This paper will provide a survey of India's foreign policy since 1947 to the present day. It is divided into three distinct historical sections. The paper will also attempt to explain the underlying reasons for these the initial orientation and subsequent shifts that occurred over time. The first section deals with the period from 1947 to 1962, the second from 1962 to 1991 and the third from 1991 to the present. The choice of these three segments is far from arbitrary. The first period constituted the most idealistic phase of India's foreign policy under the tutelage of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The second began with India's disastrous defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. This period saw a gradual shift away from the early idealism that had characterized the country's foreign policy and the adoption of an increasingly "self-help" approach to foreign policy while retaining elements of the Nehruvian rhetoric. The third phase began with the end of the Cold War and the adoption of a more pragmatic foreign policy hewing closely to the principles of Realism. "

# The Sources of India's Foreign Policy

Systemic, national and decision-making factors helped shape post-independence India's foreign policy choices.<sup>iii</sup> However, this paper will argue that India's policymakers chose, quite deliberately to ignore systemic constraints and decided to pursue an explicitly ideational foreign policy and with mostly disastrous consequences.<sup>iv</sup> The pursuit of such a policy left India utterly unprepared to cope with a serious security threat from the People's Republic of China and culminated in a disastrous border war in 1962. Only in the aftermath of the border war did India embark on a "self-help" strategy designed to guarantee its security.<sup>v</sup>

The systemic constraints on India's foreign policy stemmed from the onset of the Cold War which virtually coincided with India's independence in 1947. Interestingly enough, neither the Soviet Union nor the United States evinced any great interest in India at the onset of the Cold War. The United States was virtually ignorant about India and had few cultural, strategic or economic links with the nascent nation. Consequently, in the immediate aftermath of India's independence it paid scant attention to India. Simultaneously, the Soviet Union did not attach any strategic significance to India. This mutual lack of interest in India actually worked to India's advantage as it gave the country considerable room for maneuver. However, at a regional level, the distribution of power placed India at a disadvantage. The other major regional state, the People's Republic of China (PRC) posed a significant security threat to India one which it chose to ignore at its own peril.

At a national level, the memories of colonial rule contributed to political culture which privileged the concept of national autonomy. The desire to maintain the greatest possible independence in the conduct of India's foreign affairs was a sentiment that pervaded the

country. Public opinion, to the limited extent that it was concerned with foreign affairs, would find any notion of deference to external powers to be intolerable. The country had been under the yoke of colonial rule for two hundred years and the weight of this colonial past was considerable.

Not surprisingly, India's post-independence policymakers were acutely sensitive to the significance of this colonial legacy. Accordingly, they explicitly sought to forge a pathway that would keep India outside the ambit of the Cold War. Such a strategy was possible because anti-imperialist sentiments were widespread within the Indian polity across the political spectrum.<sup>x</sup> This strategy came to be known as non-alignment and Indian policymakers were at pains to distinguish it from "neutralism".<sup>xi</sup>

The real architect of this policy was Prime Minister Nehru. Even though he was temperamentally a Western liberal, he was deeply skeptical of the United States. xii In part, his skepticism was the consequence of his highly Anglicized personal and professional background. In effect, he had come to share the British upper class disdain for the United States. His views toward the Soviet Union were more ambivalent. He was also cognizant of the horrors of Stalin's collectivist enterprise though admiring of the achievements of the forced-draught industrialization program. His partiality toward the USSR also stemmed from his own social democratic predilections.

At least two factors can be adduced to explain Nehru's adoption of non-alignment as the lodestar of India's foreign policy. First, he was acutely concerned about the opportunity costs of defense spending. Any involvement with the two emerging blocs, he feared, would draw India into the titanic struggle and divert critical resources from economic development. Second, he was intent on maintaining India's hard-won independence. Moving into the ambit of either superpower could compromise such freedom of maneuver.

### The Pathway to 1962

From the time of independence to the disastrous border conflict with the PRC, three key features characterized India's foreign policy. First, India played a significant role in multilateral institutions and particularly in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Second, it also emerged as a critical proponent of the nonaligned movement. Third, as a leader of the nonaligned movement it also made a significant contribution toward the process of decolonization.

These three critical commitments, in turn, manifested themselves at global, regional and national levels. At a global level, India attempted to defuse Cold War tensions in a number of contexts regional and functional. To that end, India had emerged as one of the early proponents of a nuclear test ban treaty and in 1952 had introduced a draft resolution co-sponsored with Ireland to bring about a global ban on nuclear tests. In the event, thanks to the exigencies of Cold War politics, little or nothing came of this effort. Nevertheless, this endeavor was a manifestation of India's interest in forging a particular global order, one which would hobble the use of force in international affairs. India also

sought to play a vital role in United Nations peacekeeping operations as well as the peaceful resolution of regional disputes. In pursuit of these ends India became involved in the International Control Commission in Vietnam along with Canada and Poland, it was a key member of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea and it also made a significant troop contribution the United Nations Peacekeeping forces in the Belgian Congo. xiv Also, India proved to be a tireless campaigner in the effort to bring about the end of decolonization. To that end, India's diplomacy was carefully geared to the discussion of the issue at various international for and especially in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

In the region, it referred the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan to the United Nations for possible resolution. To the dismay of its policymakers, the issue became quickly embroiled in the politics of the Cold War. XV As a consequence of the largely partisan discussions at the United Nations, India's political leadership became increasingly disillusioned about the resolution of its bilateral territorial disputes through the mechanism of the United Nations. Not surprisingly, after extensive diplomatic discussion with the intransigent Salazar regime in Portugal produced a deadlock and Prime Minister Nehru faced increasing criticism from a group of Afro-Asian leaders, India chose to use force to oust the Portuguese from their colonial enclave in Goa in 1960. XVI

Finally, at national level, the country's commitment to nonalignment led to the adoption of particular set of significant policy choices. Specifically, one of the key elements of the doctrine of nonalignment was the limitation of high defense expenditures. xvii To this end Indian military expenditures were drastically limited even when steady evidence about a possible security threat from the People's Republic of China (PRC) continued to mount. xviii Such a policy, unfortunately, proved to be extremely costly when the border negotiations with the PRC ultimately reached a cul-de-sac in 1960. Faced with this situation, India embarked upon a strategy of compellence designed to restore what it deemed to be the territorial status quo along the disputed Himalayan border. This policy, however, was singularly ill conceived as it involved sending in lightly armed, poorly equipped and ill-prepared troops to high altitudes in "penny packets". In October 1962, when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) attacked with considerable force, the Indian military was grossly unprepared to face the onslaught. The PLA inflicted considerable losses on the Indian forces and then withdrew from some of the areas that they had entered. However, they did not vacate some 14,000 square miles that they had initially claimed. xix These territories and other still remain the subject of tortured and glacial border negotiations.xx

"Modified Structuralism": the post-Nehru Era<sup>xxi</sup>

The military defeat in 1962 marked nothing short of a watershed in the structure and conduct of India's foreign and security policies. In the immediate aftermath of this military debacle Nehru overcame his staunch objections to defense spending. In his final days, he oversaw a drastic re-appraisal of India's security policies and practices. Most importantly, India embarked on a substantial program of military modernization. It committed itself to the creation of a million man army with ten new mountain divisions

equipped and trained for high altitude warfare, a 45 squadron air force with supersonic aircraft and a modest program of naval expansion. However, even after Nehru's demise in 1964, his successors still could not formally abandon the stated adherence to a policy of non-alignment. Consequently, the rhetoric of nonalignment remained a staple of Indian foreign policy. India's foreign policy behavior, however, increasingly assumed a more Realist orientation.

Once again, global, regional and personal factors contributed to the major policy shift. Despite a fleeting moment of military cooperation with India in the aftermath of the 1962 war, the United States disengaged itself from South Asia after the second Indo-Pakistani conflict in 1965 as it became increasingly preoccupied with the prosecution of the Vietnam war. Barring a brief and unhappy interlude in 1966 when the Johnson administration chose to exert considerable economic pressure on India to temper its criticism of the Vietnam war, to reform its agricultural policies and to open up its domestic economy to foreign investment, the United States, for all practical purposes, lost interest in India. xxiii

Sensing an opportunity to expand their influence in the subcontinent, the Soviets brokered a peace agreement between India and Pakistan in the Central Asian city of Tashkent in 1966. With this American disengagement from the subcontinent, Pakistan sought to expand the scope of its security cooperation with the PRC to balance Indian power contributing to a growing security nexus between India's two major adversaries.

At a regional level, India's misgivings about its security increased in the aftermath of the first Chinese nuclear test at Lop Nor in 1964. The political fallout from these tests was considerable. Some within India's parliament called for an abandonment of nonalignment and even urged that India acquire an independent nuclear weapons option. After considerable debate, the ruling Congress party and the new prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, reaffirmed the country's public commitment to nonalignment and eschewed any immediate plans to acquire nuclear weapons.

However, in 1966, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Shastri's successor, decided to seek a nuclear guarantee from the great powers. This effort, proved to be quite fruitless. \*\*xv\* In the aftermath of this failure, Prime Minister Gandhi authorized India's Subterranean Nuclear Explosions Project (SNEP) which culminated in India's first nuclear test of May 1974. \*\*xv\*i Under Indira Gandhi, India's foreign policy sought to sustain two competing visions of world order. On the one hand, India still supported the cause of decolonization and continued to lead the charge on behalf of the weaker states in the international system. For example, it remained a staunch opponent of the apartheid regime in South Africa, it was an unyielding supporter of the Palestinian cause and it opposed the Portuguese presence in Angola and Mozambique.

On the other hand, it also came to accept the importance of defense preparedness and increasingly overcame its reservations about the use of force in international politics. Not surprisingly, when faced with several million refugees from East Pakistan as a consequence of the outbreak of a civil war, the country quickly forged a careful politico-

diplomatic strategy to break up Pakistan. \*\*xvii\* Part of this strategy involved the acquisition of a tacit security guarantee from the Soviet Union to counter possible Chinese malfeasance. Accordingly, despite India's professed commitment to nonalignment it signed a twenty-year pact of "peace, friendship and cooperation" with the Soviet Union in August 1971. With its northern flanks thereby protected, India had a free hand to intervene in East Pakistan. Fortunately, Pakistan's attack on its northern air bases in early December gave it the casus belli to launch an attack on the eastern front. Within two weeks, the Indian army along with an indigenous Bengali rebel movement, the "mukti bahini" (literally "liberation force") militarily prevailed against the demoralized Pakistani forces. \*\*xviii\*

In the aftermath of the 1971 war, the concomitant break-up of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, Indian emerged as the undisputed dominant power within the subcontinent. Despite its new-found status, the country was unable to transcend the region. Several factors account for this failure to emerge as a power of any consequence in the global order. Most importantly, thanks to its pursuit of a dubious strategy of stateled industrialization India's economic growth remained anemic. \*xxix\* Simultaneously, the country's deep-seated export pessimism led it to shy away from integrating itself into the global economy. The failure to develop ties with the global economy contributed to a paucity of foreign investment, important technological lags, a lack of innovation and the stifling of entrepreneurship. In turn, these forces contributed to what the eminent Indian economist Raj Krishna mordantly referred to as the "Hindu rate of growth". \*xxx

India's political choices at systemic and national levels also did very little to enhance it global stature. At a global level, in the wake of the first oil crisis of 1973, India chose to spearhead the Group of 77, a set of developing nations seeking to fundamentally alter the global economic order. Ironically, while it was a leader of this coalition it benefited little from the global spike in oil prices and failed to obtain any meaningful concessions as a resource-poor developing nation from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Indeed the country's economic weakness effectively prevented it from carrying through a viable nuclear weapons program even after it managed to successfully test a nuclear weapon in May 1974. Faced with widespread global diplomatic disapprobation and significant economic and technological sanctions, India's policymakers chose not carry out any further tests. \*xxxi\*

#### Enter the Bear

Throughout much of the decade of the 1970s thanks to its poor record of economic growth and its diplomatic limitations India became a marginal player in the global order. Its influence remained confined to the South Asian region. Its insignificance was again underscored when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. The United States paid scant attention to Indian sensibilities and concerns when it chose to forge a renewed strategic relationship with Pakistan almost immediately after the Soviet invasion. General Zia-ul-Haq even rebuffed India's efforts at reassuring Pakistan in the aftermath of the invasion. The same and the invasion.

In its efforts to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan the United States came to rely heavily on Pakistan. General Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator, quite astutely exacted a significant economic and military price for such cooperation. During his watch, the United States provided two packages of foreign assistance the first for five years of \$ 3.2 billion and the second for six years of \$4.02 billion. (The second package was not fully delivered because the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1990 and the United States also imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan for its pursuit of a clandestine nuclear weapons program). XXXIV In a effort to maintain its military superiority over Pakistan, India entered into a tighter military cooperation relationship with the Soviet Union. This military relationship, however, exacted a significant diplomatic cost. India was forced to tacitly acquiesce in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. XXXVV For the remainder of the decade, barring some limited efforts on the part of the Reagan administration to improve relations with India as part of a strategy to reduce the country's dependence on the Soviet Union, India remained of little consequence to the great powers. XXXXVI

## A Requiem for Nonalignment?

Few events, barring the shock of the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, has had as much of an impact on India's foreign and security policies as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concomitant end of the Cold War. The Soviet collapse and the transformation of the global order forced India's policymakers to make drastic changes in India's foreign policy at multiple levels. At a global level, nonalignment ceased to have much meaning. As a former Indian foreign and subsequently prime minister, Inder Kumar Gujral, quite succinctly stated, "It is a mantra that we have to keep repeating, but who are you going to be nonaligned against?" With the end of nonalignment for all practical purposes, India's foreign policy was suddenly bereft of a grand strategic vision.

At another level, the country was also confronted with an unprecedented fiscal crisis partly as a consequence of the first Gulf War of 1991. Three factors contributed to this crisis. First, anticipating a spike in oil prices because of Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of Kuwait, India had purchased considerable amounts of petroleum on the spot market thereby draining its treasury of much-needed foreign exchange. Second, the government of India was forced to repatriate over a hundred thousand workers from the Persian Gulf at short notice. Third, it lost the very substantial remittances that the workers from the Gulf had contributed to the Indian exchequer. The confluence of these three factors placed the country in dire financial straits. xxxvii Faced with his extraordinary crisis and also confronting the loss of the vast East European market as a consequence of the Soviet collapse, India's policymakers, most notably the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, chose to dramatically alter India's domestic and international economic policies. These involved abandoning the country's historic commitment to import-substituting industrialization, unbundling, though fitfully at best, its vast public sector and dismantling a labyrinthine set of regulations, licenses, permits and quotas which had largely stifled economic growth. xxxviii

Drastic changes were also undertaken in the political arena. As argued earlier, India's commitment to nonalignment had already eroded in practice, if not in rhetoric, in the post-Nehru era. Now its policymakers sought to forge a new vision for the country. However, the country lacked a leader of the stature and intellectual proclivities of Jawaharlal Nehru. Yet, the Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, possessed a sufficient grasp of international affairs to recognize the necessity of charting a new course for the country in both domestic and international arenas. Accordingly, he sought to chart a new course for the country's foreign policy.

This effort to alter the country's foreign policy orientation toward the emergent, sole superpower, the United States ran into an important hurdle for three compelling reasons. First, at a global level, the United States had few significant interests in India barring nonproliferation. This issue, of course, put the two sides on a collision course as India was a staunch opponent of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and categorically refused to accede to its expectations. The US, especially, under the Clinton administration, was committed to its indefinite and unconditional extension at the Review Conference in 1995. Not surprisingly, their fundamental differences put the two countries ate odds.

Second, at a regional level, even though the US Department of Commerce under the stewardship of Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown, had anointed India as one of the world's "big emerging markets", American investment in and trade with India was so negligible that the nonproliferation issue overshadowed other interests.

Third and finally, at a bureaucratic level in both countries the "shadow of the past" weighed heavily on all deliberations. Most Indian foreign policy bureaucrats looked were dubious about American goals and interests in South Asia and there was lingering distrust of India in both the State and Defense departments in the United States. These mutual misgivings hobbled the growth of the relationship even though some small progress had been made in the last days of Indira Gandhi and her son and successor Rajiv Gandhi. As a consequence of these three factors, improvements in relations were, at best fitful, and frequently hostage to minor, episodic differences. For example, the Assistant Secretary of State Robin Raphael's careless remark about Kashmir's accession to India at a press briefing in Washington, DC became a major diplomatic contretemps.<sup>xl</sup>

However, Indian policymakers managed to move with somewhat greater dexterity on other fronts. To that end, they ended country's reflexive support for the Arab position on Israel and the Palestinian question. Historically, since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 India had adopted for reasons of both domestic politics and national ideology, a mostly frosty approach toward the Jewish state. At home Indian policymakers were attentive to the sentiments of the Muslim population. At an ideological level they had viewed the creation of Israel as the continuation of a colonial policy. xli In 1992, in the wake of the Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinians, India upgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel to the ambassadorial level.

Simultaneously, India also directed its gaze toward South-East Asia after a long span of neglect. During much of the Cold War Indian policymakers had shunned the states of South-East Asia, with the critical exception of Vietnam, viewing them as mostly American puppets. Now as part and parcel of the opening of its markets to foreign investment and seeking to develop a viable export sector, the country embarked upon a "Look East policy". xliii

Closer to home, the Narasimha Rao regime efforts continued to improve relations with the PRC, a process that had been initiated during the Rajiv Gandhi regime in the late 1980s. Even though the two sides forged two important confidence-building measures (CBMs) in 1993 and 1996 designed to reduce tensions along the Line of Actual Control, little or no progress was made in resolving the border dispute. xliii

Finally, relations with Pakistan, India's long-standing adversary remained contentious as ever. In considerable part the relationship with Pakistan deteriorated because of the outbreak of an ethnoreligious insurgency in the dispute state of Jammu and Kashmir in December 1989. The origins of this insurgency were mostly indigenous could be traced to a process of growing political mobilization against a backdrop of steady institutional decay. All However, with the outbreak of the insurgency Pakistan's policymakers quickly stepped into the fray and helped transform a largely internal uprising into an ideologically charged, sanguinary, extortion racket.

In an attempt to suppress the insurgency India resorted to a time-honored counterinsurgency strategy. This involved the substantial use of force against the insurgents but with the promise of free and fair elections once they proved willing to abandon their secessionist agenda. As with other counterinsurgency operations, this strategy has met with some success. However, while it has reduced the insurgency to manageable proportions, it has not been able to eliminate it altogether. Continued Pakistani logistical support for the insurgents, the provision of sanctuaries in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and a porous border has prevented India from successfully suppressing the insurgency.

## Crossing the Nuclear Rubicon and Beyond

Pakistan's needling of India in Kashmir was and remains susceptible to management through India's conventional military capabilities. Nor does Pakistan's conventional capabilities pose an especially compelling threat to India's security. The conventional military capabilities, the persistence of the border dispute and the PRC's nuclear weapons posed an altogether different order of threat to India's security. Indeed it was the long-term security threats that the PRC posed to India proved to be the most compelling underlying factor that drove India's nuclear weapons program. The specific timing of the program, contrary to much polemical writing had little to do with the ascendance of the right-of-center Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power. Instead it was closely tied to the successful extension of the NPT in 1995 and the seeming inexorable efforts of the Clinton administration to conclude a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. Fearful that

the test ban treaty was all but inevitable Indian policymakers chose to exercise the nuclear option before ineluctable pressures were brought to bear on India to accede to the regime.

Despite the initial burst of hostility from the United States and the other great powers, the international community has come to grudgingly accept India as a de facto nuclear weapons state. In large part this came about as a consequence of extended bilateral negotiations between the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh, the Indian Minister for External Affairs. Also their alarmist claims and fears about a possible nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan have not materialized. Pakistan's feckless attempt to revive the Kashmir issue through its incursion in the Kargil region did contribute to a limited war between the two states in 1999. However, despite the Pakistani provocation India exercised remarkable restraint and a large-scale war was effectively avoided. Similarly, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 India resorted to a strategy of coercive diplomacy albeit with mixed results. However, it is important to note that neither of these two crises culminated in a full-scale war between the two long-standing adversaries.

In the aftermath of the 2001-2002 crisis India and Pakistan with some American prodding embarked upon a peace process. The results from this process have been limited though it had resulted in some de-escalation of tensions on the Kashmir front. However, in August 2008, tensions once again came to the fore with Indian allegations about a Pakistani violation of the cease-fire agreement. Matters worsened considerably after India (and the United States) alleged that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI-D) was behind the attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July 2008. His

While relations with Pakistan remain quite fraught, Indo-US relations now seem to be on a very secure footing. The Bush administration's willingness to exempt India from the expectations of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (which India had never acceded to in the first place) and pursue a civilian nuclear agreement provided a sound foundation for the relationship. After protracted bilateral (and internal) negotiations the Congress-led regime of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh withstood a parliamentary vote of noconfidence in July 2008. There is little question that this agreement can make a meaningful contribution toward alleviating India's energy needs. However, once consummated, its larger significance will lie in ending India's thirty-odd years of nuclear isolation from the global order. Since the United States had been one of the principal protagonists in creating and bolstering these global arrangements, the shift in American policy, which made an exception for India, was nothing short of revolutionary. Consequently, the American concession on this critical issue must be construed as recognition of India's emerging potential as a great power in Asia and beyond.

### **India Resurgent?**

Where is India's foreign policy headed in the post-Cold War era? Obviously the structure of the international system has changed beyond recognition since the immediate post-war era. Will India be able to sustain the pragmatic approach to the conduct of its foreign

policy without completely sacrificing the values that it cherishes and protects at home? Or is the new found pragmatism likely to manifest itself in a crass pursuit of India's parochial interests at the cost of any commitment to the preservation of those values? These questions are far from trivial and there are no clear-cut answers that are available. However, given the internal shifts in political power, its raid rate of economic growth and its emerging position in the global order, it is doubtful that the country will lapse into its past posture as a revisionist critic of the global order. Iv

Endnotes

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xviii Cohen, The Indian Army.

xix Sumit Ganguly, "Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View From New Delhi," *Asian Survey* Volume 29, Number 12 (December 1989), pp. 1123-1135.

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