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[The End of Arms Control?](#)

Between Arms Race and Alliance

How Pakistan and China Are Driving Indian Defence Policy

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Although India's national security has since its independence in 1947 been endangered by conflicts with its neighbours, Pakistan and China, above all others it is the latter that has become the benchmark of Indian defence measures. The Indian military must undergo extensive reforms if it is to remain prepared for future challenges. Internationally, ambitious India hopes to maintain its strategic autonomy and avoid dependence on world powers.

Public discourse in India often focuses on Pakistan and the danger of terror that, as alleged by India, the country represents. At the same time, India's conventional superiority, demonstrated by victories in all wars against Pakistan, is omnipresent. While Pakistan remains a tactical problem for India in the short term, it is China that is increasingly becoming the decisive parameter of Indian defence modernisation, and will be a crucial factor in shaping the balance of power in the region. Another factor here continues to be the tense situation in the Kashmir region, to which both India and Pakistan lay claim. In February 2019, this conflict reached a new apex during the terror attack in the Pulwama district. India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) then shifted its political election campaign to the issue of national security. This enabled it to achieve a better result at this year's parliamentary elections than was even the case in the 2014 elections, in which it received an absolute majority in the Indian Lower House. Any dialogue between India and Pakistan now seems to be a distant prospect. China, meanwhile, is proving to be a supporter of Pakistan and aiming for further investments as part of its Silk Road initiative.

India shares contested borders with both Pakistan and China that emphasise the countries' conflicting territorial claims. The Line of Control (LoC), a de facto border with Pakistan, and the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which separates the Indian-controlled territory from the Chinese-controlled territory in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, have been the source of numerous conflicts for decades. India is in a

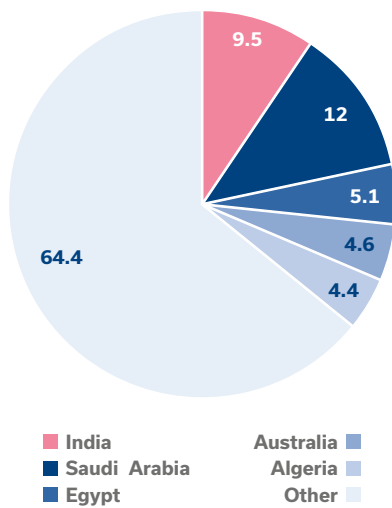
challenging security policy environment, facing off the two countries mentioned above, both of whom are now decisively modernising their military capacities.¹

The analysis below is based on the following thesis: Although Pakistan is a factor that continues to have a decisive effect on India's defence procurement and represents a focus of Indian foreign policy, China is quickly becoming a long-term strategic challenge, especially in the area of defence. This development raises the question of whether, in the face of military pressure, India is more likely to prefer bandwagoning with the US or continuing its longstanding alliance with Russia. At the same time, a central question is what role is played by defence policy dynamics between world powers and aspiring world powers. According to analysis by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), between 2014 and 2018 India was the second-largest weapons importer (after Saudi Arabia) while the US occupied an uncontested first place in weapons exports, followed by Russia, which, despite declining exports, remains India's largest arms supplier.

India's Constant Race against China

China continues to be a key issue for the Indian Prime Minister with respect to security and defence strategies, but in a much more multi-dimensional form than in the 1960s. Two years after its victory in the 1962 border war, China conducted its first nuclear test, causing great concern in India.

Fig. 1: Share of Largest Importers of Weapons Worldwide 2014–2018 (in Per Cent)



Source: Own illustration based on SIPRI database 2019, SIPRI Arms Transfers Database; in: <https://bit.ly/2p16QKG> [27 Jun 2019].

The danger that India currently fears from China can be summarised in the following points:

1. A long Indian-Chinese border along which China maintains the upper hand in ground offensive capability,
2. Continued Chinese support of Pakistan,
3. China's industrial and economic dominance over India,
4. Increasing Chinese naval power, which could play a crucial role in challenging India in the Indo-Pacific.

India's air force is currently distinguished primarily by a variety of types so great as to impede interoperability among the systems and by the rapid ageing of the single-engine Indian fleet, Such as the Russian single-engine MiG-21 interceptor. Other models, such as the French Mirage 2000 and Rafale multi-role combat aircraft, are

in short supply. Security concerns on the part of countries supplying India preclude the provision of codes that would allow Russian systems to communicate with Western data. This prevents India from generating synergies among its fleets.

The Indian answer to increasing Chinese capacities, from nuclear submarine fleets to modern aircraft carriers, appears insufficient thus far. One reason for this is the small Indian budget, while another is insufficient access to Western technology that, experience has shown, is superior to Chinese technology. Instead of choosing a uniform programme based on submarines, surface ships, electronics, and databases from the West, India is selecting a strategy for the future based on three different aircraft carriers, each carrying a different type of aircraft. Despite its fundamental access to superior technology, India's current procurement strategies mean that it has achieved no technological advantage, and that the massive Chinese military-industrial complex gained a significant head start on the fractional and incompatible Indian fleet. In a nutshell, China represents a significant long-term threat to India, especially since India has no clear strategy for dealing with China.²

Chinese Ambitions in Pakistan

The strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan may pose more of a military challenge to New Delhi than anything else. In addition to naval cooperation, it has increased on other fronts and benefitted from improved interoperability between the armed forces of both countries. This interoperability extends to military hardware as well, with increasing compatibility in accoutrement. The Pakistani air force is deploying jets built in China and is conducting joint exercises with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) air force.³

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an important part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and runs through the part of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan. A Chinese-funded motorway is situated only 50 kilometers from the location of the most recent attack. It is

Table 1: Armed Forces of India and China in Comparison (by Branches of Service, Classes or Soldiers, as of 2019)

	India	China
Air forces		
Interceptor and air dominance fighters	62	759
Fighter bombers	561	702
Close air support aircrafts	117	240
Spy, reconnaissance and surveillance aircrafts	3	51
Airborne Warning And Control System (AWACS)	4	13
Tanker aircrafts	6	13
Bombers	0	172
Naval forces		
Submarines	16	59
Aircraft carriers	1	1
Destroyers	14	27
Frigates	13	59
Patrol and coastal ships	106	205
Ground forces		
Army	1,237,000	975,000
Battle tanks	3,565	5,800
Armoured personnel carriers	3,100	5,000
Artillery pieces	9,719	8,954
Self-propelled artillery	2,395	7,396

Source: Own compilation based on The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2019, The Military Balance 2019, London, cited in: Pant/Bommakanti 2019, n. 1.

therefore hardly surprising that China has a great interest in de-escalating the conflict, especially since it is pursuing its own interests and intends to secure the Economic Corridor as a whole. On 13 March 2019, China also used its Security Council veto to once again block placing the leader of the *Jaish-e Mohammed* (JeM), Masood Azhar, who is thought to be living freely

in Pakistan, on the United Nations' terror list for the time being. On the one hand, China has now reversed this decision, a move that New Delhi has interpreted as a positive signal.⁴ While on the other hand it is clear that China cannot solve Pakistan's domestic policy problems, yet the interests and potential financial opportunities in Pakistan are currently too great to ignore.

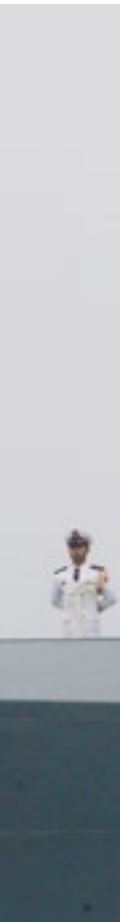
India Strives for Military Strength

From 2014 to 2018, 40 per cent of all global arms purchases went to the Asia and Oceania region – an indicator that the continent is becoming increasingly militarised. Especially in the area of nuclear weapons, significant levels of armament were witnessed on the part of Pakistan, China, and India in 2018. While China has invested in expanding and diversifying its nuclear arsenal, both India and Pakistan have increased the quantity of fissile material, which could lead to a significant rise in the number of nuclear weapons over the next decade.⁵ The primary purpose of the weapons is not for actual deployment, but rather as a deterrence so as to maintain the status quo between India on one side and China and Pakistan on the other. For even though India is the only country in the world to be confronted by two nuclear-armed opponents at its borders, it does not necessarily expect nuclear escalation on the part of the Chinese. Similar to India, China, too, pursues a no-first-use policy: It condones nuclear weapons use only in the event of a nuclear attack and not as a defence against conventional weapons. But why are all three – China, Pakistan, and India – still investing in nuclear armament? China is driven by the desire to match its omnipresent rival, the United States. India is pursuing a similar goal with the motivation of drawing even with the Chinese arsenal. For comparison: In 2018, India had 130 to 140 nuclear warheads, China more than 290, and the United States more than 6,185.⁶ Even the construction of India's first nuclear weapon, Smiling Buddha, was motivated by the Chinese atomic weapon test in 1964. Following the Indian nuclear weapons test in 1974, Pakistan argued that it, too, was now compelled to build a nuclear weapon for defence purposes. From that point onwards, there was mutually assured destruction between India and Pakistan: A dynamic that was all too familiar during the Cold War. Indian defence expert Harsh V. Pant of King's College London describes India's nuclear aspirations as follows: "Security and status will continue to guide India's nuclear policy in the future."⁷

In addition to nuclear policy, India's military inferiority compared with China on land, in the air, and at sea has a major impact on the Indian defence sector. In this context, the long border with China in the northwest of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the north-easterly border in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, are of great importance. In the summer of 2017, there was a standoff between the Indian and the Chinese armies in the region of Doklam in Bhutan, near the so-called "Chicken's Neck", a narrow land corridor bordering Nepal and Bangladesh, connecting India's northeast with the rest of the subcontinent, which is important for Indian infrastructure.

Nuclear weapons buildup in India, Pakistan, and China is intended less for actual use than for deterrence.

The military bases forming part of the String of Pearls that China has established around the Indo-Pacific and the Indian subcontinent in particular, mean that India also needs to be vigilant about its maritime borders. This policy of encirclement by its rival, as New Delhi perceives it, is part of China's BRI. It has already prompted the Chinese to develop close relationships with India's neighbours, including Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar and demonstrate a strong presence in key regions of the Indian Ocean that India has traditionally considered to be within its sphere of influence. Depending on how the relationship between India and China develops in the near future, the Chinese approach may lead to India suffering great losses, particularly economic ones, and ceding a great deal of power and influence in a region that India considers to be its backyard. The ambivalent India-China relationship is fundamentally shaped by both cooperation and rivalry. One indication of this is the comment by Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the new Indian Foreign Minister, two weeks after the Pentagon published its new Indo-Pacific



Strategy Report: “[T]he Indo-Pacific is for something, not against somebody.”⁸ Another is the neutral noises China made concerning India in its latest Defense White Paper. In spite of the territorial conflict along the 3,400 km India-China border, over the last 20 years China has become India’s most important trade partner. Nevertheless, India’s strategy experts urge caution. Unlike the US, China threatens India’s national security with persistent border disputes.

In March 2019, India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully launched its own satellite into low-Earth orbit. With the so-called Mission Shakti, Indian space technology managed to provide an example of its strength and now perceives itself as

being on the same level as the only other three countries to have succeeded in such an effort – the US, China, and Russia.⁹ The Indian Space Research Organisation scored another success in July 2019. By launching the Chandrayaan-2 lunar probe, India intends to complete its first mission to the moon in September. India is not the only major Asian power to embark on a journey to space this year: At the beginning of the year, the Chinese landed a probe on the far side of the moon. If a space race develops between the two countries, China will remain in the lead despite all of India’s successes. The Chinese space budget is almost double that of India, and the advanced Chinese technology allowed China to launch a satellite as early as 2007.¹⁰



A real threat? The Indian answer to increasing Chinese military capacities appears insufficient thus far.
Source: © Jason Lee, Reuters.

Deficits in Budget and Procurement

Ministry of Defence reforms currently being called for by Indian policymakers are very difficult to implement because of financial bottlenecks. Despite the increase in the defence budget over past years, funding for modernisation is continually decreasing. India is among the five nations in the world with the highest defence spending, yet more than half of the total defence budget for 2017/2018 went to personnel and pension salaries. What is more, India still lags far behind China: In 2018, Chinese defence expenditure amounted to 250 billion US dollars, while India's were only 66.5 billion US dollars.¹¹ Moreover, structural weaknesses cause problems for domestic armament production and the procurement of new military equipment.¹²

Although during his first term Prime Minister Modi promised to make defence the central component of his "Make in India" campaign and promote national weapons production, little has been done on that score. Domestic defence production is of insufficient quality. And it is difficult to guarantee on-time delivery. The attempt to encourage foreign armament companies to manufacture their products for the Indian military, has also only witnessed modest success to date. The only large bilateral procurement measure to be agreed during the last legislative period was the Indian-Russian production of AK-203 guns in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.¹³

The purchase of a few Rafale aircraft fighters illustrates problems symptomatic of the long, obscure Indian procurement measures.¹⁴ While the United Progressive Alliance, which was in power in 2012, initially agreed upon procuring 126 aircraft from Dassault, a French manufacturer, the National Democratic Alliance reduced the deal in 2016 to 36 aircraft – at a higher price than the 2012 purchase. In public, the government defended this decision by saying that it had purchased a larger weapons package.¹⁵ But it was not just the high price that triggered outrage; the renegotiations delayed delivery, placing an even greater load on an already weakened air force.

Strategic Partnerships That Must Be Cultivated

In view of the increasing geopolitical and military threat posed by China, a closer alliance with the US seems to be attractive for India at first glance. However, viewed historically, bilateral relations between the two countries have not always been friendly. After its independence in 1947, India consistently refused to enter the orbit of Western alliances around the US. Although India was considered bloc-free, there was a close military cooperation with the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War and India's economic development greatly influenced the country's foreign policy. The Russian Federation of the 1990s no longer represented the strategic support for India that the Soviet Union had been during the two wars with Pakistan (in 1965 and 1971). India's regional initiatives following the Cold War and its nuclear weapons programme were expressions of a more independent foreign policy. It was also this nuclear weapons programme that briefly poisoned relations with the US before the turn of the millennium. The United States responded to India's 1998 nuclear test with sanctions. Under George W. Bush, sanctions were lifted, and Indian-American cooperation deepened, ultimately resulting in the nuclear deal signed by the two countries in 2005.

Relations between India and the US have historically been ambivalent and currently remain so because of the situation with Pakistan and Russia.

The closing remarks of the last 2+2 dialogue (2018) between the Indian and American foreign and defence ministers emphasised India's status as a major defence partner (MDP) for the US. In future, the militaries of the two countries are to engage in more joint training exercises.

At the same time, the signing of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) was viewed as a security policy milestone. Its goal is to facilitate India's purchase of certain military technologies from the US, thereby allowing India to purchase US encryption technology that can be used in military and security agency communications.¹⁶

US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, called the Indian air strikes following the terror attack of February 2019 an "anti-terror operation", for which he was criticised by Pakistan. The statement was viewed in the context of America courting India with the goal of creating a counterweight to China's growing influence in the region. The most recent conflicts between India and Pakistan left behind a wide range of open questions. One question concerns the deployment of F-16 combat aircraft produced in the US. If they were actually used, Pakistan would have violated restrictions imposed upon purchase, especially since the US clearly stated that the aircraft were not to be used against India, but only for defence or anti-terror operations.¹⁷ For India, a major problem is that the plane shot down by Pakistan was an obsolete MiG-21 from Russia which was greatly inferior to the cutting-edge F-16, raising questions about the current state of Indian combat aircraft. Based on information provided by India, only the F-16 is capable of carrying the Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM), residue of which was found according to the Air Force.¹⁸ In the last week of July 2019, it was revealed that the US will continue to provide an estimated 125 million US dollars of technical and logistical support to Pakistan's F-16 programme. This entails 60 agents who will perform on-the-ground 24/7 end-use-monitoring. In its report on the arrangement, the Pentagon said that the fundamental military balance of power in the region would not be changed by the most recent sales deal, however. Another factor impeding the deepening of Indian-American relations is current trade disputes between the two countries.¹⁹ Another problem for the US is that in October 2018, Moscow and New Delhi agreed to terms governing the sale of the Russian S-400

"Triumph" long-range ground-to-air missile system. The latter provides defence against combat aircraft and cruise missiles and is likely to be installed primarily along the Chinese border. The US Senate has demanded that India refrain from purchasing any more weapons from Russia as long as sanctions against Russia remain in force.²⁰

From the point of view of India's Prime Minister Modi, at present nothing could be as interesting as alliances developing both between Pakistan and China and between China and Russia and the meaning of these alliances for India's international relations. India considers itself to be in a watchful observer role, especially since the traditional (armament) partnership with Russia is an important one for India, and Chinese ambitions for improving Chinese-Russian relations are perceived to threaten the status quo. Nevertheless, in mid-June 2019 Modi met with Chinese President Xi during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit (SCO) and agreed to enhance the bilateral dialogue concerning controversial border issues. During that meeting, Modi emphasised that Pakistan would be forced to undertake specific activities to counter cross-border terrorism before India could engage in dialogue on other bilateral issues.

During his first term of office, it was comparatively easy for Modi to build on the cooperation opportunities with all world powers, having inherited these relations from his predecessors since the end of the Cold War. But this phase of relative harmony is over. Moscow and Beijing are eager to limit US influence in what they consider their backyard (for Russia, inner Eurasia and for China, the western Pacific). At the same time, the joint goal is mutual support in conflicts with the US.²¹

Outlook

If India does not want to serve as a junior partner in an alliance, it must heavily invest in improvements to its national military capacity. Entirely in line with the "Make in India" slogan evoked by Narendra Modi in the last legislative



Increasingly self-confident: India's regional initiatives following the Cold War and its nuclear weapons programme were expressions of a more independent foreign policy. Source: © Adnan Abidi, Reuters.

period, defence issues will increasingly involve joint international initiatives in which domestic production and the opportunity for technology transfer will be essential Indian requirements in granting military contracts. India will continue

to insist on its strategic autonomy in future and make its decisions on a case-by-case basis. With respect to India's military acquisition strategy, there are recommendations to set up a separate Department of Defence Acquisition (DDA), with



the goal of centralising all procurement-related administrative measures. At the same time, regular training measures are to be offered to Indian acquisition personnel so that those trained can work more efficiently on procurement issues.

Indian media have recently reported that, by the end of 2019, a modernised Indian submarine and appropriate Shyena light torpedoes will be transferred to Myanmar's navy. The deal is part of a long-term plan that also involves training measures with India and Russia. This is in response to China's offer, such as that made to Bangladesh in 2017, to provide used submarines to Myanmar's navy. India is reacting to a fear that smaller nations in its immediate sphere of influence, such as Myanmar, could become too dependent on China through defence cooperation with Beijing.

Can Germany and the EU Function as a Strategic Anchor?

The US, which is currently an unpredictable partner for India, and the expansionist policies of India's neighbour, China, currently provide a window of opportunity for more intensive EU involvement in India. To date, it is France that has played a pioneering role. The most promising area of this cooperation is maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. Up to 8,000 French soldiers are stationed in the region. At the same time, France has paid much attention to improving its relations with India. India's purchase of French Rafale combat aircraft is a symbol of the deepening of strategic relations between India and France. During Macron's visit to New Delhi in March 2018, both states signed an agreement concerning the logistical support between their militaries, including provision of refuelling, repairing, and docking facilities for warships and aircraft by each side for the other. Indian-French military exercises have also become more frequent. During his visit to India in March 2018, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that, in concert with France, Germany could serve as "a new strategic anchor" for India.²² Germany is already India's most important European trade partner. The challenge now is to intensify exchange in other areas, including defence, to influence the balance in Asia, which is also one of Germany's interests.

India finds itself in a difficult security environment that requires increased focus on the

immediate and broader vicinity in the region. It must assume a key role here and take the initiative in its direct competition with China in lieu of simply reacting. India will decide its strategic cooperation with known world powers on a case-by-case basis depending, among other things, on whether the potential partner in question understands the maritime dimension of South Asian security policy. The Indo-Pacific continues to be a fascinating place – especially for the world’s largest democracy.

–translated from German–

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