ISAS Working Paper

India's Regional Security Cooperation:
The Nehru Raj Legacy

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Abstract

The paper explores the logic of continuity in independent India's security policy from where the British Raj had left off. Much like the Raj, Nehru's India sought to provide security to its smaller neighbours. Although the British Raj and the newly independent Republic of India were different political regimes, they were responding to the enduring geographic imperatives and the burdens that came with being a large entity with significant military capabilities. Newly independent India was indeed less powerful than the Raj thanks to a much weaker economic base, the partition of the Subcontinent, and a geopolitical environment shaped by the Cold War. Yet the first decade after independence saw Nehru sustain the Raj legacy as the provider of security in India's neighbourhood. As India becomes one of the leading economies of the world and a significant military power, that tradition is gaining a fresh lease of life and a broader sphere of application than its immediate neighbourhood.

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Introduction

Any suggestion that India's foreign and security policies under its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru were similar in many respects to those of the British Raj that he inherited would evoke serious contention. The international relations scholarship has largely held that India's foreign policy originated at the dawn of independence and was largely inspired by the vision of one man, Jawaharlal Nehru. There are few studies that have explored the roots of India's foreign policy in the two traditions that it had inherited – one was the worldview of the national movement and the other was the foreign policy imperatives of the Government of India before independence. Further compounding this was the near-universal interpretation of Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy vision as entirely idealist in its orientation. To be sure, a strong sense of liberal internationalism permeated Nehru's worldview, the articulation of India's foreign policy and its actual conduct. At the same time, Nehru also had a strong realist tendency in his worldview that was reflected most acutely in his approach to security cooperation with the neighbours. The general one-dimensional characterisation of Nehru's policy is also rooted in the lack of empirical studies of India's foreign policy record, the comprehensive neglect of Nehru's approach to the neighbours and an unwillingness to confront the great power aspirations that guided his foreign policy. A closer look at Nehru's policies of security cooperation might offer insights into how India's future role, in contemporary parlance as a 'net security provider', might emerge. Revisiting Nehru also undercuts the so-called 'Nehruvian' critique of India's current search for a larger security role in the neighbourhood and beyond.

The paper has four parts. It begins with a review of the sources of continuity in the security policies in the neighbourhood of the Raj and Nehru's India. In the second, it offers an assessment of Nehru's efforts to sustain the security structure for the Subcontinent inherited from the Raj especially in the Himalayan region. The third section looks at Nehru's attempt to build security cooperation beyond the northern frontier. The fourth and concluding section of the paper offers a brief reflection on the legacy of Nehru's security diplomacy.

The Enduring Geopolitical Imperative

In a comparative study of the security frameworks of the British Raj and independent India in their geographic neighbourhood, Martin Wainwright pointed to the huge continuities across the great chasm of decolonisation that separated them. "Although the two regimes differed markedly in their constitutional basis of power, their ethnic composition, and their long-term goals, the attitudes of their members toward South Asian security were remarkably similar".[2] While many of India's neighbours have seen India's regional policy as a determined effort to

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[2] A Martin Wainwright, "Regional Security and Paramount Powers: The British Raj and Independent India", in Chetan Kumar and Marvin Weinbaum, Eds., South Asia Approaches the Millennium (Boulder, Colo: Westview, 1995), p. 43.

sustain Delhi's primacy in the post-Raj era, the nationalist discourse within India did not, unsurprisingly, feel comfortable with the notion of India pursuing a policy not very different from that of the colonial masters. The significant opposition of the Indian National Congress to many of British India's regional policies also meant that the temptation to see a clear break from the colonial past was irresistible. Adding to the problem was the growing idolisation of Nehru at home and the domestic and international perception of his foreign policy as being driven by high-minded idealism. Others, opposing Nehru from the right at home, also vigorously criticised his foreign policy for not being realistic enough. In the more recent period, the rule by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition at the centre during 1998-2004 saw the emergence of a debate on whether the government of Atal Behari Vajpayee was abandoning the founding principles articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru.[3] On the worship and demonisation of India's first Prime Minister, A G Noorani wrote in sharp polemic: "It has been Jawaharlal Nehru's lot, as that of any other great figure in history, to be subjected either to denigration or adulation. Informed, critical assessment, which recognises both the sterling qualities and the grave flaws that belong to any mortal, is regarded as apologetics by traducers and belittlement by professional sycophants".[4]

If one looks beyond the contemporary political correctness and the domestic argumentation, the nature of continuity between the policies of the Raj and those of Nehru's India is not difficult to trace. One is the fact that both were paramount powers in the Subcontinent. "The term paramount is historically appropriate because the Raj used the term, paramountcy, to describe its sovereignty over the princely states, and because the Indian National Congress objected when the British Parliament allowed the Indian government's paramountcy to lapse with the transfer of power. Independent India did not, of course, exercise paramountcy over Pakistan, but after 1947 India was by far the most powerful state in South Asia and therefore dominated matters pertaining to the region's security".[5] Neither Nehru nor his successors employed the term paramountcy, which was entirely inappropriate to the post-colonial times that new India has inhabited. Yet the notion of primacy has been a major impulse for independent India's regional policy and the importance of keeping other powers at bay from the region. Indira Gandhi's muscular approach to the region has often been described as the 'Indira Doctrine' and Rajiv Gandhi's use of diplomatic and military force have been more explicit assertions of India's search for regional primacy.[6] Undergirding the search for primacy has been the notion of the 'strategic unity' of the Subcontinent that many practitioners and observers of India's foreign policy have continuously used through the decades. As George Tanham put it, the Indian elites

[3] See Chirs Ogden, "Norms, Indian Foreign Policy and the 1998-2004 National Democratic Alliance", Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 99, No. 408, 2010, pp. 303-15; see also Achin Vanaik, "Making India Strong: The BJP-led Government's Foreign Policy Perspectives", South Asia: A Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol. 25, No.3, 2002, pp. 321-41.

[4] A G Noorani, "Nehru: A Democratic Curzon?", Frontline, Vol. 17, No. 26, December 23, 2000 to January 5, 2001, available at <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1726/17260780.htm>

[5] Wainwright, op. cit., p. 42.

[6] See Devin Hagerty, "India's Regional Security Doctrine", Asian Survey, Vol. 31, No. 4, April 1991, pp. 351-63.

share a fundamental belief that "the unity of the subcontinent reflects the integrity and dreams of a people and constitutes an integral part of their social fabric".[7]

The commonplace understanding of India's foreign policy pre-1947 is that it was driven by British imperial interests rather than those of India itself. The nature of the continuity between the foreign policies of the two regimes becomes clearer when we recognise that the Raj had considerable autonomy from Great Britain and that it tended to reflect the geopolitical imperatives of India. An eminent historian of India, Ainslie Embree, argued that the Government of India, despite ultimate control by Great Britain, was responding to the needs and interests of the physical territory that it controlled in the Subcontinent and that the "content and style" of the Raj diplomacy "was a formative legacy for modern India".[8] Embree reinforces this conclusion by a number of propositions. One, the Government of British India pursued policies in foreign affairs that "reflected the political, economic, and geographic realities of the Indian situation, with the impulse for these policies coming from within the structures of the bureaucracy of the Government of India, not of Great Britain". Second, the foreign policies of the Raj "were the product of territorial control by a well-organized authority, and, given the fact of power, the alien origin of the ruling group is not decisive factor". Third, Embree suggests that "any strong power" based in the Subcontinent, "would have behaved much the same in relation to neighbouring states".

Finally, Embree concludes that the British Raj sought to develop 'diplomacy of dependency' in its neighbourhood. Seeking to prevent rival powers from undermining its authority in India, the Raj was determined "not to permit any genuinely independent country to exist on its borders". Although there was no explicit statement to this effect it reflects a deep-rooted imperative in structuring India's security. "The usual formulation of policy was that the government did not desire to control its neighbours; it did, however, insist [that] governments were not hostile. The translation of this insistence on friendly neighbours into policy often led to outright conquest, as in the case of Burma, or as in the case of Afghanistan, a combination of military intervention and diplomatic pressures". This diplomacy of dependency developed in the 19th century was not something that disappeared with the Raj. The system of protectorates and buffer states that were part of the ring fence erected by the Raj could not simply be discarded by the rulers of independent India. To be sure, the leaders of the national movement were critical of the Britain's imperial expansionism and its relentless efforts to consolidate decisive influence across its claimed boundaries.[9] Once in charge of India's security, the geopolitical imperatives compelled

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[7] George K Tanham, Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretative Essay (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1992).

[8] Ainslie T-. Embree, Imagining India: Essays on Indian History, Edited by Mark Juergensmeyer (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 117-20.

[9] For statements of the Indian National Congress on issues relating to British frontier policies see Bimla Prasad, The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy (Calcutta: Bookland, 1962).

Nehru and his successors to sustain the Raj legacy to the extent that they could and within the new limitations on its freedom of manoeuvre.

The Himalayan Inner Ring

As it became a strong and expanding territorial entity in the Subcontinent, the Raj constructed for itself a three-fold frontier.[10] The first frontier of administration or the inner line covered areas over which the Raj exercised full sovereignty, excluding of course the princely states that were under indirect rule. The second un-administered frontier or the outer line covered regions where the British had strong relations with local ruling groups, provided them with subsidies and protection in return for their help in defending the Raj and left them largely self-governing in internal affairs. The third was the frontier of influence, where the Raj created strong alliances with the local rulers that explicitly ruled out security ties with hostile powers beyond, initially France and West European rivals and later Russia and China. The regions between first (inner) and the second (outer) lines is often described as the inner ring and included Balochistan, the North West Frontier Province, Kashmir, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, the North East Frontier Agency, and the tribal regions of Upper Burma. The buffer regions beyond the un-administered frontier are often described as the outer ring fence and included arrangements with the tribes of the British Somaliland, the alliances with Oman and the Trucial states of the Gulf, Persia, Afghanistan, Kashgharia (for a short while), Tibet, Siam, Malaya and the fully controlled Aden at the mouth of the Suez and the Straits Settlements (Meleka, Penang and Singapore) in the Malacca Straits.[11]

This extraordinary double ring-fence system structured to protect the Raj began to be modified well before decolonisation. The separation of the Straits Settlement (1867) and Burma (1935) and Aden (1937) ended the direct administration of these territories from India. Britain avoided making Nepal a fully controlled territory and restrained the Raj from turning Tibet into a protectorate after it opened the region and made it a buffer. If its rapid decline in the early 20th century was making it difficult for Great Britain to cope with its burdens around the world, it was equally challenging for independent India to sustain the security structures created by the Raj. Partition made India weaker but also relieved it of the burden of securing frontier regions with Iran and Afghanistan. But the British Parliament's decision to end the paramountcy of the Raj within the Subcontinent generated the massive national imperative of reconsolidating India's territorial sovereignty. The first task was to integrate the princely states – more than 550 of them

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[10] For a comprehensive contemporary description, see Lord Curzon, "Frontiers", Romanes Lecture, 1907, available at < http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/resources/links/curzon.pdf>

[11] For brief descriptions of this complex system, Peter John Brobst, Future of the Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India's Independence and the Defence of Asia (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 2005); James Onley, "The Raj Reconsidered: British India's Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence", Asian Affairs, Vol. 40, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 44-62.

which had covered nearly two-fifths of undivided India – with independent India. The dispute with Pakistan over the accession of Jammu & Kashmir would endure complicating India's regional security. The second was to cope with the immediate and calamitous consequences of the Partition of Bengal and the Punjab and the creation of new frontiers in these states. The third and equally challenging was the question of independent India's future relationship with the Himalayan kingdoms. Addressing this challenge would remain very important for India's security policy after independence.

For emerging India two choices presented themselves in dealing with the new situation in the Himalayas. One was to sustain the old framework that bound these kingdoms to the Raj and the other was to simply annex them into the Republic and reduce any ambiguities about their status. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the Home Minister in Nehru's Cabinet, believed that the kingdoms must be treated as princely states that should be brought into India's fold. Nehru, however, opted for a more complex policy that viewed these kingdoms as part of India's security perimeter and calculus of frontier defence – avoid forcible accession but bind them into stronger economic interdependence with the Republic.[12] This approach essentially meant sustaining the Raj framework of treating these kingdoms as allies and protectorates. There was some variation in the relations between the Raj and the three kingdoms. Nepal was treated as an independent country, Sikkim as a full protectorate of India and Bhutan enjoyed a status in between. All three, however, were strongly bound into the security framework of the Raj through the treaties signed with Nepal in 1819 and 1923, Bhutan in 1865 and 1910, and Sikkim in 1817 and 1890.

After independence, Nehru curbed the temptations in the three kingdoms to separate themselves from India, and signed treaties with all of them during 1949-50 that largely followed the template of the earlier agreements signed by the Raj. The first to be signed was the agreement with Bhutan in 1949 under which India retained the right to guide the kingdom's foreign policy and promised not to interfere in its internal affairs. Under the agreement India also had a say in Bhutan's import of arms. The treaty did not have a strong defence clause, for the agreement was signed before Communist China's occupation of Tibet in 1949. The agreements India signed with Nepal and Sikkim in 1950 were more attuned to the challenges that China's control of Tibet posed to the security of the Subcontinent. India's July 1950 Treaty with Nepal covered a wide range of aspects and included an article on mutual defence and another on regulating arms transfers. Earlier in 1947, India signed a tripartite agreement with Nepal and Britain that allowed India to recruit soldiers from Nepal, a right that was limited to Britain until then. India's December 1950 Treaty with Sikkim reaffirmed its status as a protectorate of India and gave Delhi the right to deploy troops on its territory.[13]

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[12] For a brief but critical review, see Srikant Dutt, "India and the Himalayan States", Asian Affairs, Vol. 67, No. 1, February 1980, pp.71-81.

[13] The full texts of the treaties are available on the website of the Legal Information Institute of India, <www.liiofindia.org>

Nehru's reconstruction of the security ties with the Himalayan kingdoms was not just a replication of the treaties that the Raj had with them. For one he sought to accommodate many of the interests of the kingdoms in an effort to encourage them to remain part of the structure of securing India's northern frontiers. Nehru, unlike the Raj, fully recognised the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nepal and strongly affirmed India's commitment to Bhutan's internal autonomy. He increased the annual subsidies to these kingdoms and significantly expanded the economic and technical assistance. He also offered territorial concessions to Bhutan which sought the return of some of the territory annexed by the Raj. Nehru invited the representatives of Nepal and Bhutan to participate in the First Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in early-1947, thereby facilitating the two isolated kingdoms to establish international contacts. India's first Prime Minister also cut some slack for Nepal in putting the military relationship on a more equal footing. For example Nehru encouraged the establishment of ties between Nepal and China after India signed an agreement with China on Tibet in 1954. While he was generous in areas where he could be so with the Himalayan kingdoms, there was no doubt in his mind about the centrality of the Himalayan kingdoms to India's defence of the northern frontiers. Speaking in the Constituent Assembly on 6 December 1950, Nehru declared abiding interests: "So far as the Himalayas are concerned, they lie on the other side of Nepal, not on this side. Therefore, the principal barrier to India lies on the other side of Nepal. We are not going to tolerate any person coming over that barrier. Therefore, much as we can appreciate the independence of Nepal, we cannot risk our own security by anything not done in Nepal which permits either that barrier to be crossed or otherwise leads to the weakening of our frontiers".[14]

The system of security treaties that Nehru erected with the Himalayan kingdoms, however, faced three important challenges – the internal orientation of these regimes, the steady expansion of the international profile of the kingdoms and the emergence of China as a strong state across the Himalayan frontier in Tibet. It was relatively easy to operate the protectorate system between a powerful colonial patron, the British Raj, and the feudal rulers of the Himalayan kingdoms. The essential bargain involved in the treaties – security cooperation in return for internal autonomy was not easy to sustain in the post-colonial era. Forces of democratisation and modernisation that began to emerge in the kingdoms were aligned closely with the Indian National Congress, and other political trends in India had a stake in changing the status quo rather than reinforcing it. Some of these forces sought accession to India and others pressed Delhi to support political change in the kingdoms. India's security bargain, on the other hand, was with the rulers, whom Nehru was loath to simply abandon. Yet as a nascent democracy whose main political classes had a deep solidarity with those seeking change, Delhi chose to adopt a middle path of gradual change that neither appeased the rulers of the kingdoms nor satisfied the popular aspirations for change.[15]   India could neither sustain the pretence about the internal autonomy of these

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[14] Cited in Kavic, op. cit., p. 56.
[15] For a comprehensive discussion of the dynamic between Delhi and Kathmandu, see S D Muni, India and Nepal: A Changing Relationship (Delhi: Konark, 1992); see also Leo Rose, Nepal: Strategy for Survival (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

kingdoms nor could it hold down the rulers to the naturally unequal terms of a protectorate. This resulted in unending instability in the relations between the Himalayan kingdoms, which in turn provided an opportunity for other powers to undermine India's primacy.[16]

Amidst the general decolonisation of the developing world, the growing international interest in the Himalayan frontier as part of the Cold War competition, and the emerging sense of national identities, it was inevitable that the ruling elites of the Himalayan kingdoms sought to end their traditional international isolation. Winning new partners, the rulers knew, would increase their autonomy vis a vis India and secure them greater room for play. Support from external powers was also seen as critical for sustaining the feudal order within these kingdoms and fending off pressures for internal democratic change. Both China and the West encouraged, for different reasons, the attempts by these kingdoms to loosen their strategic bonds with India. The methods that the rulers of these kingdoms employed included, "the establishment of diplomatic relations with other states, acceptance of external aid besides Indian, the use of events like coronations, the issue of postage stamps and attendance at international meetings".[17] While they sought to increase their international profile, the feudal rulers were acutely conscious of pushing India beyond a point. This set up a consistent brinkmanship with India which, more often than not, saw India ceding some room while trying to hold on to the relationship. Delhi in turn often used the threat of support for the democratic forces to rein in the ambitions of the Himalayan rulers.

The biggest challenge to India's Himalayan treaty system was the emergence of Communist China on its frontiers through its occupation of Tibet in 1950. The first half of the 20th century saw the expansion of the influence of the Raj into Tibet and the steady accretion of special rights in that kingdom which was treated as a buffer. The next half a century would see Tibet emerge as a major source of discord between India and China. The emergence of the communist threat in Tibet initially raised the stakes of the Himalayan kingdoms in security partnerships with independent India. Nehru's policy of avoiding a conflict with China over Tibet was balanced by his determination to secure the Himalayan glacis in 1950. In return for accepting Chinese control of Tibet, Nehru hoped he could win Beijing's acceptance of India's primacy in the Himalayan kingdoms. Beijing, however, never really accepted this proposition and its charm diplomacy towards Nepal helped ease some of the concerns of the Himalayan kingdoms. Nepal, which established diplomatic relations with China under Nehru's encouragement, was the principal target of Chinese overtures. Nepal steadily began to wriggle out of the tight framework of military cooperation it had agreed with India.

Nehru's policy towards the Himalayan kingdoms after the Chinese occupation of Tibet has been summed up as "politically discreet, diplomatically cautious, and projected over a long term". Kavic argues that "the overriding determinant of its policy was to avoid giving provocation to

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[16] S D Muni, "India's Diplomacy Towards the Himalayan States, 1947-1975", School of International Studies Staff Paper (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, January 1977).

[17] Srikant Dutt, op. cit., p. 76.

Peking at almost all costs and to continue the tranquillity of the Himalayan region primarily by astute diplomacy. Prudence dictated that certain precautionary measures be taken to deter surreptitious Chinese intrusions of the long and difficult Himalayan frontiers but these measures were modest in scope".[18]   Although the Chinese control of Tibet helped India reconstruct the security system of the Raj, sustaining it proved a great challenge. The perception that India suffered defeat in the 1962 war with China tended to reduce India's prestige with Nepal as well as Delhi's leverage with Kathmandu. Writing about the concerns of the Himalayan kingdoms in the aftermath of the 1962 war between India and China, Leo Rose observed that "the fear of China is uppermost in their minds, but apprehensions over Indian policy can also be perceived, for it is feared that New Delhi, faced with overt Chinese aggression, may feel impelled to intervene in the border states to safeguard its own vital interests. The desire to be left alone by both their powerful neighbours is overwhelming. How realistic this attitude [is] may be open to serious question".[19]   But there was no denying the shock for the foreign policy assumptions of the kingdoms that were caught between the temptation of neutrality and the need for cooperation with India and for treaty relationships with Delhi. While Nehru's treaty system would come under increasing strain after 1962, there was no way Delhi could simply abandon the security framework created by him. Nor did the Himalayan kingdoms have the power to fully break their geopolitical bonds with India.

Beyond the Inner Ring

If Nehru's reinvention of the security framework of the Raj was not entirely successful, it nevertheless presents an important empirical counter to the general perceptions of Nehru as an idealist. He was deeply geopolitical in his thinking and his attitudes towards the Himalayan kingdoms underlined his vision of India as a major power that is prepared to defend its security interests, however cautiously and carefully. Nehru's interest in security diplomacy was not limited to the northern frontier. The early years of independence saw Nehru embark on significant cooperation with other neighbours, especially Burma (now Myanmar) and Indonesia. Writing before independence, K M Panikkar underlined the importance of Burma for India's security: "the defence of Burma is in fact the defence of India, and it is India's primary concern no less than Burma's to see that its frontiers remain inviolate. In fact no responsibility can be considered too heavy for India when it comes to the question of defending Burma".[20] Panikkar was convinced that Burma was not in a position to defend itself and the country's domination by another power would be disastrous for India. Panikkar also understood that emerging nationalisms in the post-colonial period would make substantial defence cooperation between

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[18]   Kavic, op. cit., p. 61.
[19]   Leo Rose, "The Himalayan Border States: 'Buffers' in Transition", Asian Survey, Vol. 3, No. 2, February 1963, p. 116.
[20]   K.M. Panikkar, The Future of South East Asia (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943), p. 45.

Delhi and Rangoon difficult. Yet, he was confident that the logic of a defence union will work for Delhi and Rangoon. What emerged, however, was a more complex story of India-Burma defence cooperation after the Second World War.

The severe internal security threats faced by Burma in the immediate aftermath of independence provided the context for substantive Indian military assistance to Rangoon. Immediately after independence Rangoon confronted major insurrections by the Burmese Communist Party, ethnic Karens and other militias in 1949. Rangoon was under direct threat from rebel forces. Burmese leader U Nu sought military assistance from India and other Commonwealth nations as well as the United States. Nehru responded with alacrity, helping mobilise diplomatic, political, and military assistance to Burma as well as extending direct bilateral assistance that was critical in preventing the fall of Rangoon to the rebels and included the supply of six Dakota transport aircraft to Burma.[21] Nehru's valuable support to Burma was acknowledged with much grace by Nu once the situation was brought under control.[22] Speaking in the Indian Parliament in March 1950, Nehru declared that India's support to Burma was not about interfering in the internal affairs of its neighbour. "It is not our purpose and is not right for us to interfere in any way with other countries, but whenever possible, we give such help as we can to our friends, without any element of interference".[23]

Beyond immediate crisis management, Nehru and Nu sought to put the bilateral relationship on a firmer footing. Nu apparently wanted an explicit agreement for military cooperation but Nehru sought to keep the defence ties informal and flexible. The idea of defence and security cooperation, however, was hinted at in the peace and friendship treaty that Nehru and Nu signed in July 1951. Article IV says: "The two States agree that their representatives shall meet from time to time and as often as occasion requires to exchange views on matters of common interest and to consider ways and means for mutual cooperation in such matters".[24] Article II outlines a broader sentiment declaring that "there shall be everlasting peace and unalterable friendship between the two states who shall ever strive to strengthen and develop further cordial relations existing between the peoples of the two countries".

Seen from the perspective of Delhi, the treaty would seem to be of the same kind as the security treaties that Nehru had signed with Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim during 1949-50. The language of Article II in the friendship treaty with Burma is entirely similar to the one found in the other three treaties. Nehru understood that Myanmar, being unlike the three Himalayan kingdoms, had to be approached very differently. Unlike the Himalayan kingdoms, towards which Nehru adopted the British protectorate framework, the Burmese Republic was viewed as India's partner

[21] Soe Myint, Burma File: A Question of Democracy (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish), p.89.
[22] See Richard Butwell, U Nu of Burma (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 186.
[23] Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946-April 1961 (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1974), pp.292-293.
[24] Text available at < http://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1951/12.html>

in articulating Asia's voice on the international stage. Therefore the security clauses were subtler.

It is important to note that the India-Burma friendship treaty was signed at around the time when both countries concluded similar agreements with Indonesia.[25] The three countries became the most vocal proponents of Asian identity in the early-1950s. While all three, as votaries of non-alignment, opposed the emerging military blocs in the East and the West, they also understood the importance of greater military cooperation among themselves. This aspect of the relationship has remained largely unexplored in contemporary discussion of Nehru's Asian policy. The context of this interesting aspect of defence diplomacy between Delhi and Jakarta was set by the extraordinary warmth between the nationalists of the two countries, especially Nehru and Sukarno. One important factor that contributed to the warmth was Delhi's mobilisation of international support for Indonesian independence and Nehru's active opposition to the Dutch aggression against Indonesia in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Nehru also convened a conference of 18 governments to voice support for the Indonesian Republic and its membership of the United Nations in 1949, generating a fund of goodwill for India.

The language of the India-Indonesia Friendship Treaty, signed in 1951, was virtually identical to that in the accord which New Delhi was go sign with Burma a few months later. Article I had a reference to the standard formulation about "perpetual peace and unalterable friendship" between the two countries.[26] Article III outlined the provisions for consultations and provided the basis for security cooperation: "The two Governments agree that their representatives shall meet from time to time and as often as occasion requires to exchange views on matters of common interest and to consider ways and means for mutual cooperation in such matters". The friendship treaty was followed by substantive cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries, under separate agreements between their respective navies (1956), air forces (1958) and armies (1960). The focus was on high level military exchanges, cross-attachment of officers, training, supply of equipment, and the grant of Indian loans to facilitate this.[27] Indonesia is the only country outside the Commonwealth that India conducted naval exercises with. India also helped Indonesia with military assistance to put down some of its internal revolts and secessionist movements in the 1950s.

The bilateral security cooperation between the three self-proclaimed non-aligned countries did not last, notwithstanding the proclamations about 'perpetual' and 'unalterable' friendship. Their focus on their internal troubles, the distractions of other regional conflicts and the divisive impact of the Cold War increasingly reduced the salience of India's security cooperation with old

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[25] The India-Burma agreement was signed on 7 July 1951; India and Indonesia had signed their accord on 3 March 3 1951; while Indonesia and Burma followed suit on 31 March 1951.
[26] Text of the treaty is available at < http://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1951/7.html>
[27] See Pankaj K Jha, "India-Indonesia: Emerging Strategic Confluence in the Indian Ocean Region", Strategic Analysis, Vol. 32, No. 3, May 2008, pp.443-44.

and new friends beyond the inner ring. If there was one single factor that had the biggest impact on the prospects for security cooperation, it was the rise of China and the border conflict between Delhi and Beijing. The emergence of Communist China generated deep anxieties all across Asia; Delhi, Rangoon and Jakarta were no exceptions. At the same time, Nehru, Nu and Sukarno had to come to terms with the fact that they must actively seek a working relationship with China, their giant Asian neighbour. They also concurred that they had no interest in supporting Western efforts to isolate China. All three believed that integrating China into the regional network of international relations could mitigate many of the potential dangers of the emergence of Communist China.

Beijing's charm diplomacy towards Southeast Asia in the 1950s and the worsening Sino-Indian relations at the turn of the 1960s complicated the prospects of any deepening strategic cooperation between Delhi on the one hand and Rangoon and Jakarta on the other. As tensions on the border with India rose, China signed a boundary settlement with Burma in 1960 that generated much unhappiness in Delhi. Rangoon sought to placate Nehru, but it irritated him by suggesting that India emulate Burma in resolving its own boundary dispute with China. Of special concern for Nehru was the map attached to the agreement that conformed to Chinese territorial claims against India at the tri-junction with Burma.[28] Burma's neutrality during the Sino-Indian border clashes of 1962 also shocked the political classes in Delhi that had gone out of the way to support Burma in the preceding years. As India turned angry at what it saw as China's 'betrayal' of Nehru, Peking remained, in the eyes of Sukarno, an anti-imperialist progressive power worth cooperating with. As an Indian diplomat concluded, "the differing images of China began to cause serious misunderstanding between India and Indonesia. The Indonesians were dismayed by India's persistence in clinging to the British-made frontiers and refusing to understand Peking's viewpoint. This in turn led India to question Jakarta's friendship".[29] The differences between Nehru and Sukarno boiled over at the first summit of the non-aligned nations, where the former sought moderation and the latter demanded a radical approach to global issues.

Nehru's security diplomacy was not limited to the East. He signed a series of friendship treaties with key countries to the west that were once part of India's frontier of influence. The first treaties of peace and friendship to be signed were with the Royal Government of Afghanistan (January 1950)[30] and the Imperial Government of Iran (March 1950),[31] both of which were central to the evolution of India's regional policy, defined by the metaphor of the Great Game, from the early nineteenth century. Both treaties underlined 'perpetual' or 'everlasting' peace and friendship between the two countries; and unlike the treaties of the Raj, they noted the 'ancient

[28] Uma Shankar Singh, Op. Cit., pp. 74-79.
[29] L P Singh, "Dynamics of Indian-Indonesian Relations", Asian Survey, Vol. 7, No. 9, September 1967, p. 657.
[30] The text of the treaty is available at < http://www.liiofindia.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1950/3.html?query=india%20afghanistan%20friendship%20treaty>
[31] The text of the treaty is available at < http://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1950/7.html>

ties' between India on the one hand and Afghanistan and Iran on the other. Neither treaty had an explicit or implicit reference to security cooperation and any focus on consular affairs and the treatment of respective nationals. Yet, having lost the frontiers with both Afghanistan and Iran after the Partition, Nehru's India was underlining the enduring significance of the two countries in its strategic calculus. In March 1953, India signed a treaty of friendship and commerce with the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, with special emphasis on cooperation on navigation by sea and air.[32] India also negotiated but could not conclude a friendship treaty with Yemen. Further afield, the Nehru Raj signed treaties of peace and friendship with Turkey (December 1951), Syria (February 1952), and Egypt (April 1955).

Many of these agreements did not turn out to be consequential, but they reflected India's search for stronger engagement with its extended neighbourhood that was part of Raj's frontier of influence. But one of those treaties led to the development of interesting defence cooperation between India and Egypt from the late-1950s to the mid-1960s. India participated in the development of a jet fighter and jet engine in Egypt. Nehru saw this as being complementary to India's own efforts at developing an indigenous aerospace industry. According to one account, Nehru's India "participated in Egypt's Helwan HA-300 jet fighter program and sent various professionals from its aeronautics industry and the Indian Air Force on detached service to Egypt, where they joined the local aircraft project. India also participated – with contributions of money, experts and equipment – in Egypt's attempt to produce an indigenous jet turbine engine, the Brandner E-300. Critically, India assured that this engine would have a viable market by pledging to power its own indigenous jet fighter, the HAL HF-24 "Marut," with the Egyptian engine".[33] Although the projects did not succeed, they underlined Nehru's deep interest in defence collaboration with friends and political partners, notwithstanding his opposition to military alliances.

Legacy of the Nehru Raj

The traditional discourse on Nehru's foreign policy and its roots in idealism is focused on his response to the emergence of the Cold War, his activism in favour of international peace, and his search for Afro-Asian solidarity. Our review of Nehru's treaty diplomacy underlines the very different universe that independent India had to contend with. The logic of India's security was bound to the nature of its territoriality that was constructed under the Raj, and a measure of continuity in India's security politics was inevitable. Nehru sought to reconstruct such continuity in security politics in the Himalayan inner ring on a modified basis, showing accommodation where possible towards the interests of the smaller neighbours but making it absolutely clear that

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[32] Text of the treaty available at <http://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1953/3.html>
[33] See Gil Feiler, "India's Economic Relations with Israel and the Arabs", Middle East Security and Policy Studies, No. 96 (Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, 2011), p. 16.

they were an integral part of India's defence system. India's significant prestige in the international system and its military weight were also recognised by other countries, small and large, as they sought security cooperation with it. Unlike the 'Nehruvians', India's first prime minister did not conflate the logic of strategic autonomy and non-alignment with the absolute necessity of pursuing India's security interests with whatever means possible. This necessarily included reordering the Himalayan glacis as well as extending security cooperation to friendly countries that sought it, especially Burma, Indonesia and Egypt. Nehru's ability to construct and maintain an inherited security system was constrained by a number of factors, including the emergence of a unified and powerful China on its northern frontiers. While the perceived threat from China initially created the conditions for stronger security cooperation, Beijing's determined quest to improve relations with India's neighbours and the deterioration of Sino-Indian relations constrained Delhi's room for manoeuvre. China would remain an important factor in strengthening the essence of India's Himalayan policy in the following decades, while its articulation and implementation had to be continuously adjusted.

If Nehru had difficulties in managing this new dynamic in the inner ring of the Himalayas, his successors struggled continually to adapt and offer concessions to the neighbours but never agreed to undo the framework that he had put in place. While this is not the place to go into a detailed discussion, Indira Gandhi absorbed Sikkim into the Indian Union and revitalised the engagement with Nepal and Bhutan. Rajiv Gandhi made NEFA into a full-fledged state of the Indian Union, embarked on coercive diplomacy against Nepal when it sought to break the terms on importing arms. Both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv reaffirmed India's right to shaping its immediate security environment. The former intervened in East Pakistan during the movement for Bangladesh in 1971 and followed up with a friendship treaty with Dhaka in 1972 – with an explicit article on security cooperation. Indira Gandhi also put in place measures to assist Mauritius in coping with its internal security problems and signed an agreement on defence cooperation with Oman. Rajiv Gandhi intervened to promote ethnic reconciliation in Sri Lanka (1987) on the basis of a bilateral agreement to establish peace and normalcy. He also helped secure the legitimate regime in Maldives against a coup in 1988. In the more recent period, the Manmohan Singh government revised the 1949 treaty with Bhutan in 2007 to put the bilateral partnership on a stronger foundation and in tune with contemporary reality. It signed a strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan, agreements for comprehensive cooperation with Bangladesh and Maldives and put in place trilateral cooperation on maritime security with Colombo and Male, all in 2011. As India's economic strength and military capabilities grew and its interests became important once again on the frontiers of its historical influence in the post-reform era, Delhi dramatically expanded security cooperation in its extended neighbourhood – stretching from Japan and Vietnam in East Asia to Qatar and Oman in the Arabian Peninsula, and Seychelles and South Africa in the Western Indian Ocean.

Underlying India's intensive security diplomacy in recent years are the propositions which Nehru had laid down clearly that Delhi's interests would extend beyond its borders – Aden to Malacca or Suez to South China Sea. As a large geopolitical unit, Nehru believed, India had the responsibility to assist friends and partners in the military domain. Nehru's sights were not limited to promoting narrowly defined national interests of India. He recognised that India should contribute to international peace and security and took the initiative to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations. It was a legacy that his successors would pursue despite deepening military challenges on India's frontiers. They would make its armed forces one of the largest contributors to international peace operations and invite the characterisation of India as a 'net provider of security' in the Indian Ocean littoral and beyond. But that is a different story that must be told in greater detail at another place and time.

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