

Preface: Setting the scene

Introduction

This book serves as a survey of India's international relations. Consideration of this topic is of ever increasing interest to politicians, planners and analysts inside and outside India. The sense is palpable that the 21st century is witnessing the 'rise' of India within the international system.¹ There is a degree of impatience in India and a sense of surprise outside India, but it does point to India's emergence as a pole of power, one of the Great Powers in the making.² India's rise is underpinned, but it is also a prerequisite for its aspirations, 'it is no longer a mere pawn on the world stage; it is also a player [...] it aspires to a place at the head table [...] it has the ambition and the confidence that India can be a major player in the emerging global scenario. Therein lie the challenges', for India and for the international system.³ In such a shift, India shares much with the People's Republic of China; but whereas China's rise has attracted frequent attention, India has attracted less, at times something that perhaps can irritate or frustrate Indian opinion. This *Handbook of India's International Relations* aims to redress this imbalance.

Consequently, two sections follow in this introductory chapter, to set the scene, as it were. First, discussion of the structure of the *Handbook*, a structure that reflects the way in which India itself talks about the structure of its foreign policy. Second, discussion of the role of International Relations (IR) theories and paradigms, which will help shed light on and across the varied relationships and settings within which India operates.

Structure of the *Handbook*

The book is centred on India's own description of its foreign policy as operating in *concentric circles*. In 2002 it was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP—Indian People's Party) administration talking of how, 'just as Kautilya talked of the Circle of States, a useful conceptual framework for the consideration of India's foreign policy would be to view it as consisting of three concentric circles around a central axis – the first of our immediate region, the second of the larger world and the third of over arching global issues'.⁴ In 2007 it was a Congress party administration talking of how, 'from the broader perspective, we regard our security as lying in a neighborhood of widening concentric circles'.⁵ This 'concentric circles' concept gives the book a clear overarching five-fold division, which is reflected in five sections: Part 1 deals with 'India'; Part 2 deals with India's 'immediate neighbourhood'; Part 3 deals with India's 'extended neighbourhood'; Part 4 deals with India's relations with other Great Powers; and Part 5 deals with India's stance on key international 'global issues'. An underpinning theme across the *Handbook* is 'challenge and response' and 'perceptions'. With regard to 'challenge and response', this involves the challenge and response by India to other countries and to international issues, as

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well as the response by others to the challenge posed by India. With regard to ‘perceptions’, this is about how India sees its own position in the world— in other words its hopes and fears, its aspirations – as well as how other actors perceive and thus respond to India.

Part 1: India

Part 1 of this *Handbook* looks at the world from India’s own initial setting, the very centre of the ‘concentric circles’ framework. Thus, Chapter 1 considers India’s national *aspirations*: is there a national consensus or are there very different aspirational currents within India? How coherent is India’s Grand Strategy and foreign policy direction? In a word, what does India want, how does it propose getting there (and where), what does it hope and fear? Chapter 2 considers India’s past attitudes to war and peace, its *strategic culture* and its legacy thereon. Chapter 3 considers what sort of *power* India has, power that shapes how far aspirations may be realized. Such power is considered in its ‘hard power’ (military and economic). It is also considered in terms of *soft power* ideas and image assets: ‘deploying soft-power assets will be as important as “hard power” assets’.⁶ Chapter 4 considers the sense of how Indian politicians have reckoned that ‘the logic of geography is unrelenting’, i.e. *geopolitics*.⁷ Here the Government has seen what it considers the ‘geopolitical realities and imperatives’ at play for India; where ‘its location at the base of continental Asia and the top of the Indian Ocean gives it a vantage point in relation to both West, Central, continental and South-East Asia, and the littoral States of the Indian Ocean from East Africa to Indonesia’.⁸ Such ‘logic of geography’ ranges from considerations of the very shape of India and its island possessions, and to the location of others vis-à-vis India, as well as moving into critical geopolitics’ concern with rightful space and rightful position (for India) within its neighbourhood/s. Finally, in Chapter 5, geopolitics gives way to the *geoeconomics* at play in India’s economic rise, which brings with it, in particular, the growing ‘challenge that India faces in seeking energy security’ outside India.⁹

Part 2: India’s ‘immediate neighbourhood’

Part 2 considers India’s relations in what it dubs its *immediate neighbourhood*, in other words South Asia, as reflected in the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). An underlying concern here is how far the Indian sub-continent is seen as India’s sub-continent, its own sphere in which to exert regional leadership and power. To the immediate north-west, Chapter 6 opens the section by considering India’s problematic neighbour, Pakistan, with analysis of the various levels of what Ganguly famously dubbed the ‘unending conflict’.¹⁰ To the immediate north, Chapter 7 looks at the Himalayan states of Nepal, Bhutan (and Sikkim), all of which involve China-related complications for India. Further to the immediate east comes Chapter 8 and India’s other large local neighbour, Bangladesh, a neighbour born with Indian help in 1971, yet one that has posed problems for India through its geopolitical location, ambiguous and porous borders, turn to Islamist tendencies and links with China. Continuing in that vein, Chapter 9 looks to India’s immediate south, to Sri Lanka, and with it the overlapping Tamil factor between the two states, as well as China-background complications again for India. The final bilateral relation with which this section deals is in Chapter 10, Afghanistan, in which competition with Pakistan and stances towards Islamist *jihadist* overspill southwards is one motif, whilst Afghanistan’s links to Central Asia pull India further northwards, out of its *immediate neighbourhood* into its *extended neighbourhood*. Before leaving India’s immediate neighbourhood, Chapter 11 looks at India’s role in regional integration, initially in South Asia, and with its regional organization SAARC’s relative failures which

are perhaps pushing India to seek more beneficial regional structures for co-operation outside South Asia.

Part 3: India's 'extended neighbourhood'

Part 3 looks beyond India's *immediate neighbourhood* of South Asia, into the areas beyond South Asia; areas dubbed by India as its *extended neighbourhood*. The significance of this framework is clear enough and was first clearly announced by India in 1999, 'our concerns and interactions go well beyond South Asia. They include other neighbours, and countries immediately adjoining this region – our "extended neighbourhood" [...] in relation to the large issues of development, and security', with *extended neighbourhood* being both a concept and a policy.¹¹

The first manifestation of extended neighbourhood frameworks in this section is Chapter 12, with what India has called its 'Look East' policy operating towards South-East Asia, in which economic ties, institutional linkages with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and a degree of competition with China (including in the South China Sea) is apparent. Chapter 13 carries this eastwards thrust forward with regard to what India has called its 'Look East 2' policy, India's further outreach into East Asia/Australasia, which involves economic links with the Republic of Korea (South Korea), security links with Australia and, above all, economic-security links with Japan. The extended neighbourhood focus then turns in Chapter 14 to India's southerly drive, for some Indians the hope to make the Indian Ocean 'India's Ocean'. The next aspect of the extended neighbourhood, in Chapter 15, brings in India's emerging 'Look West' strategy, which is evident with regard to India's strategic partnership with Iran, where constraining Pakistan and energy motifs feature uncomfortably alongside links with the USA, and with regard to the Gulf, where energy access entwines with emerging military-naval links with actors like Oman and Qatar. This westerly involvement is developed further in Chapter 16 and its consideration of India's wider links with the Middle East, which brings in the ongoing energy situation seen with Saudi Arabia, the political approach taken towards the Palestinian issue, potential links with Turkey and access to Central Asian oil, the military-security partnership with Israel, and India's own naval outreach into the Gulf of Aden through the Red Sea into the Eastern Mediterranean. Chapter 17 continues this westwards thrust by considering India's growing presence in Africa. Last, but certainly not least, portrayed in Chapter 18 is what has been called India's 'Look North' outreach towards Central Asia, in part the military links seen with Tajikistan (and even Mongolia) and even more so the energy linkages with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, an outreach that brings India into its ambivalent relationship with the vehicle of regional integration, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and latent rivalry with China.

Part 4: India's Great Power relations

This section considers India's relations, as an emerging Great Power with other major states in the international system, in which the relationship cuts across the global/extended-immediate neighbourhood divides. This reflects the sense of opportunity and challenge felt by India's leadership: 'India too is reciprocating positively to overtures of other major players in the global balance of power. No doubt this involves sophisticated bargaining with each of them', for, 'international relations are in the final analysis, power relations. This balance of power politics in international relations is more sophisticated than during the Cold War era. We must learn to deal with this new reality'.¹² Chapter 19 looks at Russia, and its earlier incarnation as the USSR, including their diplomatic and military relationship and their mutual interests in

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Afghanistan, Central Asia and vis-à-vis China. Chapter 20 considers the strategic partnership proclaimed with the European Union, and with it the extent to which economic trade is becoming more strategic security-minded in an emerging multipolar framework. Chapter 21 moves to consideration of India's biggest neighbour, China, its biggest trade partner, yet a country which territorial disagreements and past war have brought into South Asia and around ('strategic encirclement?') India, has witnessed growing naval rivalry, and has generated wider Sino-Indian contest and rivalry in India's extended neighbourhood.¹³ Chapter 22 discusses India's relationship with the most powerful state in the world, the USA, with its consideration of the extent to which their 'strategic partnership' represents a balance vis-à-vis China and an acknowledgement of India's emerging pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean.

Part 5: India and global issues

Having focused in earlier sections on India's relations with various states and regions, section 5 looks at issues of global importance, in which India's role is of some wider significance. The first global theme tackled is in Chapter 23, the Indian diaspora scattered around the world. Chapter 24 considers India's response to what has been called 'internationalism terrorism', brought into high relief with the attacks on Mumbai in November 2008. Chapter 25 looks at global governance, represented by the United Nations, in which India's role as a prominent provider of peace-keeping forces goes hand in hand with its quest to achieve a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The next issue, in Chapter 26, is that of nuclear power, in which India's nuclear rivalry with Pakistan and China can be fruitfully compared and put into the wider context of nuclear proliferation. Such a traditional security arena can be complemented by the new soft security issue of climate change, discussed in Chapter 27, in which India's role, like China's, as a new industrializing power is of central importance for achieving any global breakthrough over the next couple of decades. From climate change in the atmosphere to still further outwards into outer space is the theme of Chapter 28, where India's emergence as a space power is discussed, including the extent to which it is in competition with China. A final postscript is then given in Chapter 29.

International Relations theories and paradigms to apply

As India emerges from the Third World and seeks to play a part as one of the Great Powers for the 21st century, IR theory can be examined to see how far India's reality fits it. This represents what Rana calls 'slicing' into IR theory, necessary since 'the Indian study of IR is seriously flawed because it takes little or no cognizance of related theoretical and disciplinary developments'.¹⁴

Some analysts argue that traditional IR paradigms are derived from the West, and so are not necessarily applicable to countries like India.¹⁵ This would suggest that there are distinctive, uniquely Indian theoretical perspectives to be taken into account.¹⁶ Behera's argument on the need for 'Re-imaging IR in India' states that IR has by its Western nature 'acquired a Gramscian hegemony over the epistemological foundations' of IR and maintained 'disciplinary gate-keeping practices'.¹⁷ This study refuses to follow this Indo-centric epistemological argument, though it uses Indian settings. It does not seem that there are features of Indian international position for the coming century that are not explicable through existing IR paradigms. Admittedly, in general IR theory examples are often taken from Western practice, the criticism by Neuman and Behera. However, in itself, a Western example does not show that the underlying theory is inherently limited to the West. Kautilya, for example, showed vigorous IR realism-realpolitik in action many centuries before modern realists like Morgenthau and

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others.¹⁸ The lesson to be derived from Behera is not one of whether IR realism is applicable, but rather one of what sorts of sources are used to illustrate and validate its universal application.

However, whilst arguing that IR theory is universal rather than particular, this work refuses to take any one IR line of interpretation. Any individual model is by definition a limited ‘construct’, only part of the bigger picture. This is not sloppy relativism, but rather methodological scepticism towards any nomothetic, often sweeping, paradigm. Instead, flexibility in using IR theory is proposed. The advice by Katzenstein and Okawara for Japan and Asia-Pacific security seems just as applicable for considering India’s future relationship in the international system, namely to follow a degree of ‘analytical eclecticism’, given that ‘the complex links between power, interest, and norms defy analytical capture by any one’ exclusive methodological approach or ‘grand paradigm’.¹⁹ Let us turn to theories and explanatory paradigms.

One very influential theory has been that of IR *realism*, with its emphasis on state-centred sovereignty and inherent competition between states; Kenneth Waltz’s ‘anarchic’ international society riddled with social Darwinian competition, the law of the jungle and the survival of the fittest. It is of significance that Kanti Bajpai argues that IR realism ‘assumptions, analyses, and prescriptions are rife in India’.²⁰ Consequently, ‘states [...] unbending and jealous attachment to boundaries and territories, the fragility of inert-state cooperation and institutions in a competitive international system, the tendency towards power balancing, the centrality of military strength, and the reliance of force to regulate international relations [are] the staples of Indian thinking on international affairs. It is not just the foreign policy and security community that thinks this way; it is also the common sense of many ordinary India’.²¹

Thus, IR *balance of power* shifts and calculations, the *defensive/structural realism* represented by Kenneth Waltz, have relevance for India.²² Rajesh Rajagopalan sees Waltz’s *structural realism* as very applicable to the ongoing India–Pakistan conflict, where, in this anarchic power-driven game, *realpolitik* adjustments may be common as states seek to defend their own interests, making and remaking alliances and agreements to suit their own sovereign interests.²³ Girja Bajpai, the first Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs, began his 1952 essay, ‘India and the Balance of Power’, with the famous quotation from Thucydides, ‘the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must’. Bajpai reckoned that power considerations could not be avoided, and that ‘balance-of-power is not an ethical principle [...] it is a product of circumstances which the righteous and the upright may dislike but cannot afford to ignore’.²⁴

India has had its own balance of power imperatives emerge with regard to Pakistan and China. With regard to India’s immediate neighbourhood of South Asia, Pardesi sees that, ‘it is evident that India’s foreign/security policy has supported the main tenets of offensive realism’ with regard to maximizing her power, curtailing Pakistan and trying to establish regional hegemony.²⁵ On the other hand, with regard to China it has not so much been hard balancing in the vein of John Mearsheimer’s *offensive realism* explicit containment structures and military alliance formation, but rather *internal balancing* through building up India’s own strength and *softer balancing* through more fluid implicit understandings and arrangements with other states like the USA and Japan, which are also concerned about China.

Such balancing considerations point towards India following a *balance of threat* rather than *balance of power* logic towards China. A *balance of power* logic would suggest India aligning with China against the more powerful USA; however, Walt’s *balance of threat* criteria (aggregate power, offensive capabilities, (perceived) offensive intentions, and geographical proximity) push India to align more with the USA to constrain China.²⁶ Whilst Walt applied and took his threat framework from Middle Eastern and then European examples, we can apply it to India’s strategic situation. There, with regard to China, it is not only her power capability, but also China’s

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geopolitical relational position and positioning that make it a perceived threat for many in India. Pakistan is a threat to India, not through Pakistan's own power, but through Pakistan's balancing against India manifested in Pakistan's alignment with China.

Of course, *balance of power* considerations and shifts can trigger negative bilateral responses between states, in a mutually reinforcing negative downward spiral, IR's famous *security dilemma*. Each state sees itself as carrying out defensive moves; each sees the other as carrying out offensive threatening moves; each feeds off the fears of the other; each cannot afford not to act, yet their very actions make the situation worse. India's relations with China have manifested this 'security dilemma' process in the late 20th century.²⁷ The India-Pakistan nuclear/missile race also shows this security dilemma spiral.

There are alternatives to these rather grim IR *realism*-related pictures of an anarchic competitive international system. Individuals, and thus states, are not necessarily antagonistic or inherently competitive as IR *realism* posits. Instead, common interest and co-operation can naturally emerge between states.

IR *institutionalist theory* emphasizes how international organizations soften national edges and provide frameworks for state sovereignty to be modified, with India's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 being one such example. The question remains of how far India will be shaped by globalization, or how far local Indian conditions will be maintained, *glocalization*.

Meanwhile, there has been a growing Indian involvement in multilateral settings, regional membership and links with acronym-laden organizations like SAARC, BIMSTEC, ARF, SCO, EAS, as well as global frameworks like the WTO. India's involvement in UN activities has been noticeable in terms of providing troops for peace-keeping operations, and in her drive to gain Great Power P-5 Permanent Member status on the UN Security Council.

In contrast to IR realism, IR *liberalism-functionalism* takes a more positive view of economic processes in the international system, trade fostering international links between states. Karl Marx's focus on economics as the key determinant of power in the international arena remains pertinent for India, as do related *dependency* models. Processes in the International Political Economy (IPE) interact with processes in the international system, where India can construct development- and trade-related coalitions with other countries and blocs.²⁸ Hard-edged economic factors are certainly apparent for India, where economic growth underpins India's foreign policy, the so-called *Manmohan Doctrine*: 'Ultimately, foreign policy is the outcome of foreign policy [...] shaped by our commitment to our economic development [...] it is shaped by our yearning to recover our lost space in the global economy and our economic status in the comity of Nations [...] and our economic partners'.²⁹ India reckons that in any assessment of balance of power, 'as we approach the sixtieth anniversary of our independence, India's international prospects have never looked better. The new optimism about India's future, within the nation and the wider world, is not necessarily an irrational exuberance. It is based on sustained high economic growth rates that have touched eight per cent and more per annum in recent years'.³⁰

Control and access to resources, *geoeconomics*, has become a frequently evoked concept for the late 20th century, and in the case of India, her growing economic needs and her soaring industrialization have made questions of energy security particularly noticeable as a key geoeconomic issue, as something increasingly affecting Indian foreign policy, 'energy diplomacy' and military deployments.

Geoeconomics, the control and access to resources by the state, is closely linked to *geopolitics*, the location, shape and size of a state. Typical of this linkage were comments by Mani Shankar Aiyar, India's oil minister: 'geopolitics brings one to the interface between foreign policy and

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quest of energy security [...] We are fortunate to be placed at the vortex of an extended neighbourhood which has some of the largest gas [and oil] resources in the world'.³¹ In India, politicians have frequently used geopolitical frameworks in describing Indian foreign policy. As ministers for external affairs, Jaswant Singh asked 'how do you alter geography?', and Shyam Saran considered that 'the logic of geography is unrelenting'.³² An even blunter implication was admitted by Pranab Mukherjee: 'India's primacy in South Asia is based on demography and geography [...] that reality will not change'.³³

Geopolitical paradigms still pose questions for India's priorities and pulls, in the shape of Mackinder's Eurasian 'heartland', Spykman's 'rimland' and Mahan's Pacific 'seapower' paradigms. India looks both ways, to land and to sea. The story of the 21st century will be, in part, the story of which way and where India turns her attention. Within the Indian Ocean, India is able to pose a particular shadow over Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) through her land projection deep into the Indian Ocean, and by her middle position there. She also faces geopolitical challenges in South Asia. Previously this was on both her flanks, from West and East Pakistan. Currently it is with respect to perceptions of Chinese 'encirclement' of India northwards from Tibet, eastwards from Myanmar and Bangladesh, southwards from Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and westwards from Pakistan. At the micro level, the ability of China to cut the Siliguri corridor, and with it India's links with its north-eastern states, remains evident. India is faced with other geopolitical challenges: it remains sensitive to control of the energy choke points out of the Indian Ocean, namely the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el Mandeb at the head of the Red Sea.

Questions of economic power drives take one to Paul Kennedy's magisterial survey in 1988, in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, crucially subtitled *Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. His argument was that, ultimately and in the longer term, it was economic factors like size, population, resources and exploitation that have generally determined a country's rise and fall. It is no coincidence that Kennedy's book started by pinpointing powers at their zenith like Mughal India, which then went into decline and colonial occupation, and it was also no surprise that his book concluded by looking at new rising powers for the coming century, an economics-driven rise of India and China.³⁴ The implications for India are direct, given her underlying potential and current drive to economic and technological modernization, like China by the middle of the 21st century. Great Power rise is a well-established theme in international relations. As Pardesi argues, 'a rising India will try to establish regional hegemony just like all the other rising Great Powers have since Napoleonic times, with the long term goal of achieving Great Power status on an Asian and perhaps global scale'.³⁵

So far, *hard power* military and economic dimensions have both been mentioned as IR tools. A third swathe of IR models and paradigms can be seen with *soft power* socio-cultural-ideational aspects. The divide is not absolute. After all, globalization is a cultural as well as an economic phenomenon, to which India responds in both arenas. Iriye has long advocated consideration of culture in foreign policy analysis, alongside security and economics, 'international relations as intercultural relations'.³⁶ As such, *geoculture* can be put alongside geopolitics and geoeconomics.

One worrying inter-cultural scenario has, indeed, been Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis. Amidst his sense of how 'India's power could grow substantially in the early twenty-first century', he also pinpointed conflictual faultlines with respect to a Hindu India vis-à-vis Islamic and Sinic (Chinese) blocks, of no little importance given how one civilizational war scenario for Huntington was between India and Pakistan, proposed for 2010!³⁷ Huntington's talk of a Hindu India may have seemed alarmist in the mid-1990s, but the election of a BJP government in 1998–2004 put *Hindutva* ('Hindu-ness') at the centre of Indian politics. In *Hindutva* circles this involved a 'civilisational understanding of what constitutes the basis for

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international relations and what it means to be a regional power [in which] India is a Hindu nation and will seek to control its immediate neighborhood and influence the Asian continent to defend Hindu territory and protect Hindu interests. Serious threats to Hindus and their territory is posed by jihadi Islam'.³⁸

A very different *soft power* challenge is posed by the question of how far, as the world's largest democracy, India is, and should be, seeking to actively foster democratic values in other states.³⁹ Proponents of the IR *democracy = peace* linkage would, of course, see India as naturally tending towards peaceful relations with other democracies, but not necessarily with other non-democratic states – something of particular relevance for suggesting continuing structural friction with an undemocratic Pakistan and China.

One soft way to consider India's position is look at the constructed *images* and *perceptions* surrounding India, where IR *constructivism* challenges both IR *realism* and *liberalism-functionalism*, and to some extent runs alongside much of the *soft power* socio-cultural aspects of analysis. It remains true that from perceptions, and misperceptions, come actions and responses.

National culture is all about *national identity* and from that *international identity* – again a key theme for India in the 21st century. Ignoring for the moment the problem of exactly defining 'India', the broad question remains: who does India think it is, what does India think it stands for, where does India think it should be going? This is an attitude and a state of mind, which perhaps can be dubbed *geopsychology*. Of course, perceptions can also be *misperceptions*, at which point we come close to the IR 'security dilemma' triggers seen in the political 'hard power' domain. Talk of 'images' and 'perceptions' can be brought in not only through IR's 'constructivism', but also in history through the Annales school's concern with *mentalités*, not so much with regard to domestic settings, but with regard to India's *weltanschauung*, or 'world view'. Talk of the Annales school takes one back to its founder, Braudel, and his concern with time and long-term structural change, *long durée*, in IR terms *Long Cycle* theory of 'long-term change' for the 21st century surrounding India's rise, which was where this preface started.

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Notes

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