

# **India's European Diplomacy: The German Opportunity**

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## **Summary**

*The extended era of under-performance in Indo-German bilateral relations is finally coming to an end. In a paradox, this is occurring despite the widespread perception that the ties between the two countries would find it hard to recover from the deep divergence that emerged after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the Ukraine war and the unfolding shift in the geopolitics of Europe and Asia have created a slender opening that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have seized. A consolidated German partnership could constitute a solid anchor to India's deepening strategic ambitions in Europe.*

## **Introduction**

The year 2024 has seen significant new advances in India's engagement with Germany and reflects the new momentum in the under-performing strategic partnership between New Delhi and Berlin. A variety of initiatives – ranging from business to defence – provided a new basis for optimism about the bilateral relationship. This Working Paper reviews the different phases in the India-Germany relationship and suggests that the two sides are now at a historic inflection point. They are poised to transcend their divergence over Russia, explore common ground in Asia, expand security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and prepare to cope with the prospect of 'America First' nationalism and isolationism. It concludes with the assessment that New Delhi and Berlin can no longer be 'reluctant powers' and will need to take larger responsibility in stabilising Eurasia and securing the Indo-Pacific.

## **Before Independence**

Germany, as a rising European great power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was among the few that had developed engagement with India before its independence from the British colonial rule. In both countries, there was a bit of romance that began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the German adventures in the East and the attempts to find cultural connections with ancient India.<sup>1</sup> As its industrial capabilities and diplomatic ambitions grew after the unification of its diverse principalities in 1871, Germany began to compete vigorously with the superpower of the age, Great Britain in Europe as well as in the colonial world. Imperial Berlin undertook an active policy of undermining the British Empire. This, in turn, produced a convergence of interests between Berlin and the emerging forces of radical nationalism in India in the run-up to the First World War. The German Reich was at war with the British Empire and its establishment reached out to the Indian nationalists working in Europe and North America.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietmar Rothermund, *The German Intellectual Quest for India* (New Delhi: Manohar Books, 1986).

Radical Indian nationalists across Europe and North America were growing impatient with the Indian National Congress' peaceful methods. "The time will soon come when rifles and blood will take the place of pens and ink", proclaimed the newly formed Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast.<sup>2</sup> Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, Har Dayal, the leader of the American-based Association, met with Alfred Zimmermann, the German Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and the Berlin Committee was born. Over the next three years, in what came to be known as the 'Hindu-German Conspiracy', German money and arms, and Indian pro-independence propaganda literature were smuggled into the neutral United States (US) – their destination was Karachi from where a grand insurrection was to begin.<sup>3</sup>

Communication channels were set up through revolutionaries from Punjab and Bengal, who liaised with German agencies. With German backing, a provisional government of India was set up in Kabul in August 1915.<sup>4</sup> While the efforts of the Hindu-German Conspiracy were largely unsuccessful, it, nevertheless, left a legacy of political links between Germany and Indian nationalists.<sup>5</sup>

In the Second World War as well, India's anti-colonial struggle and Anglo-German rivalry put Berlin back in the calculus of the Indian nationalists. The Indian nationalist leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, smuggled himself across the Soviet Union into Berlin, meeting with German Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop and Chancellor Adolf Hitler, both of whom expressed interest in his idea of developing a fifth column of Indian soldiers fighting on Britain's side in Europe. Indian troops rallying around Bose received military training from German elite commando forces near Hamburg, while 17,000 Indian prisoners-of-war in Germany and Italy were freed – a quarter of whom joined Bose's Free India Legion in 1942. At the same time, German troops were also aiding the Faqir of Ipi to fight the British in Waziristan and coordinate with other Indian fighters in and around the subcontinent. However, the tide of the war began to turn in the Allies' favour, and German priorities turned away from their global ambitions, receding back into their neighbourhood. Bose himself shifted his priorities to Japan and Southeast Asia. Despite this, Bose's Free India Centre and Free India Radio, both based in Berlin, remained a symbol of the proximity of the two nations, which had aligned with each other in times of upheaval. The two world wars marked the first major instances of security cooperation between Germany and the Indian national movement. They also underlined the difficulties of consolidating it amidst the enduring global dominance of the Anglo-American powers.<sup>6</sup>

## Cold War Challenges

The comprehensive defeat of Germany in the Second World War and its partition by the victorious Allies was soon followed by the decolonisation of India which set the stage for a

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<sup>2</sup> Giles T Brown, "The Hindu Conspiracy, 1914-1917", *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1948, 299-310.

<sup>3</sup> C Raja Mohan, "What is the 'Hindu-German Conspiracy'", *Indian Express*, 6 October 2015, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/raja-mandala-a-hindu-german-conspiracy/>.

<sup>4</sup> Lal Baha, "The North-West Frontier in the First World War", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1970, 29-37.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas G Fraser, "Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914-18", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1977, 255-72.

<sup>6</sup> Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (London: Belknap Press, 2011), 184-231.

new phase of bilateral engagement between the partitioned India and divided Germany.<sup>7</sup> Independent India became the first country in the world to end the state of war with West Germany in January 1950. India and West Germany established diplomatic ties in March 1951, largely due to the strong rapport shared by their founding fathers, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. The two leaders – both of whom also held the foreign ministry portfolio – shared similar interests as they navigated the Cold War era. The two leaders sought to maintain a degree of autonomy within the massive constraints imposed by the Cold War, secure their national sovereignties and rebuild or build national capabilities after the Second World War. The Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic contacts with India as soon as it received the permission of the Allies to reopen the German Foreign Office in 1951.

The first German ambassador, Ernst Wilhelm Meyer, had a great affinity toward Nehru and his non-aligned vision, and when his superiors at Bonn asked him to condemn India's decision to establish an East German trade mission in New Delhi, he refused. Meyer argued that it was unwise to nettle Nehru when Indo-German relations were in their infancy.<sup>8</sup> Nehru's visit to West Germany in 1956 further cemented relations between the two countries. Adenauer requested Nehru to press for German reunification, to which Nehru replied that India's non-alignment policy – which was strengthened at the Bandung Conference in 1955 – precluded it from interfering in such matters; nonetheless, as a friendly gesture to Adenauer, Nehru did not accept East Germany's invitation to visit East Berlin. In the early 1950s, the Indian prime minister hoped that Germany would unite and that, in Nehru's words, the 'puppet regime' of East Germany would fall, as would the 'unnatural state' of Pakistan, leading to a similar Indian reunification.<sup>9</sup> Nehru's opinions, which were far more charitable toward West Germany than to its Eastern counterpart, stand in contrast to those who interpret the first prime minister's world view in terms of neutrality and equidistance between the East and the West. Nehru argued that India could align closely with only one of the two Germanies, and his decision to pursue stronger trade and aid ties with West Germany reflected a pragmatic streak in the prime minister. East Germany and India only began diplomatic relations in 1972 when the Hallstein Doctrine – according to which West Germany would view any country's recognition of East Germany to be an unfriendly act and suspend economic aid to it – was abolished as part of Chancellor Willy Brandt's 'Neue Ostpolitik' that sought productive engagement between the two German states.<sup>10</sup>

With Nehru's death in 1964, Indo-German relations went into a period of drift, punctuated by brief phases of engagement. West Germany's president Heinrich Lübke's trip to India in 1962 had been the first by a German head of state, but it was only during Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's tenure that economic ties were revived. India's 1971 war with Pakistan, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, and Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency in 1975 were

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<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive historical review of bilateral relations, see Rajendra K Jain, *India and Germany in a Turbulent World* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Dietmar Rothermund, "Sixty years of Indo-German Relations", Lecture at Max Mueller Bhawan, New Delhi, 20 March 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Amit Das Gupta, "Divided Nations: India and Germany,, in *India in the World since 1947: National and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Andreas Hilger and Corinna Unger (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 304.

<sup>10</sup> Dietmar Rothermund, "Indo-German Relations: From Cautious Beginning to Robust Partnership", *India Quarterly*, Vol 66, No. 1, 2010.

viewed with scepticism in Germany, which criticised the setback to democracy in India and called for the release of jailed dissidents.

Schmidt was far more interested in deepening ties with China than he was with India amid the unfolding entente between China and the West. That India was drifting towards the Soviet Union reinforced the strategic focus in Berlin away from India. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, Indo-German relations were ones of 'benign neglect' – as described by Dirk Oncken, the West German Ambassador to India – in which India's economic stagnation and Germany's reduced official development assistance toward it led to a dwindling of relations between the two countries.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the Indo-German Joint Commission on Industrial and Economic Cooperation was set up in 1978 (after the end to Emergency in 1977), and it was the first of its kind. The mid-1980s marked a steady increase in bilateral trade and cooperation, symbolised by Schmidt's successor Helmut Kohl's visit in 1983 and 1986. Rajiv Gandhi sought to bring a fresh perspective to India's engagement with Germany during his visit to Bonn in 1986. During this period, West Germany had become one of India's largest trading partners, and German investments in India had grown considerably. This reflected the post-War rise of West Germany's industrial might.

On the geopolitical front, once again, drastic changes in the two countries and upheavals in the global order brought about cooperation between the two countries. India's drift towards Soviet Union and state-led socialism were made unviable by the Soviet Union's demise and the end of the Cold War. The fall of the German Wall in 1989, the unification of Germany and the liberalisation of India's economic regime in 1991 were pivotal moments that affected the foreign policy trajectories of both countries.

## **Unrealised Strategic Partnership**

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union during 1989-91 provided a new and positive global context for reimagining the relationship between Berlin and New Delhi. The breakdown of India's old economic model based on Soviet state socialism at the same time compelled New Delhi to begin reforms in favour of economic liberalisation and globalisation. This, in turn, opened the space for greater commercial collaboration with German industry as well as deeper trade ties with Berlin and Brussels that were accelerating the economic integration of Europe. The long-standing presence of German companies like Siemens in India and the chambers of commerce set up in the mid-1950s were there to support stronger economic ties between New Delhi and Berlin. The disappearance of the Soviet Union – the strategic anchor of India's foreign policy during the Cold War – also persuaded India to reinvent her foreign policy, diversify her great power relations and rebuild its ties with the Western powers, including Germany.

Within a decade after the end of the Cold War, New Delhi and Berlin established a strategic partnership in 2000 and developed institutional mechanisms, such as the

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<sup>11</sup> Hannes Ebert, "India's Germany Policy since 1947: An Entrepreneurial Partnership", in *Engaging the World: Indian Foreign Policy since 1947*, ed. Sumit Ganguly (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 272.

Inter-Governmental Commission, to solidify the partnership.<sup>12</sup> The stability of leadership in both capitals since the turn of the millennium provided a good basis to build sustained high-level engagement with Germany. In the 2000s, India has had only three prime ministers (Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi) and Germany had three chancellors (Gerhard Schroder, Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz). Besides regular bilateral visits, the leaders had opportunities to connect with each other in a widening range of international summits in the 2000s, including the G-20 and India's regular participation in the G-7. India and Germany also found common causes on the global stage for the first time, for example, in the quest for an expansion of the permanent membership of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. New Delhi also backed the German initiative on building a global "alliance for multilateralism" at the UN.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, a quarter of a century later, the outcomes of the strategic partnership have been underwhelming. Although trade and investment volumes have expanded significantly since the launch of the strategic partnership, they are yet to realise their full potential. India's business environment, despite much improvement, remains quite daunting to the smaller companies or the *Mittelstand* in Germany.<sup>14</sup> Although India's economic performance improved considerably since the 1990s, its shine as a market dimmed when seen along with China. With its commercial roots struck deep in China, the German industry seemed to have little incentive to make a big push towards India.

In the 2000s, it was not easy for New Delhi to get around Germany's globalist agenda on nuclear non-proliferation. However, thanks to the historic civil nuclear initiative that was negotiated between India and the US between 2005 and 2008 and President George W Bush's persuasive powers, Germany and other smaller European nations suppressed their opposition to let the initiative get past the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Germany's strict opposition to all things nuclear meant, there was little room for cooperation in this domain. The nuclear deal was the precursor to the liberation of export controls on dual-use and other sensitive technologies to India. Germany, however, has been hesitant to liberalise these rules. Even as it campaigned to sell more arms to India, Berlin could not always overcome the domestic liberal resistance to arms sales to India that fell into a 'conflict zone'.<sup>15</sup>

As Germany's commitment to democracy and human rights surged after the end of the Cold War, Berlin's scrutiny and criticism of India on these issues grew. Sections of the German establishment were also eager to meddle in the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. Although the intensity of German diplomatic activism varied over time, the post-Cold War German focus on human rights, democracy and conflict resolution triggered

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Germany Relations", New Delhi, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Germany-2024.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Harsh Pant and Tobias Scholz, "Indo-German Strategic Convergences in times of paradigm shifts", New Delhi, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2023, <https://in.boell.org/en/2023/05/11/indo-german-strategic-convergences-times-paradigm-shifts>.

<sup>14</sup> Rahul Chhabra, Secretary Ministry of External Affairs, "India is the opportunity that German *Mittelstand* must explore", Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, 8 June 2021, [https://www.ficci.in/api/press\\_release\\_details/4183](https://www.ficci.in/api/press_release_details/4183).

<sup>15</sup> For a review of India-German partnership and its changing contours, see, Christian Wagner, "India as a partner of German foreign policy", Berlin: SWP, 2024, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024RP17/>.

irritation and resentment in New Delhi. Germany's domestic social policies, too, began to create friction with New Delhi. The separation of a three-year-old Indian child from her parents and having put her in foster care on suspicion of abuse became another point of contention between Berlin and New Delhi. This tension between German liberalism and India's democratic backsliding became sharper since Modi took charge in 2014. The German media's focus on human rights issues in India tended to undermine the proposition that the relationship between Berlin and New Delhi was built on shared political and social values.<sup>16</sup> The Russian invasion of Ukraine brought the troubling Russian factor back into play between New Delhi and Berlin. Although Germany had developed a special relationship of its own with Russia both during and after the Cold War, New Delhi's reluctance to condemn Vladimir Putin's aggression and its continued purchase of oil from Moscow rankled in Berlin as elsewhere in Europe since 2022. By late 2024, however, the complexity of the situation in Ukraine, the growing political resistance in Washington to open-ended military support for Kyiv, the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections and the growing divisions within Europe on the Russian question had made this less of a barrier for expanding the engagement between the two countries. India's own new outreach to Ukraine and Poland in late 2024 and its support for a peace process seemed to open new possibilities for productive consultations between New Delhi and Berlin on the question of Ukraine and European security.<sup>17</sup>

## **Towards New Pragmatism**

The intensifying geopolitical challenges confronting Germany, its economic slowdown and the constraints on traditional commercial ties with China began to persuade Berlin to take a fresh look at the relationship with India. New Delhi's continuing improvement in the relations with Washington, its sustained high growth rates, its potential as an important element in the diversification of Germany's Asian relations and the role of India as a potential partner in the outreach to the Global South made a reset in the relationship an important priority for Berlin, and it was reflected in the run-up to and Scholz's visit to India in October 2024.

In a rare country-specific paper published before Scholz's visit, the German Foreign Office outlined a new strategic approach to India.<sup>18</sup> Five ideas stand out among the many laid out in the paper.

The first is about managing the differences on Ukraine and preventing the Russian question from tripping up the partnership with India. The focus paper notes the divergence with India on Russia's war in Ukraine but recognises the need to build bridges with India through "dialogue in a spirit of trust and identify joint initiatives, particularly in fields where direct

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<sup>16</sup> Gurjit Singh, "The Role of perceptions in India-Germany Relations", *ORF Occasional Paper 360* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Patryk Kugiel, "Modi's visit to Poland, Ukraine strengthens relations with Central Europe, EU", Warsaw, Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2024; <https://www.pism.pl/publications/modis-visit-to-poland-ukraine-strengthens-relations-with-central-europe-the-eu>.

<sup>18</sup> The German Federal Government, "Focus on India", Berlin, October 2024; <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2680288/8909ac2c501ab85d55defff7d1b8b75d/241016-fokus-indien-data.pdf>.

security interests are affected.” Berlin also “welcomes the Indian government’s repeatedly expressed willingness to work to bring about a peaceful end to the war. India can make an important contribution here thanks to the special influence it brings to bear in the international community.”

This willingness in Berlin to tone down the moral outrage against India’s position on Ukraine is reinforced by the deepening divisions within Germany on the next steps towards Kyiv and Moscow. According to reports, 47 per cent of Germans support Ukraine’s fight to recapture all territory currently occupied by Russia, while 43 per cent believe Ukraine should cede parts of its territory to Russia to end the war.<sup>19</sup> The political parties in Germany are also split on this issue. Mainstream parties emphasise different aspects of Ukraine policy, with some advocating for continued robust support for Ukraine, while others are more cautious, fearing an escalation of the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Second, it underlines the importance of deeper economic ties with India in the increasingly turbulent Indo-Pacific. This is a major break from the tradition of putting ‘China First’ in its Asian economic policy. Reversing Germany’s four decades of deep commercial engagement with China is not on the cards. However, Berlin is determined to diversify its economic relationship away from China and India is on top of the list of likely partners. Germany is making a renewed and determined effort to revitalise the economic partnership with India. For New Delhi, there could be no better partner than Berlin in reviving the manufacturing sector in India and has a stake in drawing more German investment into its effort to raise the share of manufacturing in its economy.

Third, Berlin is also eager to “work with India to further promote key technologies and sectors for the future such as artificial intelligence, environmental technologies, energy technologies, digital and space technologies as well as semiconductors. This will strengthen our strategic and technological sovereignty as well as economic resilience – even though India is competing with us in some of these spheres. We want to set ambitious targets for this with India in a roadmap for innovation and technology.”<sup>21</sup>

Fourth, Germany wants to be a strong security partner for India in Asia, which has emerged as a major theatre of global conflict. As the German paper further notes, “The rules-based international order is under pressure in the Indo-Pacific and in India’s direct neighbourhood. Germany and India share the common goal of defending this order and its principles. In an environment marked by fundamental shifts of power, exertion of economic and political pressure and new arms dynamics in the region, India is asserting its mounting aspirations to shape developments.” The paper also notes that “the Bundeswehr is demonstrating a more frequent presence in the Indo-Pacific region and expanding its cooperation with the Indian Armed Forces. As part of regular deployments of Bundeswehr units in the Indo-Pacific and

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<sup>19</sup> Jeff Rathke, “The Ukraine War and the German Election”, (Washington DC: The American German Institute), 19 December 2024, <https://americangerman.institute/2024/12/the-ukraine-war-and-the-german-election/>.

<sup>20</sup> Jens Thurau, “Survey: Germans fear Russia—and political instability”, Deutsche Welle, 12 December 2024, <https://americangerman.institute/2024/12/the-ukraine-war-and-the-german-election/>.

<sup>21</sup> The German Federal Government, “Focus on India”, Berlin, October 2024, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2680288/8909ac2c501ab85d55deff7d1b8b75d/241016-fokus-indien-data.pdf>.



joint manoeuvres with close partners, the German government will place cooperation between the German and Indian armed forces on a more permanent footing.”<sup>22</sup>

Berlin also wants to “conclude an agreement on reciprocal logistical support of the armed forces with India in order to facilitate deployments of the Bundeswehr in the Indo-Pacific in future. A liaison officer is to be seconded to the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region in New Delhi.” From the Indian perspective, the most important new element is the German promise to help India make weapons at home. Berlin offers to “expand its arms cooperation with India, continue to improve the reliability and predictability of arms export control procedures and promote and support cooperation between German and Indian arms companies.”<sup>23</sup> An early Indian decision on the acquisition of submarines from Germany and Berlin’s commitment to transfer a range of advanced technologies and enhance the local sourcing of material and parts would demonstrate the new possibilities for a German role in modernising India’s defence industrial base.

Lastly, Berlin wants to step up the recruitment of Indian skilled personnel to boost the German economy that is facing a significant demographic decline. This is not an easy decision for Germany amid growing hostility towards immigration within the country. Yet, there is also the recognition that immigration of technical talent is critical for the future of the German economy. The focus paper notes, “With the Migration and Mobility Agreement (signed in 2023) Germany and India have considerably expanded opportunities for the increased mobility and fair migration of skilled workers, students, trainees, researchers and journalists between the two countries. A joint working group on mobility and migration issues was set up under the agreement. The German government has placed cooperation on repatriation on a new, viable basis with the agreement, thus helping to limit irregular migration.” India, on its part today, is eager to promote legal migration of its skilled personnel and be more supportive on limiting illegal migration. German government leaders say that the strategy of attracting Indian professionals has been a success. According to Federal labour ministry statistics, some 137,000 Indians were employed in skilled-labour positions in February 2024, that is roughly 23,000 more than the previous year. In 2015, the number of Indians in such jobs was about 23,000 in total.<sup>24</sup>

The new German approach has been described as pragmatic that skirts over some of the traditional difficulties in the bilateral relationship. As Tobias Scholz puts it, the paper “combines an interests-based approach with a good amount of pragmatism. In areas where cooperation is already increasing, like in security, climate and technology policy, the German government makes pertinent new suggestions. However, in areas where the partnership previously faced challenges, like in multilateral cooperation or the European Union-India Free Trade Agreement, the strategic document does not pitch completely new ideas.” This is not surprising since the paper is produced by a government and a committee within it with the specific purpose of building on the positives in the relationship and widening the ambit

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Deutsche Welle, “Germany takes steps to attract skilled Indian workers”, 16 October 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-takes-steps-to-attract-skilled-indian-workers/a-70517896#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20streamline%20the%20migration%20of%20skilled,offering%20German%20classes%20for%20those%20intending%20to%20relocate.>



of cooperation. But sceptics are right in pointing to the need for New Delhi and Berlin to thoroughly discuss their differences and consciously address the potential risks in the relationship. At the same time, optimists have a point in arguing that the structural changes in the international system – in geopolitics as well as in geo-economics – might offer opportunities to transcend past difficulties and find new ground for strategic cooperation. Progress in implementing the ideas in the paper are bound to lend the long missing geopolitical heft to the Indo-German relationship.

## **Towards a New Indo-German Compact**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian nationalists turned to a willing Germany to overthrow the British colonial yoke. That did not go very far, as the Anglo-American allies prevailed over Berlin. After the two World Wars, Germany became a critical part of the world order led by the Anglo-Americans in the Cold War. India, which was part of Britain's imperial defence system and played a key role in supporting the Anglo-Americans in the two world wars, drifted away towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Despite their contrasting locations, the two sides carved out a niche for cooperation in the 1950s. That phase did not last long and the geopolitical and commercial distance between the two rapidly widened as India turned inward economically and took radical positions that pitted it against the West on many issues. Efforts to bridge the gap did not really work during the Cold War despite the shared political values and enormous goodwill for Germany in India, the substantive German developmental assistance to India and impressive cultural and educational cooperation.

The end of the Cold War during 1989-91 opened the door for a productive engagement between the two countries and the announcement of a strategic partnership in 2000. Despite significant advances during these decades, New Delhi and Berlin have been unable to realise the full potential of their bilateral partnership. That is beginning to change amidst the new churn in global affairs. This includes the return of great power rivalry, the breakdown of the post-Cold War regional security order in Europe, the rise and assertion of China, and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific are altering the geopolitics of the world. Meanwhile, the US turn away from the world of globalisation that it had built since the Second World War amid China's weaponisation of trade, technology and manufacturing for unilateral gain is forcing major nations to recalibrate their geo-economic calculus.

After the Second World War, both Germany and India were seen as reluctant powers. India had consciously rejected power politics and presented itself as an exponent of moralpolitik. Post-war Germany had to eschew nationalism and any independent role in the world and embedded itself into North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European project. Years after the Cold War, Germany continued to resist greater responsibility. By the mid-2010s, Germany began to call itself a 'reflective power' – a term coined by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier – ready to be more assertive in global politics, but undertaking this new role with 'restraint, deliberation and peaceful negotiation.'<sup>25</sup> Although India was under no constitutional or externally imposed constraint, restraint, peaceful orientation and commitment to liberal internationalism have long characterised India's own prudent global policies. As its material capabilities grow and its international standing rises, New Delhi is

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<sup>25</sup> Frank-Walter Steinmeier, "Germany's New Global Role: Berlin Steps Up", *Foreign Affairs*, 95 (4), July/August, 2016.

moving, ever so gingerly, towards greater global security activism and talking about being a 'leading power' in the world.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, the progress towards a larger role in the world has been slow in the making. However, the transformative developments of the 2020s demand that Berlin and New Delhi move with greater urgency and speed to take responsibility for reshaping their regional environments in Europe and Asia. The changing global dynamic and the increasing interpenetration of European and Asian theatres also demand greater security cooperation in Eurasia. As the old global trading and technological order crumbles, there is also much that Berlin and Delhi could help each other in modernising their economies. Unlike in the past, when a 'developed' Germany provided economic and technical assistance to an 'underdeveloped' India, there is a greater possibility for give and take between the two nations. India is expected to surpass Germany as the third-largest economy in the world in the 2020s and it is also becoming a major producer of technologies. That in turn provides the basis for a healthy and sustainable strategic partnership between the two nations.

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<sup>26</sup> Ashley Tellis, "India as a Leading Power", Washington: Carnegie Endowment, 2016. See also C Raja Mohan, *Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2015).