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## **Not the Hedge You're Looking For: Why India's Rise is Not the Fix for Great Power Competition**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The United States has the opportunity to adjust its strategic partnership with India to account for its most pressing geopolitical rivals. Namely, China's continued domineering of Southeast Asian waterways, expansion of its "no limits" partnership with Russia, and expanding economy could provide pressure for the United States to clamor for new allies.<sup>1</sup> In India, American policymakers see the potential to hedge against a rising China and empower a growing democracy and technological powerhouse. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ushered in a new era of Indian prosperity, and India's interest in being a lynchpin in global affairs continues to rise.

However, relying upon India in this manner would be a grievous error. The United States has a history of collaboration with states whose intentions it does not fully understand in order to defeat or deter their current rival. Sometimes, this approach has generally benefitted the world, as with the alliance with the Soviet Union in order to defeat the Axis Powers. In others, it has played a part in creating the next great geopolitical rivalry, as the United States expanded its relationship with China to hedge against the Soviet Union, only to end up embroiled in great power competition with Beijing decades later. India's recent rise and relatively unknown goals for the future are hard to assess, but recent trends do not bode well for a formal alliance. The expansion of a sometimes-violent Hindu nationalism, the suppression of opposition forces, and the sudden uncoordinated assassination attempts of Indian targets in North America show an India that wants to steer for itself.

The United States benefits most by planning parallel to India versus planning with it. Interacting periodically through mini-lateral organizations provides a reasonable framework to both build a secure relationship with India while continuing to make more informed assessments on the world India envisions. Embracing this new,

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powerful India with little regard for where it sees the United States in the future could be a recipe for future direct competition and conflict.

## India's Rise

Two active wars and the looming threat of great power competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) turning into a kinetic confrontation have created a fraught geopolitical climate. Amid the chaos, some middle powers have seen their fortunes grow. Saudi Arabia has continued expansive infrastructural projects and is on the cusp of a major security agreement with the United States. Argentina has embraced a populist leader whose retrenchment policies have saved the state from serious economic peril.

Most notably, India under Modi has flourished economically and displayed a more pronounced voice in the international community. As a self-proclaimed leader of the Global South, Modi has taken measures to ensure that India's rise beckons in a more diverse international order, where the powers of the day have the same weight as those who remade the world in the aftermath of World War II. India's rise is a product of its economic successes, its diplomatic maneuvering around bipolar constructs, and its people's willingness to phalanx around Modi. As a result, the world may see a new superpower emerge in the next decade, thereby disrupting the current alleged bipolar reign of the United States and China.

## Is the World Multipolar, and Does it Matter?

### The Return of Multipolarity

Recent changes in global power dynamics have ushered in a return to traditional international relations terminology. Namely, the term "multipolarity" has been renewed as the term du jour to explain the power imbalances that come with rising middle powers. By textbook definition, the concept relies on "significant power... concentrated in more than two states," which can be further refined by the term "unbalanced multipolarity."<sup>2</sup>

This change in global power structures is thought to principally be fueled by the end of the Cold War. As

the United States and Soviet Union engaged in their great power rivalry, other states either succumbed to the bifurcated system or chose nonalignment.<sup>3</sup> Those who stayed nonaligned were typically poorer states who, as a result of the fractured pre-World War II international system, primarily focused on domestic affairs as a result of either newfound independence or a recent delineation of new borders. The United States and the Soviet Union truly dominated as global powers during the Cold War, as they and their respective blocs comprised 88 percent of global GDP. Today, those broken alliances account for roughly 57 percent.<sup>4</sup> In addition, US and Soviet defense expenditures accounted for roughly 56 percent of the world's totals, not including those of their respective alliances and partners.<sup>5</sup> While no single metric perfectly measures a state's power, the dominance of the United States and Soviet Union across the Cold War shows a relatively clear distinction in the global power landscape.

This distinction suits those who would wish to hedge against China, the United States, or both. Those middle powers who rise in the face of this dynamic tend to have grievance with an international system that does not often represent their interests. The restructuring of major international systems may come as a result of countries who opine that the world is more multipolar and less multilateral.<sup>6</sup> Those who did not align themselves during the Cold War may have a substantial opportunity to reshape international order. While those powers may not be on par with the world's principal powers, the United States and China alike must reckon with their rise.

### Multipolarity's Critics

There are varying forecasts and projections for multipolarity's implications. If the distinguishing factors that comprise power are "economic size, military might, and global leverage," then it is reasonable to look at today's metrics and surmise that the United States and China represent the two poles of a bipolar world.<sup>7</sup> In assessing the middle powers that could theoretically become a new pole and forge a multipolar world, it is important to note that India, as of 2021, is the third-largest defense spender globally. However, its military budget is roughly a quarter of China's.<sup>8</sup>

Some assess that the perceived rise of multipolarity has little to do with the actual state of the world and

more to do with blatant attempts to unseat the United States in its current position as a superpower. As was seen by French President Emmanuel Macron's comments that Europe was becoming a "third superpower" in the global order after a visit to China, the resulting disruptive effects on alliance structures can be extremely detrimental to the order that exists.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the future may hold, some claim that seeing the current dynamic as anything other than bipolar is foolish.

## **Why Does it Matter?**

While some argue that the current state of the world is bipolar, trend lines increasingly point to a world where success for China or the United States in great power competition may depend on their willingness to befriend and employ middle powers to advance their interests. Furthermore, too much time spent focusing on the rival of the moment may distract either party from the next geopolitical crisis or threat. If the United States determines that out-competing China is its primary strategic objective, it has to have a vision for the future centered on something other than U.S. global hegemony. The rising middle powers will not be interested in the continuity of an international system in which they are not adequately represented.

## **Why India, Why Now?**

### **A Bulwark Against Beijing?**

The rise of India has garnered the interest of American politicians seeking to curb Chinese dominance and, if necessary, defeat Chinese geopolitical ambitions in Southeast Asia. Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley and Congressman Mike Waltz have called for a formal alliance as a show of strength after the America's "disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal" in 2021.<sup>10</sup> Principally, their case relies on India's growing military strengths and its history of economic and military cooperation with Washington, as well as New Delhi's ability via the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) to provide a substantial deterrent to China's continued rise.

More recently, the former Chairman of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, Mike Gallagher, has claimed that both he and ranking member Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi

"desperately want to go to India," and even had a trip planned that was cancelled as former Speaker Kevin McCarthy was removed from his role.<sup>11</sup> While both Gallagher and Krishnamoorthi are aware of India's long strategic history of nonalignment, they remain convinced that a committee trip to India is pivotal to providing a hedge against a revisionist PRC. Yet the desire to use a rising power to hedge against the current rival, while understandable, has historically led to a future rivalry with the very power with which the United States has allied itself.

Unfortunately, India is likely not the solution to all of the United States' problems when it comes to deterring China. India and America are like-minded in wanting to stymie the effects of a revisionist China. India's former national security adviser, Shivshankar Menon, has claimed that "Chinese leadership is convinced that China must shape its external environment if it is to prosper."<sup>12</sup> This is met by more grief from current Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, who has lamented India's timidity and willingness to watch China "go first" in terms of seizing critical international positions, such as a seat on the United Nations Security Council.<sup>13</sup>

### **A Shift Under Modi**

Indeed, while nonalignment has kept India out of horrible conflicts, it has at times kept it from exerting influence in international fora. Today, India's rise under Modi has caused a renewed pride in Indian nationality and culture. This resulting renaissance has created an India that is much more open to engaging with the world and finding its place on the international stage. India's hosting of the G20 summit was something of a celebration of Modi's popularity and served as an opportunity to propel Modi as a global thought leader and international voice for those seeking to challenge the current global order.<sup>14</sup>

India's previous policy of nonalignment is almost unrecognizable given its current partnerships. From this history, a theory of "strategic autonomy" has emerged which involves India aggressively pursuing matters both foreign and domestic that suit its national interest. Whether its leadership roles in the Global South or in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), its stellar hosting of the G20 summit, or its simultaneous security engagements in both the Quad (between the United States, Australia and Japan,) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

(SCO, principally run by China), India has been busy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it's difficult to surmise how much these partnerships influence Indian decision making and action. There's a possibility that India could be so bound in its network of overlapping partnerships that it is rendered immobile when called upon by a partner state or international organization to act.

Moreover, India's ability to play "both sides" of an arguably bipolar dynamic allows it to truly pursue its own national interest. As the United States has encountered with great frustration, India's willingness to buy Russian oil despite Western attempts to sanction Russia as punishment for its invasion of Ukraine have allowed Russia to sidestep those sanctions and India to plus up its oil reserves for pennies on the dollar.<sup>15</sup>

In the pursuit of winning the game of great power competition, U.S. policymakers must ensure that India's intentions truly match those of the United States. India would in many ways benefit from dilution of Chinese power; it could advance its manufacturing base for critical technologies, it could build a more dominant position at their shared border, and could grow its stature amongst Southeast Asian states. However, the risk of antagonizing China may be more than India is willing to accept, despite these advantages. Betting on India to wholesale align with U.S. objectives in great power competition risks a U.S. loss in global stature that may not be reinstated.

## **How America Nominates Its Next Rival**

### **Russia**

The United States has been a global superpower for nearly a century. Its critical role in defeating the Axis Powers in World War II created room for a rewriting of international order and made itself an obvious candidate to lead the revision. However, the alliance of opportunity between the United States and the Soviet Union quickly turned into the world's preeminent rivalry, as the differences that both countries were willing to put aside in pursuit of the broader, noble objective of defeating the Axis Powers became the dividing lines that created a 45-year Cold War. Over the course of the Cold War,

smaller nations were compelled to choose between a democratic or communist system, and to potentially face the wrath of the opposing power as a result. Some smaller states, however, were able to maintain policies of nonalignment. After the partition of India following Britain's departure in 1947, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, pursued a policy of nonalignment that put India's national interests squarely at the heart of India's foreign and domestic policy despite the pressures to choose a side. Despite India's success in maintaining this policy, the world was engulfed in the strategic competition between the two major powers, as various proxy wars, intelligence agency-led coups, and threats of nuclear Armageddon defined a half-century.

Few would argue that the United States' alliance with the Soviet Union during World War II was the incorrect action. The existential threat that Nazi Germany and imperial Japan created was worth teaming with a state with clear ideological differences, even if that state had its own grievous sins. In addition, the urgency rendered by France's quick fall and Germany's persistent, brutal bombing of Britain did not give the United States ample time to engage in longer-term game theory regarding Soviet intentions after the war. The moment was so monumental that follow-on effects came second to the objective, and played little part in determination of how that objective would be achieved. While the Cold War created vast suffering and global paranoia, it was an unfortunate but necessary evil to thwart the ambitions of a completely maniacal new world order.

### **China**

While the United States could argue that its hand was forced in creating its first bipolar rival, its decision to "bring China into the world" during the Nixon administration was much more predictive and deliberate.<sup>16</sup> The Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 brought about increased bilateral talks between the communist PRC and the United States. This series of talks, followed by the publication of the document itself, opened the door to normalized relations. The United States was able to leverage this relationship to conduct critical intelligence and surveillance operations from mainland China and exploit fault lines between Beijing and Moscow.<sup>17</sup> China was able to propel itself onto the global stage as a peaceful nation that would "never be a superpower" and "oppose[d]

hegemony and power politics of any kind.”<sup>18</sup>

The eventual fall of the Soviet Union, as a result of a myriad of factors but including flawed institutions, overextension of its industrial complex, and the loss of China as a like-minded partner, left the United States as the lone superpower in a post-Cold War world. Spin was rampant. The “end of history” was declared.<sup>19</sup>

However, the “peaceful rise” of the United States new potential partner was ultimately flawed.<sup>20</sup> As China’s vibrant economy exponentially increased its global role, it was welcomed into the international community with open arms and admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Then, China embarked on a sweeping effort to strengthen its military and aggressively pursued dominion over its alleged territorial waters in the South and East China Seas. Through its failure foresee China’s rise and adequately assess Chinese desires and temerity, the United States played a role in creating its next geopolitical adversary.

Hindsight is a dangerous weapon in this assessment. To say that the United States singlehandedly launched China into its present role in the current alleged bipolar dynamic would be irresponsible. Furthermore, the United States almost certainly did not hope to supplant the Soviet Union with the PRC. However, the facts illustrate a United States that either made a faulty risk decision or completely failed to assess the threat from China. The subsequent global embrace of China was partly due to a world eager to globalize and to mutually benefit from the wares and services of previously underutilized or untapped resources. Moreover, an economic behemoth in Asia was seen as a healthy cog in a global machine. Perhaps geopolitical ambitions were not inspected as much or as often as a result of sheer relief from the end of the Cold War. Ultimately, the tradeoff of the end of the Cold War for a renewed great power competition with a much more powerful state in China will be left to history as this decade comes to a close.

**Figure 1: US History of Power Nomination and its Results**

	Catalyst for partnership	Objective	Fellow Partners	Partners' Grand Strategy at time of Partnership	Current State
Russia	WWII	Defeat Axis Powers	UK	Revisionist	Renewed tension; proxy war
China	Cold War	Deter Soviet Union	Unilateral	Ambiguous; interested in power	GPC; brewing kinetic action

## India: Next In Line?

Given these historical trends, a full embrace of India as it continues to rise is likely not in the best interest of the United States. The potential for an ambitious India to steer the United States away from its current role in an increasingly multipolar world is possible, especially if America or China lose geopolitical might as the result of a direct confrontation surrounding Taiwan or infringements on territorial waters in the South and East China Seas. India and other middle powers have the right to disavow the alleged rules-based order that upholds their relatively diminished status in the international system. The revisions to international organizations that account for the changes in geopolitical power should come soon, but those revisions should not happen without the United States present and powerful. Furthermore, today’s India deviates enough from its previous geostrategic mindset that a new, in-depth assessment must be made.

Understanding the risks of partnering with a state under a populist that favors consolidation of power, that has favored a return to Hindu nationalism at the expense of other citizens, and that has started to act boldly and unlawfully abroad in defense of India’s new power is pivotal to keeping the U.S. national interest at the heart of foreign relations.

## Human Rights, Democracy, and Values

### The BJP’s Vision

India’s rise is not without flaw or collateral damage. In order to make India a major player in international affairs, Modi has painstakingly recrafted an Indian identity as a Hindu nation. Modi is a part of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was formed in 1980 but had had ideological roots in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> The RSS is an all-volunteer force that serves as a pseudo-militarized security infrastructure with the goal of creating an India that reflects a Hindu image.<sup>22</sup> The BJP has historically not had rampant success in India’s politics, as the rival Indian National Congress party, which has been *de facto* dominated by the virtually dynastic Gandhi family, has enjoyed almost uninterrupted rule in the Prime Ministership and the Lok Sabha (India’s legislature) since the partition in

1947. The Congress party has long been the steward of both nonalignment and secularism, as Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, espoused in the oversight of the Constitution of India.<sup>23</sup> The BJP's 2014 success with Modi's election was a momentous victory for both the BJP and the Hindu nationalist movement.

## Modi's Violent Past

While Modi comes across as a jovial, grandfather-like figure, he has been at the center of some of India's recent horrific atrocities. In 2002, when Modi was the chief minister for the state of Gujarat, a train of Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya were attacked by a large mob of 1,000-2,000 villagers believed to be Muslim. Sixty pilgrims died in the attack. As a result, riots started in Gujarat, in which both the BJP and Modi allowed and were deemed complicit in. These riots left over 2,000 people, a majority of them Muslim, dead and over 150,000 people displaced in refugee camps. This incident was so internationally startling that the United States revoked Modi's diplomatic visa and denied him a future one (the latter of which was reversed when Modi won the Prime Ministership in 2014).<sup>24</sup>

More recently, Modi has continued to prop up Hindu nationalism despite recent violent episodes. His consecration of a new Hindu temple in Ayodhya, where a 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque was burned to the ground in 1992 by Hindu rioters, was seen as a further slight against Muslim Indians. Modi specifically invoked the history of Islam in India, claiming that this consecration was "the beginning of a new era..." and that India was a "nation rising by breaking the mentality of slavery," referring to the 11<sup>th</sup> century invasion of Moghul Muslims from Persia into India.<sup>25</sup> The violence underpinning both of these cases makes Modi's passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act, which allows a "fast track for naturalization for Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Christians" from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, (notably excluding Muslims), especially troubling. In addition, this law prevents illegal migrants from becoming Indian citizens, creating a convoluted process for Muslims to approach Indian citizenship.<sup>26</sup> All of these events and measures have led to an increasingly Hindu nationalist India.

While nonalignment and secularism served India for a time, India's populace under Modi longs for a more

aggressive, forthright standing in the world. Just recently, a survey of 5,000 respondents aged 18 to 35 across India reported that 88 percent agreed that it was important for India to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and 83 percent said India should be a permanent part of the G7.<sup>27</sup> Modi has given Indians reason to believe that these goals are completely within reach. So far, it seems Indians are relatively willing to look past domestic issues including restrictions on freedom of speech, if India's overall stature continues to rise. Freedom House has recently rated India "partly free," noting significant issues with freedom of assembly, due process in civil and criminal matters, and an academic system free of political indoctrination. Many of these ratings come from incidents involving the National Volunteer Association (NVA), a Hindu nationalist organization that is partially responsible for BJP resurgence that has engaged in violence across campuses across India.<sup>28</sup> This grim reality pairs with a slowly advancing Indian disinformation apparatus.

## The "Disinformation Capital of the World"

India, long a friend of Israel due to perceived parallel missions in defining national identity, was understandably appalled by Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Quickly, Indian social media was flooded with messages in support of Israel, as images were exchanged and shared of the atrocities and bloodshed. Amidst the commotion, Indian fact-checking service BOOM noted a "disinformation campaign" on X that "targeted Palestine with negative views while supporting Israel."<sup>29</sup> A video of young girls that were allegedly taken by Hamas as sex slaves circulated over X, which later proved to be wildly out of context, as this video was likely from a school trip to Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> Videos of a beheading allegedly in Israel were later reported to be imagery from a Mexican drug cartel.<sup>31</sup>

Some fact-checkers have attested that India is the "disinformation capital of the world," and have attributed the proliferation and spread of disinformation material surrounding the Hamas attack to BJP's IT cell, which specifically handles social media accounts and campaigns.<sup>32</sup> The events of October 7<sup>th</sup> were objectively and unimaginably despicable. The observation of India's disinformation apparatus as a result of this attack is noteworthy for future crises, as it could seek to sway Indian thought

back to the ruling party's line.

## **Assassination as a Political Tool**

More troubling still is an India that is willing to exert itself abroad outside the bounds of international law and cooperation. In June 2023, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh leader in British Columbia was shot and killed near the Sikh temple he led. Royal Canadian Mounted Police later stated he was “ambushed by masked men.”<sup>33</sup> Nijjar was a “self-proclaimed ‘Sikh nationalist,’” who was making broader efforts to establish a nation called Khalistan, currently within the northern state of Punjab in India. Nijjar was declared a terrorist by the Indian government in 2020, despite the fact that he had left India in the mid-1990s. Canadian intelligence linked this assassination to “agents of the government of India,” which caused a direct one-on-one confrontation between Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and Modi at the G20 Summit in New Delhi. Modi “completely rejected” the claim that the Indian government was responsible, calling the accusations “absurd.”

However, just days later, Vikram Yadav, an officer in India's spy agency known as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), gave the order to assassinate another Sikh activist, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun at his home in New York<sup>34</sup> Modi was in Washington, DC, being received warmly by President Biden when the order went out. It is only through its intelligence networks that the United States was able to uncover this plot. The Indian government had long been critical of Western states allegedly harboring Sikh terrorists and were concerned Canada in particular would fund movements to create Khalistan. Neither the United States nor Canada's governments were contacted to extradite or detain these alleged terrorists. Of note, the move to install a permanent state of Khalistan remains very small with little to no international backing.

An emboldened India that moves unilaterally on foreign territory to assassinate that countries citizens is a troubling reality. The United States has moved to oust these attempts in the future, sending CIA Director William Burns to New Delhi to confront Indian intelligence counterparts with the intelligence Washington received of the assassination plot. There have been no further punitive measures despite a brief delay in a \$4 billion delivery of armed drones to India. India in general has treated these accusations with

relative “indignance and resignation,” and these events have only served to strengthen Modi's magnanimity and power.

Defiantly, despite the United States alleging that Modi is taking the matter seriously in private meetings, Modi has stated that “India's enemies know: this is Modi, this is the New India” and “this New India comes into your home to kill you.” An India that freely gallivants throughout fellow democracies and picks off chosen targets one by one is a difficult one to start a formal alliance with.

## **Recommendations**

The United States has its own sins and has previously overlooked or ignored a partner nation's flaws in order to achieve its strategic objectives. Indeed, looking for states without flaws is likely not a quality prescription for finding suitable allies and partners. However, the United States government must decide how much alignment on values should inform its foreign policy. In turn, it must make informed assessments of rising powers' respective visions for the world. If that assessment is ambiguous, Washington must bide its time while extracting what useful information or assets it can from these powers.

The mounting pressure to deal a crushing strategic defeat to China by whatever means available could lead to risky decisions that don't account for these assessments. A strategic defeat of China would not automatically usher in a unipolar wave of prosperity; rather, it would more likely leave a vacuum of competition that would likely fall to hungry, well-resourced middle powers. Rather than using China as the axle on which US grand strategy revolves, the United States should make plans to maintain and bolster its seat at the table in a world beyond great power competition.

## **AUKUS Now, Quad Later**

As stated, the United States must manage deterrence of China while accounting for its own future role in the world. Taking advantage of newly developed existing security architecture by way of the AUKUS partnership (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) is the means to deter China, while continuing to nurture the Quad is the means to secure standing in

an unbalanced multipolar world.

As part of AUKUS, the United States has agreed to train Australian sailors onboard its nuclear submarines in order to eventually sell Australia three Virginia class submarines to Australia by the early 2030s for Canberra's own use in deterrence operations.<sup>35</sup> This deal is unprecedented given the typical secrecy shrouding U.S. submarine programs. While this initial "pillar" of the agreement is profound on its own, the agreements in "Pillar II," deemed "Advanced Capability Development," fosters more hope on economic and technological fronts. AUKUS countries have agreed to license-free defense trade, stronger integration and coordination across their respective industrial bases, as well as, notably, "engaging close partners and allies."<sup>36</sup> This section of Pillar II serves as a kind of call for applications to the trilateral agreement, as the press release from the U.S. Department of Defense dictates the group will "undertake consultations in 2024 with prospective partners."<sup>37</sup> Japan is called out by name, for its "strengths and close bilateral defense partnerships with all three countries;" therefore, the addition of Japan in the coming years would not be a surprise. A notable exclusion is India.

India wants to ensure that the Quad is a worthwhile security arrangement. AUKUS could be viewed as a heavy blow to the credibility and utility of the Quad. For one, the idea of Australian submarines in the Indian Ocean is not an overly desired end for Indian security.<sup>38</sup> This is a fair concern for a country that values strategic autonomy. However, the reticence with which India has met AUKUS is partially due to India's own unwillingness to securitize the Quad, as it is "wary of supporting hard power projection that could risk its own security."<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, India's membership in the SCO further complicates the purpose of the Quad, as the SCO's own language specifically dictates the upholding of "non-alignment" as well as "non-targeting at other countries."<sup>40</sup> This duplicity could prohibit Quad's intended objectives. Namely, maintaining the "maritime rules-based order, including those in the East and South China Seas" may be an unfortunate kinetic reality should tensions in the area persist.<sup>41</sup> China's often coercive behavior in the 2010s has in fact been the driver for the Quad's resurgence.<sup>42</sup> India's membership in the Quad presently allows it the

autonomy it desires in the Indo-Pacific. Modi wishes to continue to sustain this relationship, offering to host a summit in 2024.<sup>43</sup> It remains to be seen if the focus of the summit will be on the issues of the Indo-Pacific or if it will function as a public relations opportunity for Modi.

## Environmental and Technological Pursuits

The United States can still produce meaningful change through a strategic partnership with India. As of 2021, India was the third-largest energy consumer in the world, with 68% of its energy coming from either coal or petroleum.<sup>44</sup> Notably, India's carbon emissions per capita are relatively low given their massive population. The U.S. government has partnered with India via the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to help New Delhi achieve at least 40 percent non-fossil sources by 2030.<sup>45</sup> India has also set ambitious goals to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2070.

The United States and India are, under the current U.S. administration, aligned in the importance of curbing the effects of climate change. Both have partnered on the creation of the U.S.-India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (SCEP) and the Global Biofuels Alliance, which could both play crucial roles in strengthening energy markets and creating jobs for both states.<sup>46</sup> This endeavor should be a strategic imperative for the United States not only for the betterment of the planet, but to continue to move India away from Russian crude oil purchases. The United States should leverage this partnership as a prosperity measure that can benefit both states and keep the United States away from any formalized alliance structure.

India's technological developments and vaunted workforce provide ample opportunity for mutual benefit. Much like the United States, India has started to develop a foothold in the semi-conductor space, with information technology (IT) companies such as Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) developing a 50,000-employee presence in the United States.<sup>47</sup> Competition in this sector helps dilute China's current dominance in legacy semiconductor manufacturing, and allows the United States to both employ Americans and attract Indian talent to its IT firms. India's already close relationship with the U.S. Department of Energy through measures to promote the energy transition could translate well to shared



technological gains through the CHIPS and Science Act.

The United States desires improvements in its quantum computing sector by way of the CHIPS and Science Act,<sup>48</sup> and India’s development of quantum labs leveraging Amazon Web Services (AWS) could provide for inroads for cooperation.<sup>49</sup> Finding means to bring other quantum advocates, such as Japan and South Korea with whom the US has already developed quantum partnerships, into this partnership would enable the United States to benefit from India’s talent while stiff-arming more rigid relationship structures.

### Leverage Mini-Laterals

While dealing with India directly may be in the America’s near-term interest, the risk of propelling a state with unknown geopolitical ambitions into a more prominent international role is not worth it. Therefore, using “mini-lateral” organizations to offset the chances of aggressive development and geopolitical shifts provides the United States the necessary time to assess partners’ true intentions. Working through the Quad to address security issues, continuing to function as a Comprehensive Strategic Partner to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to address economic and diplomatic concerns, and being a party to groups such as the SCEP and Global Biofuels Alliance to mitigate climate change are likely the best way forward.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, the United States will need to be wary of how open criticism within these forums will affect India’s disposition toward the United States and willingness to engage. There are worthwhile issues regarding freedom of speech and democracy to critique; however, using the “power of our example” to show the United States own past of both racial discrimination and challenges to democracy could create an environment more focused on learning than lecturing.<sup>51</sup> Finding the right forum and the right points of connection and unity should help foster a mutually beneficial relationship that does not depend on the crutch of security.

**Figure 2 A Juxtaposition of Historical Frameworks with Predictive Analysis of India’s Future**

	Catalyst for partnership	Objective	Fellow Partners	Partners’ Grand Strategy at time of Partnership	Current/Projected State
<b>Russia</b>	WWII	Defeat Axis Powers	UK	Revisionist	Renewed tension; proxy war
<b>China</b>	Cold War	Deter Soviet Union	Unilateral	Ambiguous, interested in power	GPC; brewing kinetic action
<b>India</b>	GPC	Promote peaceful, prosperous world order	Quad, ASEAN, SCEP, etc.	Aligned, with ability to hedge with partners as conduits	Unbalanced, manageable multipolarity

### Conclusion

India’s true ambitions are nascent to the world at best and unknown at worst. That is the concern that should keep the United States from taking broad measures to raise India’s geopolitical might at the expense of China. The world following a major conflict with China is not one in which policymakers should pretend to have an innate understanding. The United States does not need to ensure that the global order does not change; it needs to ensure that its position in that order does not change. The rising middle powers representation amongst shares of the world’s military might, GDP, and technological sectors requires historic great powers to give credence to those who are making their name in the world. The United States has the tools necessary to manage a multipolar world; it must simply realize that that world is arriving.

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