

In opposing the use of Indian armed forces by the Raj during the colonial era, the Indian national movement sought to differentiate between 'imperial interests' of Great Britain and

²⁴ For a recent attempt by a private group to revive the ideology, see *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century*, New Delhi, February 2012, available at <http://cprindia.org/workingpapers/3844-nonalignment-20-foreign-and-strategic-policy-india-twenty-first-century>. Accessed on 4 March, 2012.

²⁵ For a discussion see, Srikant Dutt, 'India and the Himalayan Kingdoms', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1980, pp. 71-81.

²⁶ For a discussion of independent India's South Asian security policy, see Devin T. Hagerty, 'India's Regional Security Doctrine', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 4, April 1991, pp. 351-63.

²⁷ For a discussion, see Ainslie T. Embree, *Imagining India: Essays on Indian History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 76-93.

the ‘national interests’ of India. This attempted separation was natural in the context of India’s struggle for freedom from the British colonial rule. There is much scholarship on British Indian history that questions a simple depiction of Calcutta (and later Delhi) as a mere implementer of London’s imperial policy towards India’s periphery. As historian Pradeep Barua argues, ‘the British colonial establishment in India as represented by the bureaucracy and the Indian army had developed into an independent institution with only nominal control from Whitehall. Its members, while still sharing common cultural, social, and political bonds with England, had over time developed a uniquely “Anglo-Indian” perspective of India’s role within the context of the British empire. Their actions, though rarely pro-Indian from the perspective of the Indian nationalists, nevertheless followed a more independent route than Whitehall would have preferred. Nowhere was this independence more assertive than in the emergence of a distinctive British/Indian, and as an indirect consequence Commonwealth, imperial defence policy’.²⁸ Other historians have pointed to the critical role of geographic imperative, as viewed from Calcutta and Delhi, in shaping many of the security policies of the Raj. Writing about the continuous projection of military force from India by the Raj, Metcalf argues that ‘connected to this deployment of Indian troops was the construction of an arc of power emanating from the government’s mountaintop aerie at Simla and extending throughout this Indian Ocean arena. India remained always, to be sure, a subordinate partner in the larger British Empire, but from Africa to eastern Asia, its army made possible the empire’s very existence. At the same time, sheltered by this military umbrella, India’s Foreign Office claimed responsibility for the movement of troops and making of imperial policy throughout much of Asia’.²⁹ Metcalf concludes that the military power projection of the Raj was directed at British imperial interests, but, as often as not, followed the interests of India as a territorial entity.

Historian Robert Blyth has explored in great detail, the relative autonomy of the Raj in developing and implementing foreign and security policies in the Western Indian Ocean. Writing about the ‘empire of the Raj’ in the region stretching from Persia to the East Coast of Africa, Blyth argues that ‘in theory, initiative in external policy rested with officials in London rather than the men on the spot or their political masters in Bombay and Calcutta. However, in the days of the East India Company, and for some time beyond, this represented an unrealistic and impractical ideal. The great distance between India and Britain, slow and unreliable communications, and the frequent need for a more immediate and flexible response to pressing issues made it impossible for the metropole to exercise any meaningful control over the details of Indian external policy. It was the Indian government, not the remote offices of Whitehall, which handled the minutiae of treaty negotiations, the promotion

²⁸ Pradeep Barua, ‘Strategies and doctrines of imperial defence: Britain and India, 1919-45’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 25, No.2, 1997, pp.240-266.

²⁹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California press, 2007), p. 69.

and protection of commercial activities, and small-scale naval and military operations'.³⁰ Blyth goes on to assert that there were indeed clear limits to British India's 'independence' in foreign affairs. 'India, could not, of course, conduct a foreign policy detrimental to broader British concerns, but through necessity it was given the latitude to develop an approach driven by singular regional perspective, which was more suited to its own needs.'³¹ By the turn of the 20th century, Blyth points out, London sought to exercise greater control over the policies of the Raj; yet financial considerations did demand giving a measure of autonomy to the Raj. 'While Indian involvement in external affairs might frustrate Imperial officials, produce inter-departmental and inter-governmental friction, and lead to excessive delays in the formulation and implementation of policy, Whitehall had to balance the benefits of metropolitan control against its costs. The Indian sphere, almost wholly financed by Calcutta exchequer, certainly represented an inherently lucrative deal for the Imperial government'.³²

Conclusion

It is not common place in the contemporary discussion of India's foreign and security policies to explore the enduring legacies of the Raj. Our preceding discussion has shown that the Raj was not a simple extension in space of British imperial interests. The nature of modern India's territorial construction, its geographic circumstances, the size and massive resources played important roles in shaping the policies of the Raj besides the interests of the metropolitan power. It is not surprising that these structural elements, related to security of India as a geopolitical entity, have ensured a measure of continuity in Delhi's regional security policy after independence. Independent India's opposition to intervention of other powers in its periphery, security assistance to smaller neighbours, and the claim of a security perimeter running from Aden to Malacca are rooted in the definition of territorial India's defence imperatives under the Raj. To be sure, independent India was different from the Raj; but there was no escaping the enduring geographic imperatives of India's security. Divided at decolonisation, independent India was also a much weaker entity than the Raj. Unsurprisingly, Delhi could not keep the great powers out of its periphery nor could it prevent its neighbours mobilising others to balance India.

The partition of the subcontinent, the emergence of new borders with Pakistan and the entry of China into Tibet posed security challenges to independent India that were unimaginable during the Raj years. As it coped with the new threats on its changed frontiers, independent India found that it had enough 'military surplus' that could be devoted to the maintenance of

³⁰ Robert J. Blyth, *The empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa, and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (London: Palgrave), p. 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

international peace and security. While he actively dissociated India from the military blocs in the Cold War, Nehru persisted with an international security role. In choosing to join international peacekeeping efforts, Nehru changed the previous unconditional nationalist opposition to sending troops abroad to deploying them only under the flag of the United Nations. Over the decades, India has become one of the largest contributors to international peacekeeping. India's future role as a security provider is likely to gain further traction as India's economic and military weight in the international system continues to grow. At the same time, the other legacy from the colonial era - the emphasis on third world solidarity, non-use of force, and cooperative security - is bound to constrain India's military role beyond its borders. As rising India comes to terms with the competing legacies from the Raj, its emerging role as a security provider, the geographic scope of its international military activities, and the terms and conditions under which it might deploy its armed forces beyond borders are all valuable areas of academic inquiry in the coming years.

Quite clearly, the philosophy, political framework and operational style of India's new military role will be significantly different from that of the Raj, for India is not a colonial power. Yet, like the Raj, India is emerging as one of the important military powers in Asia and the Indian Ocean and there appears to be new political will in Delhi to see itself as a regional security provider. While the United States remains the pre-eminent military power in India's immediate neighbourhood, its military resources are under increasing stress. China is fast emerging as a consequential military power with growing interests in the Indian Ocean and is likely to step into India's own presumed sphere of influence.

Meanwhile, Delhi itself is likely to emerge as an important element in the new regional balance of power. The domestic logic of securing the vital interests spread around the Indian Ocean and beyond is likely to act as a push factor on Delhi's expanding regional role. The growing international interest in India's possible contribution to collective goods in the Indian Ocean and beyond, the great power demands on India to participate in security coalitions, and the requests from smaller states for Indian security assistance constitute the new pull factors on India's emerging role as a security provider.

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