

## INDIA AND DECOLONISING THE WORLD ORDER

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### ABSTRACT

The independence of the colonies did not mean the end of colonialism in the international system. The international institutions of political, economic, and security management remained colonial. The return of China and India as major players in world politics and their attempt to determine their place in the world politics by themselves from their own perspectives has triggered decolonisation, both in the world politics and in the study of international politics.

The role of South Asia in changing world politics is crucially influenced by Indian politics. Since independence, India's goal has been to become one of the world's leading powers, if not the leading one, at least morally. Here, India looks to its mythical past in history and the restoration of lost greatness, which defines Indian politics in its neighbouring regions of South Asia and, more broadly, throughout Asia.

India's problem, however, is China's similar efforts to restore its own mythical greatness and leading role in the world system. In pursuing it, China is seeking to limit India's influence in Asia, especially in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. In this way, the tension between China and India plays a central role in the foreign and security policy of the entire South Asian region. It also challenges India to seek partners with whom it could jointly limit China's growing influence in its own neighbouring regions and, more broadly, throughout Asia.

**Keywords:** decolonisation, international order, India, China, South Asia, Indian Ocean.

### CHANGING WORLD SYSTEM AND DECOLONISATION

The economic development of India and China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the loose alliance created by emerging countries together with Russia in 2008, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa) are challenging the more than 500-year-old Western-centred world order. Its latest engine and world police has been the United States, which may be losing its legitimacy to determine the rules of the game (Buzan, 2016, p. 24). The focus of the world economy and politics is shifting from the transatlantic dimension and from Europe to Asia and the Pacific Ocean. It is therefore likely that the shape of the emerging post-colonial world order will be resolved in Asia and the dominant country in Asia will also be one of the leading powers in the evolving international order (Tip, 2017, pp. 264 – 265).

In this essay, I will look at India's position and role in the above-mentioned transition. India's world politics is multi-faceted. Dealing comprehensively with it in a limited essay is impossible. To construct an overview, three factors define the perspective of this essay: (1) Dismantling the colonial system (decolonisation) as a long-term objective of Indian world politics; 2) China's role as a driving force in India's foreign and security policy, and (3) India's superpower dream and its attainment.

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Due to its economic growth, China has become a global power which is already strong enough, both economically and militarily, to challenge the United States in Asia (Sinha, 2015, pp. 4, 9). That is why the focus of US policy has shifted to Asia. Latest example about that before the war in Ukraine was the foundation of AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and the USA) in September 2021. India, on the other hand, is the only Asian power capable, at least to some extent, of balancing China's growing influence (Nayar & Paul, 2003, p. 48). So far, however, China is not willing to become the leader of the world, Russia is unable to do so, and India is not able to do so either. That is why the alternative to the US domination is, at least temporarily, a multipolar system. However, the supporters of multipolarity, i.e., BRICS coalition, do not really know what they want or what it means to each of them (Buzan, 2016, pp. 24, 31).

Several theories of international politics, and in particular the theory of political realism, suggest that, as the economic and military power of a state grows, it wants to increase its influence in the institutions of global governance. At the same time, it wants to change the existing system and its standards so that they better contribute to its own interests (Pant, 2009, p. 6). This is what China and India do in increasing their influence in the institutions of global governance, the UN, WTO, IMF, and the World Bank. Contrary to the Western-centric world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the former developing world or the non-West is now taking its place in the system on its own terms, not satisfied with the position provided by the West (Buzan, 2016, p. 23).

From the Indian and Chinese perspective, the issue is not their rise, but the return to the top of the international system. India and China were two of the world's largest economies during 100 BC–1800. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, India accounted for 23% of world GDP, and in 1820, Indian and Chinese production accounted for half of world production (Ayres, 2018, p. 72; Tharoor, 2012, p. 123). Extensive trade networks covered Central Asia, the South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean from 2000 years ago to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Those networks connected the Mediterranean and East Asia. The sea route opened by Vasco da Gama around Africa to Asia and the following colonialism led to the disintegration of traditional economic and social networks in Asia and connected the region as a periphery to the Euro-centric system (Singh, 2005, pp. 242–243).

For at least the last 300 years, Asia, Africa, and Latin America have been objects in world politics and economy. The so-called liberal world order, which has secured the Western dominance, has been maintained by military force (Mahbubani, 2008, p. 81). While the West built democracy and liberal social systems, it used violence to submit the South to serve its needs. In India, the British Empire and the imposed modernisation sucked up the wealth from the region. In contrast to that, empires that had flourished there including Mughal Empire increased the region's prosperity (Datta-Ray, 2015, p. 168). In the historical context, it is possible to say that civilisations humiliated by imperialism have returned to world history.

The return of India and China to the world system also means decolonisation, dismantlement of the colonial system that still continues. Colonialism did not end with the independence of the colonies, but continued as an economic, political, and cultural supremacy of the West and in custodial development co-operation. The purpose of the institutions of global governance built since the Second World War has been to safeguard the interests of the West, which have been presented as universal interests. Through the institutions of global governance, the white Christian minority has defined the terms of action for most of the humanity (Mahbubani, 2008, p. 267). The violent nature of the system is reflected, among other things, in the fact that the US population is only 4% of the world's population, but accounts for as much as 40% of the world's military spending (Mahbubani, 2008, p. 105).

Due to their economic growth, the Indians and the Chinese no longer want to act in accordance with the rules established by the West and call into question the legitimacy of the continuing supremacy of the West (Khanna, 2019, p. 10; Mahbubani, 2008, p. 130). At the same time, they ask which elements of their own civilisation and history should be revived and brought alongside the Euro-American values and rules that now prevail. It has become important for the emerging countries in dismantling the colonial system and mentality to regain themselves, the heritage that has not become Europeanised in the course of history. What is interesting about such a change is that never before has there concurrently existed a strong India, Japan, and China, each with their own dream of an Asian and global system.

In the prevailing global system, only China is currently appearing as a challenger for the United States. Thus, the confrontation between China and the United States means that the United States is a key player in Asia (Chellanaey, 2006, p. 234; Horimoto, 2015, p. 15). Alongside China and the United States, India has a vital role to play in establishing a possible global balance. However, India is linked to the reconstruction of Asia, mainly in co-operation with the United States and Japan (Horimoto, 2015, p. 20). It is a priority for India to prevent the development of a China-centric Asian and global system. On the other hand, India is unlikely to agree to function as anyone's younger partner in a system based on Western norms (Dutta-Ray, 2015, p. 97).

India's national decolonisation means that India is trying to define itself and its place in the world through its ancient pre-colonial values. Indian traditions encourage India to believe that it is destined to be a superpower and its civilisation has something to give to the rest of the world. In Indian nationalism there is a strong perception that India is a natural global leader (Pande, 2017, pp. 4, 7).

### INDIA'S DREAM OF RESTORING LOST GREATNESS

In Hindu culture, Vedic literature, which is thousands of years old, plays a significant role. Hinduism as a religion or world-view is based on it. That literature as well as the epos Mahabharata form the foundations of India's mythical greatness. At the heart of that myth is the idea of a unified Hindu South Asia (Cohen, 2002, pp. 18–19; Pande, 2017, p. 5). However, throughout history, India has achieved political unity only three times: during the Mauryan Empire 322–185 BC, the Mughal Empire 1526–1707, and British India 1858–1947. However, over the course of history, the goal of many local rulers has been to politically unite the Hindu culture (Cohen, 2002, pp. 10–12). The meaning of the mythical past is reflected in the dharma wheel in the centre of the Indian flag, which refers to Ashoka, the ruler of the great Mauryan Empire.

When the British Empire collapsed, India's partition at least briefly destroyed the dream of a unified South Asia, as it broke the 'holy geography' (Saran, 2017, p. 63). However, the idea of restoring South Asian unity is just one factor behind India's foreign policy. Jawaharlal Nehru and many other leading politicians for India's independence believed Pakistan would rapidly collapse and return to India (Cohen, 2002, p. 131). This has not happened until now, and Pakistan has, in a way, become one of the obstacles of India's foreign policy and superpower status. In waiting Pakistan's possible return, Congress party representatives considered it important for India to restore borders of British India (Singh, 2016, pp. 164–165). The dream of a unified South Asia has therefore made neighbourhood policy a central area in India's foreign and security policy.

In the context of ancient greatness, India's objectives extended beyond the neighbourhood to global level right at the beginning. Nehru passionately believed that India was destined to play a key role in world politics because of its rich history, traditions, resources, and population (Nayar & Paul, 2003, p. 115; Pande, 2017, p. 49). India had to be developed into a great power that reflects its size and population, whose status would primarily be based on moral power. According to Nehru, the time had come for India to create a plural world order to replace the Euro-centric colonial system. To obtain this, India had to find other countries ready to co-operate in implementing the new order (Goswami, 2016, p. 8).

However, in Indian foreign policy, co-operation with other states has never meant alliances. Nehru considered autonomy to be the absolute basis for India's foreign policy. The alliance was seen as a threat to independent foreign policy and the alliance easily subjected to the objectives and interests of other parties. The purpose of non-alignment was to create space for India's own policy, to create a new non-European system. In this way, non-alignment was a solution dictated by political realities which freed India from the limitations of the Cold War (Nayar & Paul, 2003, p. 124; Mohan, 2003, p. 30; Goswami, 2016, p. 30; Saran, 2017, p. 31; Pant & Super, 2019, p. 129). In India's world view, non-alignment was not withdrawal, but active opposition to power politics and violence without participating and made it possible to construct an India-centric policy (Datta-Ray, 2015, p. 213; Goswami, 2016, p. 4).

India's non-alignment policy found a concrete expression in the Non-aligned Movement, launched at the Belgrade Meeting in 1961, of which India was a key member. Within the framework of that movement, India built co-operation with newly independent and developing countries. At the same time, the movement gave India the opportunity to become a kind of leader of the developing world and a champion of moral politics (Mohan, 2003, pp. 29–31). In the movement of non-aligned countries, India found a sounding forum for its policy to dismantle colonialism. In the movement, India's support for developing countries against colonialism also meant opposing the domination of the West and interventions in the internal affairs of other countries. It was not just a question of opposing the policy of individual Western states, but of opposing the entire international system built by Europeans and led by the United States (Mohan, 2003, p. 37; Malone, 2012, p. 49; Acharya, 2018, p. 63).

India's ambitions for great power status and the construction of a new world order were also expressed in concrete terms in its Asian policy. The idea of Asian solidarity and a common front against European imperialism was an integral part of Nehru's Pan-Asian policy. Here, the appeal to Asian values and traditions, that is, the emphasis on differences between European and Asian world-views, was noteworthy (Nayar & Paul, 2003, p. 79; Kalyaranamn, 2014, p. 162). Nehru's Pan-Asianism also played an important role in India-China co-operation to overturn the Euro-centric world system (Cohen, 2002, p. 25). The 1962 border war between India and China scrapped that dream and, on the other hand, it was burdened by India's dream of leadership in the new Asian order (Pande, 2017, pp. 95–96).

One hindrance to India's dream becoming a reality is the Kashmir conflict and the relationship with Pakistan. From an Indian perspective, Pakistan occupies part of Kashmir, which belongs to India. The Kashmir conflict has tied India into the South Asian neighbourhood policy. Indian great power policy would require a resolution of the conflict. But in practice, it is an almost unresolvable equation. For India, a united Kashmir as part of India would be an important proof that Muslims and Hindus can live in harmony in a secular state. For Pakistan, if parts of predominantly Muslim Kashmir belong to India, the division of South Asia is incomplete, indicating the failure of the two-nation policy (Pillai, 2005, pp. 225–226; Cohen, 2002, p. 213).

By arming and supporting the jihadists fighting against Indian rule in Kashmir, Pakistan fights a constant proxy war against India (Mahadevan, 2016, pp. 184, 186). In this way, Pakistan, on the one hand, poses a threat to Indian security and, on the other hand, serves China's ambitions to prevent India from becoming its rival for Asian leadership. In India, Pakistan's policy, on the other hand, gives Hindu nationalists the legitimacy to argue that India is threatened by forces hostile to Hinduism (Cohen, 2002, p. 45). From an Indian perspective, the Kashmir conflict also connects the United States to the South Asian conflict by supplying its ally, Pakistan, with weapons (Menon, 2005, p. 128).

Pakistan became an ally of the United States in the Cold War divisions when, in 1954, it joined SEATO (South-East Asian Treaty Organization). However, India never saw the US's support for Pakistan as a fight against the Soviet Union or communism in general, but as a hostile policy against India. From India's point of view, the United States banned its own values and the values shared by India and the United States in supporting Pakistan against the world's largest democracy. This fuelled the anti-West, anti-US attitudes in India, forcing India to approach the Soviet Union. At the same time, India's goal was to reduce US influence in Asia because it prevented India from achieving its goals (Cohen, 2002, pp. 231, 275; Mohan, 2003, p. xx; Stobdan, 2016, p. 86).

## CHINA AS INDIA'S PROBLEM

In Asia, India is not the only country to look to the future through the past. China, too, is aiming to restore the ancient greatness stripped by the Europeans. Like India, China has a strong impression that the millennial history of its civilisation requires a great power status for it (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010, p. 149; Ishida, 2018, p. 163). When this is placed within the framework of a Confucian world-view, it is not difficult to understand that China wants to see itself as at least one of the leading global powers. In Confucian philosophy, the universe forms a unified whole, and the central goal of politics is to unite

the world. Even now, for Chinese leaders, the idea of China is equal to the idea of Asia with China as its centre (Cohen, 2002, pp. 215, 256). However, China sees itself not only as a regional power, but as a global power whose only rival is the United States (Malik, 2009, pp. 164–165).

The intensive interaction between India and China has over 2,000 years of history, and it has mainly been peaceful. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the national elites of both countries acted together against the Asian policy of imperialist powers in the spirit of Pan-Asianism. At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, the leaders of both countries jointly called for the dismantling of colonialism and supported the efforts of the colonies to gain independence. They were also quite unanimous in their criticism of the Western-dominated world order. However, China is not willing to share Asia and its leadership with India and, since the 1962 border war between the two states, China's key objective has been to limit India's importance in various ways, both in Asia and in world politics (Malik, 2009, p. 170).

China's superpower ambition found its concrete expression in President Xi Jinping's report to the Chinese Communist Party meeting on March 18, 2017. It set the objective of China being the world leader in 2049 and capable of making a significant contribution to the development of all mankind (Xi, 2017). Although, at global level, China does not see itself as competing with India, China considers India to be its competitor in Asia. However, it does not perceive India as a threat to itself even if it warns India of any action that could somehow be directed against China (Rajagopalan, 2017, p. 25). For China, India is mainly a South Asian power in China's periphery (Malik, 2009, p. 165).

Since the 1962 border war at the latest, India has experienced China as both an economic and, above all, a military threat. China's close relations with Pakistan and, increasingly, with other India's neighbours are a serious challenge to India's position in South Asia. China's military support to Pakistan has contributed to enabling Pakistan-backed terrorist activities in India, particularly in the Kashmir region (Rajagopalan, 2017, p. 1; Ayres, 2018, p. 128). One goal of China's Pakistani policies is to bind India to South Asia, as China does not want to see India as a major player outside South Asia and, on the other hand, its aim is to prevent India to be a hegemon in South Asia (Karnad, 2014, p. 225; Malone, 2012, p. 141; Mohan, 2003, p. 155).

China's action to limit India's influence is not just related to South Asia. China's growing military power and presence in the Indian Ocean is another challenge for India (Rajagopalan, 2017, p. 6). China's dream of being one of the world's leading powers includes the idea of becoming a true maritime power. This, in turn, requires a solid foothold in the Indian Ocean, for example, which India has considered to be its own *Mare Nostrum*. China justifies its increasing influence and presence in the Indian Ocean with history. Before Europeans arrived in the Indian Ocean in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese navy, led by Admiral Zheng He, had a strong position there (Yoon, 2018, pp. 137, 145). In the Indian Ocean, India is particularly concerned about China's so-called String of Pearls policy, which encircles India. At the heart of the policy are Gwadar port in Pakistan, the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh, and the port of Kyaoukpyu in Myanmar, all funded and built by China (Nagao, 2018, p. 221).

To bind India to South Asia, China's policy includes keeping the border issue open. From India's point of view, it is important to understand that China's Defence White Paper takes account of the possibility of border wars. It mainly concerns India, with which China has unresolved border problems (Singh & Dahiya, 2012, p. 80). India considers illegal China's possession of the Kashmir region, handed over by Pakistan. China, on the other hand, does not consider the so-called McMahon line in the Arunachal Pradesh region to be legal. In fact, China considers much of the state of Arunachal Pradesh to belong to China and calls the region South Tibet (Panda, 2017, p. 35; Chang, 2016, p. 243).

In addition to regional requirements, China is keeping India alert by constant border violations in the areas China has claims. This, in turn, binds India's military strength and resources. By exerting a strategic pressure on the borders of India, China expects India to be prepared to meet China's demands at some point. That is why India assumes that China has little interest in finding an agreement, even though negotiations to solve border problems are under way between the two countries (Singh & Dahiya, 2012, pp. 60–61). India is therefore disappointed that it has already accepted China's sovereignty over Tibet and adopted the One China policy, but in return, China has not become more flexible regarding border issues.

Relations between India and China are also influenced by a water problem affecting a few hundred million South Asians. The sources of the major rivers in Asia are in Tibet, China. The rivers important to South Asia, especially to India, i.e., Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra, have their origins in Tibet. There is no agreement between China and India, at least for the time being, on the allocation of rivers' water resources. China has plans to turn Brahmaputra's waters into China (Panda, 2017, p. 67). The implementation of such plans would have far-reaching implications for the already problematic region of North-East India and Bangladesh.

It is understandable that India is concerned about China's active policy in India's neighbourhood. In a way, China tries to eliminate India's importance by encircling India and ties it to the neighbouring areas in South Asia (Madan, 2014, pp. 331, 34)<sup>1</sup>. India's focus on Pakistan and its own interests in the neighbourhood make it a regional power, while China takes on the role of a superpower in Asia and, in fact, at a global level, too, as the importance of Asia is heightened in world politics (Pant, 2010, p. 101). Meanwhile, India is forced to work resolutely and commit resources to mitigate China's efforts to limit its influence and presence in its extended neighbourhood (Fair, 2009, p. 139). This is reflected in India's initiatives for regional co-operation in Asia.

### INDIAN AND CHINESE EFFORTS FOR ASIAN REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

Despite mutual tensions and competition, India and China are also working together in the emerging world's own institutions to change the system. In fact, they are building alternative global governance institutions such as BRICS, NDB (New Development Bank), and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) to make their goals and voices more audible than is possible within the framework of traditional institutions. They also seek to strengthen their weight at international negotiation tables (Ayres, 2018, pp. 164, 172; Michael, 2019, p. 157).

These alternative institutions are characterised by the fact that they promote South-South co-operation and exclude countries that traditionally dominate world economy and politics. By their actions, they embody the opposition of the West and the colonial system it has created. At the same time, they try to turn the economic potential of at least the so-called emerging countries into political potential (Jafflerot & Sidhy, 2013, p. 326). The emerging countries, particularly the BRICS coalition, have managed to criticise the prevailing Western-centred system. However, they have not been able to offer a post-colonial alternative, at least for the time being, and have not actively taken the lead for the new order (Siidhu, Mehta, & Jones, 2013, p. 10).

However, co-operation in the institutions challenging the domination of the West does not prevent India and China from fighting each other in Asia. It is quite undeniable that they are struggling for influence in South and South-East Asia. At the very least, they seek hegemony in their own regions, if not all of Asia (Wagner, 2018, p. 122; Yoon, 2018, p. 143). This struggle has found a concrete expression in the various regional co-operation initiatives by both countries. It is interesting to see how both countries are building post-colonial infrastructure or rebuilding pre-colonial economic networks. It also appears that the West is happy to support regional co-operation projects initiated by India to limit Chinese influence (Yoon, 2018, p. 143).

Xi's report at the Chinese Communist Party meeting in 2017 put Xi's 2013 initiative, now known as BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), into the centre of China's Asia and world policy. The project has two dimensions: continental connections from China via Central Asia to Western Europe and the so-called maritime Silk Road. It will help China contribute to its goal of being one of the world's leading powers, while at the same time demonstrating its responsibility for globalisation (Panda & Basu, 2018, p. 3; Szczudlik, 2018, pp. 31-32). It is noteworthy that the initiative will connect 4.4 billion people, 63% of the world's population, to China's economy and its development. At the same time, it creates demand for key Chinese products in the region's infrastructure projects and opens the doors for foreign natural resources to China (Panda & Basu, 2018, pp. 3-4, 7).

For China, the BRI project is important because it demonstrates that the country is capable of financing large-scale international joint projects and, at the same time, producing global public goods. This is a measure of global action and leadership (Yonsong, 2018, p. 74). From a historical and de-colonisation perspective, the project means restoring pre-colonial

connections and Chinese influence in Asia (Yoon, 2018, p. 138). It makes China a middle kingdom, connecting it to Central Asia and maritime South Asia and bringing it back into the Indian Ocean.

BRI consists of six infrastructure and development corridors. India finds two of them particularly problematic. BRI's biggest project is CPEC (China-Pakistan economic corridor), which connects western mainland China via the Gwadar port project to the Arabian Sea and further to the Indian Ocean. From an Indian perspective, CPEC emphasises Pakistan's importance to China in its South Asian policy (Wagner, 2018, p. 118). However, the most difficult matter for India to digest is that the development corridor goes through the Kashmir region, which India sees Pakistan is occupying illegally. In this way, China is acknowledging Pakistan's sovereignty over the disputed region.

Another problematic BRI growth corridor is BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar), whose history is older than the 2013 BRI initiative and has played a role for India, mainly for the development of North-East India. This corridor provides access to the Bay of Bengal and further to the Indian Ocean via the ports of Bangladesh's Chittagong and Myanmar's Kyaoukpyu. In its activities, the corridor covers around 40% of the world's population (Panda, 2017, pp. 98–99, 105). Since India has not supported the BRI project, India has remained a passive party in BCIM.

China's BRI together with other China-centric co-operation initiatives in Asia easily lead development towards China's growing influence and a unipolar Asia. Since India has its own goals for Asian leadership, India is naturally opposing such a development and is not part of the BRI initiative (Panda & Sarka, 2020, pp. 23–24). From India's perspective, China's maritime Silk Road aims to legitimise China's presence in the Indian Ocean. In addition, India regards the mainland Silk Road development corridors and the maritime Silk Road as binding India to South Asia (Panda, 2017, p. 84; Ishida, 2018, p. 176). In return, India develops its own co-operation projects in Asia and does not participate in Chinese-led initiatives.

India's own Asian co-operation initiatives are the INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor), BIMSTEC (Bengal Bay Initiative for Multidisciplinary Technical and Economic Cooperation), and the Mausam Project. The INSTC was born at the initiative of Russia and aims to open a transport link from the Indian Ocean via Iran and Russia to the Baltic Sea and further to Western Europe. For India, the project was important at least until the Russian war in Ukraine, since it provides a gateway to Central Asia past Pakistan. From India's point of view, the Chabahar port in Iran is at the heart of the project. India has already invested at least USD 8 billion in the construction of the port (Käkönen, 2020, p. 27). In addition to ignoring Pakistan, India hopes that the project will undermine China's strong position in Central Asia.

The BIMSTEC project started in 1997 and includes in addition to India also Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The project is part of India's broader South-East Asia policy, which began as early as 1991 at the end of the Cold War. With BIMSTEC, India aims, on the one hand, to isolate Pakistan in South Asia and to circumvent SAARC (the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation). It is also the equivalent of China's BCIM and aims to undermine China's influence in South-East Asia (Käkönen, 2020, p. 28). For India, the project focuses on building a road link India-Myanmar-Thailand to support the development of North-East India (Nagao, 2016, p. 153).

The Mausam project aims to provide for India a key counterpart to China's maritime Silk Road. It is essentially a research project that seeks to remind the countries of the Indian Ocean about the historical past that unites them: the spice road, as well as Hindu and Buddhist culture. It is mainly a cultural project that resurrects the many influences of Indian culture in the Indian Ocean region (Käkönen, 2020, p. 28; Panda, 2017, p. 85). As a research project, the project has already produced several publications, but it is unlikely to be able to compete with China's maritime Silk Road both economically and politically.

From the point of view of decolonisation of the international system, and of the Asian system, competing projects of both countries have one common feature. They are all, in a way, based on historical networks and structures before colonialism. It is therefore possible to suggest that those projects dismantle colonial structures and try to restore pre-colonial traditional Asian networks as part of the construction of a new system. At the same time, the role of non-Asian players in the Asian

economy and politics is marginalised. It is simply possible to say that India is trying to restore the marine power of the Chola Empire (about 300 BC–1279) and China is attempting to reinstate the Ming dynasty's (1368–1644) position in the Indian Ocean (Khanna, 2019, p. 105).

## INDIA SEEKING PARTNERS

Being bullied by China, India on its own is unlikely to be able to achieve its dream of being one of the world's leading powers, which would also determine what would replace the colonial or liberal international order. In the short term, India wants to have a dominant position in the Indian Ocean and a stronger role as a security provider in South-East Asia (Yoon, 2018, p. 148; Pandalai, 2016, p. 490). For this, India's resources alone are not enough. The United States remains a key player in Asia, and India wants closer relations with it. The United States, for its part, would like to see a strong India in Asia that would be able to balance China's growing influence over the Asian and Pacific regions. China, on the other hand, would like India to limit the influence of the United States in Asia (Das, 2015, pp. 8, 70).

Until the 2010s, the history of relations between India and the United States has prevented the development of meaningful co-operation between these two countries. India had strong reasons to be suspicious of the United States. In the 1962 border war, the United States did not want to help India, since it feared it would have a negative impact on the country's relations with Pakistan. In the 1971 war, in which India supported the independence of East Pakistan, or Bangladesh, the United States was determined to support Pakistan despite the genocide committed by the Pakistani army in Bangladesh. From India's perspective, the United States supported Pakistan's military dictatorship and communist China instead of democratic India (Das, 2015, p. 21; Nayar & Paul, 2003, pp. 177–178).

Since the Second World War, nuclear weapons have been one of the elements of a superpower. The relationship between India and the United States has also been abrasive by the United States' efforts to prevent India from developing into a nuclear weapon state. India saw it as a threat to its security and, above all, to its status as a superpower (Nayar & Paul, 2003, p. 227). India's nuclear test in 1998 forced the United States to recognise the reality, and a common understanding of the threat posed by China has brought the countries closer to each other. Their common interest is to resist China's growing influence, both in Asia and globally (Mohan, 2003, p. 25; Karnad, 2018, p. 140; Rajagopalan, 2019, pp. 26, 28).

The 2008 US-India nuclear agreement was a clear turning point in US policy to bring India to balance China's strengthened position. However, on the flip side of that agreement, China signed a nuclear co-operation agreement with Pakistan, and Pakistan's position in China's politics was strengthened. By 2011 at the latest, the United States began to consider it important that India develops as a regional superpower capable of providing stability and security in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (Das, 2015, pp. 43, 49). The convergence of relations between countries was given concrete expression in the 2015 jointly agreed Strategic Vision for Asia, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean (Kornegay, 2016, p. 320).

India is prepared to seek relations with other major powers, especially with the United States. From the American perspective, however, India's desire to continue to maintain the prospect of independent politics and self-interests may continue to be a problem. For the United States, India has become one of the pillars of maintaining its own leadership in the Indian Ocean region and at a global level. It may be pointless for the US to expect that India is ready to promote the US interests in the world – something that the United States usually expects from its allies (Pant & Super, 2019, p. 136; Ayres, 2018, p. 212). India is not interested of being the little helper of the United States in maintaining its hegemonic position and prevailing order.

Although India and the United States have a common interest in limiting China's influence, India does not want to be an ally of the United States, but mainly just a friend. India does not want to be the pawn of the US regarding its China policy. India wants to avoid creating the impression that it is one of the factors in the policy of isolation of China, nor does it want to be part in producing factors that China could interpret as India having allied with the United States in its anti-China policy. For India, it is still a question of non-alignment and, on the other hand, a new dimension to selective partnership (Mohan, 2012, p. 244; Tharoor, 2012, pp. 218, 226, 237).



Like India, Japan sees China as a threat – but feels at home in the liberal international order and wants to maintain the US-led system. Japan, however, fears that the United States will no longer stand strictly as a guarantor of its security. In turn, India's effort to maintain strategic autonomy has brought India and Japan closer to each other during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is despite the fact that at a global level, India is working together with China against the Western-centric liberal order. However, neither country wants to see a China-centric system emerge (Malik, 2009, p. 186; Ishida, 2018, pp. 180, 183).

Both countries believe that co-operation between them can limit China's empowerment in Asia and the Indian Ocean. In 2014, Japan identified India as one of the key elements of the change in the international system. That is why Japan wanted to extend its co-operation with India, and this was also justified by the common values and interests shared by the countries (Khan, 2020, pp. 127–128). In 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative as a response to China's BRI. This initiative reflects the US's desire for close co-operation between India and Japan (Terada, 2020, pp. 170–171). Founded in 2017, the Act East Forum further strengthens India-Japan co-operation and is set to co-ordinate Japan's FOIP policy and the Indian Act East initiative targeting Southeast Asia (Panda & Sarka, 2020, p. 27).

The India-Japan shared vision of the world took shape in the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor initiative (AAGC), launched in 2017. Its aim is to promote the common values of both countries and to balance China's marine Silk Road initiative and increasing presence in the Indian Ocean (Panda, 2018, pp. 270, 286). For India, co-operation with Japan is important because it is unable to compete with China's economic resources alone. Japan's increased activity in the Indian Ocean has brought Japanese finance into several development projects in the Bay of Bengal and India to develop North-East India.

In the Asia-Africa corridor, the port of Chabahar plays a key role. It is of strategic importance to both India and Japan in curbing China's influence. That is why Japan has contributed to the financing of the port project. However, here both countries oppose the interests of their common partner, the United States. The United States wants to isolate Iran from international co-operation and therefore is not happy to see India and Japan co-operating with Iran (Kasai, 2018, pp. 207–208; Aoki, 2020, p. 265). This is one of the paradoxes of India's foreign policy that is poorly seated within the framework of Western-centric theories of international politics, but is well explained in the context of a traditional Hindu world-view.

India and Japan counterbalance their Iran policy by following the wishes of the United States within the framework of the so-called Quad policies. Partly encouraged by the United States, Japan is interested in a multi-party democratic co-operation in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions. The Quad is made up of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. It is hoped that this co-operation will function as a counterweight to China's influence in South-East Asia. At the same time, Japan hopes to strengthen its position in the changing international system (Pant, 2010, p. 79; Kornegay, 2016, p. 332; Panda, 2020, p. 3).

In South-East Asia, India has had a strong relationship with Vietnam. India was one of the few countries that supported Vietnam's intervention in 1978 to overthrow the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. India views it as the first humanitarian intervention. The countries also share the experience of border wars with China. The countries signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2007. For Vietnam, this partnership means that India is one of its most important arms suppliers. For India, the partnership has brought the opportunity to permanently deploy its naval units in the South China Sea and to exert pressure on China in its own backyard (Vinh, 2016, pp. 115–117, 119).

Under pressure from China, India's new partnership policy may not be perfectly in line with the traditional non-alignment policy. It is possible to interpret India's policy in the 2010s as replacing non-alignment and Nehru's moral politics with a multidimensional coalition policy. In it, India, on the one hand, is working together with some powers to destabilise China's position and, on the other, challenges its partners and does not submit itself to the role of a pawn of others' policies (Pandalai, 2016, p. 490; Ayres, 2018, p. 118). It may be that India has already lost its autonomy by flirting with the United States. At the same time, it has lost its ability to independently influence the development of power relations in Asia (Karnad, 2018, pp. 155–156).

## WHERE TO GO

In a changing world, China seems to be the biggest challenge to India's foreign policy and realisation of its dream. China's strategy is to create a China-centric Asia and exclude US presence in Asia. For its global leadership, China wants to be economically, politically, and militarily dominant in Asia, to be the actor that determines the rules of the system (Ishida, 2018, p. 177; Ghosh, 2020, p. 313). China's point of view is that Asia belongs to Asians, but India needs US presence in Asia (Kamerling, 2018, p. 56). Another problem is that relations between China and Pakistan prevent the settling of border disputes and therefore the normalisation of relations between India and China (Zhongying & Sapkota, 2016, p. 59).

However, tensions at the regional level in relations between China and India do not prevent them jointly opposing US hegemony. At the same time, India co-operates with the United States against Chinese domination in Asia (Mohan, 2003, p. 145; Aoki, 2020, p. 270; Raghavan, 2013, p. 64). In this context, India is pursuing its national interest in establishing itself as one of the leading powers in a possible new world order. It has not resigned itself to the role given by the US to function as a balancer against China. India does not want to be dragged into the China-US conflict because it can benefit from China's economic growth (Ayres, 2018, p. 224; Rajagopalan, 2019, p. 11).

Although the economic relations between India and China are significant for India, the same does not apply to China. That is why China is prepared to use even hard means against India if it feels they are necessary for achieving its objectives (Singh & Dahiya, 2012, p. 59). So far, China has managed to bind India strictly to regional policy, and India is not an undisputed leader even on its own territory. Thus, India is unlikely to become more important than a regional superpower until it reaches undeniable domination in its own neighbourhood, South Asia (Pant, 2010, p. 149; Tharoor, 2012, p. 120). India's neighbours fear this option and seek support from China.

For India, it is not enough to play the role of a regional power. Nor is it enough to be the leader of poor countries against colonialism and imperialism. India's message, at the latest under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been that it wants a role that equals its population, economy, and military power in managing the global system. For India, it is not enough to be a balancing factor. However, its dilemma so far has been that it is more a responsive than a creative player. To achieve its objectives and interests, India's contribution in shaping the emerging world order must be decisive (Ayres, 2018, pp. 95, 101; Malone, 2012, p. 73; Sidhu, Mehta, & Jones, 2013, p. 4).

Competition for global leadership and the struggle with China requires India to play a dominant role in the Indian Ocean. Traditionally, India and China have been continentally oriented states whose key security threats come from Central Asia. Over the course of history, however, the worst threat came from the sea in the form of Europeans. Now India, like the Chola Empire, is turning into a maritime power. It is an essential requirement to assume a superpower status, both in Asia and in the global system (Ayres, 2018, p. 102; Basu, 2018, p. 310).

In addition to the above, India must consider that it has become dependent on natural resources and markets beyond its own territory. To gain and maintain a superpower status, such an addiction means that the country must be capable of controlling and defending transport links across oceans. That is why, for both India and China, the Indian Ocean plays a key role. In India's energy security, its strategic interest stretches from the Hormuz Strait to the Malacca Strait. India cannot control sea area this vast without a so-called blue-water navy (Pardesi & Ganguly, 2009, p. 125).

India's need to control the Indian Ocean region and China's access to it have underlined the region's strategic importance. They have also strengthened arms race in the region and led to its militarisation (Ghosh, 2020, p. 309). In 2001, India established an integrated army, navy, and air force command in the Andaman and Nicobar region to secure its position in the Indian Ocean. Japan, on the other hand, has invested in the development of the infrastructure of the islands (Ghosh, 2020, p. 318). This regional arms race, together with nuclear weapon status, is transforming India from a moral superpower into a military superpower, in accordance with the principles of traditional power policy. At the same time, the threat experienced by India's neighbours and China is growing.

India and China are building their superpower image upon ancient mythical greatness, which justifies the role of a great power (Malone, 2012, p. 64). At the same time, they are trying to restore their pre-colonial positions and influence in the world. In this way, they sort of nullify the 400–500-years history of humiliation. This is the issue of the transition from a Euro-centric colonial system to a possible new system. Against this background, it is also understandable that India is unlikely to commit itself to any coalition that would serve solely the interests of the West (Cohen, 2002, p. 23).

However, India is no longer a non-aligned state in the traditional sense. It implements a multi-alliance policy that gives a strategic autonomy and serves as a tool for the dismantling of the colonial system (Panda & Sarka, 2020, p. 23). India is seeking a position of a strong state in which it can set standards for the functioning of the international system. According to some researchers, India has achieved its goal to some extent during Prime Minister Modi's governance (Gupta & Mullen, 2019, p. 4). The new standards that India is asking for are based on Hindu philosophy and are already manifested in India's foreign policy. India may co-operate with the United States or China, even when there is conflicting tensions in their relations.

In Hindu philosophy, dualism is a kind of alien concept. In Hindu universalism, differences do not constitute a confrontation, but form a complementary whole. Therefore, the other is not necessarily the enemy that must be isolated or destroyed (Datta-Ray, 2015, p. 35). Knowing this, it becomes understandable that India's foreign policy contains many paradoxes from the perspective of Western-centric theories, but they are not paradoxes in the Hindu context. Therefore, on the one hand, India supports the maintenance of the existing system and, on the other hand, acts to change it. Whether India is a status quo, or a revisionist power remains to be seen.

The fact is, however, that India is one of the key players in building regional communities and alternative global governance institutions between developing countries. The West can interpret those as a disintegration of global governance, as power is slipping away from the institutions built by the West after the Second World War. It is also evident that global governance is deteriorating, at least temporarily, and that the management of collective problems loses its importance when no one can take leadership in the international system (Buzan, 2016, p. 28). However, it seems likely that new globalisation will be managed from the East rather than from the West (Acharya, 2018, p. 205). India will play a vital role in this.

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