

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly outlines the shape of the world map.

Towards A New NATO Strategic Concept

A View from India

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- During the Cold War years, India was the only major liberal democracy that kept its distance from the US-led security community. Two decades after the end of the Cold War, India is now developing strong security relationships with several major countries in the Atlantic Alliance.
- India has always resisted playing the democracy card in its foreign relations.
- India is mentioned in the *NATO 2020* document in only four places, and each time in a different context: as an emerging global power, as a major power in the Asia-Pacific region, as a source of instability in Asia and as an Asian democracy.
- The new Strategic Concept lists seven factors that aggravate uncertainty and therefore may emerge as major threats and challenges. Each of these factors also poses major security challenges for India.
- The word »disarmament« does not appear even once in the *NATO 2020* document. This does not reflect the new realist commonsense that is emerging on nuclear disarmament, nor does it accommodate US President Barack Obama's call in Prague in April 2009 »to put an end to Cold War thinking« with regard to nuclear weapons.
- The document is overly self-congratulatory and does not adequately account for some of the existential issues, internal and external, that the Atlantic Alliance will perforce have to contend with and resolve in the coming years.



Introduction

NATO came into existence less than two years after India gained independence, at a time when India was constitutionally a Dominion of the British Empire. Nevertheless, from its earliest years, India has always kept NATO at arm's length. During the Cold War years, India was the only major liberal democracy that kept apart from the security community led by the United States. India's attitude to the Atlantic Alliance fluctuated between aloofness and hostility, a sentiment that was reciprocated in equal measure by many NATO member states. India tended to view NATO – and similar organisations, such as the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, CENTO and SEATO – as contributing to global insecurity. By remaining nonaligned, India sought to avoid the perils of the East-West confrontation. However, after signing a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1971, India increasingly took diplomatic positions that either favoured the Soviet bloc or were soft in the face of Soviet transgressions, most notably after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, India's relationship with NATO, as such, has not changed substantially. Nevertheless, India is now developing strong security relations with several major countries in the Atlantic Alliance. For example, India regularly conducts major multinational naval exercises with the USA, the UK and France. In April–May 2009, the Indian Navy conducted *Malabar 09*, a trilateral naval exercise with the US Navy and the Japan Maritime SDF at Sasebo and also east of Okinawa. The regular India–UK bilateral naval exercise, *Konkan 09*, was conducted for the first time in the North Atlantic in June–July 2009, as was the regular Indo-French bilateral naval exercise, *Varuna 09*. If India is willing and able to maintain strong security ties with many Western countries, why does it still shy away from establishing links with NATO? In order to answer this question, it is essential to understand the role of democracy in Indian foreign policy.

The Missing NATO Link and the Role of Democracy in Indian Foreign Policy

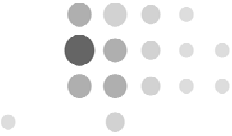
In June 2000, India was one of the co-sponsors of a US-led initiative that resulted in the creation of a »Community of Democracies« in Warsaw, Poland. For India, this diplomatic initiative was an aberration, since

it has always resisted playing the democracy card in its foreign relations. This reluctance is for three reasons. First, while being a democracy might mean that India is on the »winning side« of history at the level of values, democracy has taken root in India for altogether prosaic and instrumental reasons. Participative and representative politics have created the space for socio-cultural pluralism, thus making the political experiment called »India« possible. (This gives rise to the reflection – with apologies to Leo Tolstoy (the opening line of *Anna Karenina*) – that while all dictatorships are essentially alike, every democracy is a democracy in its own special way.) Thus, India has very *Indian* reasons for being democratic, reasons that do not translate easily into the sphere of foreign relations.

The second reason why democracy does not feature in Indian foreign policy is because of India's ambiguous relationship with Western liberal democracies. India has never been part of the Western security community: threats to India have not been seen by the West as threats to *democracy*. This was true during India's disastrous border war against China in 1962, and remains true today: the roll call of post-9/11 terrorist outrages includes Bali, Madrid and London but not Mumbai.

Finally, India is located in an undemocratic neighbourhood. In most of India's neighbours, democracy has either been completely absent or has been at best a fleeting visitor. Thus, India does not have the luxury of interacting only with those countries that are democratic. Indeed, it is probable that overt Indian support for democratic forces in its neighbouring countries would significantly *weaken* those forces, since it would then be quite easy for the authoritarian ruling establishments to dismiss the pro-democracy forces as being »pro-Indian« and hence »anti-national«. Indeed, this is precisely what has happened since the late 1950s in Nepal, and more recently in Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar. All the same, India's reluctance to play the democracy card has opened it up for criticism, particularly from some Western countries that would like to see a more active Indian role in Burma, Nepal or even Sri Lanka.

Since most Indians, elites and masses alike, clearly value democracy *for its own sake*, India will remain a noisy and teeming democracy. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Atlantic Alliance, it is by no means certain that India regards democracy as a universal value. India's



democratic challenges are domestic and do not include democracy promotion in other lands and climes. However, being a democracy does make India's own passage to great-power status a bit easier: it ensures, at the very least, that India does not appear on the radar of the USA or NATO as a foe.

Reference to India in the New NATO Strategic Concept

The recommendations for the new Strategic Concept of NATO give us some insight into how the most powerful military alliance in the world conceives of its future role. It is interesting to note that India is mentioned in the *NATO 2020* document in only four places, and each time in a different context:

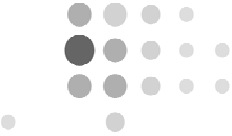
1. As an emerging global power: »Emerging global powers such as China, India and Brazil are asserting their rising influence in a peaceful manner« (p. 14).
2. As a major power in the Asia-Pacific: »In the Asia-Pacific, the major powers, which include Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, India, and Australia, all view regional stability as in their interests and are generally supportive of international norms« (p. 16).
3. As a source of instability in Asia: »The two primary sources of instability [in Asia] are longstanding – the rivalry between India and Pakistan, and the dangerous government of the People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK)« (p. 16).
4. As an Asian democracy: »India, Indonesia, and the leading democracies of Africa and Latin America share with NATO a commitment to global peace and the rule of law« (p. 29).

From an Indian perspective, these multiple characterisations of India are, to an extent, mutually contradictory. If India is emerging in a peaceful manner, views regional stability in the Asia-Pacific as being in its interest, is generally supportive of international norms and is committed to global peace and the rule of law, perhaps it is, despite the relative accretion in its capabilities in recent years, a status quo power. How, then, are we to make sense of India's »rivalry« with Pakistan as a source of instability? Pakistan's population (169 million) is less than one-seventh of that of India (1.18 billion). That's rough the same size differential as between the USA (309 million) and Colombia (45

million). Can there truly be a rivalry given such an enormous size differential? Nuclear weapons, it is true, give Pakistan strategic parity with India. But the nuclear dimension to the »rivalry« is overstated. By giving Pakistan security in perpetuity, nuclear weapons are a factor of stability in South Asia. It is not Pakistan's (or India's) nuclear weapons, but rather Pakistan's asymmetric war strategy against India, which is destabilising.

Despite its relatively smaller size, Pakistan is the revisionist state in South Asia. Few countries in the world have pursued a revisionist foreign policy for as long, and with as little success, as has Pakistan. Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) is not just a covert intelligence agency; it is the sword arm of the Pakistan military, charged with the responsibility of conducting asymmetric warfare while other arms of the Pakistan military, whether conventional or nuclear, play defensive or deterrence roles. Since the late 1980s Pakistan has, under cover of its nuclear deterrent, consistently pursued asymmetric strategies against India, not only in Kashmir but also in other parts of India. No country in the world has suffered more terrorist violence in the recent past than India has. According to the databases maintained in the South Asian Terrorism Portal (satp.org), between 1994 and 2005 – that is, over a period of 11 years – 11 people were killed, on average, *every single day* in India due to terrorism or counterterrorism. Clearly, not all the terrorism in India originates from Pakistan; there are many home-grown sources of violence in India. Furthermore, violence is endemic across South Asia; Pakistan has itself been the victim of some horrific acts of terrorism in recent years. Nevertheless, most Indian analysts would concur that Pakistan is the *fons et origo* of terrorism in India.

Many Western analysts assume that Pakistan's actions against India are linked solely to the Kashmir issue, but that isn't entirely true. If asymmetric war against India were ever to succeed, India would be cut down to a size that Pakistan could live with a bit more comfortably. It is India's continuing restraint in the face of repeated provocation from Pakistan that has kept the region from going up in flames. Despite – or perhaps because of – the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan, the Atlantic Alliance continues to ignore the fact that Pakistan's policies have made it a source of instability not only to its neighbours but increasingly to itself. The *NATO 2020* report's observation that



»Afghanistan and Pakistan, whose cooperation is crucial to the success of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are also outside any formal structure for dialogue with NATO« (p. 29) is the only comment of any significance on Pakistan in the document.

One of the most interesting recommendations in the document is that »NATO should do more to deepen its partnerships with countries outside the Euro-Atlantic region by expanding the list of shared activities while preserving the ability of individual partners to form tailored co-operative relationships with the Alliance« (p. 29). Peacekeeping cooperation is an area in which a NATO–India partnership could emerge. In recent years, individual NATO member states, as well as the organisation itself, have been engaged in multiple peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. India has a long history of participation in UN peacekeeping operations, having since the 1950s contributed over 100,000 troops and several force commanders to over 40 UN missions. The experience of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990 has also been salutary. India’s experience in democratic post-colonial nation- and state-building on a sub-continental scale should add to its allure as a peacekeeping partner.

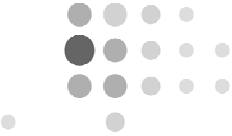
Seven Factors of Uncertainty and Their Relevance in the Indian Context

The new Strategic Concept lists seven factors that aggravate uncertainty and therefore emerge as major threats and challenges (p. 13). They are (i) the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; (ii) the ambitions of international terrorist groups; (iii) the persistence of corrosive regional, national, ethnic and religious rivalries; (iv) the world’s increased reliance on potentially vulnerable information systems; (v) the competition for petroleum and other strategic resources (thereby highlighting the importance of maritime security); (vi) demographic changes that could aggravate such global problems as poverty, hunger, illegal immigration and pandemic disease; and (vii) the accumulating consequences of environmental degradation, including climate change. It is significant that each of these factors poses major security challenges for India as well. As a state with nuclear weapons, India is subject to all the challenges (including absolute physical security of nuclear weapons and fissile material) of the established nuclear powers, along with

the difficult task of establishing responsible deterrence relationships with Pakistan and China. As we have seen, India is the target of terrorism emanating from Pakistan, much of it – particularly the terrorist actions of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) – having direct links with al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Both internally and regionally, India is beset with ethnocultural strife; however, most of India’s internal discontents are mediated and resolved through democratic electoral politics. As a major global player in information and communication technologies, especially in the software sector, India needs to be particularly vigilant with regard to cybersecurity. As an energy and resource deficient economy, India is increasingly reliant on the global sea lanes of communication (SLOC) and has also begun to play a major role in anti-piracy and SLOC security operations. India has the world’s largest population of young people and will overtake China as the most populous country in fifteen years. At the same time, it will also soon have the world’s largest number of HIV/AIDS infected persons. India’s role in aggravating climate change, due to its inevitable and necessary economic growth, as well as in mitigating it, thanks to its innovations in green technologies, also make it a major player.

Major Deficit: No Reference to Nuclear Disarmament

It is noteworthy that the word »disarmament« does not appear even once in the *NATO 2020* document. This isn’t surprising: military alliances do not usually focus on disarmament issues. Nevertheless, this also reveals a rather traditional realist perspective. In recent years, new calls for nuclear abolition have come from an unexpected quarter, with two influential *Wall Street Journal* articles in January 2007 and 2008, co-authored by George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn. These articles signify that the old realist/idealist divide on nuclear weapons could become a thing of the past. Why the new scepticism regarding nuclear weapons, particularly among key American realists? The most obvious reason is the fear that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists, who cannot be deterred. Unfortunately, the new Strategic Concept does not cater for this new realist commonsense. In particular, the document states that:

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- »As long as nuclear weapons remain a reality in international relations, the Alliance should retain a nuclear component to its deterrent strategy.«
 - »The retention of some US forward-deployed systems on European soil reinforces the principle of extended nuclear deterrence and collective defence.«
 - »Broad participation of the non-nuclear Allies is an essential sign of transatlantic solidarity and risk sharing« (p. 43).

These are, of course, the bedrock principles that have defined the nuclear dimension in the Atlantic Alliance right from its very beginning. The lack of fresh thinking in this regard is particularly disappointing given US President Barack Obama's endorsement of »Global Zero«, an aim that would be entirely compatible with India's own disarmament aspirations as expressed in the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan of 1988. As President Obama expressed it in his speech in Prague on 5 April 2009, »First, the United States will take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons. To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same.« There is no sign in *NATO 2020* that the Atlantic Alliance has gone beyond Cold War thinking as far as nuclear weapons are concerned. The document also notes that »President Obama's decision to deploy a phased adaptive missile defence will provide more effective, rapid and reliable coverage than earlier proposals. It also puts missile defence fully within a NATO context, with participation open to all Allies and all Allies to be protected« (p. 11). It is not clear whether the endorsement – and future operationalisation – of a missile defence system for all the countries of the Atlantic Alliance can be compatible with the goal of comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

Conclusion: Three Challenges Remain that Have Yet to Be Addressed

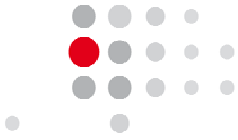
The new Security Concept is overly self-congratulatory and does not adequately account for some of the existential issues, internal and external, that the Atlantic Alliance will perforce have to contend with and resolve in the coming years. There are three, in particular, that must be highlighted. First, although the report insists that NATO is »a regional, not a global organisation« (p. 9), it would perhaps be more accurate to characterise NATO as an organisation that is regional in composition but global in its capabilities, roles and, increasingly, aspirations. For how long can the Atlantic Alliance

remain restricted solely to the countries of the Euro-Atlantic? Would it be possible for NATO to escape its Mediterranean and Eurasian futures? These issues are dismissed rather facetly in the new Strategic Concept's chapter on partnerships. Geopolitically, the Atlantic Alliance cannot avoid much greater engagement with the Islamic world in the years to come. Today, Turkey is the only Islamic country that is a member state of NATO. Is it reasonable to expect that this will not change in the coming years? Secondly, there are several issues internal to the Atlantic Alliance that need serious analysis. Burden sharing is the most obvious of these. But perhaps even more important are the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies within the security community. NATO has been singularly successful in bringing several Central and Eastern European countries into its fold. On the other hand, the politics of many NATO member states are susceptible to important non-Atlanticist – and counter-Atlanticist – tendencies. Within the European Union, the forces that favour greater union often posit trans-Atlantic ties as a threat. Similarly, in North America, the Atlantic perspective is being increasingly challenged by the Pacific perspective. Northern California, after all, already trades more with the rest of the Asia-Pacific than it does with the rest of North America.

Finally, the global centre of gravity itself is slowly shifting from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific. The current global financial crisis has accelerated the shift in global weight. How will the Atlantic Alliance and its member states cope with the new geopolitics and geo-economics embodied in this global power shift? The future of the Asia-Pacific is fraught with uncertainty. China is rising, but can its rise be sustained over the next two decades in the face of its many internal contradictions? India is emerging, but will that emergence be shackled by India's unique blend of incapacity and indecision with regard to its own neighbourhood? Japan is normalising, but will that process of normalisation be able to withstand Japan's (perhaps irretrievable) demographic decline? Russia is resurgent, but will its resurgence continue to be determined by the level of global hydrocarbon prices? As a Pacific power, the USA has been present in Asia not only militarily but also in political, economic and cultural terms since the Second World War, but will the level of US presence in Asia remain unaltered? The USA is also preponderant globally, but for how long can its preponderance persist in the face of domestic mismanagement and rising rivals (who are also its



partners in prosperity)? Most important of all, unlike the Atlantic world, which has evolved into a security community (NATO) embedded in a larger cooperative security arrangement (OSCE), the Pacific world has neither. The countries of the Asia-Pacific are still living in the historical moment of modernity. States in this region are still obsessed with sovereign territoriality, the perfection of which remains the fundamental driver of politics, internal and external. Might not the global power shift therefore involve stepping away from the brave new postmodern world and back to the politics of sovereign territoriality? NATO as an organisation could play a catalytic role in the evolution of a cooperative security mechanism, structured around regular security dialogues, in the Asia-Pacific. On this, *NATO 2020* remains strangely silent.

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