

Indo-Pacific and Delhi's New Europolitik

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INTRODUCTION

Europe's turn to the Indo-Pacific is welcome in India for several reasons. Europe's new interest in the Indo-Pacific provides a concrete regional context for deepening the bilateral strategic partnership between Delhi and Brussels as well as between India and the key European states. Europe's strategic return to the East of Suez comes amidst the profound transformation of Asian geopolitics. The dramatic rise of China and its muscular unilateralism have triggered an equally significant US response that has evolved through the successive administrations of Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. If Obama's Asian Pivot was widely seen as being too tentative, Trump presented the China challenge in stark terms and defined a new geography, the Indo-Pacific, to frame that problem. Trump also turned the moribund quadrilateral forum, the Quad, with Australia, India, and Japan, into an important institution to rebalance Asia. Although many within the US and beyond were sceptical of the moves by the Trump administration, the Biden administration fully endorsed the identification of the China challenge as well as the new initiatives on the Indo-Pacific and the Quad. Unlike Trump, Biden and his team put special emphasis on the importance of working with the traditional Asian and European allies in strengthening the US strategy towards the Indo-Pacific. Well before the Biden Administration took charge, key European powers as well as the EU had begun to turn their strategic gaze to the Indo-Pacific.

As Europeans reviewed their policies towards Asia and the Indian Ocean regions, the partnership with India inevitably emerged as an important component of that review. For India, too, Europe has begun to figure far more prominently in its economic and geopolitical calculus. This essay is in three parts. The first section reviews the sources of the estrangement between India and Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. The second part focuses on the efforts in the 21st

century to build a strategic partnership between India and Europe amidst a greater convergence of their interests, especially in the Indo-Pacific. The last section will examine the residual constraints on realising the full potential of the partnership between India and Europe.

ESTRANGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

That independent India and Europe had difficulties in constructing an enduring partnership during the Cold War is widely recognised. Despite shared political values, the long presence of a European capital in India, and India's immense contribution to the Allied victory in the Second World War, the two sides struggled to build a solid partnership in the second half of the twentieth century. If Delhi found it hard to think strategically about Europe, Nehruvian India was a misfit in Europe's Cold War priorities.

Independent India's problems with Europe were conditioned by a number of factors. One was the tendency to see the continent through the eyes of the British. If India's Anglo-Saxon colonial heritage prevented the Indian security establishment from seeing the full possibilities with Europe, Delhi's growing alignment with the Soviet Union during the Cold War further distorted India's perspective on Europe. The Delhi establishment's tendency to view Europe either through the British or the Russian prism robbed all potential nuances from Delhi's approach.

As modern state-building began in India, Europe was a problem for the British Raj initially headquartered in Calcutta from the late 18th century onwards and then in Delhi in the early 20th. The securing of British primacy in India demanded the fending off of London's European rivals. It involved defeating the Europeans that had already set up their presence in the subcontinent. The Great Game that followed was about preventing France, Russia and Germany from breaching Fortress India, and if possible, to hold them back, far away from the subcontinent, in the Middle East and inner Asia.

This conflict between London and its rivals gave the Indian princes room to mobilise European powers to preserve their sovereignty and freedom of action; but the British eventually prevailed. That did not stop new threats from Europe emerging; Napoleonic France, Czarist Russia and Imperial Germany all had their eyes on India and continuously sought to find ways to undermine the Raj in India. And for the Raj and its state agencies, keeping an eye on European rivals was a permanent preoccupation.

By the turn of the 20th century, the emerging nationalist forces in India fighting the British inevitably turned to its European rivals. The first provisional government

of India in Kabul – headed by Raja Virendra Pratap Singh and Maulana Barkatullah Khan – was set up with Berlin’s help in 1915.¹ Indian nationalists scattered in Europe during the inter-War period constituted themselves into the Berlin Committee in the effort to overthrow British rule.² The emergence of the Soviet Union saw the Indian revolutionaries turn to Moscow for help.³ And as the Second World War unfolded, Indian nationalists like Subhas Chandra Bose turned to Germany in the west and Japan in the east for military assistance.

This complex geopolitical play between India and Europe turned into a crude binary in the Cold War years. In denouncing security alliances in Europe, and framing India’s foreign policy as standing non-aligned between the East and the West, Delhi steadily lost all sense of Europe’s own complex navigation of the Cold War and the possibilities for engaging Europe for India’s national benefit. India also drew closer to the Soviet Union in the Cold War, in response to the Anglo-American alignment with Pakistan. As a result, Delhi’s European perspective was increasingly shaped by Moscow. Proximity to Soviet Russia did give India privileged access to Eastern Europe. But Delhi could not make much of it, thanks to the constraints imposed by the bloc politics of the East. Regrettably, India did not seem too sensitive to the structural contradictions between the Central Europeans and the Soviet Union nor prepare for their resolution in favour of the former at the end of the Cold War.

The difficulties imposed by the East-West divide were compounded by the North-South conflict that emerged after the Second World War. India’s anti-colonial tradition and the politics of non-alignment had meant that Delhi had actively opposed the role of former colonial powers in Asian security during the Cold War.⁴ Delhi also actively campaigned against attempts by the European colonial powers to reclaim territories lost to Imperial Japan. It also mounted pressure on them to complete decolonisation in the small islands and other territories scattered around the world. This left little room for strategic cooperation of any kind between India and the European powers. To be sure, India frequently turned to major European powers for the supply of arms. It also found common cause with small and liberal

1. See for example, Thomas G. Fraser. 1977. Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914-18. *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 2 (1977): 255-72.

2. On the Berlin Committee, see, Saumya Sengupta. 2013. Indian Independence Committee: Some Aspects On Different Schemes And Group Rivalries. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 74 (2013): 532-38.

3. John Patrick Haithcox. 1971. *Communism and Nationalism: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

4. See the classic work of Dietmar Rothermund. 2006. *Routledge Companion to Decolonization*. London: Routledge.

European states on such issues as arm control and disarmament. But that did not in any way alter the larger structural limitations on Delhi's political engagement with Europe.

Despite Britain's rivalry with other European powers, there was substantive accumulation of European commercial involvement in India in the colonial age. Many large European companies had developed extensive businesses in India at the time of its independence. But India's socialist policies, which saw the imposition of significant constraints on domestic and foreign capital, saw the weakening of these commercial ties with Europe. Rather than take advantage of Europe's post-War recovery and growth, Delhi became addicted to aid programmes from European states that did little to transform the Indian economy.

The end of the Cold War provided the conditions for a fundamental re-orientation of India's relations with Europe. First, the collapse of the Soviet Union compelled India to rethink its great power relations at the dawn of the 1990s. India discovered that its relations with the US, Europe, China, and Japan were all underdeveloped. Rebuilding relations with the West, re-engaging China, and salvaging ties with post-Soviet Russia lent a new dynamism to India's foreign policy.

India's new foreign policy was reinforced by a long-overdue reform and the opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s that unleashed India's long-suppressed commercial energies. Europe was empathetic and supportive of India's new economic orientation. Major European powers, like France, were also interested in the prospects for India's diversification of its security partnerships in the post-Soviet world.

Yet, a number of factors continued to constrain the engagement between India and Europe. Despite the widened horizons of both India and Europe, both were tied down by their regional preoccupations. If Europe was focused on the project of constructing a Union, India was deeply distracted by the turbulence in its neighbourhood, marked by the rise of violent religious extremism that was bred in the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. India was also challenged by the emergence of a Pakistan that was armed with nuclear weapons and had the impunity to pursue its support of terrorism in India. All these challenges left little diplomatic bandwidth in Delhi to think strategically about Europe and engage it purposefully. While Europe was interested in the new openings of the Indian market, it was drawn like a magnet to the much larger opportunities that emerged in China as Deng Xiaoping ordered a new wave of reforms at the turn of the 1990s. If India's slow pace of change was frustrating to the Europeans, Delhi was perplexed by the rapid integration of Europe. Accustomed to dealing with individual European powers, Delhi struggled to cope with the rise of Brussels.

INDO-PACIFIC CONVERGENCE

The halting and tentative engagement between India and Europe was marked by the launch of a formal strategic partnership between Delhi and Brussels in 2004.⁵ But it was only in recent years that there has been a real momentum in the engagement between Delhi and Brussels. The government of Narendra Modi, which had brought new energy to the conduct of India's foreign policy, provided the basis for a fresh start in bilateral relations.⁶ This in turn was reinforced by the political reconstruction of the Indo-Pacific geography that provided a more comprehensive basis for deeper Indian strategic engagement with individual European powers as well as the European Union. Before the EU came up with an Indo-Pacific strategy in the fall of 2021⁷, Brussels had begun to take a renewed interest in the strategic partnership with Delhi. Brussels issued an India strategy in 2018 and put Delhi at the top of its priorities in the connectivity strategy it had articulated in 2020.⁸ Individual European countries like France, Germany, and the Netherlands too had all come up with their own guidelines for engaging the Indo-Pacific and India as part of it.⁹

The EU strategy identifies several areas for cooperation with its Indo-Pacific partners. They range from trade and investment to green partnerships, from the construction of quality infrastructure to digital partnerships, and from strengthening ocean governance to promoting research and innovation. Defence and security are important elements of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy, which "seeks to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure

5. Ummu Salma Bava. 2010. India and the European Union: From Engagement to Strategic Partnership. *International Studies*, Vol. 47, Nos 2-4, (2010), pp. 373-86.

6. See, Rakesh Sood. 2020. EU-India Relations: Time to chart a new course. Observer Research Foundation, 15 July 2020. (<https://www.orfonline.org/research/eu-india-relations-time-to-chart-a-new-course/>); Krzysztof Iwanek. 3 April 2019. Reviewing India's Foreign Policy Toward Europe Under Narendra Modi. *The Diplomat*. (<https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/reviewing-indias-foreign-policy-toward-europe-under-narendra-modi/>).

7. Joint communication on the Indo-Pacific. European Union External Action Services, Joint Papers 16 September 2021. (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104126/joint-communication-indo-pacific_en).

8. Elements for an EU strategy on India, Joint Communication To The European Parliament And The Council. European Commission, Brussels, 20 November 2018. (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jc_elements_for_an_eu_strategy_on_india_-_final_adopted.pdf).

9. For a recent review of European approaches, see James Bowen, ed. 2021. *Europe's Indo-Pacific Embrace: Global Partnerships for Regional Resilience*. Perth: KAS and Perth US Asia Centre.

sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific".¹⁰

Although the EU strategy on the Indo-Pacific did not get much popular attention in India, the historic significance of the collective European approach to Indo-Pacific security was not missed in official Delhi. For the first time since the European colonial powers retreated from Asia amidst the surge of nationalist movements in the middle of the 20th century, Europe is returning as a geopolitical actor to Asia and its waters – the Indo-Pacific if you will. Delhi, which actively campaigned against European colonialism in the post-War period, is eager to herald Europe back into Asia.

Underlining this extraordinary shift is, of course, the profound shift in the Asian regional security environment. The rise of Asia in the 21st century has been debated mostly in terms of the shifting dynamic between the East and the West or in terms of the conflict between the US and China. Less understood in the West is the fact that Asia's rise has also been marked by sharpening internal contradictions.¹¹ If the collective rise of Asia is real, so is the fact that China has risen much faster than its Asian neighbours. China now towers over its Asian neighbours. The Chinese GDP, at about \$16 trillion, is now three times larger than Japan's and five times larger than that of India. Its annual defence expenditure, at about \$250 billion, is at least three times larger than that of India and five times larger than that of Japan.¹² China does not simply tower over its Asian neighbours, but is also seeking regional dominance. Beijing's ambition to construct a regional order led by it is not even hidden.

The structural change in the distribution of power in Asia has created a very different ideological context for India's foreign and security policies. Delhi no longer sees the principal contradiction as between Asia and the West. India, traditionally a champion of Asian unity and solidarity, is now at the receiving end of Chinese power. Unsurprisingly, it has sought balancing strategies that involve greater cooperation with the West. India's relationship with the US has never been deeper than it is today. There is growing military and security cooperation with the United States. India, which long shunned Western political groupings, is now

10. Joint communication on the Indo-Pacific, European Union External Action Services, Joint Papers, 16 September 2021, p. 13. (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104126/joint-communication-indo-pacific_en).

11. Two important exceptions are, Bill Emmott. 2008. *Rivals: How Power Struggle Between China, India, and Japan Will Shape Our Next Decade*. London: Allen Lane; and Michael Auslin. 2018. *End of the Asian Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

12. Military Expenditure (current USD) - India, Japan, China. The World Bank. (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=IN-JP-CN>).

ready to join minilateral organisations including the United States and its allies.¹³ In the East, it has become part of the Quadrilateral forum involving Australia, Japan, and the United States. Launched in 2007, the Quad has now acquired much political momentum under the Trump and Biden administrations.¹⁴ In the Middle East, India has joined Israel, United Arab Emirates and the US to form a similar forum in October 2021.¹⁵

Although the US now looms large in India's Indo-Pacific calculus, Delhi is acutely conscious of the need to broad-base its strategic coalitions. India is also aware that there is more to the West than just the United States. As the deepening confrontation between the US and China begins to squeeze Southeast Asia, Europe is widely seen as widening the strategic options for the region. The perspective is similar in Delhi. Although much of Asia has experienced European colonialism, few in the region now view Europe with strategic suspicion. Many in Asia see Europe as a valuable partner. A survey earlier this year of policymakers and thought-leaders in the ASEAN region put the EU as the most trusted partner in the region, after Japan and ahead of the US.¹⁶ China and India are way down the list. In India too, Europe has increasingly become an integral part of India's geopolitical calculus.

As External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar puts it, India's strategy is to "engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play".¹⁷ For students of Indian foreign policy, the command to "cultivate Europe" is certainly new. Asked to explain his remarks on "cultivating Europe", at the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia in September 2021, Jaishankar admitted that Delhi had not devoted adequate attention in the past to Brussels amidst its preoccupation with the larger countries of Europe. Jaishankar added that Delhi was now focused on developing a strong partnership with Brussels and engaging all its 27

13. Jamir Shea. 16 April 2021. India: the latest recruit to the alliances of the democracies. Friends of Europe. (<https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/india-the-latest-recruit-to-the-alliance-of-democracies/>).

14. Tanvi Madan, 16 November 2017. Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the Quad. War on the Rocks. See also, Tanvi Madan. 24 September 2021. Understanding the American enthusiasm for the Quad. Indian Express.

15. C. Raja Mohan. 20 October 2021. India and the new "QUAD" in West Asia. The Indian Express. (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-and-the-new-quad-in-west-asia-7578842/>).

16. Sharon Seah et al. 10 February 2021. The State of South East Asia 2021, Survey Report. ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS and Yusof Ishak Institute. (<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf>).

17. For a comprehensive view of India's new approach to great power relations, see the book by the Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. 2020. *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*. New Delhi: Harper Collin.

members – big and small – individually.¹⁸ Brussels has long been ready to dance with Delhi.

The EU's 2018 India strategy focuses on four themes – sustainable economic modernisation, promotion of a rules-based order, foreign policy coordination, and security cooperation. At the summit in Portugal in May this year, the EU and India agreed to resume free trade talks and develop a new connectivity partnership that would widen options for the world beyond the Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁹ Above all, there is recognition in both Delhi and Brussels that the India-EU strategic partnership is crucial for the rebalancing of the international system amidst the current global flux marked by the Russian reassertion, Chinese muscle-flexing and America's recalibration of its global policies.

This abstract framework, however, needed a concrete regional context to promote wide-ranging strategic cooperation between India and Europe. That exactly is what the Indo-Pacific regional framework provides. As we noted earlier, regional cooperation with the former colonial powers of Europe was not part of the Indian foreign policy agenda. In fact, Delhi was ranged against Europe on most international issues during the Cold War. Within India's neighbourhood, the fault lines triggered by the Cold War left little room for collaboration. The post-War engagement largely focused on bilateral and global issues rather than regional cooperation. The first to break out of the old paradigm was France. President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India in 2018 saw the identification of shared interests in the Indo-Pacific and the laying out of a concrete agenda for strategic cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean, where Paris has had a historic presence and role in shaping the regional order.²⁰ Delhi, which in the past shunned the Europeans as extra-regional powers with colonial baggage, now was ready to see the advantage of working with France to secure its own interests, increasingly challenged by the projection of Chinese

18. Jaishankar at Bled Strategic Panel – Partnership for a Rule Based Order in the Indo-Pacific. Ministry of External Affairs. 2 September 2021. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efM2_W1hq-c at 27 Minutes 30 Seconds).

19. Joint Statement on India-EU Leaders' Meeting. 8 May 2021. Ministry of External Affairs. (https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33853/Joint_Statement_on_IndiaEU_Leaders_Meeting_May_08_2021).

20. For the Joint strategic vision on the Indian Ocean unveiled by Macron and Modi in 2018, see (<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29598/Joint+Strategic+Vision+of+IndiaFrance+Cooperation+in+the+Indian+Ocean+Region+New+Delhi+10+March+2018>).

naval power into the Indian Ocean. Soon after that India also ended its reluctance to engage with the EU on maritime security.²¹

The last few years have seen an entirely unanticipated convergence between India and Europe on an interesting idea traditionally associated with India – promoting a multipolar world.²² After the Cold War, India's quest for a multipolar world has largely been associated with Russia. Moscow persuaded Delhi to join a triangular forum with Beijing in the 1990s in the so-called Russia-India-China forum (RIC) and the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) grouping in the early 2000s, which brought in Brazil and South Africa. The objective was to limit American unilateralism and promote a multipolar world. But there was another effort to promote multipolarity that did not really succeed. It was the French initiative to restrain the US hyperpower under president Jacques Chirac.²³ Paris was eager to draft Delhi into this effort, but they did not get very far despite the expanding partnership between the two since the 1990s.

India's strategic problems today are focused on the dangers of a unipolar Asia dominated by China. To make matters worse for Delhi, Moscow has become closer than ever before to Beijing. RIC and BRICS offer little relief to Delhi in addressing the principal challenge confronting it. That is where Europe could step in. With great economic weight, technological strength, and normative power, Europe promises to boost India's own quest for a multipolar world and a rebalanced Indo-Pacific. A stronger Europe with greater geopolitical agency is very welcome in Delhi. India is conscious that the EU and individual European actors like France can't match America's strategic heft in the Indo-Pacific. But a European partnership could significantly enhance India's capacity to shape future outcomes in the Indo-Pacific. It would also be a valuable complement to India's deepening ties with the Quad nations – Australia, Japan and the United States. The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, in turn, sees room for working with the Quad in the Indo-Pacific, while stepping up security cooperation with a number of Asian partners, including India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Vietnam.

21. See the EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025, issued at the 15th EU-India Summit in 2020. (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45026/eu-india-roadmap-2025.pdf>).

22. For a general discussion, see Bernd von Muenchow-Pohl. 2012. India And Europe In A Multipolar World. Carnegie Papers. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (<https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/10/india-and-europe-in-multipolar-world-pub-48038>).

23. See Michael Duclos, 4 October 2019. Jacques Chirac – The Explorer of the Multipolar World. Institut Montaigne; see also Jean-Luc Racine. 2002. Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 25, No 2, 2002, pp. 157-91.

Equally interesting is the convergence on strategic autonomy. For India, strategic autonomy has been an enduring principle of its foreign policy. In operational terms it was about retaining its autonomy and avoiding an entangling alliance with the United States and more broadly with the West. The emphasis on strategic autonomy in the Indian foreign policy discourse in recent years has often dampened prospects for closer security cooperation with the US. But Delhi under the Modi government has managed to rise above that constraint to find a way to strengthen the strategic partnership with Washington. In Europe, the debate on strategic autonomy is about developing an independent security policy amidst the growing anxiety about the US leadership and Washington's temptations about unilateralism. Although they are coming from different directions – India from a tradition of non-alignment and Europe from an extended dependence on a security alliance with the United States – the convergence on strategic autonomy is a welcome development; but it is not without its share of problems.

The unprecedented US move to offer nuclear-powered submarines to Australia in partnership with the United Kingdom as part of the effort to cope with the Chinese challenge in the Indo-Pacific was a definitive moment in the regional military order. The AUKUS agreement on helping Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines involved Canberra's cancellation of the prior "deal of the century" – worth nearly 50 billion Euros – with Paris to build 12 French submarines in Australia. The surprise announcement of the AUKUS in mid-September with little advance notice to Paris has inevitably generated political outrage in France.²⁴ At stake for Paris was a lot more than a lucrative contract and the breach of political trust. It was about the sudden breakdown of a critical pillar in its Indo-Pacific strategy. President Macron Emmanuel had chosen to pursue an ambitious Indo-Pacific strategy in partnership with Australia.

The AUKUS decision overshadowed the unveiling of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in more ways than one. Paris saw AUKUS as a setback not just for Paris, but for Europe as a whole; but it is not clear how deeply that sentiment is shared in the rest of Europe. But the AUKUS decision has certainly enhanced the clamour in France for strategic autonomy from the US. Washington has moved quickly to mollify the sentiments in Paris. In a joint statement issued after talks with French

24. C. Raja Mohan. 22 September 2021. With AUKUS dividing Western block, is there a role for India? The Indian Express. (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/aukus-agreement-australia-new-defence-deal-nuclear-powered-submarines-france-7523389/>); C. Raja Mohan. 21 September 2021. An Expert Explains: Why the defence deal among US, Australia and UK has irked France. The Indian Express. (<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/australia-united-states-united-kingdom-defence-deal-france-submarine-7520154/>).

President Emmanuel Macron on 22 September 2021, Joe Biden affirmed the “strategic importance of French and European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, including in the framework of the European Union’s recently published strategy for the Indo-Pacific.”²⁵

Although Delhi did not make any official statement either welcoming AUKUS or expressing reservations, it is quite clear that Delhi has no quarrel with the decision. The establishment view in Delhi is that AUKUS will help strengthen deterrence against China’s maritime assertiveness and naval power projection. And Delhi is not complaining about being excluded from AUKUS. Given India’s own growing number of security challenges with China across a broad range of domains, any deterrence produced by others is welcome in Delhi. The Modi government understood the sense of outrage in Paris and was quick to reach out to reaffirm the shared commitment to securing the Indo-Pacific. But there is no doubt that Delhi is deeply distressed by the prospect of a rupture within the West triggered by the AUKUS and its impact on the structuring of a stable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. Delhi believes France and Europe have a critical role in the Indo-Pacific. It would like to see an early resolution of the dispute between France and the AUKUS states and the prevention of a breakdown of the emerging Western coalition in the Indo-Pacific. It would want to contribute in any way it can to facilitate that resolution.

The AUKUS crisis, however, pointed to the potential conflicts within the West and within Europe on engaging the Indo-Pacific. India can overcome this problem by pursuing expansive engagements with both the US and the EU as well as key individual European states. On the security front, India needs to end its reluctance to engage the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as well as seek partnerships with the new security mechanisms, like Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), being created in Europe. While the quarrels within the West do not pose a fundamental threat to India’s interests in the Indo-Pacific, the potential divergence between Delhi and Brussels in the assessments of Beijing and Moscow presents a problem.

For now, Delhi appears closer to Washington than Brussels in assessing the problems posed by Beijing. The European formulation that China is a partner on global issues, a competitor in the economic domain, and a systemic rival on the political front is certainly interesting. But India worries that Europe might be tempted to underestimate the challenges presented by China. Distance from China and the absence of regional security commitments like the US certainly provide the basis

25. Joint Statement on the Phone Call between President Biden and President Macron. The White House, 22 September 2021. (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/22/joint-statement-on-the-phone-call-between-president-biden-and-president-macron/>).

for a more relaxed attitude in Brussels. This problem applies in reverse to India's reluctance to acknowledge the challenges that Europe sees from Russia. Given Delhi's political inheritance from the Cold War and its continued dependence on military supplies from Moscow, India can often be tone-deaf to the regional security dynamics in Europe. Delhi's new engagement with Brussels, then, is a good moment to begin a comprehensive discussion of great power dynamics and to minimise the potential friction between their respective policies. It is also an opportunity to imagine the new strategic possibilities presented by a multipolar world. As Washington looks to greater defence burden-sharing in Europe and Asia, and Brussels looks to enhance its regional security role, Delhi could be an important part of the potential answers.

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