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Aditi Malhotra

India in the Indo-Pacific

Understanding India's Security Orientation towards Southeast and East Asia

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Aditi Malhotra
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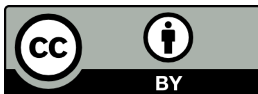

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List of Abbreviations

A&N	Andaman and Nicobar
ACNS (FCI)	Assistant Chief of Naval Staff-Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AEP	Act East Policy
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARC	Asian Relations Conference
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BoP	Balance of Power
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CBMs	Confidence Building Measures
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CISMOA	Communication and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement
CNS	Chief of Naval Staff
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
CORPAT	Coordinated Patrol
CPEC	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
DMA	Department of Military Affairs
DTTI	Defense Technology and Trade Initiative
DV	Dependent Variable
EA	East Asia
EAM	External Affairs Minister
EAS	East Asia Summit
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Energy Information Administration

FM	Foreign Minister
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FS	Foreign Secretary
FY	Financial Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOI	Government of India
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IA	Indian Army
IAF	Indian Air Force
ICC	International Control Commission
IFS	Indian Foreign Service
IMB	International Maritime Boundary
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMMS	India's Maritime Military Strategy
IN	Indian Navy
INC	Indian National Congress
INS	Indian Naval Ship
IO	Indian Ocean
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
IR	International Relations
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
ISRO	Indian Space Research Organisation
IV(s)	Independent Variable(s)
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
KRC	Kargil Review Committee
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LEP	Look East Policy
LoC	Line of Credit
LSA	Logistics Supply Agreement
MBD	Mission Based Deployment
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoF	Ministry of Finance

MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
MoS	Minister of State
MoU(s)	Memorandum of Understanding(s)
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
MV	Moderating Variable
NAM	Non-Alignment Movement
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NFDR	New Framework for the US–India Defence Relationship
NNRC	Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission
NRC(s)	National Role Conception(s)
NSA	National Security Advisor
NSC	National Security Council
OD	Overseas Deployment
OVL	Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Ltd.
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PIC	Pacific Islands Countries
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	PLA Navy
PM	Prime Minister
PMO	Prime Minister Office
POW	Prisoners of War
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RC(s)	Role Conception(s)
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia
RIC	Russia–India–China
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SAR	Search and Rescue
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SCS	South China Sea
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
SINDEX	Singapore–India Defence Exercise
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLOCs	Sea Lanes of Communication
SWJN	Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US DoD	US Department of Defense
US	United States
VCNS	Vice Chief of the Naval Staff
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
WSA	White Shipping Agreements

1. Contextualising the Indo-Pacific

As repetitive as it may appear, one cannot deny that the centre of global power is rapidly shifting towards Asia (see Shambaugh, 2005; Kissinger, 2010; Beeson & Bisley, 2010). According to Gareis and Liegl (2016, p. 99), "the historical predominance of the West […] is coming to an end due to Asia's rise in world politics". The putative end of a unipolar world and the emergence of non-western countries has led to a strategic flux in global security. As the new rising powers, India and China have become essential shapers of the changing regional order. Other characteristics of the regional evolution are the retreat of the United States (US), the growing salience of Southeast Asia (SEA) and East Asia (EA), specifically given Japan's resurgence, and the emergence of the new geopolitical construct—'Indo-Pacific'.[1]

Drawing comparisons between the rise of India and China with the rise of united Germany in the 19th century and the US in the 20th century, scholars argue that Beijing and New Delhi "will transform the geopolitical landscape, with impacts potentially as dramatic as those in the previous two centuries" (National Intelligence Council, 2004, p. 9). India and China are economic giants with divergent models of development and distinct external orientations. Concurrently, they are racing to increase their strategic footprints in the near and distant regions. A complex future is forthcoming where non-western entities will dominate the security landscape and give birth to new geopolitical configurations.

As the world lies amid this unprecedented shift, it has become increasingly necessary to understand the foreign policy motivations and security conduct of these emerging Asian powers. While China's rise and foreign policy conduct have attracted immense scholarly and analytical attention, the same has not been valid for India. The world's largest democracy, India, is home to one-sixth of the global population. It is one of the fastest-growing economies and possesses the world's second-largest military after China. Despite this, as noted by Wagner (2015, para.1), China has been the "primary focus … [and] often lost in the discussion is India, its strategic objectives, and its political influence in Asia and the world".

One of the most tangible strategic implications of India's ascent is the emergence of the geopolitical construct, the Indo-Pacific.[2] The Indo-Pacific has gained sudden eminence in strategic and geopolitical discourse (see Mohan, 2013a; Chacko, 2016; Tourangbam, 2014, 2018; Chaudhury & de Estrada, 2018; Mahapatra, 2019). The concept of Indo-Pacific supplants the term 'Asia-Pacific' to convey the regional views of many countries more fittingly. The Indo-Pacific encompasses an expansive area that includes many sub-regions, including the eastern coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), SEA,

EA, Oceania, and the west coast of the US.[3] Brewster (2011, para.1) puts forth that India's rise has changed the geographical "mental map of Asia".[4] The emergence of the Indo-Pacific encapsulates the power shift towards Asia and acknowledges the growing interconnectedness between developments in the Indian Ocean (IO) and the Pacific Ocean. It would not be an exaggeration to state that without India, there would be no Indo-Pacific (Gupta, 2011). By dint of its importance in the IO, India forms an indispensable part of the Indo-Pacific. It is poised to play a crucial role in shaping regional security architecture. Given this, India's security cooperation within the Indo-Pacific region warrants greater research attention. As mentioned above, the Indo-Pacific stretch includes many sub-regions. The scope of this book is limited to the eastern part of the Indo-Pacific, i.e., the space from eastern IO to the west coast of the US.

India's security cooperation with the SEA and EA regions has displayed a notable qualitative and quantitative change over the last two decades. Interestingly, the SEA and EA together form the central part of the Indo-Pacific region. To understand India's emergence as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific, it is essential to understand the motivations to increase security cooperation with the SEA and EA. Although contemporary scholars have examined India's rise and foreign policy at large (see Malone, 2011; Ray, 2011; Paul & Shankar, 2014; Mazumdar, 2015; Ganguly, Chauthaiwale & Sinha, 2016; Basrur & de Estrada, 2017; Ayres, 2018; Bekkevold & Kalyanaraman, 2020; Davar, 2021), there is a dearth of literature on New Delhi's engagement of SEA and EA (rare endeavours include Devare, 2006; Das, 2013a; Mukherjee & Yazaki, 2016; Grare, 2017; Wagner, 2018; Basrur & Kutty, 2018; Mayilvaganan, 2021). Overall, the Balance of Power (BoP) theory dominates the record on India's foreign policy's theoretical explanations towards SEA and EA, followed by constructivism. These theoretical perspectives provide, at best, only a partial explanation of the phenomenon.

With the larger objective of understanding India's security rise in the Indo-Pacific, the book examines the drivers of heightened security cooperation with SEA and EA over the last two decades. Despite the limited geographical scope of this book, it does not discount the influence of crucial powers such as China and the US on India's policy decisions and actions. The study focuses on the years between 2001 and 2021 while also covering a historical overview of India's foreign policy towards Asia.

At this juncture, it is necessary to clarify that this book focuses on examining parts of the Indian foreign policy that are relevant to its external security conduct in the Indo-Pacific and not the broader all-encompassing concept of foreign policy. This clarification is needed to obviate the possibility of equating the two concepts (foreign and security policy) as one. To quote Joshi (2016, p. 9), "external security policy is basically a subset of foreign policy which largely concerns issues pertaining to external security in inter-state relations".

Hence, whenever the term foreign policy is used in the book, it refers to India's external security orientation and behaviour.

Further, even 'security cooperation' is a broad concept and can mean different things to different people. In the context of this book, security cooperation refers to inter-state cooperation on traditional and non-traditional security issues. It is conducted through defence consultations and strategic dialogues (at multiple levels), defence exchanges, port calls, joint military exercises, educational and training exchanges, counter-terrorism cooperation, and disaster relief/crisis response operations.

1.1 Mapping India's Rise in the Indo-Pacific

Since its independence, New Delhi has attempted to project its power in the Indian subcontinent, which comprises India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives (northern IO). Because India's security threat perceptions were primarily related to land-based issues vis-à-vis China and Pakistan, other regions such as SEA and EA remained a secondary priority. Even when New Delhi was involved extensively in Asian affairs under Jawaharlal Nehru, it eschewed an active security role. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the Singaporean Prime Minister (PM) repeatedly requested New Delhi to assume a regional security role. To this, the Indian Foreign Minister (FM) Swaran Singh responded by stating that their interests were in "keeping its *western* sea lanes open" (Lee, 2000 in Brewster, 2009, p. 600). This clarification confirmed India's limited interest in the eastern region. Fast forward to some decades later, when New Delhi initiated the Look East policy (LEP)—a policy of engaging SEA—it was believed that India's geographical location, size, economic, and military potential might impact Asia's security landscape (Jeshurun, 1993). However, contrary to expectations, it remained a negligible player economically, politically, and security-wise for more than a decade. C. Raja Mohan argues that New Delhi was irrelevant in the "ordering of Asia-Pacific security" as it was the "weakest of the major powers in Asia" (Mohan, 2009a, p. 2). In stark contrast to that era, perceptions about India's pertinence as a security actor have changed.

Since the advent of the third millennium, India's military budget has swelled. Between 2000 and 2017, military expenditure increased by more than 121% (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], n.d.). Standing at US $72.9 billion, India became the world's third-largest defence spender in 2020 (Lopes da Silva, Tian, & Marksteiner, 2021). From 2016 to 2020, it was the world's second-largest arms importer accounting for 9.5% of the global arms trade (Wezeman, Kuimova, Wezeman, 2020). These trends indicate New Delhi's desire to modernise and expand its military forces and project

power beyond South Asia. New Delhi's interest in farther regions is also illustrated by its deepening security cooperation with Vietnam, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, the US, and Australia.

Traditionally, India shied away from infusing a security link in its foreign policy relations. This thinking is no longer carved in stone. The security-related interactions with SEA and EA have undergone a quantitative and qualitative change in the last fifteen years. Within the broader security and defence ties, maritime cooperation is the most conspicuous. New Delhi has strengthened its power projection potential and indulged in extensive naval diplomacy (naval exercises, port calls, Coordinated Patrols [CORPAT]) with regional countries. Comparing the first ten years of LEP [1993–2003] with the next ten years [2003–13], the number of Indian naval exercises with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries has more than doubled. In the first decade, India conducted 22 naval exercises with the ASEAN countries, which jumped to 51 in the following decade (Das, 2013b).

The qualitative changes in the context are evident in developments that denote a break with tradition. For instance, since 2004, New Delhi has allowed Singapore to train its air force and army personnel in Indian facilities because of the limited space in Singapore (Jha, 2011). This decision marked a shift in the historical standpoint of forbidding foreign militaries on Indian soil. Similar changes have been visible in ties with the SEA and EA countries, especially after introducing the Act East Policy (AEP) in 2014. Since then, there has been a steady stream of high-level exchanges between India and the SEA and EA countries. For the ASEAN region, New Delhi has emerged as a provider of capacity building, especially in the maritime sector. Today, the Indian Navy (IN) boasts of conducting regular overseas operational deployments to the regions of SEA, the South China Sea (SCS), and the Western Pacific, a trend that would have been unforeseen 15 years back. The IN's operational reach has expanded exponentially. Since 2017, the IN has carried out Mission Based Deployment (MBD), which involves deploying ships and aircraft along the crucial Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs)[5] and chokepoints in the IOR (Jaishankar, 2019). India has also inked 22 White Shipping Agreements (WSAs) with multiple countries, including Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, the US, and France (Das, 2021). The WSAs help enhance the MDA and situational awareness in the IOR through maritime information sharing.[6]

Furthermore, India has been active in naval and space diplomacy and even issued Lines of Credit (LoC) to countries for defence procurement. Space diplomacy and providing credit lines for arms export are distinct features of India's outreach under the AEP. New Delhi's practice of exporting military hardware to countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Mauritius marks a change from its "historical stand of not exporting defence equipment which can indirectly fuel conflicts" (Guha, 2015, para. 3). In recent

years, the Indian government has been actively pushing for defence export and undertaken policy reforms to pursue it. Between 2012–13 and 2017–18, defence exports increased by more than 320%. Although the current recipients of supplies are mostly the IO littorals, New Delhi has been tapping into the SEA markets. In mid-2018, the Indian state-owned aerospace and defence company Bharat Electronics Limited established its representative office in Vietnam to cater to the region's potential market. India also offered LoC to countries in SEA and the IOR, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Mauritius. In January 2022, New Delhi and Manila finalised a US $375 million deal for the sale of three batteries of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile system to the Philippines.

India is also set to upgrade Vietnam Navy's two Soviet-era Petya-class frigates for an anti-submarine role by providing a modern sonar, torpedo launchers, a new fire control system, and an antisubmarine rocket launcher system (Pubby, 2018a). In addition to ongoing India–Vietnam discussions on the export of defence systems such as BrahMos cruise missile, Hanoi is also looking to buy *Varunastra* 533-millimetre heavyweight torpedo and *Akash* missile defence system (Jha, 2016). Additional deals include the sale of avionics to Malaysia for Su-30 MKM fighters and HMS-X2 sonars to Myanmar (Jha, 2016). New Delhi also handed over a diesel-electric submarine to the Myanmar Navy in a bid to enhance its Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Space diplomacy is another instrument of security cooperation. India and Vietnam finalised a deal wherein the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) would set up a Data Reception, Tracking, and Telemetry Station at Ho Chi Minh City (Chaudhury, 2016). The ISRO already has satellite tracking stations in Indonesia and Brunei, and the eventual aim is to build a network of satellite monitoring stations in the ASEAN region.

India's growing involvement in regional affairs is also denoted by its relatively vocal stand on the South China Sea (SCS) dispute, a trend that has been conspicuous since 2011. Although not a claimant in the SCS, Indian officials have repeatedly asserted the importance of freedom of navigation and reiterated the need to adhere to international law. India's direct involvement in the SCS region comes from its cooperation with Vietnam in oil exploration activities. The relevant oil fields fall within Vietnam's jurisdiction based on the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, China claims the area as its sovereign maritime zone based on the dubious nine-dash line. Given this background, China has occasionally warned India against cooperating with Vietnam in the SCS. Nonetheless, it remains involved in energy explorations in the SCS.

India's interest in the region emanates from the fact that SEA acts as a "bridge to East Asia and Asia-Pacific region" (Chaudhury, 2013, para.7). It is home to strategic SLOCs, which allow smooth passage for merchant ships and energy supplies. One of the most vital maritime checkpoints, the Malacca

Straits, facilitates the transit of more than 40% of Indian imports (Umaña, 2012). Southeast Asia is also important to ensure the "defence of the Indian peninsula" (Chaturvedy, 2015, p. 361). This emanates from the fact that some of India's eastern island territories "lie barely 90 miles from the Straits of Malacca" (Ayoob, 1990, p. 9) to ensure sustained presence in these strategically important areas. Since 2017, the IN has been undertaking mission-based long-range deployments in the IOR. These periodically-held deployments stretch from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca and Sunda (Pandit, 2017b).

Apart from growing ties with the SEA region, New Delhi is engaging the EA countries more seriously. The unprecedented progress in Japan–India ties within the last two decades is a case in point. In 1998, when India conducted its nuclear tests, Tokyo recalled its Defence Attachés from New Delhi and froze its grants and aid. However, within the next decade, there was a drastic change in how Japan viewed India and approached it. Despite the restrictions inherent in Japan's constitution, the two sides have made remarkable advancements in security cooperation. Since 2012, the IN and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force have participated in the annual bilateral naval exercise, Japan–India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX). Much to China's consternation, Japan has been a permanent participant in the Indo-US Malabar naval exercise since 2015. They also hold a 2+2 Dialogue at the level of foreign and defence ministers. This is in addition to other arrangements such as National Security Advisors (NSAs) Dialogue, Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue, and Defence Policy Dialogue.

Even South Korea has attracted greater Indian attention and vice versa. Before 2005, India and South Korea could only boast of lower-level naval exercises and a few Korea-supplied Offshore Petrol Vessels to India in the 1980s. From signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defence Logistics and Supplies in 2005 to announcing a Special Strategic Partnership in 2015, their security relations have gained momentum. Security cooperation was institutionalised by signing the MoU on sharing military expertise and technology. In 2012, India established a Defence Wing at its embassy in Seoul (Tayal, 2014). The two sides hold a 2+2 Dialogue at the defence and foreign secretary levels. India is a crucial partner for Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. This speaks volumes about the progress they have made over the last few decades.

Another indicator of India's security rise in the Indo-Pacific is its heightened security interaction with other crucial powers of the Indo-Pacific, such as the US and Australia. Despite their chequered past, the Indo-US ties have strengthened over the years. In 2016, the US designated India as its 'Major Defence Partner'. Pant and Joshi (2016) view the improved Indo-US ties as India's alignment with America's strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. This was apparent in 2015 when the US and India announced their 'Joint Strategic Vision for Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region'. Today, New Delhi stands

as one of the lynchpins of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. The two countries hold a regular 2+2 Dialogue at defence and ministerial levels and are involved in multiple joint military exercises, including the Malabar naval exercise and tri-services joint exercise. Washington persistently encourages India to take up a larger security role in the Indo-Pacific and strengthen its security relations with SEA and EA. Notably, it was only after the improvement of the Indo-US ties that countries, including Japan and Australia, began looking at New Delhi as a potential security partner. The India–Australia security-related interactions have gained steam in recent decades. In June 2020, New Delhi and Canberra elevated their relations from Strategic Partnership to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). Since 2015, they have held the biennial naval exercise, AUSINDEX. They also engage through the 2+2 foreign and defence ministerial dialogue. Further, they interact in trilateral formats at the FS levels (with Japan) and the Senior Officials' Strategic Dialogue (with Indonesia).

Indian practices have evolved when engaging countries in minilateral or multilateral arrangements. During the Cold War years, when India followed a non-alignment policy, it was against joining multilateral security groupings. Far from its extreme reluctance, New Delhi now engages a range of countries in multilateral settings on various security issues. One of the most crucial multilateral frameworks that India has embraced in recent decades is the Quad. The Quad is a grouping of four democracies (India, the US, Japan, and Australia) of the Indo-Pacific region. It is regarded as a pivotal multilateral mechanism to address the challenges posed by China's geopolitical and military rise in the region. Through the strategic dialogue, the Quad members seek to cooperate on converging areas of geostrategic interests and coordinate their efforts to maintain the rules-based international order. Despite its earlier inhibitions towards the Quad, New Delhi now remains a more active member and has forged stronger partnerships with Quad member countries, particularly in maritime security. The sum of the developments stated above conveys that India has emerged as a relevant security actor within the last two decades. These changes have attracted some scholarly attention to India's motivations as a security actor in the region. Despite attempts to provide theoretical explanations, some anomalies are puzzling for theorists and policymakers alike.

1.2 The Puzzle

Since the 20th century, the field of International Relations (IR) has attempted to discern and explain real-world events and developments. Multiple theories have cropped up in the recent decades, claiming to explain global or regional events more effectively than the preceding theoretical approaches. Despite the vast array of IR theories, the literature on India's security behaviour in the

Indo-Pacific and cooperation with SEA and EA is grounded in structural perspectives such as BoP (part of neorealism). This school of thought views India's security cooperation with the SEA and EA regions as driven by its desire to balance China's growing political, economic and military influence in the region. The BoP theory propounds those countries (specifically major powers) that experience a disadvantage in the face of changing power equations tend to respond by balancing the rising power. Schweller (2016) explains that balancing is done both externally and internally. Internal balancing refers to investments in hard power to tackle the advantageous actor and respond to a potential clash at any given point in time. In other words, if a country intends to balance a rising actor, it is likely to invest in military capabilities to address the power imbalance. In terms of external balancing, the balancer forges alliances with countries that share concerns over the rising power.

Convinced by this logic, many scholars who study India's foreign policy have reached a near-consensus that the China factor drives its security conduct in the Indo-Pacific region (studies include Batabyal, 2006; Pant, 2007a, 2013; Rehman, 2009; Mohan, 2009c; Bötscher, 2011; Malik, 2012; A Singh, 2012; Jha, 2015; Rajagopalan, 2017; Smith, 2016, 2018; Paul, 2019). While some scholars refer to India's actions as a form of 'counter-containment' (Rehman, 2009, p. 114), others identify it with concepts of 'limited hard balancing', 'soft balancing' (Paul, 2018a) and 'evasive balancing' (Rajagopalan, 2020). Most scholars who privilege structural theories over other theories believe that the very phenomenon of China's rise and its growing power has motivated India to pursue a balancing act.

Based on the propositions of the BoP theory, India must pursue internal and external balancing against China at the regional level. It is worth probing if New Delhi's behaviour aligns with theoretical expectations. While some actions merge with the characteristics of internal or external balancing, other policy decisions belie the expected course of action. For instance, for India to internally balance China in the Indo-Pacific (which has a substantial maritime stretch), its naval modernisation should be directed strongly towards a build-up of submarines. However, as Walter Ladwig III claims, the trends indicate otherwise (Ladwig III, 2012). He studied the trajectory of India's naval modernisation (from 1992 to 2012) to conclude that New Delhi appears to be driven primarily by the objective of safeguarding crucial SLOCs and undertaking "softer aspect of power projection" instead of "deterring hostile powers" such as China (Ladwig III, 2012, p. 18). He adds that India would have focused more on the submarine fleet if it aimed to deter or truly balance powers such as China (Ladwig III, 2012).

Furthermore, concerning external balancing, the BoP theories would expect New Delhi to address the imbalance created due to China's rise by seeking an alliance with Washington. The US would be a default choice because Washington (and its allies) share India's discomfort regarding Beijing's military rise

and assertive behaviour in the region. Besides, the US is the only country that can materially respond to China. Nevertheless, contrary to expectations, New Delhi continues to be opposed to an alliance with the US or any other power. Besides, India continues to reject America's proposal to undertake joint patrols in the SCS. In 2012, the Indian Defence Minister opposed the idea of concentrating on military partnerships and urged Washington to "strengthen multilateral security architecture in the Asia-Pacific and to move at a pace comfortable to all countries concerned" (PTI, 2012b, para. 3).

There are striking trends in India's China policy that dilute the relevance of the BoP theory as a viable explanatory theory. For instance, in 2018, New Delhi decided to improve and 'reset' relations with Beijing. Both countries had held two informal summits in Wuhan (China) and Mamallapuram (India) in 2018 and 2019, respectively. These informal summits demonstrated India's intent to iron out the bilateral differences with China, thus contradicting the impression that it was balancing China. The deadly clashes of June 2020 proved to be an inflection point in their bilateral relations and hardened New Delhi's perceptions of Beijing (Panda, 2020). Despite this, scholars and commentators believe that India has "far too long acquiesced to Chinese aggression without sufficient retaliatory military action" (Haqqani and Pande, 2021, para. 15). Despite an ongoing border standoff with China, India participated in a Russia–India–China (RIC) meeting and even agreed to initiate a defence ministers' dialogue. This was indicative of a nuanced strategy rather than pure external balancing. Similarly, New Delhi became a more vocal and enthusiastic supporter of the Quad after 2020. Still, it takes extra efforts to "minimise perceptions of the Quad as a U.S.-led containment coalition" (Smith, 2021, para. 26). New Delhi also projects its conception of the "free and open Indo-Pacific" as inclusive and nonconfrontational. It is equally important to note that India does not mention China by name in its joint statements with the US or Quad countries. According to Ambassador Kenneth Juster, former US Ambassador to India (2017–2021), New Delhi displays a "restraint in mentioning China in any US–India or any Quad communication" because it "is very concerned about not poking China in the eye" (Times Now, 2022).

Going by the vantage point of BoP, China is the rising power, and the regional balance of power is shifting in its favour. Despite this, why is India not actively balancing China, especially as it has considerable support from crucial powers such as the US, Japan, and Australia? For neorealism, India's actions may appear anomalous and indicative of irrational behaviour. Other equally relevant questions cannot be reasoned by neorealism: why is New Delhi reluctant to the idea of an alliance with the US against China? Why did it reset ties and seek to improve ties with Beijing pre-2020, given the severe border contentions? Despite the border clashes of 2020, why does New Delhi continue to engage Beijing through the RIC grouping and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)? In short, the broader question remains as to why

is India increasing its security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, especially with the SEA and EA countries, if not to balance China?

Apart from the studies that rely on structural explanations, there are other works, although limited, wherein scholars have used constructivism (or social constructivism) to explain the drivers of India's security interactions with SEA and EA. Using the explanatory variable of 'identity', they argue that India's foreign and security policy behaviour results from a changed identity. For instance, Sandeep Singh (2014) reasons that India has embraced the new identity of an Asia-Pacific player. As a result, it has increased interactions with SEA and EA. While there is some strength in the argument that India's identity has changed, a review of its security-related actions and policies indicates that New Delhi is not pursuing the path of an Asia-Pacific power. Its power projection ability remains limited to the IOR. Moreover, its current policy actions or military modernisation trends do not resemble a country that aims to be a full-fledged Asia-Pacific power. Besides, India remains wary of taking up greater security responsibilities in areas beyond the IOR. It has also refrained from getting deeply involved in issues of the region, such as the SCS dispute, except for making periodic statements on the subject. Officials from some ASEAN countries and the US have frequently expressed that New Delhi is 'not doing enough' as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific region (see Prakash, 2018; Lalwani & Byrne, 2019a; 2019b). If India's identity has changed, why does its policy behaviour not correspond with the new identity?

Other works that opt for constructivism include Priya Chacko and Deepa Ollapally's postulations. Chacko (2014) believes that India's current foreign policy is best understood through the ideational changes taking place within the country. She states that there are two dominant perspectives that form a nationalist–pragmatist hybrid. To explain, the nationalists wish to limit the usage of military power. In contrast, the pragmatists are keen to expand India's security cooperation beyond the traditional limits (Ollapally & Rajagopalan, 2011, as cited in Chacko, 2014). Chacko argues that India's ideational changes related to the Indo-Pacific are also an extension of the preceding LEP and other policies in the extended neighbourhood. Despite providing a greater understanding of the subject, Chacko does not adequately address how these ideational factors translate into final policies, particularly related to security cooperation with SEA and EA. It is also worth questioning if the Indian policy is influenced primarily by ideational changes with only limited relevance to systemic factors or other developments at the sub-national levels.

Writings that study Indian security behaviour through the prism of constructivism raise more questions than answers. The primary question is, why is there a gap between the stipulated identity change and policy actions? Differently put, even if there is an agreement that New Delhi's identity has changed, why is this not evident in all Indian activities in the Indo-Pacific region? Apart from this, several additional questions remain unaddressed. Is In-

dia's foreign and security policy determined by one or two ideational factors alone? Also, how have the new identities translated into policy actions? Does the transition from identity change to policy implementation take place automatically? What factors shape these identities? Are the new identities created by endogenous ideational factors only or in combination with material elements? Do domestic institutions hold any relevance in the formation of identities? Or do external countries have an influence in the process? These questions remain unanswered or inadequately addressed in the constructivism-guided scholarship on India's Indo-Pacific outlook.

Overall, the lack of balancing by India is a puzzle for structural theories. It is equally challenging for constructivism to rationalise the discrepancy between its identity change and policy actions. If India's security conduct in the Indo-Pacific is not motivated by balancing or if ideational factors alone cannot address it, then what explains the phenomenon. To address this puzzle, it is pivotal to ask appropriate research questions. The following research questions inform this empirically motivated and theoretically-guided study:

1. *Why is India expanding its security relations with countries in the SEA and EA regions?*

In the process of answering this question, the book also addresses the following sub-questions:

a) *What internal and external factors explain India's increased security cooperation with SEA and EA?*
b) *What explains the gap between India's political rhetoric and on-the-ground actions?*

1.3 Overview of the Argument

When answering the stipulated research questions, this work takes a detour from traditional variables of security and identity. This book is based on the premise that BoP and constructivism provide an incomplete picture of India's policy towards SEA and EA and its drivers (refer to Chapter 2 for details). The empirical puzzle is addressed through foreign policy role theory. Role theory comes from the discipline of social psychology, and since 1970, has been utilised to explain the foreign policy behaviour of states. Unlike some IR theories, role theory does not depend on a single explanatory variable but on many interrelated variables. A conceptual framework is developed in this book, guiding the overall analysis (see section 2.3.2). Through its many concepts, role theory facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the agent-structure relationship and policy formulation. It also encourages multilevel analysis. The book ex-

amines events at regional levels and studies the developments at national and sub-national levels.

One of the fundamental variables of role theory is Role Conception (RC), which refers to policymakers' perception of their country's position in the system and the expectations of external actors towards them. The central argument is that a country's external policy decisions and actions (known as role performance) are correlated to its RC(s). Based on this correlation, it is argued that alterations in security policy towards SEA and EA are linked to the evolution of India's RCs in recent decades. The initial part of the book maps out India's security RCs in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on the SEA and EA regions.

The book then digs deeper to examine the drivers of the evolving RCs. For this, the concept of RC is reviewed in depth. The brief description above shows that RC is co-constituted by the self and the outside world. In role theory, these dimensions are captured in the concepts of 'self-conception' and 'role prescription'. Role conception refers to domestic perceptions of the country's role in the system. Role prescription or role expectation is the expectation of external actors towards the country in question. In simple words, self-conception captures the domestic dimension while role prescription encapsulates the external sphere. Based on these linkages, the book argues that India's RCs have evolved due to changes in domestic and external determinants over two decades. To expand on this, economic emergence and maritime awakening in the early 2000s led to the expansion of India's self-conceptions. The interplay between evolving self-conceptions and external expectations resulted in role compatibility with select countries (namely, the US, Japan, and select ASEAN countries) and reignited intra-role conflict with China. Together, all this led to a role evolution.

In the process of role evolution, Indian policymakers dealt with issues and conundrums at multiple levels. For instance, New Delhi experienced convergence and divergence when interacting with external actors, which impacted the scope and pace of its external actions. Challenges at the sub-national level included dilemmas due to limited resources and competing priorities, and constraints to policy implementation due to poor inter-agency coordination. Together, these issues moderated the translation of RCs into corresponding policy actions, thereby creating a gap between conception and role performance.

The work aims to highlight that India's policy behaviour is a reflection of complex and intricate developments. The broader objective is to make one cognisant that India's foreign and security actions in the Indo-Pacific cannot be judged solely by events at the systemic or regional levels. Instead, it is equally pertinent to explore what is happening within the country. The various chapters give credence to the argument that the process of policy formulation and implementation is anything but simple. It is a complex process resulting from multiple determinants and resource constraints and is rife with dilemmas and operational problems.

1.4 Relevance and Significance

At a time when the regional and global order is transitioning and newer powers are gaining greater agency in world politics, it has become essential to understand the foreign policies of rising non-western powers, namely, China, India, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa. Among these countries, the book focuses on India and its foreign and security policy in the Indo-Pacific region. The construct of the Indo-Pacific is a recent addition to the lexicon of global politics, IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). As a result, there is scant literature on the subject and minimal explanation of the Indo-Pacific's regional security dynamics. More so, even today, there are limited studies (Mohan, 2013a; Chacko, 2014, 2016; Mahapatra, 2019; Baruah, 2020; He & Li, 2020) that explore India's role within this complex region. This book concentrates on India's growing security profile in the Indo-Pacific and extensively examines factors that determine its policy conduct.

Before addressing the importance of studying India, it serves well to know why it is crucial to focus on the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific brings together two very dynamic sub-regions, the IOR and the Pacific Ocean. This integrated region remains pivotal for its economic, political, and geostrategic value. By virtue of its location, the Indo-Pacific is home to crucial SLOCs that facilitate global sea-borne trade. Whether related to traditional or non-traditional security threats, any major event in the region can impact the health of the global economy. Equally pertinent is the fact that the Indo-Pacific houses two rising powers of Asia (China and India), one re-emerging power (Japan), a relatively declining superpower (the US), and crucial secondary powers such as the ASEAN countries. Such unprecedented developments are taking place simultaneously. The behaviour of these countries in the region and their interactions will determine the future of global politics, making it imperative to study regional developments.

A study on India's foreign and security policy is crucial for several reasons. Primarily, India is the largest democracy in the world. Furthermore, it is not only one of the largest economies in the world today but also one of the biggest military spenders globally. India represents a crucial rising power because of its expanding political, economic, and military potential. Today, New Delhi has forged stronger ties with almost all major powers, making it more influential than in previous decades. While the US and its allies expect India to balance China, Beijing is interested to see New Delhi support China's rise. Simultaneously, Moscow wants New Delhi to minimise its dependence on the US or the West and revive the focus on India–Russia ties. These expectations are cropping up at a time when New Delhi is looking to carve a prominent security role. The course of action that India follows today is not only going to impact its rise but can shape the global security dynamics of tomorrow. As

more western and eastern countries forge political, economic and security links with New Delhi, it has become increasingly crucial for national leaderships, scholars, strategic analysts and policymakers to understand Indian behaviour and comprehend why New Delhi acts the way it does.

Despite the growing studies on India's foreign policy, some problematic trends in contemporary literature deserve mention. First, the current discourse can be best described as an 'echo chamber' dominated by neorealism's notions of power politics and balancing behaviour (Pant, 2007a; Malik, 2012; Smith, 2018). These narratives are internalised to the extent that India's security conduct is equated with the act of balancing. Such analysis is not only rampant in western (in particular, American literature) literature (Smith, 2016; Peacock, 2018) but has seeped extensively into Indian scholarship as well (some examples include Batabyal, 2006; Mohan, 2006; 2009c; Mohan & Mishra, 2018; Paul, 2019). Second, one sees the continuation of George Tanham's age-old argument that India lacks a strategic culture (Tanham, 1992). This argument has been adopted to account for the discrepancies and fluctuations in the Indian external behaviour in general (Bajpai, 2002; Karnad, 2005). Third, it is equally common to come across literature that restricts the analysis of Indian actions to conceptual moulds of 'Nehruvianism', the notion of strategic restraint, normativeness and idealism (Ogden, 2009; Ganguly & Pardesi, 2009; Hall, 2016b). Such narratives dominate the current discourse. As a result, the textures of Indian foreign policy thinking and the associated complications get neglected. A bigger problem lies in the uncritical agreement to the assigned pre-set categories and eventual internalisation of such ideas. This work intends to spark a discussion on the dangers of following such trends. This book demonstrates that it is self-defeating to restrict Indian actions to the confines of balancing, normative power/idealism or identity changes without unravelling the intricacies of policy conduct and the reasons for it.

By analysing India through the dominant state-centric lenses and neglecting the complexities within, observers tend to produce a facile view of the country's behaviour. Due to an inadequate understanding of the drivers of Indian external policy, foreign governments may prepare strategies based on expectations, which may differ from the thinking and preferences of New Delhi. Such policies may prove to be ineffective or suboptimal at best. Foreign policy practitioners and commentators in the US are known to have concerns over what they view as 'Indian shortcomings', even referring to New Delhi as the 'weakest link' in the Quad (Grossman, 2018b; Lalwani & Byrne, 2019a, para. 2; Smith, 2019; Lee, 2021). Similarly, ASEAN countries such as Singapore have frequently expressed their frustrations with Indian officials on their country's security conduct in the region.[7] Such sentiments warrant the need to explain the intricacies of Indian foreign policy thinking to facilitate scholarly discussions and aid practitioners in formulating well-informed policies and strat-

egies towards India. It is in this context that this work carries significant relevance and thereby makes a meaningful contribution.

This book challenges the conventional wisdom on the subject and shows that the key to understanding Indian behaviour is to study what drives it. This work affirms that the quest for power (as used by neorealism) or changing identity (the domain of constructivism) are insufficient explanatory variables on their own. Most of the literature adopts an outside-in approach to Indian foreign policy behaviour. Without opening the black box of the state, an observer cannot make sense of domestic problems, competing priorities, and structural weaknesses, which are equally responsible for the choices that India makes on external policy issues. Chatterjee (2014, p. 1) asserts that non-western settings can be understood better through the "ontology based on the experiential reality" of these countries. He urges scholars to factor in domestic drivers sufficiently instead of remaining 'fixated' on western concepts and understanding. Likewise, Shivshankar Menon makes a case for utilising alternative theoretical approaches. He believes:

> "Today we can see that the world which created IR theory as we know it now is rapidly fading. The centre of gravity of the world economy and politics is returning to Asia. And that is why it is time for us to think afresh and for ourselves again about India and its place in the world" (Menon, 2019, para. 11).

Motivated by such sentiments, this book aims to explain the Indian case better by applying role theory. Such an inquiry is made by reviewing external interactions and digging deeper into domestic determinants, including historical experience, civilisational history, dilemmas of policymakers, and disharmony between sub-national agencies.

The book is also significant for its contributions to the scholarship on emerging powers. Despite the academic interest in the subject, few studies have combined material and ideational factors to explain India's external behaviour. As pointed out above, there has been extensive work on China's foreign policy through a combination of ideational and material factors (such as Harnisch, Bersick & Gottwald, 2015; Jones, 2017), but such vigour is missing when it comes to the literature on India's foreign policy and security behaviour. Equally neglected is the practice of analysing relevant factors at multiple levels. By focussing on India, this work enriches one's understanding of the subject. Examining its security behaviour in the Indo-Pacific (particularly vis-a-vis SEA and EA) through the conceptual framework of role theory makes this work original and unprecedented. The analyses not only include material and ideational determinants (see Fuchs & Lederer, 2007; Fuchs & Glaab, 2010 to understand the value of this approach) but go a step ahead to bring to light the challenges that policymakers of India tend to face at the sub-national level. Only through a multi-level and inclusive examination can one grasp the nuances of Indian policymaking. Such insights would also be valuable for examining other underexplored rising powers such as Brazil and South Africa.

The relevance of this work is also related to the advancement of role theory and its application for multilevel analysis. The book contributes by building a conceptual framework that provides a comprehensive overview of the processes that determine a country's external behaviour. It also fleshes out and builds on some of the concepts of role theory that have not received sufficient attention before. Through role theory, this book investigates New Delhi's interactions with the system (as seen in bilateral and multilateral relations) and covers the drivers and inhibiting factors at the sub-national level. In the process, it will shed light on both India's past foreign policy thinking and the current conceptualisations of its role in the region, thus offering an informed prognosis of future foreign policy conduct.

1.5 Structure of the Book

The book is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the broader context within which the study is situated. It presents an outline of India's rise as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific and its increased security cooperation with SEA and EA. With this background, the chapter focuses on the empirical puzzle and research questions that guide the study. It is then followed by an overview of the relevance and significance of the book. Subsequently, the chapter touches upon role theory, the preferred theoretical lens to address the puzzle at hand. The chapter closes by elaborating on the structure of the book.

The second chapter deals with the literature review and lays out the conceptual framework of role theory. First, the author undertakes a critical review of the current theoretical explanations and identifies the gaps in their accounts. The chapter asserts that the choices of theories in extant literature offer an insufficient explanation of the complexities of Indian behaviour in the Indo-Pacific. This is followed by a detailed description of role theory, its conceptual blocks and framework. Finally, the chapter gives an overview of the strength of role theory and how previous works have utilised it to elucidate India's external behaviour. The last section covers the methodology and research approach used in the book.

Further ahead, the third chapter produces a historical overview of India's RCs relevant to its policy choices in Asia from 1947 to 2000. Within Asia, the focus of the analysis is on the SEA and EA regions. The chapter maps out India's role changes through 53 years, including cases of role evolution and role restructuring as seen in the early 1990s. In doing so, the chapter briefly covers the influence of self-conception and role prescription on New Delhi's RCs and performance during the stipulated period.

The fourth chapter examines India's RCs from 2001–02 to December 2021. The identified RCs are linked to India's role performance in the Asia-Pacific. The evolution of RCs forms a continuous thread in the chapter. It traces new and ambitious self-conceptions, which interplay with role-prescription to create a well-established RC. In the process, the chapter compares RCs with role performance. It identifies instances when the two were reasonably corresponding and when a prominent gap existed between them.

The fifth chapter focuses solely on self-conception, which encapsulates the domestic determinants of role evolution. This chapter studies internal factors that explain India's increased security cooperation with SEA and EA. It also identifies domestic factors that cause a discrepancy between rhetoric and policy actions. Initially, the chapter sketches out permanent endogenous determinants—geography, civilisational history and the quest to preserve strategic autonomy—that have shaped India's foreign policy conduct since the early days. After that, the chapter examines domestic factors—economic growth and the rise of the IN—that have changed in the last two decades and thus facilitated the evolution of Indian self-conception(s). The chapter then identifies factors—role competition and contestation between sub-national institutions—which are instrumental in creating the discrepancy between India's rhetoric and policy implementation.

Following the review of the domestic dimension, Chapter 6 examines the external determinants of role evolution. It seeks to elucidate external factors driving India's role evolution and identifies causes for the gap between conception and role conduct. Through the concept of role prescription, the chapter maps out the influence of external actors on India's changing RCs. By examining four case studies—China, the US, Japan, and the ASEAN countries (with Vietnam as the embedded unit of analysis)—the chapter demonstrates the interplay between India's self-conception and external actors' role prescriptions. While doing so, it captures different bilateral equations through the concepts of role compatibility and role conflict. Each of these cases provides a distinct and nuanced explanation of how external actors' perceptions and other exogenous factors lead to a country's role evolution and, in turn, its external policies. Alongside the drivers, the chapter observes aspects that restrict India's RC and role performance. The relevant factors, i.e., the convergence-divergence dynamics and inter-role conflict, add to the policymakers' dilemmas and impede the translation of India's RC into effective role performance.

The seventh and final chapter summarises the findings, along with essential takeaways and concluding remarks. It expands on the theoretical and empirical implications to offer a sound understanding of the key findings. The contributions of the study are covered further. The chapter ends with recommendations for improving the paradigm of role theory and offers proposals for future research.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In the ongoing scholarly debate over India's emergence and foreign policy, the focus remains on its interactions in the immediate neighbourhood or with major powers such as the US and China. Despite India's growing security cooperation with the SEA and EA countries, surprisingly, there is scant theoretical work or theory-informed analysis on New Delhi's motivations towards the region. Even when the LEP and AEP are theoretically examined, the research is mainly informed by the variables of power distribution (neorealism) or identity (constructivism). While both these schools of thought offer some insights, they are, at best partial. Each theoretical lens sheds light on one aspect of the subject and fails to delve deeper into the seeming contradictions in Indian behaviour. Understanding what is missing in the current literature is vital to appreciate the strength of the theory of choice, the role theory.

The chapter begins with a critical analysis of studies that rely on BoP (neorealism) and constructivism to rationalise India's security policy conduct within the Indo-Pacific, particularly towards SEA and EA. It points out the gaps and problems in current accounts, making it a good starting point to stress the need for an alternative framework. The chapter then provides a detailed overview of role theory, its conceptual building blocks, and theoretical tenets. The subsequent sections explain the strength of role theory and why it is an appropriate prism to analyse India's external orientation. The chapter ends with details on the methodology of the study.

2.1 Balance of Power Theory (Neorealism)

Realism or neorealism believes that international politics can be best understood through the units of power and self-interests, especially in the absence of formal central authority in the world (Gareis, 2012). Adherents of this school of thought view the international system as anarchic, where power shifts constantly, leading to uncertainties. The BoP theory is attached to the concept of Westphalian sovereignty. Westphalian sovereignty means that "sovereign states have a legitimate right to exist, regardless of their size and power capabilities, and that the equilibrium in power is essential to prevent a lawless situation from emerging" (Paul, Wirtz & Fortmann, 2004, p. 7). Drawing from this understanding, BoP emphasises the 'state' as the primary actor in the anarchic system and examines its behaviour concerning material power and quest for security.

Balance of Power can be divided into two variants—offensive and defensive realism—with differential viewpoints on the degree of 'power' desired by a state and its effect on 'balancing'. Offensive and defensive realism converge on their understanding of the structure of the international system. Both branches believe that the anarchic system results in an ever-changing nature of the balance of power. However, they differ in terms of how much power the states desire. Offensive realists, such as John Mearsheimer, believe that states wish to maximise their share (of power) and, in the process, compete with other states (Mearsheimer, 2001). In contrast, proponents of defensive realism (neo-realism), such as Kenneth Waltz, argue that it is imprudent for states to amass maximum power because they may eventually get punished by the system (Waltz, 1979). Further, defensive realists maintain that a "roughly equal distribution of power amongst states" ensures stability (Slaughter, 2011, para. 5).

The BoP theorists aver that global dynamics are shaped by some key actors, which can operationalise an expanded foreign policy by virtue of their military capability (Baldwin, 2016). These actors are known as 'great powers'. Offensive realists such as Mearsheimer (2001) argue that the struggle to gain ascendancy over other states is a zero-sum game. He believes that "great powers are rarely content with the current distribution of power; on the contrary, they face a constant incentive to change it in their favour" (2001, p. 38). Despite the general application of BoP for 'great powers', some have contested this practice and asserted that BoP need not be strictly applied to the global level. Instead, as Waltz acknowledged (1979, p. 37), BoP applies to "any set of competing states", whether at the regional or global level. The competing states at the regional level are known as major powers that are different from the global-level great powers.

Regardless of the variant, the BoP theorists attest that the major/great powers balance the perceived competitor or aggressor by resorting to various strategies such as balancing. Emer de Vattel, a Swiss political philosopher, describes 'balance of power' as the "state of affairs such that no one power is in a position where it is preponderant and can down the law to others" (Vattel, 1916, as cited in Bull, 1971, p. 101). Therefore, in circumstances when the international system faces a rising power or a hegemon, key states are likely to balance with the intent of attaining a condition of power equilibrium (Paul et al., 2004). Other strategies to deal with a dominant power include buck-passing (which the offensive realists consider as the great powers' alternate to balancing), bandwagoning, and appeasement (which the offensive realists believe is adopted by weak powers).

Balancing can be divided into two types: external and internal. External balancing refers to the practice of creating a defensive alliance to contain the aggressor, and this strategy is most prevalent in a bipolar system. For example, the US and USSR allied with minor powers as they were the only great powers during the Cold War. External balancing is not always very swift and efficient

because it requires immense efforts to ally with other units in the system, co-ordinate, and work smoothly towards a common goal. On the other hand, in the case of internal balancing, the balancing state employs self-help strategies such as mobilisation of resources, expanding defence spending and accumulation of hard power. Internal balancing is relatively faster than the former. Still, it is beset with limitations such as the limited capability of a country to undertake significant mobilisation at a given point in time or due to an unfavourable domestic situation.

Based on the proposition of the BoP theory, it has been periodically argued that "India is pursuing a balancing strategy against China" and thereby is countering "the growing Chinese influence in the SEA and the Asia-Pacific region" (Batabyal, 2006, p. 180; also see Malik, 2012). Mohan (2005) affirms that New Delhi's greatest foreign policy challenge is handling Beijing. Building this argument, Mohan and Mishra (2018, p. 162) state that balancing China has been an "integral component of Indian diplomacy" for decades, and this is manifested even in its approach towards the Indo-Pacific. Following the same line of thought, Rajamony (2002) showcases the relevance of the US factor in India's foreign policy. He avers that New Delhi's engagement with Washington is to counter China's rise, which tends to threaten India's strategic interests. Likewise, Paul (2019, p. 236) portrays India as an "offshore balancer for the US in Asia", which, he argues, could help establish a sound base for the evolution of the Quad arrangement. Pant (2011) looks explicitly at India's balancing tendency in the ASEAN region. He affirms that the ASEAN region is a meeting point for India and China's shipping activities, making it a focal point of strategic interest for both. He believes that New Delhi wishes to have access to ports in the ASEAN region not only to "protect its trade routes" but also to "more effectively counter Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean" (2011, p. 4). While BoP's application may seem plausible at the surface, it cannot explain many other aspects of a state's behaviour and motivations.

Before proceeding further, it is worth clarifying that India cannot be considered a great power at the global level as it does not qualify in terms of military, economic, or political capabilities (Rynn, 2001). Even if we consider it a major power at the regional level, it would be an over-exaggeration to believe the assumptions of the offensive realists that India seeks to maximise its influence with the final goal of being a hegemon. On the contrary, scholars and analysts such as Cohen and Dasgupta (2010, p. xvii) claim that a "deeply engrained tradition of strategic restraint" influences India's foreign policy or security-related actions. Likewise, Karnad (2015) opines that the notion of strategic restraint is connected to India's inability to become a great power. Explaining India's deficiencies in being a major power, Perkovich (2003, p. 129) infers that India "has just enough power to resist the influence of others … [but still lacks] significant power over other states and thus in the international system at large". It is valuable to review some theoretical expectations of BoP

with actual developments. As is ascertained below, India's conduct does not appear to follow the template of a traditional balancer. Instead, if we view India solely as a balancer, its security policies and associated activities may seem contradictory and baffling to observers. This is partially why some scholars appear critical of India's inadequate 'balancing' in the region (Grossman, 2018b; Staniland, 2018; Lalwani & Byrne, 2019a; 2019b; Rajagopalan, 2020).

Theorists of this school of thought believe that the major/great "powers inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 99). While India possesses power projection capabilities in the IOR, its capabilities remain short of matching the profile of regional power in SEA or EA. With the current military (particularly naval) assets, New Delhi cannot undertake sustained long-term operations to counter or challenge China's maritime power in SEA or EA. For India to have credible power projection in the region, it will need to substantially enhance its naval capabilities, but is lagging for decades, despite attempts to address the lacunas. In sum, it does not fit into BoP's reference of a balancer in terms of its hard power and ability to balance China in the Indo-Pacific region (Schweller, 2016). It also serves well to highlight the gaps between India and China's security cooperation with the SEA countries. From 2000 to 2013, China's military sales to the SEA countries amounted to US $1.6 billion, while India's sales to the region were a mere US $14 million (Blank, Moroney, Rabasa, & Li, 2015). Not to mention, India sold arms only to Myanmar while China sold to five more countries, namely Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, and Malaysia. These figures suggest that either India does not intend to balance China or has limited ability to address the power imbalance in the region. In light of this, it is only natural to wonder if India is a balancer in the region.

Even if judged through the lens of defensive realism, India will still fall short of being a 'balancer' in Indo-Pacific. Let us take the case of the India-US-China triangle, which is usually chosen by scholars and commentators to underscore New Delhi's credentials as a balancer (Malik, 2016). Undoubtedly, India has heightened its strategic and security cooperation with the US in the last 22 years. However, the question remains if it is genuinely balancing China by partnering with the US? If India was indeed balancing China, then what explains its decision to 'reset' ties with Beijing, especially months after a long-drawn standoff along the disputed border.

The BoP theorists would expect that in the aftermath of India's standoff with China, it would be more enthusiastic about aligning closely with Washington vis-à-vis Beijing. This, however, has not been the case so far. India's decision to actively participate in the RIC and even the SCO compensates for its participation in the Quad arrangement with the US and its allies, which deviates from what is expected of a balancer. Formerly, New Delhi periodically attempted to maintain distance from the US by not signing crucial defence-

related agreements because it did not want to risk antagonising China (Sutter, 2013). This sentiment was further corroborated in 2016 when New Delhi ruled out the US proposal to participate in joint naval patrols in the SCS (Pasricha, 2016). It is frequently argued that the Indian delay in transferring BrahMos missiles to Vietnam is due to its sensitivities towards China. Besides, India had persistently expressed its preference to limit the Quad consultation to the level of officials and only agreed to take it to a ministerial level in September 2019 (IANS, 2019). Even today, India projects its idea of the Indo-Pacific as inclusive with no intention to target a particular country. These developments belie the general assumption that India is enthusiastically balancing China in SEA and EA. Instead, it showcases a measured reluctance despite increased security cooperation in the region. New Delhi is likely to refrain from getting involved in any official alliance, an idea duly followed by all Indian PMs, without exceptions. Some political observers, for instance, Dasgupta (2011, para. 5), lament that "Indian political leaders, who should be at the centre of a coalition to counter China, have repeatedly shown no appetite to confront China".

Another limitation of the BoP theory is its inability to explain the subtle but certain changes in India's external actions. China's rise and India's desire to balance it has been a consistent theme for many years, even before India's economic boom (see Ayoob, 1990; Ollapally, 1998; Naidu, 2001; Kuppuswamy, 2002; Pant, 2007b; Chellaney & Takenori, 2007). Because the BoP theory regards China's growing material power and Indian balancing behaviour as constant, it cannot explain any variations in India's behaviour over the years. If New Delhi was balancing Beijing in the 1990s and early 2000s and continues to do so even today, does this imply that there has been no change in Indian behaviour over the years? It is precisely these types of questions that the theory fails to answer. In essence, it falls short in identifying variations in a state's behaviour and factors driving those changes.

Similarly, the BoP theory is inefficient at explaining the discrepancies in countries' conduct globally within the "paradoxical nature of present international order" (Paul et al., 2004, p. 365). The current world order is increasingly complicated compared to the bipolar setting of the Cold War or the western world during the World Wars. The current global order is defined by globalisation and economic interdependencies where states tend to "fear and perceive the need for the support of each other" simultaneously (Paul et al., 2004, p. 365). The compounding effects of economic interdependence and politico-military competition make India's putative external balancing less straightforward because that alone cannot ensure power equilibrium. This dichotomy makes India's balancing more ambiguous and sophisticated, which has not been captured by the current scholarship of BoP. As aptly brought out by NSA Menon, "if the balance of power were all that mattered, how do we explain the development of the relationship in the last twenty-five years?" (MEA, 2013d, para. 9).

Even when it comes to internal balancing, India does not perfectly align with the theory's propositions or expectations. Internal balancing refers to the balancer's strategy of developing one's own military power to offset the power of the rising power or potential hegemon. It is pertinent to note that, to counterbalance China's power in SEA/EA or contest more effectively in the region, New Delhi should have invested much more heavily in military capabilities, particularly in naval power. India's naval modernisation trends indicate a significant interest in expeditionary power projection than a focussed strategy to balance China in SEA and EA (Ladwig III, 2012). Overall, the trajectory of India's naval modernisation does not resemble a balancer's strategy. Corroborating this line of thought, Pant and Joshi (2016, p. 7) aver that "given its [India's] limited national power, internal balancing may not suffice to deter China". One wonders how the BoP theory explains the existing inadequacies of internal balancing because this remains an enigma for observers who view India as a balancer.

Balance of Power as a theory is limited in its view of what motivates a state's behaviour. This does not mean that the underlying logic of BoP is irrelevant to the case. China's rise has changed the global balance of power, which has sparked responses from several countries. However, it cannot be the only factor driving every security-related decision. By explaining events through the variable of 'power', BoP is incapable of comprehensively explaining complex state behaviour, especially that of the emerging powers. As also argued by David C. Kang, "a theory designed to explain the Cold War […] may not explain why Asian states are not necessarily balancing China in the same way that the United States balanced the Soviet Union" (Kang, 2003, p. 171). Besides, if the Indian behaviour is interpreted through BoP, it appears to be an empirical anomaly. Explaining interactions with other countries by presupposing that New Delhi is *solely* driven by its desire to balance China may be misleading. By relying strongly on the variable of material power and strategy of balance, the possibility of having an alternate explanation is underplayed. Instead, such a singular focus tends to overlook the nuances of India's security conduct and its motivations. There may be a possibility that New Delhi is not driven exclusively by the desire to balance China's material power in the region but influenced by a confluence of additional factors as well.

2.2 Constructivism

Constructivism originally began as an "interpretive meta-theory" and contested the conventional wisdom of realism/neorealism at the meta-theoretical level (Behravesh, 2011, para. 1). It offered a "reflectivist critique of the scientific approach to social sciences" (Behravesh, 2011, para. 1). Constructivism

questioned the structural theories' reliance on the "materialist conception of politics" (Guzzini, 2000, p. 157). In contrast to BoP (or neorealism), constructivists adopted a "sociological concept of action as the starting point for theorising" the state's actions (Busse, 1999, p. 44; also, see Andrews, 1975; Katzenstein, 1996). Simply put, this theory views the states as social actors. Emanuel Adler describes constructivism as "the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world" (Adler, 1997, p. 332).

Unlike structural theories, constructivists believe that the international system is not present in any physical form. Instead, the social structure is created by ideas and "an intersubjective awareness among people" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2006, p. 162). Constructivism was introduced into IR as a theory in 1989 with Nicholas G. Onuf's book, World of Our Making, which pointed to the urgent need to reconsider how IR was being studied. He explained that global politics could be better understood by including explanatory variables such as rules and social facts, primarily created by human actions (Onuf, 1989). Upon its introduction in IR, constructivism met with extreme criticism as it attempted to transform from a meta-theory to an IR theory. Over time, the theory strengthened and developed hypotheses on states' interactions in the international system. It gained popularity in the post–Cold War era and has been accepted as one of the many IR theories ever since.

In essence, constructivists emphasise the variables of 'ideas' and 'identity' to explain a state's behaviour and the working of global politics. According to Wendt (1992, p. 397), "actors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self, by participating in collective meanings". This theory asserts that state identity shapes the national interest, which affects foreign policy decisions (Finnemore, 1996). They believe that the most popular variables, namely, material power, economic interdependence, and institutions are non-existing entities. Instead, these entities gain relevance or importance because of the social meanings that a state holds towards them (Wendt, 1999). These meanings are "constructed from a complex and specific mix of history, ideas, norms, and beliefs", which affect a state's behaviour (Slaughter, 2011, para. 20). In simple words, this school of thought propounds that states do not merely examine their interactions with other states as an automated process based on material power. Instead, they perceive other states based on categories such as friends, enemies, and threats. It is these different perceptions which inform the state behaviour in the international system. Constructivists believe that identity is subject to changes over time, which implies that a state's interest transforms. The amalgamation of these changes alters a state's foreign policy.

While there are many variants of constructivism, the most popular variant, i.e., systemic constructivism, is believed to be a deduction from the works of

Alexander Wendt. The fundamental claims of systemic constructivism are as follows (Wendt, 1994):

a) states are the primary actors in the international system
b) the "key structures in the states system are intersubjective rather than material" (Wendt, 1994, p. 385)
c) a state's identity is a socially constructed reality instead of emanating from human nature

It is pertinent to note that despite focusing on different variables, there are points of agreement between Wendt's constructivism and other branches of neorealism. Wendt's understanding converges with structural theories on the primacy of the state in the international system. They also agree on the assumption that states pursue their interests (Hurd, 2008). Both schools of thought have a positivist approach to IR, especially in terms of their preference for the principle of parsimony. These theories seek to produce distinct and (almost) universal answers with as minimum assumptions as possible. They aim to bring IR closer to the tenets of natural sciences, where simple theories or concepts can explain broad and diverse empirical realities.

In recent years, constructivism has gained immense attention in explaining the foreign policy behaviour of non-western states. Although not as popular as structural theories, a growing number of studies adopt constructivism to explain India's foreign policies or dynamics in the Indo-Pacific (see Ollapally, 2014; Chacko, 2014; Sandeep Singh, 2014; Singh Smita, 2016). Sandeep Singh utilises the variable of 'identity' to explain that India's growing engagement with the region is a "reflection of its desire to craft a new external identity for itself—the identity of an 'Asia-Pacific player'" (Sandeep Singh, 2014, p. 187). Likewise, Smita Singh (2016) argues that India's self-perception of being a player of 'global significance' drives its economic growth and foreign policies. Along similar lines, Ollapally (2014) utilises 'identity' as an explanatory variable in the Indo-US bilateral ties. She argues that New Delhi's "soft nationalist identity" does not align with what the US expects from India (Ollapally, 2014, para. 15). As a result of what she refers to as the 'identity gap', India was not on-board with the US pivot to Asia in 2011 (Ollapally, 2014).

Further ahead, Chacko (2014) utilises Jeffrey W. Legro's model to argue that India's regional policies are affected by ideational changes. She avers that the Indian framing of the Indo-Pacific results from the 'nationalist–pragmatist hybrid', which is a happy medium between the dominant schools of thought in India, i.e., the nationalists and the pragmatists (Chacko, 2014). While foreign policy nationalists want India to continue with non-alignment and remain averse to exercising military power, foreign policy pragmatists remain keen to nurture military relations and increase engagement with global governance (Chacko, 2014).

While the focus on identity or ideational factors provides some insights into India's foreign policy conduct, some issues make the theory of constructivism unsuitable for explaining the case at hand. First, despite the emphasis on identity, it is surprising that there is little consensus among constructivists on the definition of identity. Additionally, there are disagreements on what factors influence a state's identity. Due to a lack of unanimity, constructivism has been unable to integrate the variable of identity into a sound analytical framework, making it challenging for scholars to follow a well-defined methodology or framework.

Second, the problem with privileging ideational attributes over material factors to explain external is that it overlooks the relevance of systemic and material determinants. Reality cannot be captured by either of the extremes of material or ideational factors. Instead, it lies somewhere in the middle. Third, the assumption that a change in identity automatically results in changes in foreign policy behaviour is implicit in constructivism-guided studies. This may not always be true. In the real world, where states face numerous challenges in implementing foreign policy, it is natural to witness a gap between identity and actual decisions or actions. For instance, when Sandeep Singh asserts that India's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region is due to an ongoing change in its identity, there is limited consideration of the fact that there is a gap in the identity and policy actions (Sandeep Singh, 2014). Suppose the foreign policy was direct causation of identity; in that case, India should have increased its presence in SEA and EA without any hesitation and expanded its military to suit the demands of the new strategic frontiers, which is not the case.

Fourth, most constructivism-guided studies (except Ollapally, 2014) do not sufficiently account for the impact of other countries on Indian behaviour. While identity is crucial, there is little probing into other countries' identities and if that influences Indian policymakers. In the same way, is there any relevance to what other countries expect from India? Considering that foreign expectations are essential, and they seem to merge with India's own identity, does this denote harmony, or are there areas of contestation within despite the harmony? Similarly, what happens if foreign identities clash with India's own? These are some of the many questions that remain unanswered in current accounts on the subject.

It is appropriate to assert that scholars experience challenges due to the limited theoretical mechanism in constructivism to explain the gap in India's identity and its foreign policy actions. As a result, there is insufficient explanation of the genesis of India's identities, which is crucial to understanding what really drives Indian external decisions and actions. In constructivism-informed studies, most scholars also do not differentiate between the concepts of identity, culture, and ideas and use them interchangeably. This is done without any discussion on whether these concepts are related or unrelated. This practice

also makes it challenging to understand the link between India's identity and its external actions.

Theoretically speaking, there are some issues with the theory of constructivism, which makes it difficult for scholars to plug the gaps in extant literature. Constructivists endorse co-constitution between domestic and international dimensions. However, according to William Flanik, "in practice, much constructivist works favour structure" (Flanik, 2011 as cited in Kaarbo, 2015, p. 13). Without a doubt, systemic constructivism has opened room for discussion on issues separate from power consideration and economics. Despite this, it remains confined to the structural approach as its primary agent is the state. It was initially assumed (especially among the FPA theorists) that constructivism's critique of the neorealism-neoliberalism debate implies that it would focus on the agent and open the 'black box'. Contrary to general expectations, Wendt (1992) failed to adopt an individualist approach and largely confined constructivist understanding to the systemic level of analysis.

Although systemic constructivism views the state (agency) and international system (structure) as "mutually constitutive and co-determined," it continues to view the state as a 'black box' (Wendt, 1999, p. 184). This is despite constructivism introducing concepts of ideas and identity, which point towards an understanding of the agent from *within* (Smith, 2001). Wendt's reliance on the structural approach resembles the theories of realism and neoliberalism. Therefore, the adherence to a systemic outlook and little analytical focus on identity formation opens constructivism theory to similar criticisms as faced by the BoP theory and its ilk. Due to this, there are prominent limits to what constructivism can explain.

Furthermore, the almost unitary nature of the actor under constructivism assumes a shared understanding between the individuals' agents or groups of individuals within the state. As pointed out by Zehfuss (2001, p. 24), Wendt's "conceptualisation of identity assumes it to be a bounded category and, more importantly, needs it to be so. It is an identity without difference". Identity as a unified unit limits the scope for contestations within the state. Zehfuss (2001, p. 27) adds that constructivism cannot cater to identities that are "unstable in themselves". For some constructivists, identity change is primarily regarded as a shift from one or a maximum of two stable identities to another (Zehfuss, 2001, p. 27). Therefore, the transition phase or possibility of overlaps or conflict between the identities is not sufficiently examined. As the case of a set of identities is missing, it reinforces misleading perceptions that states hold almost monolithic identities that inform all their foreign policies. There is minimum theoretical attention on how a range of identities (at times contradictory) shapes foreign policy choices (Kaarbo, 2015). The notions of 'shared meaning' and 'identity' become meaningless if one fails to peek inside the black box or glosses over the existing conflicts between the various identities or between identities of sub-state agencies.

Even when scholars such as Ollapally (2014) and Chacko (2014) bring out the variants of India's identities, they remain limited to a maximum of two identities. To expand, while Ollapally divides India's identity into soft and hard nationalism, Chacko divides it into nationalists and pragmatists. Despite adding value to the scholarship, they provide limited insight into what has led to the creation of these identities and other relevant domestic identities that may exist in addition to the stipulated ones. Expectedly, they do not elucidate the impact of sub-state contestations on India's foreign policy implementation or on-the-ground actions.

As is clear from the above two sub-sections, there have been multiple efforts to answer this question. The more dominant discourse on the subject is characterised by a heavy reliance on structural IR theories such as BoP that focus on the explanatory variable of relative power. While the logic of BoP offers some useful insights into Indian behaviour, it cannot sufficiently explain India's external orientation comprehensively. A singular focus on the distribution of power provides a cursory and shallow understanding of the subject matter. Due to neorealism's customary focus on power distribution and balancing behaviour, it fails to account for any evolution in India's outlook towards the region or its changing regional conduct. Also, by viewing India as a 'balancer', the current scholarship inherently presumes that it abides by this role, although the empirical data raises questions on this assumption. By sticking to select preconceived roles (in this case, the balancer) that emanate from the expanse of American literature, scholars tend to snatch away any Indian agency in defining its behaviour.

In addition to the dominant structural explanation, other studies on the subject have adopted the constructivism theory that looks at identity change. For starters, these studies serve well by acknowledging that India's identity has changed and commands more significant inquiry. However, there are problems in solely relying on identity to understand the complexities of India's evolving foreign policy. One of the issues with constructivism-guided analysis is the assumption of direct causation between identity and policy conduct. By automatically linking identity and foreign policy actions, pertinent studies furnish a relatively simplistic explanation and neglect any possible gap between identity and foreign policy. Other limitations include a scant focus on the genesis of identity formation and the belief that a state holds a single or maximum of two identities at one point in time. It is also presumed in select studies, and misleadingly so, that identity changes are relatively smooth, non-contradictory and not contested domestically. Such a straightforward explanation does not capture the intricacies of reality that are far more complex and convoluted.

This work challenges the dominant narrative that pervades the current literature. It maintains that India's foreign policy behaviour cannot be understood solely by the structural conditions or through the notion of identity change. This does not mean that the logic of BoP or constructivism is wrong. However,

they provide an incomplete picture of reality. In the current works, the general practice of not sufficiently opening the 'black box' makes it tough to grasp developments within the state and the interactions between the agent and structure. It is crucial to rise above parsimonious explanations and choose an appropriate framework that produces an intelligible analysis of the complex and multi-layered reality. This work seeks to fill this significant gap by utilising role theory.

The book examines India's security interactions through the conceptual framework of role theory. Few studies have gone to the depth that role theory enables when explaining India's policy towards SEA and EA. By dint of its ability to undertake multi-level analysis, role theory can bridge the agent-structure gap, study a combination of material and ideational driving factors of India's role evolution, and look at sub-national factors that constrain policy behaviour. Role theory combines the strengths of neorealism and constructivism and plugs their inherent shortcomings. This work builds upon the positives of social constructivism as a meta-theory. Constructivism offers credible potential at the meta-theoretical level duly utilised in this work. Role theory, situated between IR and FPA, has been adopted as the preferred conceptual framework to address the research questions.

2.3 Alternate Theoretical Explanation: Role Theory

As established in the previous section, the current literature on the subject utilises the BoP theory (neorealism) and constructivism. These theories are inadequate to address the drivers of India's security cooperation with SEA and EA and are inefficient in capturing the nuances of Indian behaviour. Therefore, it is worthwhile to present an alternate theory that is more promising in answering the research questions stated previously. A recently revived school of thought, role theory, holds tremendous potential in this regard.

Role theory explains a state's foreign policy behaviour by focusing on the unit of role(s). Roles were originally present in the field of theatre and plays. Over time, they were adopted in social sciences, particularly in branches that studied social behaviour and societies. The work on roles was initially limited to sociology and social psychology and was used to explain individual behaviour and their interactions within society. In the case of an individual, a role is a "set of rules or norms that function as plans or blueprints to guide behaviour within a particular society" (Delamater, Myers & Collett, 2015, p. 13). These norms or sets of rules allow an individual to place themselves in a particular context within the society imparting meaning and purpose to their being. For example, an individual may play many roles (professional or relational), such as a professor, leader, mother, mentor, and friend. It is most likely that this

individual will behave according to the role they are enacting at a particular time or in a given situation. In sum, it is the set of these roles through which an individual interacts within society.

Inspired by its success in sociology, role theory was eventually utilised to examine the external policy behaviour of states. When role theory is applied to the study of foreign policy, the 'individual' is replaced by the 'state.' Like individuals, a state behaves in a regional or international system according to the set of roles that it deems fit for itself. It is precisely these roles that states perform during their interactions with other countries. For example, a state may perform the role of a hegemon, regional leader, mediator, liberation supporter, or ally, depending on what role is finalised. Usually, a state is not limited to playing a single role but a set of roles, which may differ based on issue or region.

The use of role theory to explain a state's external behaviour has roots in the seminal work of Kalevi J. Holsti. Holsti (1970) claims that roles were implicitly used in IR literature even before role theory was introduced. He explains that every time the terms 'non-aligned' states, 'balancer', and 'aggressor' are used, the concept of roles is at play. Many scholars built upon Holsti's work, such as Walker (1979), Le Prestre (1997), and Wish (1980). Despite this, role theory remained a marginally-used framework to explain empirical puzzles. In recent years, however, role theory has been substantially revived, and there is a resurgence in utilising it to explain real-world phenomena. The current wave of scholarship is best known for the works of Harnisch, Frank & Maull (2011), Aggestam (2006), and Elgström & Smith (2006).

Although role theory is categorised as a 'theory', it can be better understood as a conceptual framework that captures foreign policy's intricacies without compromising its explanatory potential (Caisova, 2019). It sits in between the disciplines of IR and FPA. Its fundamental assumptions fall under FPA, but there is substantial overlap (at the meta-theoretical level) between role theory and social constructivism of IR.

Having noted the weaknesses of constructivism as an IR theory above, its contributions at the meta-theoretical level cannot be neglected. Guzzini (2000, p. 147) presents constructivism as a 'reflexive meta-theory' and affirms that it is "epistemologically about the social construction of knowledge and ontologically about the construction of social reality". As explained by Harnisch (2013), role theory considers social constructivism as the meta-theoretical foundation. Both these sub-disciplines believe that social reality is constructed and is co-constituted by domestic and international developments. They, however, differ distinctly in their choices of the primary actor. While social constructivism considers the state as the primary actor, role theory views the group of national leaders and policymakers as the principal actor. Role theory can also be distinguished from constructivism at the philosophical level. While constructivism embraces positivism, most role theorists consider their ap-

proach a “middle ground between positivism and post-positivism” (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011, p. 15).

Despite these differences, there is substantial overlap between role theory and social constructivism. Breuning (2011, p. 20) attributes this overlap to “constructivism’s implicit role theory”. She argues that many scholars of constructivism use “language (such as self-image, identity) that is reminiscent” of earlier works of role theory (Breuning, 2011, p. 20). These concepts are utilised in their study by situating them “within *their interpretation*” of the unitary state (Breuning, 2011, p. 20). Role theory’s unit of analysis is the group of policy-makers, which places it closer to the discipline of FPA. As shown in Figure 1, role theory falls between the systemic and sub-systemic levels and goes on to bridge the gap between IR and FPA.

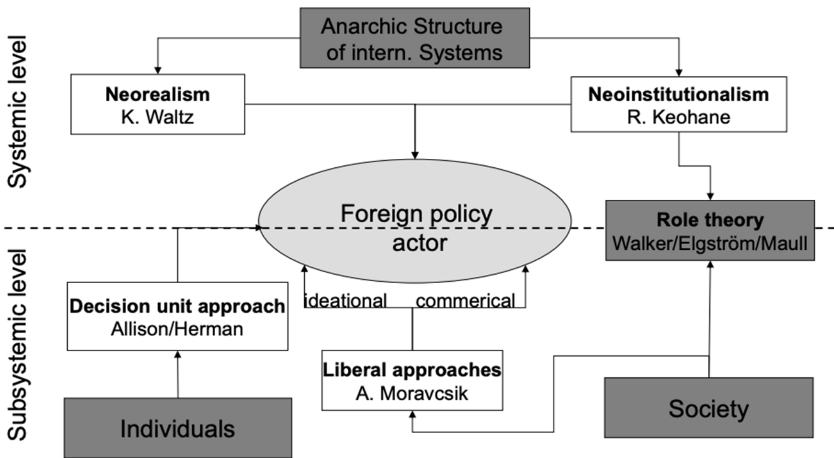

Figure 1: Role Theory situated between IR and FPA. Source: Harnisch (2013)

As per Breuning (2017, p. 2), role theory is “concerned with the interaction between the agent and structure”. The core strength of role theory lies in its ability to successfully bridge the agent-structure problem in IR by considering the domestic processes, sub-agency developments, and the influence of structure. By opening the ‘black box’, role theory not only accounts for developments within the agency but allows one to undertake multiple levels of analysis. The utility of systemic and sub-systemic levels of analysis to explain foreign policy behaviour and its determinants make role theory a promising framework for this work. Needless to state, role theory is less parsimonious than BoP (neorealism) and constructivism. However, as the ensuing chapters demonstrate, it is more effective in explaining India’s orientation towards the Indo-Pacific and identifying reasons for its increasing security cooperation

with countries of SEA and EA. It will also bring us closer to appreciating the variations in India's behaviour and security-related thinking.

Grossman (2005) notes that role theory rests on two main assumptions:

a) The primary agent is the group of national leaders and key decision-makers, including the national leadership, diplomats and military bureaucrats, and foreign policy elites. These actors can decide on the role(s) and perform them and influence how the set of roles is implemented (Grossman, 2005).
b) The international system functions as a "type of social system," which is stratified. Keeping in mind the hierarchical nature of the social system, actors define their roles and attempt to perform them accordingly (Grossman, 2005, p. 336).

Despite the recent surge of interest in role theory and the growing body of literature on it, there is an ongoing debate on how to approach the unit of 'role(s)'. How one describes the term depends on which variant one chooses to consider. For instance, cognitive and symbolic interactionalists describe roles as "repertoires of behaviour, inferred from others' expectations and one's own conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands" (Walker, 1992, p. 23). Contrastingly, the structural, functional, and organisational branches believe that roles denote a state's "conduct that adheres to certain parts or positions" and not the actors that perform these roles (Sarbin and Allen, 1968, p. 489). By considering roles as positions, these branches assumed the "structural influences on a particular role beholder as rather rigid" (Caisova, 2019, p. 11). As is clear from these definitions, certain branches of role theory consider roles as positions while others see them as a range of behaviour.

While each description focuses on a particular aspect, this work requires a more integrated definition that caters to the empirical subject at hand. Hence, Sebastian Harnisch's description, which falls under the symbolic interactionist variant, is the most appropriate for this work. Harnisch defines roles as "social positions (as well as socially recognised category of actors) which are constituted by Ego (self) and Alter (external actors) expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organised group" (Harnisch, 2011, p. 2). As evident in the definition, self and external actors are not mutually exclusive. They exist because they interact with each other and embrace performativity.

It is vital to comprehend the conceptual building blocks. Although role theory has a range of concepts, the following section covers specific concepts that are most pertinent to the study and covered in the book.

2.3.1 Conceptual Building Blocks of Role Theory

Through its interpretive approach, role theory seeks to understand policymakers' thinking and reasoning for their actions. The most crucial concept of role

theory is *RC*. RC traces its origin to the concept of National Role Conceptions (NRCs), which Holsti (1970) introduced and described as—

> "… policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems" (Holsti, 1970, pp. 245–6).

Holsti's definition of NRC was ego-driven, which did not sufficiently capture the interaction between the Ego and the Alter. Over time, theorists built on the 'relational' nature of role formation by drawing more heavily from sociology and social psychology, where role theory is far more established and evolved. According to the current wave of role theorists, RC can be described as "an actor's perception of his or her position vis-à-vis others (Ego part of a role) and the perception of the role expectations of others (Alter part of a role) as signalled through language and action" (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011, p. 8).[8]

Briefly put, an RC is created through the interplay of an actor's self-conception (Ego) and external expectation (Alter). The policymakers' domestic perception regarding their state's appropriate role in the system is known as *self-conception*. Because no state operates in isolation, systemic developments or external actors are worthy of attention. The Alter part of the RC is captured in the concept of role prescription. The implicit or explicit expectation(s) of external actors towards the state in question is *role prescription* or *role expectation*. In simple words, role prescriptions are roles that external actors expect a state to perform (Aggestam, 1999).

Role theory distinguishes the RC from its implementation. The "actual foreign policy behaviour", i.e., the sum of governments' policy decisions and actions, is known as *role performance* (Aggestam, 2004, p. 88). Simply put, a state's external policy conduct and on-the-ground behaviour are considered its role performance. In the context of this study, India's role performance is its policy or strategy towards the Indo-Pacific in general and its security cooperation with SEA and EA in specific. In classic literature, *role change* refers to a "change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries" (Turner, 1990a, p. 88). Role change must be distinguished from any temporary deviation from the established role performance, as covered in subsequent sections.

A country's RCs are most apparent in the discourse of the national leaders, policymakers, and foreign policy elites. Nunes (2006) explains that decision-makers make repeated references to their country's RCs domestically and internationally. Periodic references "perpetuate specific RCs to justify the maintenance or change of foreign policy roles and to define a certain type of international rank from which result from rights and responsibilities" (Nunes, 2006, p. 48). She further adds that such references also help "generate internal consensus about continuity and adaptation of RC". It must be stressed that it is impossible to define RCs in such a detailed manner that policymakers can

simply take automated decisions without any deliberation. When interpreting the role-related references, practitioners tend to infuse meaning into them by adding their own reasoning and redefining them according to changing situations and events.

It serves well to understand that states do not perform a single RC but enact a number of them simultaneously. Many role theory-guided studies confirm this argument (see Holsti, 1970; Le Prestre, 1997; Harnisch, Bersick & Gottwald, 2015; Sakaki, 2011). According to Le Prestre (1997), the multiplicity of RCs relates to the frequency and levels of the state's engagement with the overall system. One could argue that this is natural because policymakers are influenced by a range of internal as well as external factors. According to Harnisch (2011), some RCs are by virtue of the actor's relation to a group (members of the United Nations [UN]) while others are functional, such as the RC of a negotiator, balancer. What is worth considering here is that although states possess a set of RCs, the priority or importance of each of them varies depending on what issue, time period, or geography one considers. Of course, it is improbable that a country could give equal attention to all its RCs. Within the spectrum of roles, some RCs are prominent and more salient than others.

There are two types of RCs—master RC and auxiliary RC. Master RC(s) are the most salient conceptions of the policymakers and are encapsulated in broader-level roles such as superpower or major power. Master RCs are the overarching roles that a state performs or aspires to accomplish. They are usually drawn from policymakers' perception of their state's position in the regional or international system (Thies, 2001, as cited in Wehner, 2014). Auxiliary RCs, on the other hand, are the supplementary conceptions that are mostly established within the boundaries of master RCs (for details, see Thies, 2013). Auxiliary RCs are performed with the intent to assert the validity of the master RC. To quote Wehner and Nolte (2017, p. 108), auxiliary RCs "sustain and give meaning" to the master RC. India is a case in point. The Indian leadership and policymakers refer to their country as a 'major power', best understood as a master RC that New Delhi aspires to perform. Supplementary to this are auxiliary RCs such as a net security provider, supporter of freedom of navigation, and economic actor. By performing auxiliary RCs, New Delhi gives meaning and validity to its aspirational master RC. Interestingly, if a state's master RC broadens, the possibility of expanding auxiliary RC exists to a great extent.

2.3.1.1 Co-constitution of Role Conception: Self-Conception and Role Prescription

The essence of role theory lies in the understanding that RC is co-constituted by self-conception and role prescription. This makes one conscious of the systemic, regional, national, and sub-national factors that shape a state's behaviour and influence a change therein (Aggestam, 2006). Self-conception emanates from the domestic dimension and entails the policymaker's self-role towards an issue or within a region, independent of the external expectations. Holsti highlights some of the internal/domestic determinants such as "location of the state; economic and technical resources; available capabilities; traditional policies; national values, public opinion 'mood'; and the personality or political needs of key policymakers" (Holsti, 1970, p. 245–6). Taking this further, Breuning (2011) states that within domestic sources, ideational factors such as the cultural notions, public sentiments, social values of a country, historical experiences and contexts, norms are all equally important. Overall, there is a consensus among role theorists that self-conception is a product of ideational as well as material determinants, as shown in Figure 2.

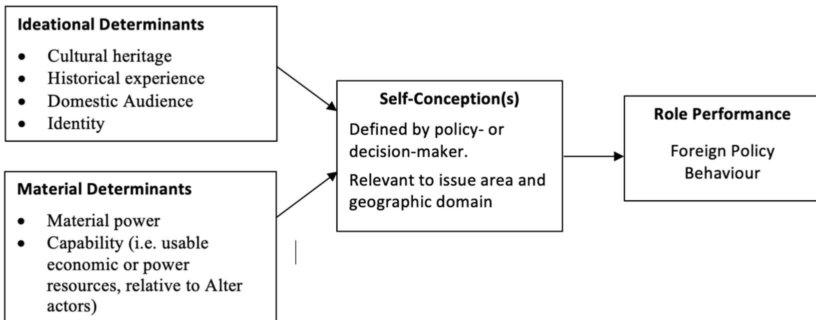

Figure 2: Determinants of Self-Conception(s). Source: Adapted from Breuning (2011)

It is worth noting that not all factors impact the policymakers in the same way or with the same intensity. Some elements may be more influential than others. The relevance or irrelevance of factors depends on specific cases or the situational context under which a state operates.

Just like RCs, self-conceptions are of two types—master and auxiliary self-conceptions. This means that a country can have both broader (master) and supplementary (auxiliary) self-conceptions. An actor's master/auxiliary self-conceptions can translate into master/auxiliary RCs in two ways. First, the actor may possess the ability to perform its self-conception independent of external actors' views or actions. This is possible in the case of a hegemon or superpower because they are likely to have the means and ability to perform their

self-conception regardless of any resistance from other systemic actors. In this case, self-conception can be equated to the RC. Second, an actor's self-conception can transition into an RC by receiving sufficient support from the external player through corresponding role prescriptions and supportive role performance (discussed in subsequent paragraphs).

It is well established that role prescriptions are equally crucial for the creation of RCs (Herrberg, 1998). According to Turner (1990b, p. 87), "every role is a way of relating to other-roles in a situation". He exemplifies that the role of a father is meaningless without the corresponding role of a child. This argument is repeated by Schnelle and Szczepanska (2016, p. 36), who believe that actors' roles generally need "complementary or commensurate roles" of other actors to "support its function". States do not perform roles in isolation but in relation to other countries' roles. The impact of role prescriptions on a state's RC can be varied and is rarely uniform. Regardless of the degree of influence, role prescriptions form a crucial part in ascertaining the RC.

For policymakers, role prescriptions can function as either 'external constraints' and/or 'inducements' towards a particular issue or a specific policy action (Mello, 2014, p. 27). Role prescriptions can be related to an actor's master and/or auxiliary RCs. When discussing the external dimension, one cannot overlook numerous countries in the international system. Within the generalised set of countries, it is impossible for all the nation-states to impact an actor's RC. Instead, a select few countries are relevant at a given point in time or in terms of a particular issue. Hence, when considering role prescriptions, only the relevant external actors whose interactions matter are worthy of consideration.[9]

Therefore, an RC is meaningful only when it is understood with the counter-role(s) of other relevant external actors (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011). There are two types of counter-roles—corresponding and oppositional. The corresponding counter-roles are supportive roles that external players perform to support or enhance an actor's self-conception(s). In contrast, oppositional counter-roles are roles performed by external players to either discourage or make it impossible for the actor to perform its self-conception. For example, suppose an actor holds the self-conception of a leader. In that case, it can only perform the role if others provide a conducive environment through a corresponding counter-role and accept that country as their leader (Bengtsson & Elgström, 2011). Without a corresponding counter-role, it may be difficult for the actor in question to perform its self-conception as a leader. By contrast, if an actor's self-conception matches external expectations, then the self-conception may transition into a well-defined RC, and the likelihood of an effective role performance increases significantly. Because RCs are produced out of complex interactions between self-conception and role prescription, they may fluctuate and waver before assuming a final and stable shape.

In the regional and international landscape, policymakers interact with national leaders and policymakers of external actors in varied settings (bilateral or multilateral) and at different hierarchical levels. During these interactions, the role prescriptions are "signalled through language and action" to the policymakers (Holsti, 1970, p. 238). The role-related expectations are communicated through verbal demands, counter-roles, and actions. The combination of these factors provides policymakers with a reasonable understanding of external expectations. Role prescriptions are captured in joint discussions (privately and publically), public declarations, and joint statements. Bengtsson & Elgström (2011, p. 114) believe that external actors may have expectations from an actor based on its "formal position or to great power status" because the state's action can have consequences for the whole system. Needless to state, the external actors' expectations and behaviour are a "function of their own mix of internal and external role expectations", i.e., of their own RCs (Harnisch, 2017, p. 9).

It is worth stating that role prescriptions do not automatically translate into compliance by the actor in question. In fact, the relationship between self-conception and role prescription is interactive, dynamic, and complex.[10] Decision-makers, during interactions with their external counterparts, tend to negotiate and bargain over roles that are compatible with their self-conception. Wehner (2011) says that RCs are constructed through constant dialogue and conflict between the involved subjects. An actor evaluates external expectations based on fundamental factors such as its compatibility with self-conception, resource availability to perform the role, and expected commitments. As evident, policymakers have the agency to correspond to external expectations or simply ignore them, reject them, or accept them with modifications (Bengtsson & Elgström, 2011). States may also choose to adopt a corresponding counter-role and an oppositional counter-role to an external actor's role prescription.

2.3.1.2 Role Conception and Role Performance

Role theory establishes a strong correlation between RC and role performance. Many scholars, including Holsti (1970), Shih (1988), and Hermann (1987), argue that the government's foreign policy actions and decisions are linked to its RCs. In the words of Shih (1988, p. 600), RCs can be viewed as the "core of a grand causal map" that is employed by policymakers to "make sense of the world". According to Krotz (2002), RCs influence states' behaviour (role performance) through prescription, proscription, and inducing preferences. They prescribe a state's behaviour by motivating policymakers to follow a particular course of action or work towards a specific goal (Krotz, 2002). At times, RCs can also influence through proscription. Influence through proscription means that RCs can shape behaviour by ruling out or limiting specific actions. Overall, RCs allow the policymakers to understand their state's role in the sys-

tem and accordingly make judgements on what actions would be acceptable or unacceptable.

It needs reiteration that RC(s) and role performance are linked by a strong correlation and *not* causation. Causation between RC and performance would mean that every role a state conceives of would automatically translate into foreign policy actions. In the real world, these translations are complex and rarely automatic. A country requires the appropriate material resources, sufficient domestic consensus on the role, and adequate support (in most cases) from the alter to perform a role. Thies (2012) maintains that role performance depends on the "social and material conditions" of the state and the related role prescription (as cited in Wehner, 2014, p. 5). When the country is experiencing one or more of these inhibiting factors (which is more of a norm than not), there is likely to be some gap between its RC and performance. Elgström and Smith (2006, p. 248) refer to this gap between the stated RC and actual policy actions as a '*conception–performance gap*'. In other words, when a state's role performance does not align with its stipulated RCs, there is a conception-performance gap.

2.3.1.3 Role Change

When examining foreign policy behaviour (role performance), one infers that states generally follow a 'patterned behaviour' until they experience some change (Aggestam, 2006, p. 22). The continuing pattern in foreign policy behaviour implies that RCs are, more or less, stable. Sakaki (2011) reasons that RCs are relatively stable because they are shared beliefs which have a sense of legitimacy and validity. To avoid cognitive dissonance, decision-makers tend to "incorporate information that reinforces their existing views while ignoring or distorting data that is inconsistent with the dominant belief" (2011, p. 27). For this reason, changes in RCs are generally incremental unless in cases of revolutionary events, which may result in substantial revisions of the RCs. Aggestam (2006, p. 23) observes the two types of RCs which are likely to remain relatively stable:

a) RCs that are compatible with the broader set of roles played by a country,
b) RCs that enjoy a high degree of consensus or legitimacy among the decision-makers and between the state and other units in the system (for details, see Rüland, 2015).

It should not be misconstrued that RCs are constant and not subject to variation. There is a consensus in the classical literature on role theory that roles are not fixed but subject to durability and changes over time (for more details, see Turner, 1990; Demo, 1992; Gordon & Gordon, 1982; Biddle, 1986; Ickes & Knowles, 1982). Role theory considers RCs as "sensitive to situational context and time" (Aggestam, 2006, p. 23). Having noted that, RCs are also not easily

malleable because that would mean they may frequently change, resulting in an exceedingly random international environment that may be "beyond one's control" (Chafetz, Abramson & Grillot, 1996, p. 736). Even though they have a high degree of stability, they are subject to change(s) or modification(s) over time. Therefore, they should not be considered either fluid or absolutely fixed. Given the strong correlation between RC and role performance, alterations in RCs may lead to a change in the state's foreign policy orientation, actions, and decisions (Nunes, 2006, p. 48). It is also worth remembering that when the state adopts new RCs and associated role performance, it may "potentially set in motion a reconstruction of counter-roles or commensurate roles" (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011, p. 256).

RCs can either experience evolution (incremental changes) over time or sudden role restructuring in case of significant social changes. *Role evolution* involves gradual changes that are generally limited to select master or auxiliary RCs. By contrast, during (major) role restructuring, policymakers make a conscious attempt to overhaul substantially. In such cases, the changes in RCs are not restricted to a select few roles but spread across the spectrum (Maull, 1990). For example, after the Second World War, Germany and Japan's role performance experienced a significant restructuring after they embraced the new master RC of civilian powers and changed the range of their auxiliary RCs (Le Prestre, 1997).

To understand why certain (master and auxiliary) RCs change or evolve, it is crucial to study their determinants. Beneš and Harnisch (2014, p. 149) reiterate that RCs are constituted through a "unique pattern of ego-alter composition that, as a dynamic social structure in itself, constantly changes and evolves over time". Therefore, when an element (self-conception or role prescription) that shapes the RCs is changed, it may spark a role change (Harnisch, Bersick & Gottwald, 2015). Changes in either self-conception or role prescription or both may spark incompatibility with the established RCs, causing a role conflict. This also triggers the possibility of a role change.

It is well known that national leaders and policymakers simultaneously engage at two levels—the domestic (Ego) and international (Alter). They gauge the incrementally altering situational contexts, domestic and international state of affairs, range of role prescriptions, and changes in domestic material power and capacities. These changes do not directly impact foreign policy but are channelled through the policymakers' interpretation. The policymakers perceive and interpret the domestic or/and international changes and may act on them by adjusting the state's RCs. Adding to the argument, Harnisch et al. opine that "actors change their role conception and role behaviour to maximise utility […] to retain or regain legitimacy by finding 'appropriate' responses, or after arguing about (new) standards of appropriateness, i.e., norms and values" (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011, p. 275).

Based on its determinants, Frank (2011) divides foreign policy role change into three types: changes due to self-conception, role prescription or a combination of two. This does not mean that a change in any dimension automatically leads to a role change. With every possible variation in self-conception and role prescription, it is incumbent on policymakers to adjust the RCs. In most cases, policymakers pay heed to factors that are relevant to the state's ongoing behavioural pattern. Generally, as believed by Brummer and Thies (2014, as cited in Jones, 2017), policymakers choose to ignore changes until they are not consequential enough to influence the established RC or performance patterns.

2.3.1.4 Additional Concepts of Role Theory

As established above, any changes in self-conception or role prescription can stimulate a change in established RCs and thereby in role performance. The process of role change/evolution is complex, disorderly, and not homogenous. When conceptions evolve, there is rarely a clean break from the established ones. Instead, conceptions tend to overlap with the role performance of present and former RCs. The combination of overlap between new and old RCs and challenges associated with simultaneously occurring role-related issues may lead to a conception–performance gap and even make the role performance appear contradictory. When policymakers adjust the RC(s) given the changing environment they operate in, they may experience role-related circumstances such as role compatibility, (inter- and intra-) role conflict, role competition, and domestic contestation.[11]

Role compatibility is the situation of correspondence or harmony between an actor's self-conception and role prescription. It denotes a high degree of convergence between the role an actor perceives for itself and the role-related expectations of the external actor. In such cases, role prescriptions are effective because the actor is likely to respond positively to role expectations that match its self-conception.

Distinct from role compatibility is the concept of role conflict. *Role conflict* refers to when policymakers face a clash between self-conception and role prescription and/or within the set of RCs it holds. Role conflict is more a "norm rather than an anomaly" (Brummer and Thies, 2014, cited in Jones, 2017, p. 7). It is classified into two types—intra-role conflict and inter-role conflict. *Intra-role conflict* is the situation when policymakers experience a clash between their self-conception and role prescription. For instance, if a state wants to become a nuclear weapons-armed power (self-conception) but the external actor(s) want it to remain a non-nuclear armed country (role prescription), the situation can be described as a case of intra-role conflict. If the intra-role conflict intensifies to a level where the involved actors cannot manage their differences, it can lead to a military conflict or a war. However, intra-role conflict

does not always lead to such a scenario. Instead, in most cases, decision-makers work towards ironing out the differences until the divergences become irreconcilable. In role theory, intra-role conflict simply implies that it has the potential to disrupt the status quo in the system and result in confrontation but is not always destined to. Intra-role conflict may also create conditions that spark an oppositional counter-role by an actor. In some cases, as brought out by Cantir and Kaarbo (2016, p. 5), policymakers "may attempt to impose its role despite alter resistance".

Another form of incompatibility, which remains underexplored in current role theory literature, is the clash between actors who perform similar RCs, more so in overlapping peripheries. For instance, if two actors seek to perform the role of leaders in a limited geographical space, there are increased risks of instability and extreme intra-role conflict if not managed effectively at the diplomatic level. Such scenarios tend to play out between a rising power and an established power or between two or more rising powers.

Following the description of the concepts of role compatibility and intra-role conflict, it is necessary to understand that both these situations are subject to what is known as the 'convergence/divergence dynamics' (Yang, 2016, p. 43). The role compatibility or conflict, as suggested by Koenig (2016, p. 172), "does not necessarily affect the entire role, but rather certain elements within it". For instance, even if the involved states have compatibility, they may still have differences in terms of a particular role or disagreements on how to perform a specific role. Similarly, when countries are involved in an intra-role conflict over a specific issue or within a particular region, it does not mean that the conflict applies to all roles. Decision-makers have sufficient agency to cooperate on other auxiliary roles or even in areas where the intra-role conflict exists. As is demonstrated in the study, in both situations of role compatibility and intra-role conflict, there is space for convergence and divergence between the Ego and the Alter.

Further, *inter-role conflict* refers to the "conflict between non-compatible, competing or clashing" RCs (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011, p. 256). Because a state performs many roles simultaneously, it may experience inconsistencies or ambiguity within the set of RCs. At times, an actor may even have to perform contradictory roles simultaneously or face the challenge of deciding between them.

Some challenging role-related circumstances include *role competition* and *domestic contestation*, which may result in a conception–performance gap. Role competition is when the expected actions (towards the fulfilment of an RC) compete with other necessary actions in terms of resources or time. It is clear by now that a state performs multiple roles at a given point in time. Therefore, the finite material resources needed to perform similar roles can come under stress. This means that even when a state is experiencing no role conflict, it may be unable to translate its conception into performance because it lacks

the time and resources needed to enact that specific role. In simple words, the contestation between "material and temporal constraints" is termed role competition, which has the potential to create a conception–performance gap (Sakaki, 2011, p. 33).

Finally, domestic role contestation is known as the clash or contest within the Ego. According to Keane and Wood (2015, p. 101), *domestic role contestation* is a situation that emerges due to "multiple inputs of different sub-state institutions or agencies, each influenced by their own organisational RC". Domestic role contestation or disagreements between sub-state can result in policy dysfunction, which may, in turn, lead to a conception-performance gap.

2.3.2 Conceptual Framework of Role Theory

There are three main arguments in the book. First, a change in India's RCs (role evolution) has led to alterations in its foreign policy conduct (role performance) towards SEA and EA. Second, RCs have evolved due to changing self-conceptions (domestic factors) and role prescriptions (external interactions). Third, even as RCs develop and affect foreign-policy conduct trajectory, some variables inhibit the manifestation of new RCs into role performance.

Before proceeding ahead, it is crucial to clarify that role evolution is treated as both Independent Variable (IV) and Dependent Variable (DV) in the study. In the first half, India's role performance (foreign policy actions) is regarded as the DV, and role evolution (incremental changes in India's master and auxiliary RCs) is considered the explanatory variable or IV. In Chapters 3 and 4, the primary argument is that changes in India's foreign policy actions are connected to its role evolution. While Chapter 3 offers an overview of historical RCs and their impact on role performance, Chapter 4 expands on role evolution in the last 20 years and how it influenced India's conduct in the Indo-Pacific region. To reiterate, in both these chapters, role evolution is the IV that impacts India's role performance (DV).

After establishing this correlation, the book takes a step forward and examines the factors responsible for the role evolution. Therefore, role evolution, which was earlier the IV, becomes the DV. With role evolution as the DV, there are two pertinent IVs—self-conception and role prescription. This implies that the two IVs have facilitated the evolution of India's RCs. Chapters 5 and 6 showcase the strong correlation between self-conception and role evolution, and role prescription and role evolution, respectively.

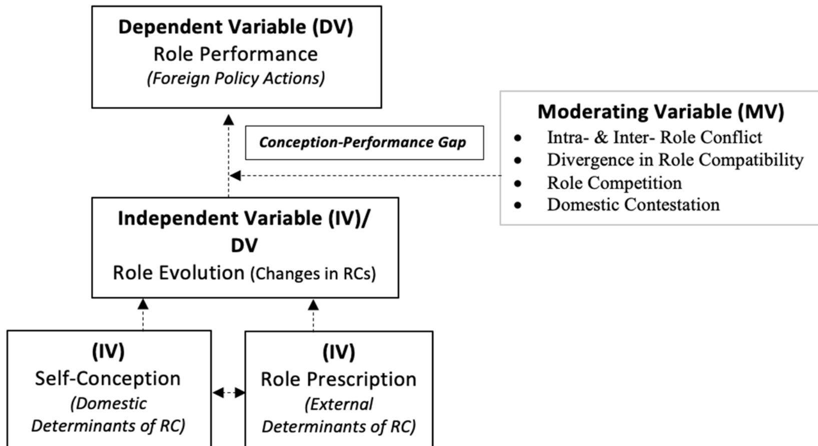

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of Role Theory. Source: Own adaption based on the role theory literature

In addition to this, Chapters 5 and 6 also cover relevant Moderating Variables (MVs). MVs either strengthen or diminish the association between IV and DV. In simple terms, there are MVs that weaken the correlation between the original IV (role evolution) and DV (role performance). The identified MVs are (inter- and intra-) role conflict, divergence in role compatibility, role competition and domestic contestation. As is demonstrated in the said chapters, these MVs weaken the link between role evolution and role performance, thus causing a conception–performance gap. This means that the conceptualised roles do not effectively translate into role performance due to hindrances, decisional dilemmas, and challenges. Figure 3 offers a pictorial representation of the conceptual framework or role theory and captures the relationship between each of the stipulated concepts.

2.3.3 Why Role Theory?

Many reasons make role theory a promising conceptual framework. First, it enables multiple levels of analysis—international/regional level, national level, and sub-national level. Because it overlaps with the meta-theory of constructivism, role theory has the potential to integrate the disciplines of IR and FPA. Second, role theory captures the strengths of former theoretical explanations while plugging their inadequacies. Simply put, role theory does not dismiss the logic of balance of power but embraces it while also addressing the conceptual gaps in the BoP theory. To recap, BoP views the state as a 'black box', and the developments within the box are considered meaningless. Therefore, *only* the changes in the distribution of material power and interactions between systemic actors are factored in. By contrast, role theory provides greater explanatory value because of its ability to bridge the agent-structure divide theoretically. It enables the explanation of the state's conduct by studying the relevance of structural factors and considering the developments at the agency level. The conceptual vocabulary of role theory (such as RC, role performance, role conflict, and role compatibility) allows one to understand the agent-structure interactions and the associations between sub-national institutions.

Third, role theory does not assign value judgements to states based on predetermined theoretical terminologies and expectations. For instance, BoP implicitly assigns states with limited roles such as balancer, buck-passer, and appeaser. Most of these pre-defined roles are based on western classical interpretations (or American when considering the contemporary literature) and their perceptions of what each role entails. Applying BoP's preset moulds to non-western settings may be unconstructive, mainly because they do not capture the essence of a state's historical experiences or culture. Despite being a western origin theory, role theory does not perpetuate the problem inherent in other western-dominant IR theories. Role theory does not assign already established concepts and understanding to roles but instead generates roles based on an inside-out view. Based on the most popular technique of role theory, i.e., content analysis, the 'roles' are derived from the discourse (see Appendix B for details). The identified roles are then conceptualised based on the states' domestic, historical, cultural, and geopolitical settings and their interaction with the external world. This practice obviates the possibility of assigning biases or assumptions to a great extent.

Lastly, role theory can address the shortcomings of constructivism. One of the weaknesses of constructivism (as used in current literature) is its inability to explain the difference between rhetoric and behaviour because they do not differentiate between the variable of identity and actual foreign policy conduct. Role theory considers the two concepts distinct and digs deeper to explain the gaps and reasons for it. As some variants of constructivism are limited to the

systemic and national levels, they cannot analyse developments at the sub-national level. Role theory allows one to disaggregate the state and identify the influence of relevant institutions (such as the military or bureaucracy) on RCs and thereby on the role performance. Likewise, constructivism does not cater to the influence of external expectations towards the state, which role theory does. Role theory also allows greater freedom to identify material and ideational factors, which is a rarity in other theoretical approaches used to explain Indian foreign policy.

2.3.4 Role Theory and India

As is evident by now, most of the scholarship on Indian foreign policy draws from realism and constructivism. Despite the inadequacies of these theoretical lenses to explain the subject at hand, there have been minimal efforts to explore different theoretical prisms. As role theory has regained recognition in recent years, some scholars have begun venturing into its application to the Indian case. Examples of the limited role theory-guided studies on India include Wagner (2005), Vogel (2010), Hansel and Möller (2015) and Z. D. Singh (2014; 2017; 2018). To the best of the author's knowledge, at the time of writing, this is an exhaustive list of studies in English and German that have used role theory in the Indian context.

In the first-ever application of role theory to explain Indian foreign policy in detail, Wagner (2005) explored the historical trajectory of India's foreign policy from 1947 to 1998. In the book, he argues that although India possesses some of the characteristics of great power, such as size, economic and military potential, it remains far from being one. He refers to India as the '*verhinderte Grossmacht*', which best translates into English as 'a hindered great power' (Wagner, 2005). Wagner delves into Indian foreign policy's domestic roots and even examines New Delhi's interactions with external powers. He adds that India's rise to the superpower status depends not only on itself but on the outside powers, and for this, New Delhi will need to learn and adapt to the changing environment. While Wagner's book sparks a meaningful discussion, his analysis is limited to one aspirational role (or RC). Not disregarding the value of his contribution, India's quest for superpower status alone cannot explain the intricacies of all its foreign policies, including the sub-regional behaviour, which is examined in the book.

It is equally worth noting that the RC as a great power has found little mention in official speeches, at least not sufficient to be considered the sole driver of foreign policy decisions. Besides, Wagner's application of role theory is limited, which is understandable because of the scant theoretical literature available at the time. As the literature on role theory has evolved over the last decade, it would be rewarding to re-examine some of the aspects covered in

Wagner's book. A case in point is the identification of RCs. Unlike Wagner, who focuses primarily on the role of 'great power', this work locates RCs that emanate from the official discourse (see the categorisation in Appendix B). Further, the nuances and connotations of the identified RCs are analysed from secondary literature on India's historical and contemporary experiences, and political and strategic objectives. An inside-out approach to RCs obviates the possibility of applying less-relevant terms and minimises the chances of infusing a preconceived bias.

Another valuable role-theory guided study is Vogel's book, in which he examines India's China policy. Vogel (2010) narrows down RCs that influence New Delhi's relationship with Beijing. Vogel finalises them through a discourse analysis of select speeches of two Indian PMs, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. He identifies India as an Asian power that is on its way to becoming a global power. Apart from this, he examines a set of values that he considers relevant to the case: the centrality of sovereignty, the focus on territorial integrity, and the Indian value of non-violence. Based on the combination of these RCs and values, Vogel argues that there is a dichotomy between the values of preserving territorial integrity and non-violence. A similar contradiction exists in India's outlook towards China. He calls it a blend of suspicion and desire for cooperation. More specifically, he describes India as a '*misstrauischer idealist*' towards China, which translates into a 'distrustful idealist'. This contradiction is believed to shape India's China policy and their relationship.

Vogel's work adds immense value to the literature on India–China relations. However, there are certain areas that require further investigation. For instance, his work does not explore the determinants of India's roles and values. Apart from this, Vogel overlooks the need to review sub-national dynamics and domestic settings that are reasonably relevant to India's policy towards China. As will be clear in the book, apart from the material and ideational factors, Indian policy conduct is equally impacted by structural settings at home and the relationship between the domestic institutions. Finally, by not distinctly establishing the relationship between the RC and actual performance, Vogel tends to gloss over the complex nature of policy formulation and implementation. Inspired by the need to address these limitations, this book focuses on the concept of the conception-performance gap (the gap between RC and role performance) and investigates the factors causing it.

In addition to Wagner and Vogel, another perceptive work comes from Hansel and Möller (2015). They utilise role theory to study India's behaviour vis-à-vis Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and international criminal law. Hansel and Möller argue that New Delhi holds a range of NRCs, which tend to clash with each other, leading to an inter- and intra-role conflict. As a result, there are inconsistencies in how India approaches the issues of R2P and justice and law in IR. Hansel and Möller utilise the existing literature on role theory

more effectively than older studies on the topic. They also depend on material and ideational factors to explain Indian behaviour and provide fresh insights on the issue. Despite that, they neglect the importance of domestic institutions and structural weakness, which also determine a country's external conduct.

Finally, Zorawar Daulet Singh is one of the few scholars who have employed role theory to tackle more than one empirical puzzle of Indian foreign policy. It is worth mentioning that some of his works inspire this book. Although Singh has used role theory to undertake analysis at the state and individual levels (see Z. D. Singh 2014; 2017; 2018 for details), he has restricted his research to the variable of RC and does not explore other valuable concepts of the theory. Singh's latest work on Indian foreign policy traces historical RCs (Z. D. Singh, 2018). He undertakes an individual-level analysis and compares the RCs of two PMs, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, and how that impacted Indian foreign policy choices and behaviour (Z. D. Singh, 2018).

Notwithstanding his work's exceptional contributions, Z. D. Singh's decision to not engage with other relevant concepts of role theory makes his analysis limited in theoretical richness. There are certain other weaknesses as well, which deserve attention. For example, Singh equates RC with the concept of role performance, which as the following chapters will show, is misleading. Furthermore, under the broader umbrella of non-alignment, Singh identifies only a single RC for each leader—peacemaker for Nehru and security seeker for Gandhi. Despite the analytical details with which he covers each RC, Singh gives the impression that a single RC can explain most Indian foreign policy decisions. This is not the most appropriate representation of the complex foreign policy formulation. To address the existing conceptual limitations, this book advances some concepts and expands on the complexities involved. The study demonstrates that some RCs are more crucial than others. The dominant ones are master RCs that provide the overarching guidance and are supported by a range of auxiliary RCs. Policymakers are not guided by a single RC but a range of RCs that may differ based on a specific region or an issue. Besides, RCs that apply to one case may not be relevant to all the issues that the policymakers deal with.

As is evident in the review above, there are still many aspects that have not been discussed in the current literature, and most authors have applied role theory in a limited manner. Despite exploring the material and ideational factors, the studies have disregarded the relevance of structural settings and inter-agency functioning. This work aims to plug these gaps and complement the strengths of the previous studies. To be fair, many of these aspects remain unstudied because the literature on role theory is still evolving, and many concepts have not been elucidated yet. As a result, the mentioned studies have focused on the few available concepts and have been unable to explain the determinants of policy conduct comprehensively. This is where the value of this study deserves mention.

Given the limitation of current literature on role theory, this book will develop and elaborate on concepts that have mushroomed in recent years but have rarely been studied in depth. Some of these concepts are conception–performance gap, role compatibility, corpat, and the categories of master and auxiliary RCs. These concepts help explain the relationship between the conceptions held by policymakers and the final policy implementation. The transition phase provides an ample understanding of the determinants and actors involved in between and how some variables act as facilitators and others as inhibitors. More importantly, a conceptual framework has been developed, which guides the analysis of the study and provides a robust theoretical ground for future works. By applying the conceptual framework to the empirical case at hand, the book offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between the identified concepts. Unlike the studies covered above, this work looks at a recent empirical puzzle. To the best of the author's knowledge, there is no role theory-guided study on India's policy in the Indo-Pacific, making this book prototypical and topical.

2.4 Methodology

Before laying out the methodology, it is essential to clarify what this study is not. This work does not entail theory testing. This is expected considering that despite a "theory centred character", role theory "does not provide any testable predictions per se" (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999 as cited in Rein, 2017, p. 22). Furthermore, it does not entail hypothesis testing. When an empirical issue is analysed through hypothesis testing, it generally requires a researcher to either prove or disapprove. In some studies, where the primary goal is to approve or disprove the theory, there may be an inherent bias from the data collection stage itself. In such cases, if the researcher discovers empirical irregularities, they may be ignored to ease the research process. As a result, one tends to miss the nuances of the practical problem at hand. Hence, hypothesis testing is avoided in this work.

Broadly, the study follows a problem-driven approach and is guided by the conceptual framework of role theory. Kohlbacher (2006, para. 78) believes that theory-guided analysis is a "special strength of qualitative content analysis". The fundamental idea is to "constantly compare theory and data—iterating toward a theory which closely fits the data" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 541). At this juncture, it is worth restating that although role theory is not a theory in the conventional sense, it offers high explanatory value. Through role theory, the book maps the evolution of India's security conduct in the Indo-Pacific (with a focus on the security cooperation with SEA and EA) and examines its determinants.

2.4.1 Qualitative Content-Analysis Research

The most crucial methodological instrument used throughout the book is qualitative content analysis. Morgan and Smircich (1980) build the case that research methods should be chosen based on their basic assumptions related to ontology, epistemology and the nature of phenomena under study. They demonstrate that qualitative research is helpful for studies that view reality as a "realm of symbolic discourse" (ontological assumption) and seek to "understand how social reality is created" (epistemological view) (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 492). Based on this understanding, qualitative research is most pertinent because it shares the fundamental assumptions of role theory. Adopting a similar line of thinking, Ting-Toomey (1984, p. 170) states that qualitative research as the study of symbolic discourse entails the "multiple realities for the involved actor in the social scene". She adds that the interpretive principles of qualitative research seek to process and understand the discourse (monologue forms such as speeches and narratives) from the participant's viewpoint. A qualitative approach is suitable for this work because it allows one to understand patterns, meanings, and reasoning that may not be apparent in other traditional methods.

Within the broader domain of qualitative research, content analysis is the most appropriate method for identifying RCs (Backman, 1970). Holsti (1969, p. 14) describes content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". Content analysis can be applied to quantitative as well as qualitative data. Qualitative content-analysis research enables a detailed analysis of official texts, narratives, and historical and contemporary data.

A review of current empirical studies, which utilise role theory, shows a marked preference for the content analysis of foreign policy speeches (for more details, see Sakaki, 2011; Başer, 2015). This, in no manner, implies that it is a default approach. However, it is preferred because it corresponds with role theory's focus on the national leader and policymakers as the primary agents. There is a wide-held belief among role theorists and relevant scholars that RCs are reflected in national leaders' speeches and statements of key policymakers and political elites. As this study seeks to recognise patterns and changes in India's RCs, content analysis becomes a natural choice. Qualitative content analysis allows extensive mapping of India's RCs in the Indo-Pacific region, which influences its foreign policy towards the SEA and EA regions.

Qualitative content analysis of speeches can be done in three ways—inductively, deductively, or a combination of both. The deductive approach uses categories that emanate from previous studies or emerge from extant theoretical assertions. Some examples of this approach include the 17 categories of NRCs presented in K. J. Holsti's work or the well-established roles of a balancer or buck-passer in neorealism. By contrast, in the inductive approach, the

categories are picked out after combing through the data. Categories are identified based on recurring themes and statements that are relevant to the subject at hand.

Creswell and Clark (2007, p. 23) refer to deductive analysis as a 'top-down' approach to the empirical reality and inductive analysis as the 'bottom-up' view of the developments. This study adopts a combination of both the inductive and deductive approaches. In Chapter 3, which provides a historical overview of India's RCs from 1947 to 2000, there is heavy reliance on deductive analysis of secondary data. This means that the RCs for this period have been identified from secondary literature on India's foreign policy. Some RCs are also adopted from relevant studies such as Z. D. Singh (2018). By contrast, in terms of the time period from January 2001 to December 2021, which forms this study's primary focus, an inductive analysis has been undertaken. Based on an inductive analysis of Indian official foreign policy speeches of these years, master and auxiliary RCs have been identified in Chapter 4. This allowed the identification of RCs with subtle variations, which would have been impossible to grasp through deductive analysis. Secondary literature was also used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the identified RCs.

The rationale for depending on official speeches comes from the idiosyncrasies of the foreign policy process and security-related discourse in India. Historically, India's foreign policy-making process remained insular. Only the political or foreign policy elites enjoyed a stronghold on the subject and its practice. With India's economic liberalisation since 1991, new political and private players came to the fore. New political parties, private media channels, thought influencers, lobbies, and corporates made the political, economic, and social landscape increasingly dynamic. Nonetheless, these changes have not drastically altered the foreign policy and security decision-making process in India. Sullivan (2015) asserts that political leaders and foreign policy elites continue to hegemonise the process in India.

Lederer (2018, p. 193) acknowledges that foreign policies of countries are "still dominated by the executive branch", but it is no longer the only driver. Instead, there are other relevant ministries that influence the process of policy formulation (Lederer, 2018). This is true in the Indian context as well. The core groups that form the foreign policy and security elites are political actors, foreign policy officials, and key military officials, i.e., the PM, National Security Advisor (NSA), Foreign Secretary (FS), External Affairs Minister (EAM), Ministers of State for External Affairs, Ministry Executives of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Even the Ministry of Finance (MoF) is crucial for it dispenses the funds for policy implementation. Notably, the bureaucrats of the MEA make foreign policy functioning of the country smooth and offer a sense of "continuity and expertise" to the Indian foreign policy (Hill, 2003 quoted in Sullivan, 2015, p. 23). Although heads of the three wings of the Indian Armed Forces—the IN, the Indian Army (IA), and the Indian Air Force (IAF)—have

limited say on security issues, the final word rests with their civilian counterparts. The preceding paragraphs do not denote that public opinion of the citizenry is irrelevant. It merely indicates that India's political heads and foreign policy elites continue to have a significant say in the country's foreign policy discourse and conduct. Given the prominent role they play in the creation of RCs and foreign policy conduct, it is natural to focus on select sub-agency actors when examining their views on India's role in the region.

The RCs that have been analysed in the book were identified from the analysis of 212 speeches (January 2001 to December 2021) that were relevant to India's foreign and security policy towards the Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific region (see Appendix B for detail). The extended timespan ensured a broad set of samples that were not specific to a particular government or leadership and helped chart the evolution of RCs over the years. The reviewed sample was a healthy mix of speeches given at home and abroad. Initially, the author examined the speeches in search of a pattern of periodically appearing RCs. While going through the speeches, sentences or combinations of words that indicated/communicated a specific responsibility or function for India were selected. The sentences had to include the speaker's reference to India in specific (or in conjunction with another country) or use a substitute for India such as 'we', 'our', or 'us' (Hansel & Möller, 2015 also followed this practice). Following the selection of relevant statements, they were reread and distributed into categories. Overarching conceptions were identified as master RCs and were divided into a major power, leading power, and global power (refer to Appendix B). The supplementary ones were put in the table of Auxiliary RCs (see Appendix B). The auxiliary RCs were also branched out in two categories—roles relevant to the IOR and ones pertinent to the broader region of Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific. This delineation helped identify the slow changes in RCs over the years. By the end of the speech analysis process, it became more apparent that roles prominent in the preceding years evolved and could easily fit into two stipulated categories: net security provider and stakeholder in the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region. These two categories were the final culmination of a range of roles. To illustrate, multiple officials referred to India's role in the "mitigation of natural disasters" and its function of "providing training for capacity building" since the mid-2000s (MEA, 2006b, pt. 4). These relatively minor functions supplemented the broader net security provider RC, which appeared in the speeches from 2010 onwards. The evolution of these patterns into a distinct auxiliary RC is covered in Chapter 4.

The research tool for this work is process tracing. Process tracing remains one of the essential tools of qualitative research. Collier (2011, p. 825) describes process tracing as an "analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence—often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena". In terms of epistemology, process

tracing is linked to the "turn toward social science explanations based on reference to causal mechanisms or the underlying entities that generate observed processes and outcomes" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 10). It helps describe and understand political and social phenomena through inferences of causation or correlations. There is an agreement among scholars that process tracing is valuable in theory-guided explanations because it allows a researcher to attend to minute elements of causation (see Hall, 2008; Caporaso, 2009).

Therefore, process tracing is best suited to infer the linkages between independent, dependent, and moderating variables. Recurring regularities and established patterns of correlations will be mapped out. Process tracing will be used to show the link between India's changing RC and its role performance (Chapters 3 and 4), changing self-conception (Chapter 5), changing role prescription (Chapter 6), and moderating variables and the connection between the IV and DV (Chapters 5 and 6). These analyses will be undertaken chronologically, which will help appreciate the role change over the years.

2.4.2 Case Study Method

This work utilises a multiple-case design, specifically in Chapter 6, to examine the interplay between role prescription and RCs. Robert K. Yin describes the case study research method as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984, as cited in Zaidah, 2007, p. 2).

According to Bennett (2004, p. 19), case studies allow detailed contextual analysis, which enables a researcher to provide "historical explanations of particular cases … [and] examine intervening variables in individual cases to make inferences on which causal mechanisms may have been at work". There are three main types of case study categories: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Yin, 1984, as cited in Zaidah, 2007). Out of these, this study utilises the descriptive case study method. Descriptive case studies "describe the natural phenomena which occur within the data in question" (Zaidah, 2007, p. 3). Zaidah states that the descriptive-qualitative case study method generally assumes a 'narrative form' and begins with a 'descriptive theory' to substantiate the in-depth "description of the phenomenon". The main advantage of using this method is that it helps understand complex social phenomena by capturing real-world developments in single or multiple cases. Within the select cases, a researcher can dive deep and uncover the subtle insights that may be difficult otherwise.

Due to these advantages, the case study method becomes a natural choice. Given the expanse of the Indo-Pacific region, it is challenging to analyse India's interactions with all the (Alter) countries of the region. Although the

book's geographical scope is limited to the SEA and EA regions, it is difficult to examine all the regional countries individually. This challenge is addressed with the multiple case-study research method, making it relatively easy to grasp the complexities of the real-world situation by examining select cases.

Before expanding on the case selection criteria, it is useful to highlight one of the usual pitfalls that crop up when studying the SEA and EA regions. These regions comprise states that are marked more by diversity than similarities, whether from the point of view of geography, people, or their strategic inclinations and regional concerns. Many analysts tend to fall into the trap of generalising trends for the entire region based on tendencies present in individual countries. Such a practice only results in unsatisfactory results and a misconstrued understanding of foreign policies and the region. Therefore, the selected case studies should not be considered a microcosm of the region.

Out of the many countries that fall under SEA and EA, a select few case studies (also referred to as cases) have been finalised, which capture the complex interactions between India and the Alter actors. The case studies include—a) China, b) the US, c) Japan, and d) the ASEAN region (including Vietnam). There are a fair number of reasons to settle for these cases. First, drawn from the propositions of role theory, it was necessary to choose the relevant Alter actors that have maximum influence on India's RC and role performance. Based on prior studies and in the initial round of interviews with experts, two countries were most prominent—China and the US. Needless to reiterate, selecting China as one of the case studies was indispensable because of the dominant narrative in extant literature that connects India's growing security cooperation in the region to China (see Malik, 2012; Bötscher, 2011; Peacock, 2018; Frankel, 2011; Gilboy & Heginbotham, 2013). At the same time, one cannot disregard the US' relevance as the most crucial actor in the Indo-Pacific, with the ability to substantially shape the regional dynamics. As a result of this background, it is vital to understand India's interactions with these two countries to confirm or disprove their relevance in influencing new RCs. Another fundamental criterion was to opt for countries that have experienced a qualitative and quantitative change in their security interactions and cooperation with India. Indo-US relations have undergone a significant change in the last 20 years. Since early 2000, New Delhi's relationship with Washington and increased willingness to cooperate on security issues exhibit a measure of qualitative change.

An additional criterion in choosing the cases was to study at least one country from each of the two regions, SEA and EA (or the ASEAN region), that have experienced progress in security cooperation with India. In these measures, Vietnam and Japan were the most suitable cases. Vietnam and Japan are the most prominent countries in SEA and EA, respectively, that have undergone a substantial change in their security-related interactions with India in the last two decades. For instance, Japan was staunchly opposed to India after

the 1998 nuclear tests but is now enthusiastic about partnering with New Delhi on a gamut of strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific. Moving further, in addition to the fact that India–Vietnam security cooperation has expanded by many folds, Hanoi also acts as India's plank in the SCS. Without their energy collaboration in the SCS, New Delhi would be devoid of any direct involvement in that maritime space. More importantly, Vietnam and Japan's multi-layered relationship with China—a combination of disputes and cooperation—illustrates the intricacies involved, which may impact the way these countries interact with India. Before it examines the case of Vietnam, the section (see Chapter 6) includes a discussion on the ASEAN region's broader interactions with India. This effectively makes ASEAN an embedded case study because it has Vietnam as an embedded unit of analysis.

2.4.3 Data Collection

Primary Sources: As role theory lays great stress on the policymakers/decision-makers, semi-structured interviews with identified interviewees formed an essential part of the data collection stage. The initial round of interviews included experts and scholars, which helped understand factors that impact India's changing RCs and constraint policy implementation. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews with serving and retired Indian government officials and diplomats, serving and retired officers of the IN, and a foreign diplomat helped gain an 'insider view' and the Alter's role prescriptions towards India. Primary data was vital for this work because it helped infuse the cultural and historic meaning attached to RCs that were identified through speech analysis. This obviated the risk of being influenced by other analysts or scholars' interpretations, who may assign different meanings to the identified RCs. Furthermore, the interviews were most useful in identifying MVs, which led to the conception–performance gap. The responses were also crucial for triangulation and helped substantiate the theoretical propositions.

The work also relied heavily on foreign policy speeches, government reports, military doctrines and strategy documents, government declarations, joint statements, annual reports of the MEA and the Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD), and statements of relevant leaders/ministers. All the analysed speeches were accessed from the website of the MEA. The MEA website offers a rich depository of speeches from the year 2001, which includes the speeches of national leaders and the relevant government officials. All the speeches were initially analysed to identify the final list of most-relevant speeches that enabled the content analysis. Other primary data was available on the government websites of the Indian MoD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), US Department of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vietnam), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA). Specifically, the

IN's website was a valuable source to access the previous and current maritime doctrines and strategy documents. The diplomatic cables of the US government, the Cablegate, provided a useful insight into the US' approach towards India and its changing expectations from 2003 to 2010. It also provides a deep understanding of the discussions between the US and its allies (Japan, Australia, and Singapore) and their perspectives on New Delhi.

Secondary Sources: The book utilised secondary sources for researching the subject. Academic and scholarly literature in the form of books, journals, news reports, and relevant websites were crucial in this regard. Reputed journals on the subject, such as *The India Quarterly*, *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (National University of Singapore), and *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* (GIGA), offered quality analysis and perspectives. Apart from this, an immense understanding was gained by extensively studying publications emanating from think tanks and research institutions in India, the ASEAN region, Japan, Vietnam, and the US. Some of the noted think tanks include the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), National Maritime Foundation (NMF), Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Brookings (India), Carnegie (India), Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), China Institute of International Studies, Centre for Foreign Relations, and Center for Strategic and International Studies (USA). The latest developments related to the subject were thoroughly followed through news portals including the ASEAN News, The Hindu (India), Business Standard (India), The Economic Times (India), The Times of India, The Straits Times (Singapore) and Viet Nam News (Vietnam).

The use of the above-mentioned methods and research approach that combines content analysis, process tracing, semi-structured interviews, and case study method enabled a more in-depth investigation of what determines India's foreign and security policy. The collected data offered an inside-out view of Indian behaviour and produced fresh insights on the subject that went beyond the mainstream paradigms of IR.

3. Historical Overview of India's Role Conceptions: 1947–2000

This chapter provides a historical overview of India's master and auxiliary RCs and role performance, tracing back to its early years as a sovereign country. This chapter broadly covers three prominent time periods: 1947 to the early 1960s, the mid-1960s to late 1980s, and the first decade of the 1990s. To clarify, it only covers RCs that are germane to India's foreign and security policy actions towards SEA and EA. It is worth noting that the stated time periods are not precise demarcations that denote a clear-cut change in RCs. There are relative overlaps despite changing RCs, and the time periods are rough estimations and not categorical timeframes. This chapter demonstrates a strong correlation between India's RCs and role performance, and the interplay of self-conception and role prescription towards role evolution.

3.1 Early Years to early-1960s: Non-Aligned Asian Power and Peacemaker

Before its official independence in 1947, India was subject to British colonial rule for almost two centuries. Despite India's historical, cultural, civilisational, and trade ties with the East of Asia, there was a limited engagement of the region during the colonial years. British India's subcontinental outlook and policies had weakened India's former linkages with the East. Whatever connections existed were driven by the British Raj's policies, which flowed from the empire's commercial and political considerations (Pandya and Malone, 2010). Nonetheless, a few years before India's independence, the contours of its self-conceptions towards SEA and EA began shaping up.

As a sovereign country, India's foreign and security policy formulations were dominated by India's first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru and his confidant and advisor, Krishna Menon. For the first 15 years after independence, Nehru was not only the PM but also the FM. Nanda (2003, p. 122) points out that Nehru "himself was taking practically all foreign policy decisions". Nehru's leadership proved to be a determining factor for India's early master and auxiliary self-conceptions, which shaped the future trajectory of India's foreign and security policy conduct.

India's role performance (foreign policy and security conduct) towards Asia at large and SEA and EA, in particular, were guided by a range of master and auxiliary self-conceptions. The fundamental self-conceptions were a *non-*

aligned actor and an *Asian power*. These master self-conceptions were supplemented by a range of auxiliary conceptions, including the *regional peacemaker* role (Z. D. Singh, 2018).[12] The self-conceptions emanated from a belief in the greatness of Indian civilisational history, its experience as a colony, its perception of the Asian region, and Gandhian teaching about "the moral force of a political subjectivity grounded in non-violent struggle" (Mishra & Narayanan, 1981 as cited in Abraham 2008, p. 195). The representation of a glorious Indian past informed a sense of 'Indian-ness', which was connected to the "wider civilisational heritage of Asia" (Sinderpal Singh, 2010, p. 7). Considering this context, Nehru assumed India to be worthy of playing a leadership role for the newly independent countries of Asia (and Africa). Nehru and his advisors were convinced of the indispensability of India's regional leadership. In the words of Nehru, "India is the natural leader of South East Asia if not of some other parts of Asia also. There is at present no other possible leadership in Asia and any foreign leadership will not be tolerated" (Nehru, 1988, p. 611). Within Asia, the SEA and EA countries were crucial for New Delhi as they formed a crucial part of Nehru's broader vision of a 'new Asia' and his belief in Asian unity (Segil, 2015).

Raghavan (2015), a noted historian of India's foreign policy, reasons that Nehru's idea of seeing India as a powerful actor in Asia was not merely a hangover of the ideas of the British officials. Instead, it could be traced to India's size, geographical location, and the global setting in which India was operating at the time. India's self-conception as a major regional power was strongly linked to its contributions during the Second World War. India contributed approximately 2.5 million men to the War and acted as a "major military-industrial and logistical base for Allied operations in SEA and West Asia" (Raghavan, 2015, para. 3). By the end of the Second World War, when Japan suffered a significant blow and China was plagued by civil war, India remained the "most potent Asian military power".

In addition to this, Nehru had a serious notion of Asian unity and India's role in ensuring that. India sought common ground with the Asian countries on multiple issues ranging from colonialism to great power dominance. India's strong linkages with Asia were also rooted in their struggle to overthrow western imperialism. During the last years of British rule in India, the Indian public and elites diligently followed the freedom movements in Asian countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia. As a result, Indian leaders and political elites felt connected to the freedom struggle in SEA against their colonisers. Their shared experience, anti-colonial sentiments and the struggle for self-determination helped facilitate a pan-Asian conception, which shaped Nehru's vision of Asian unity.

As part of the provincial Indian government, Nehru hosted the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) in March–April 1947 in New Delhi. The conference was a crucial step to rekindle the spirit of Asia and strengthen the post-colonial

Asian unity. Leaders of national movements and 25 Asian countries attended the event. At that time, the conference was considered a success. The ARC had modest objectives, which, according to Indian leaders, were satisfactorily met. There was consensus on the need for 'Asian unity' based on civilisational claims, and India's central position within the continent was recognised (Sinderpal Singh, 2010).

India showcased its leadership again during a second major conference organised by Nehru in January 1949 in New Delhi. At that time, the Dutch intended to re-establish colonial rule over Indonesia. The conference helped rally support for the Sukarno-led struggle against the Dutch power (Morning Bulletin, 1949). This event was an opportunity for India to attempt to perform its self-conception as an Asian leader, champion Asian unity and stand in support of victims of colonisation, and finally position itself as a regional peacemaker. Much to the consternation of the western countries and the Soviet Union (which had ideological differences with India), New Delhi mobilised support among the Afro-Asian countries. Participants at the gathering criticised the Dutch government and called for the UN's action on the issue.

India's self-conception as an Asian leader was supported by a range of external actors, as seen during the Asian Relations Organisation gathering (1947) and the New Delhi Conference on Indonesia (1949). In sum, the convergence between India's self-conception and external expectations resulted in relatively stable RCs. Judging by India's material resources, it was easy to discern that New Delhi was punching above its weight. To expand, New Delhi asserted its leadership mostly as a diplomatic and political actor in the region. New Delhi had little sway as an economic actor because of its inward-looking economic approach and obsession with self-reliance. Even in terms of security, India's power projection capabilities were limited to its immediate neighbourhood. Regardless, India's external conduct was heavily driven by its master RC as a major Asian power.

The other relevant self-conception was a non-aligned role. At the time of India's independence, the world was engulfed by Cold War politics. Actors in the global system chose to side with either the US or the USSR. India did not wish to align with either. Instead, New Delhi's non-aligned posture became one of the constraining factors for better Indo-US relations for decades to come. Nehru, as a part of the interim government (in June 1946), stated that an independent India would pursue a "much more independent role in foreign affairs" (*Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* [*SWJN*], 1946 cited in Raghavan, 2016, p. 246). Similar sentiments were asserted by Krishna Menon, who remarked that "we [India] would not go back to the West with its colonialism, and there was no question of our going the Soviet way" (Brecher, 2016, p. 130). Many domestic factors drove India's decision to remain non-aligned. There was consensus that if New Delhi aligned with any side, it could be easily

dragged into a conflict not of its own choosing. Retaining India's autonomy to undertake foreign policy or security was perceived as the key.

Further, there were genuine limitations in terms of India's military and economic capabilities to align. The Indian leadership believed that if India aligned with any of the military blocs, it would be required to earmark funds for security-related activities, thus taking a toll on the country's resources for developmental needs (Mukherjee, 2010). The former Indian FS, Shyam Saran, argues that if India were to join the US camp, then it would be forced to view the USSR and its supporters as India's enemy even though the USSR camp in no way posed a threat to India (Saran, 2017c). India's self-conception as a non-aligned actor was acknowledged by external actors in due course and therefore transitioned into a stable RC.

Briefly put, the RCs, as a major Asian power and a non-aligned actor, became stronger and shaped India's foreign policy and security conduct (role performance) in Asia and particularly towards SEA and EA. Some of the exemplary cases to showcase this include New Delhi's policy actions during the Korean crisis and the First Indochina War.

3.1.1 Korean Crisis

Even though many Asian countries were part of one of the two blocs, the dynamics of the Cold War had not directly impacted the continent until 1950. When North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, the former was backed by the Soviet Union and the latter by the US. The Western bloc feared that the fall of South Korea would indicate 'communist hegemony' in Asia. India's initial response was in tune with its RC as a non-aligned power, which meant that it was averse to taking a side. When the US introduced a United National Security Council (UNSC) resolution condemning North Korea and called for a complete withdrawal of North Korean forces to the 38th Parallel, India supported the resolution, inviting Chinese and Soviet ire. However, when an additional resolution called for assisting South Korea and establishing a unified command, India abstained. Predictably, the US was angered by the Indian move. India's abstention made strategic sense to its policymakers as they wanted to avoid any foreign powers from getting involved in Asia and threatening its perceived unity. Nehru remarked, "what happens in Asia concerns us much more, and we are part of it" (Nehru, 1954 as cited in Z. D. Singh, 2018, p. 99). Throughout the Korean crisis, India's policy was guided by its RCs of a non-aligned Asian actor and a regional peacemaker.

Nehru was convinced that Peking would overtly enter the crisis if American forces crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea (Mukherjee, 2010). Zorawar D. Singh argues that Nehru perceived the events in the Korean peninsula (and the First Indochina War) as "indivisible fronts of a wider threat to Asian

security" and responded to "counteract the expansion of Cold War (Z. D. Singh, 2018, p.99). Nehru was convinced that "war in any part of Asia" would have "some close effect on India" (Bajpai to Pandit quoted in Madan, 2020, p. 33). There was persistent fear in New Delhi that the Korean crisis would lead to an arms race in Asia and new military alliances within Asia.

Performing the role of a regional peacemaker, India emerged as the sole link between China and the West (Mukherjee, 2010). India communicated the Chinese message to the West, dissuading them from crossing the 38th Parallel. Regardless, the US forces headed towards the Yalu River that separated Korea from China and expectedly, China became a party to the conflict and retaliated (Mukherjee, 2010). A military deadlock ensued. To break the diplomatic and military stalemate, Nehru supported China's candidature to the UN Security Council (UNCS), where he hoped all the parties could work towards a solution. According to Nehru and his colleagues, Peking needed to be involved at the high table to resolve the crisis and socialise China into becoming a responsible regional actor (Raghavan, 2012).

Even though India and the others took diplomatic steps to ensure a solution, the stalemate continued until June 1953. On 7 July 1950, the UNSC requested UN members to provide military assistance for peacekeeping operations during the crisis. India abstained from pursuing this request and decided against sending any fighting troops. The idea of dispatching the military conflicted with India's role as a regional peacemaker, and therefore it remained opposed to using military power. In the words of Nehru, "our [India's] moral help is a big enough thing, which outbalances the petty military help of some other countries" (Nehru, 1993, p. 314). Alternatively, India agreed to send a paramedical unit to Korea, comprising more than 300 personnel.

In recognition of India's bipartisan approach to the issue, it was appointed as the Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) after the ceasefire. In the language of role theory, India's self-conception as a non-aligned actor corresponded with Alter's role prescription. New Delhi was expected to maintain a balance between the involved parties and be the custodian of non-repatriated Prisoners of War (POW) in Korea (Tayal, 2014). New Delhi also needed to execute the terms of reference to the NNRC. The Indian government provided 6000 Indian Custodial Force to Korea, which was tasked to hold custody of more than 22,000 POWs and ensure their repatriation or disposal (Bhardwaj, 2014). The Korean crisis marked India's first-ever overseas security operation, which supplemented India's broader RC as a regional peacemaker. Over time, New Delhi got frustrated with its inability to execute the NNRC's terms due to periodic objections from other countries, including China, the US, and South Korea. Resultantly, India resigned from the post and transferred the non-repatriated POWs to the UN. This can be regarded as the first episode wherein India tried to perform the range of its RCs.

3.1.2 First Indochina War

The other crisis where India's role performance was a clear illustration of its RCs was the First Indochina War (modern-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). At a time when most Asian countries were close to gaining independence, Indochina was experiencing an escalation in its freedom struggle against the French. While the Indochina crisis began in late 1946, it eventually got hijacked by the geopolitics of the Cold War. By the 1950s, America was assisting the French forces (financially and militarily) against the Vietnamese rebels, which were backed by Communist China. In February 1954, India entered the equation as a relevant actor after Nehru appealed (recommended by Menon) for an immediate ceasefire. The Indian government also supported the call for independence against the French colonial power. Menon surmised the French government was more receptive to the idea of the ceasefire, but its actions were restricted by the Americans (Z. D. Singh, 2018). He urged Nehru to seek Chinese and Russian support to ensure some progress on the issue. At the time, Nehru was trying his best to keep the influence of the Cold War out of Asia and away from India's periphery. In a letter dated 1 July 1954, he made clear that "our [Indian] policy externally is to prevent war because that is the primary consideration today … what happens in Asia concerns us much more, and we are part of it" (Nehru, 2014, p. 374).

When the issue of Indochina was under discussion at the Geneva Conference (a congregation of nine countries including the US, the UK, France, and the USSR), Nehru urged the participants to have an Indian representation. As an Asian power, India wanted the European powers to be sensitive to the desires of the Asian countries (Nanda, 2003). Nehru's appeal for an Indian representation received little enthusiasm among the western powers at the Geneva Conference. Nevertheless, New Delhi gathered support from the Asian countries (Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Burma) at the Colombo Conference in April–May 1954 and introduced a six-point plan to resolve the crisis (Nanda, 2003). After the Colombo Powers agreed on the six-point plan, Nehru sent an emissary (Krishna Menon) to Geneva. The emissary was tasked to communicate the Asian perspective to the western countries. By the end of the Geneva Conference, a ceasefire was finalised.

According to the Geneva Conference's agreement, Vietnam was divided into the North (with a communist government) and the South (with a nationalist government). France withdrew its troops from the north, and Laos and Cambodia were accepted by the Communists as independent countries. Despite India's (or any other Asian country's) official absence from the conference, Asian perspectives were incorporated in the final decision of the Geneva Conference. Menon was able to gain support from the British government and eventually from the French (Nanda, 2003). The French PM, Pierre Mendès-France, acknowledged India's role in the negotiation when he referred to the

conference as the “ten-power conference—nine at the table—and India” (Mendes-France quoted in Suryanarayan, 2004, para. 14). Overall, Nehru’s objectives during the First Indochina War were somewhat met. Also, India’s role performance as a non-aligned Asian leader and a peacemaker assumed relevance and was supported by some external actors.

Asian powers such as China requested to appoint India as the Chair of the International Control Commission (ICC). Along with Canada and Poland, India was appointed to the ICC to supervise the implementation of the Geneva agreement. India’s involvement with the ICC was an endorsement of its role as a non-aligned Asian actor and regional peacemaker. Among other responsibilities, New Delhi oversaw the imports of foreign armaments into Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Chandra, Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2008). Notably, the Indochina War never really stopped and eventually led to the Vietnam War or the Second Indochina War.

3.1.3 Emerging Conception–Performance Gap

By the mid-1950s, the limits to India’s role performance became more apparent. India’s ability to perform its established RCs was being mitigated by Cold War politics and the emergence of another crucial Asian power, China. The change was most apparent during the Bandung Conference, which was held in April 1955 and attended by 29 countries from Asia and Africa. It was intended to be another gathering of post-colonial states such as the ARC, but the scope was expanded to include African countries. Unlike the solidarity felt during the ARC, there was limited cooperation. A lot of time had passed since the ARC in 1947, and the harsh reality of *realpolitik* and the dynamics of Cold War politics undermined Nehru’s vision of Asian unity. Anti-colonial sentiments and the notion of ‘Asian unity’, which was rife in the 1947 conference, were no longer sufficient to address the divisions within the region (Abraham, 2008). The establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1954 had brought out the political incompatibilities, mistrust, and discord between the Asian countries. SEATO was a US-led collective defence grouping against communism and included France, Great Britain, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan (Farrell, 2011). In a letter detailing the conference, Nehru noted that some delegates were “committed to either NATO or SEATO and were thus parts of the American system of military pacts and alliances. They had been fully briefed for the occasion and took up, almost in detail, the American line” (Nehru, 2014, p. 461).

With the hope of reviving the Asian unity, India strived to include China in multilateral forums to ensure greater understanding between Beijing and other Asian countries. Nehru introduced China to the Bandung Conference. Nanda (2003, p. 151) believes that Nehru hoped “Premier Zhou would endorse

his stand on regional and global issues just out of sheer gratitude, thereby helping in the elevation of Nehru's status as the undisputed leader of Asia". The actual events, however, proved to be far from these calculations. According to Nehru (2014, p. 462), Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Thailand, and the Philippines (members of SEATO and the Central Treaty Organisation [CENTO]) "fully represented the pure American doctrine" and opposed China's participation and India's involvement at the Bandung conference.

China's participation diminished India's perceived prominence during the conference. Throughout the event, Zhou Enlai utilised every opportunity to establish links with various Asian and African countries. During the proceedings of the conference, the tussle for leadership between India and China became pronounced. Ayoob (1990, p. 9) avers that the Indian delegation saw China's performance as "an exercise in one-upmanship at India's expense", despite Indian efforts to alleviate the fears of many countries regarding China's presence at Bandung. The proceedings of the conference and associated developments made Indian policymakers realise that there was a noticeable gap between the role New Delhi sought for itself and the expectations of Asian countries, specifically the SEA countries.

There was a subtle but perceptible intra-role conflict between India's self-conception and external expectations, especially concerning the US and its allies. India steadily withdrew from the Asian stage and resolved to pursue non-alignment more strongly. Although non-alignment was one of India's master RCs, it became the focal point post-Bandung conference. India's role performance as a non-aligned actor overshadowed its previously prominent role performance as an Asian leader. The SEA region was essential for Nehru to gain support for India's role performance, although there were serious challenges in this regard.

The undivided attention on the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) meant that India was slowly departing from the Asian stage. It was shifting towards a more expanded geographical outlook. India's role performance in this regard led to the emergence of the NAM.[13] The impetus for the NAM came from the Brioni Declaration of 1956, when the leaders of Yugoslavia, Egypt, and India met in Yugoslavia. The Brioni agreement formed the basis of the first Non-Aligned Summit at Belgrade (Yugoslavia) in September 1961. The summit witnessed participation from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, thus highlighting the expansiveness and importance of the idea at that time. The participating countries were primarily united in their views about the risks of the Cold War and needed to act together to reduce tensions (Crabb, 1965, as cited in Abraham, 2008). The NAM began as an organisation with two "primary objectives: (a) non-alignment, and (b) national liberation or decolonisation of third world states" (Keethaponcalan, 2016, p. 3). These objectives resonated with the master and auxiliary RCs of India.

3.1.4 Determinants of Changing Role Conceptions

India's role conduct in the NAM provided it greater leverage to negotiate with the great powers of the time. However, it had little relevance to India's neighbourhood, especially vis-à-vis China and Pakistan. Focusing on the NAM and other issues, India did not pay much attention to investments in security-related areas or its defence preparedness, especially on its north-eastern border (Ganguly, 2010). Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, India only had a degree of diplomatic influence bereft of any economic or military capabilities (Nanda, 2003). Even when New Delhi had sufficient evidence to confirm China's security threats along the northern borders, the defence budget or levels of military preparations did not witness any surge (Ganguly, 1991). India's military was primarily focused on its disputed border with Pakistan. The limits of New Delhi's dependence on diplomacy and political clout were soon to become evident.

Since the late 1950s, India had been struggling in its relations with China, particularly over the disputed land border, which was inherited from the British Raj. After negotiations with China failed, India initiated a Forward policy to deter Chinese incursions by setting up posts and increasing patrolling by the Indian forces (Raghavan, 2010). It was hoped that such a strategy would signal India's resolve and keep China in check. Nehru and his advisors grossly misread China's intentions and were convinced that it would not contest the forward policy. Also, the policy was conceived without paying heed to the lack of military preparedness in India. In October 1962, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) attacked the Indian forces, and the Indian side suffered a big blow. Subsequently, the PLA withdrew but retained the stretch of land it had claimed in the western sector (Aksai Chin) of the disputed boundary (Ganguly, 2010). The land retained in 1962 continues to be a subject of negotiations between the two countries, along with new claims by China in recent years (PTI, 2017a). Nehru, who had long been admired as a statesman in India, faced the harshest criticism from the domestic public and Indian political leaders. J. N. Dixit, the former India FS, called the war "an end of illusions" (Dixit, 1998 as cited in Nanda, 2003, p. 195).

Even Nehru conceded that "we [India] were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and we were living in an artificial atmosphere of our own creation; we have been shocked out of it" (Nehru, 1984, p. 223). India was dismayed by Chinese aggression and was also perturbed because most non-aligned countries were reluctant to favour India or condemn Chinese actions. Ironically enough, India was compelled to request aid from the western bloc and received it immediately (Brecher, 1979). The fear of the Chinese escalating the war was so intense that Nehru is said to have requested American assistance and wished for "immediate delivery of fourteen squadrons of U.S. fighter planes […] and three squadrons of bombers […] to attack the Chinese

communications lines" (Bowles, 1971, p. 474). During an intense debate in the Indian Parliament, one of the Parliamentarians remarked—"How are we to become strong if we hang on to this non-alignment policy […] Non-alignment has not served us; does not serve any longer. The sooner we get rid of it, the better" (Das, 2012, p. 136).

In essence, the 1962 war sparked a significant role change for India (for more details, see Z. D. Singh, 2018). Some master (Asian power) and auxiliary RCs (peacemaker) began waning off soon after. The post-1962 period was a time of serious introspection. The Indian leadership began considering altering India's fundamental RCs, thereby its foreign policy conduct. In 1963, Nehru lamented, "Our efforts at peace and following the path of peace have been knocked on the head" (Nehru as quoted in Pradhan & Godbole, 1999, p. 179). After the war, a change in India's tone towards security and 'Asian security' was noticeable. Nehru and his associates, who were resistant to military spending before, embarked on a massive overhauling of security policies (Ganguly, 2010). A significant restructuring of India's military thinking, assets, and threat perceptions was underway. Almost two years after the Sino-India war, Jawaharlal Nehru passed away in May 1964, marking the end of an era. After Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri took over the political reigns and became the second Indian PM. India's role change got crystallised as its master RCs were revised soon after. Prime Minister Shastri embarked on increased defence spending, which continued under the next Indian PM, Indira Gandhi (Madan, 2020).

3.2 Mid-1960s to Late 1980s: Subcontinental Power and Security-Seeker

The Indian foreign policymakers realised that although India's role performance as a non-aligned actor enhanced its global standing, it had failed to combat China. It also produced limited benefits when dealing with the immediate neighbourhood. India did not have cosy relations with most of its neighbours and shared an acrimonious relationship with Pakistan and now, even China. Given India's mixed experience, its RC and performance as an Asian power receded dramatically. It was replaced with a new self-conception—*a subcontinental power*.[14] During Shastri's short stint as the PM, the focus on security and military preparedness was relatively high, having learned the lessons from the 1962 debacle. India's concentration on South Asia was evident in its reluctance to pursue even an indirect security role in SEA. Singapore was grappling with Chinese-supported communist influence internally and faced a dominant Indonesia and Malaysia externally (Brewster, 2012). Singapore requested In-

dian PM Shastri for assistance in training its military forces but received no response from New Delhi (Brewster, 2012, p. 106).

After Shastri's mysterious death in January 1966, Indira Gandhi was elected as the PM. She came to power when India's regional position had declined considerably, and the country was suffering from numerous domestic challenges. Indira Gandhi, who was Nehru's daughter, remained in power for long stretches beginning from 1966 to 1977 and again in 1980 until her assassination in 1984.[15] Like her father, Indira Gandhi also dominated India's foreign policy decision-making. Gandhi and her core advisors—P. N. Haksar, Rameshwarnath Kao, D. P. Dhar, T. N. Kaul—were the "only source of coordination for different branches of government" (Mansingh, 2015, p. 114; Also, see Z. D. Singh, 2018). Gandhi built upon the momentum of altering RCs, which began after the 1962 war with China and was propelled further with the 1965 war with Pakistan. The consequences of Nehru's policy decisions had awakened New Delhi to the risks of ignoring the security sector. That New Delhi felt compelled to request military assistance from the Western bloc during the crisis indicated the compromise it had to make. Zorawar Singh (2018) underscores another determinant of the new self-conception. He points out that India realised the cons of depending on the US during the temporary period of India–US strategic cooperation, which began during the 1962 war.

The quest for security was strengthened due to the intensification of the Cold War (external determinants) and economic inadequacies at home (internal determinants). According to the former Indian ambassador K. Shankar Bajpai, Gandhi developed an "acute sense of the role of power and of India's interests" (Bajpai quoted in Z. D. Singh, 2018, p. 195). Indira Gandhi and her advisors shed the former RC of a 'regional peacemaker'. India's future role performance was heavily informed by the new security-seeking self-conception. Gandhi chose to embrace a strong security role. To a great extent, this decision was influenced by the domestic political situation and international pressures (some real and some exaggerated) that Indira Gandhi's government faced. Chacko (2016) points out that PM Gandhi faced an immense political backlash at home at the time. Her government's uneasy relationship with Washington, in particular with President Richard Nixon, infused strong distrust towards the US. India's other bilateral relations in the region were in no better shape. There was a "climate of psychological insecurity" (Gupta, 1990, p. 712), and there was near-perpetual fear of being toppled from power at home and distrust towards external countries alike.

Gandhi and her advisors worked on consolidating India's position in South Asia (particularly concerning Burma, Sri Lanka, and Nepal). New Delhi pursued policies that allowed it to establish military and political predominance in the region. From the Indian viewpoint, it was essential to establish a decisive security role because they feared that Beijing could exploit India's complicated equation with its bordering countries (Nanda, 2003). These fears were substan-

tiated by China and Pakistan's growing partnership, which could undercut India's position in South Asia. During the 1965 India–Pakistan War, China alerted its troops along the India–China border, thereby putting pressure on New Delhi. When India requested US assistance, it refused. Washington's refusal strengthened India's resolve to seek security unilaterally. These events fuelled New Delhi's sense of insecurity, and the policymakers wanted to neutralise any threat to Indian security along its land and maritime borders. Overall, the confluence of these factors formed the basis for India's new master self-conception of a *security seeker*.[16] At the time, the decision-makers were mindful of India's economic and military weaknesses. Therefore, they continued to focus on the limited geographical area of South Asia rather than stretching commitments to other regions.

Intending to maximise security, India played its diplomatic cards with dexterity vis-à-vis the crucial external actors, the USSR and the USA (Joshi, 2019). Eventually, India carved out space for itself to perform the role of the subcontinental power. New Delhi directed efforts towards military modernisation and even reappraised India's nuclear policy. Under Indira Gandhi, India rose as a strong South Asian military power. Having a subcontinental focus meant that investments were directed towards the modernisation of the IA and IAF in case of a war with China or Pakistan. Resultantly, the sea power did not receive sufficient attention (Mohan, 2013a). India's continental outlook complemented its conception of the limited regional space of South Asia and northern IOR. New Delhi now saw SEA and EA as distant regions, and this inward focus limited any potential interest in the East of Asia.

In the late 1960s, when the British commenced their withdrawal from the SEA region, there was growing concern in the region, especially among the non-communist SEA states (Thompson, 2015). There was also scepticism over the US' commitment, given the Nixon Doctrine, which signalled America's retreat from the security role it played in Asia previously (Ravenal, 1971). Countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia were anxious about the ensuing 'void' and the possibility of Chinese influence/Communist hold in the region. Given Singapore's good relations with India, Singapore's PM, Lee Kuan Yew, requested Indira Gandhi for the IN to take over the regional security role previously played by the British Royal Navy in SEA (Suryanarayan, 2008 cited in Brewster, 2009). He repeated the request in 1970 during Yew's visit to India (Brewster, 2009). Declining such a possibility, the Indian FM Swaran Singh clarified that New Delhi's interests lay in "keeping its western sea lanes open" (Lee, 2000, p. 254). India's response was expected given its self-conception, which was limited to the subcontinent, with limited interest in SEA and EA. In a statement by B. R. Bhagat, the then Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, he clarified:

> "If there was a defence agreement [with SEA] it would only mean India committing her manpower to the defence of areas which is beyond our capacity at present

> … If we dispersed our efforts and took on responsibilities that we are not capable of shouldering, it would not only weaken our own defence but would create a false sense of security and might even provoke a greater tension in the area" (Bhagat as quoted in Brewster, 2014, pp. 128–9).

By the 1970s, Cold War politics was once again playing out in South Asia. The systemic developments of the early 1970s intensified India's security-seeking role performance. In the late 1960s, a thaw in the US–China ties appeared. Much to New Delhi's consternation, Pakistan had a part to play in the process (The White House, 2001). The contours of a Sino-US-Pakistan partnership in South Asia intensely exacerbated India's worry of being surrounded by inimical forces. The situation became more menacing because these events coincided with the Bangladesh Liberation War, which eventually metamorphosed into a full-blown India–Pakistan war in 1971 (Simha, 2011). American inclination towards Pakistan was conspicuous in their words and actions all through the crisis (Simha, 2011). New Delhi was fearful of any Chinese actions as well. Theoretically speaking, the US, China, and Pakistan's role expectations towards New Delhi conflicted intensely with India's self-conception as a subcontinental power. Intending to jealously guard its ability to perform the role, New Delhi sought partnership with the USSR.

The USSR was undergoing strained relations with China (Sino-Soviet split) alongside its ideological divide with the US. The confluence of these events created the ground for role compatibility between New Delhi and Moscow. Shortly after Kissinger's trip to Beijing, Indira Gandhi signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, in August 1971. The treaty aided India against any possible Chinese or American intervention on behalf of Pakistan during the 1971 Bangladesh crisis (Ayoob, 1990). This added a new role for India to perform—a partner to the Soviet Union. New Delhi continued to claim to be a support of non-alignment even as it tilted towards the USSR. India's persistence in not compromising its strategic autonomy ensured that the Indo-USSR relations did not transform into an alliance.

This is an appropriate juncture to highlight the inter-role conflict that Indian policymakers faced at the time. As India was pursuing its new self-conception of a Soviet partner, there was a role clash with the former RC of a non-aligned power. Unlike the role of Asian power, and peacemaker, which slowly faded, non-alignment continued to be relevant. Non-alignment no longer featured as a master RC but as an auxiliary one. There were instances where Gandhi and her advisors faced an inter-role conflict between the security-seeking role, the role of partner to the USSR, and the non-aligned power role. In such cases, New Delhi sought to strike a delicate balance and chose to perform the role that suited the context at hand. This was not always smooth and was visible in India's performance. There was a clear conception–performance gap, which was natural, considering that contradictory roles needed to be enacted simultaneously.

With assurance from the USSR, India launched a military operation in East Pakistan. India defeated the Pakistani forces. The war ended with the creation of a new country in South Asia, i.e., Bangladesh (Saikia, 2004). During the last days of the Indo-Pakistan war, Washington dispatched the USS Enterprise, a nuclear aircraft carrier of the US Seventh Fleet, to the Bay of Bengal. The move was motivated by the American government's desire to support its ally, Pakistan and dissuade India from attacking West Pakistan (Hiranandani, 2009). For most parts of the Cold War, New Delhi was wary of foreign powers in its maritime vicinity. India's attitude towards the IO was "proprietary, exclusionary, and rooted in the rhetoric of non-alignment" (Rehman, 2013, p. 131). Therefore, this incident had a lasting impression on the Indian policymakers and naval planners' minds, leading to a "strong sense of maritime embattlement" (Rehman, 2013, p. 132). The fear of a prominent seaward threat further added to India's quest for a strong security role.

India's victory in 1971 was a defining moment because it reestablished India's dominant position in the subcontinent (Ayoob, 1990). The dismemberment of Pakistan and standing up to the US pressure affirmed New Delhi's role performance as a subcontinental power. These events naturally impacted the external actors' perceptions of India. As a result, what began as a self-conception graduated into a distinct RC after India emerged as the subcontinent's preeminent security power. In this case, the self-conception did not shape up into an RC with support from most external powers but some crucial actors, such as the USSR. Overall, New Delhi's role performance and closeness to the USSR hampered its image in the eyes of the SEA and EA countries. New Delhi's role performance in the 1970s and its tilt towards the USSR during the Kampuchea crisis exacerbated the ASEAN countries' anxieties.

3.2.1 Two Vietnams and the Kampuchea Crisis

As covered above, India, during the Nehru years, was staunchly non-aligned and maintained equidistance from both North and South Vietnam. This was apparent in India's position during the Geneva Agreements of 1954. Following the same line, India offered de facto recognition to both the parties and even set up Consulate-Generals in Hanoi (North Vietnam) and Saigon (South Vietnam) (Thakur, 1979).

However, New Delhi's policy of not taking sides and remaining truly non-aligned with regard to Hanoi and Saigon (present Ho Chi Minh City) altered after the 1971 war. Driven by its security seeker role, India's Vietnam policy centred around the objective of "limiting the influence of the US and China in Indochina" (Brewster, 2009, p. 601). Until the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, the USSR and China fought on the same side against America. The relations worsened to the extent that they were involved in a war in 1969. As India and

the USSR established greater role compatibility, New Delhi changed its stand on Vietnam and sided with the Soviet Union. In January 1971, India upgraded its relationship with Hanoi (the regime supported by the Soviet Union) from the consular level to the ambassador level (Thakur, 1992). Its diplomatic relations with US-aided Saigon remained unchanged. India's decision met with immense criticism in Saigon and other ASEAN countries. India's subdued condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan further damaged its image among the ASEAN countries. The fallout was damaging to such a degree that India, which had been a part of the ICC in 1954, was not allowed to participate in the International Commission for Control and Supervision (upgraded version of the ICC) in 1973 (Tucker, 2000). Overall, India's closeness with the USSR remained a major irritant in the India-SEA relations until the Cold War ended.

The Janata Party replaced the Gandhi-led government in 1977. Although the Janata Party had a short tenure in the government, it worked hard to align India's role performance with 'genuine non-alignment' and even attempted to mend ties with China and the SEA countries. In December 1978, Vietnam attacked Kampuchea and defeated the Kampuchean Revolutionary Army. On 8 January 1979, a pro-Vietnamese government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), was set up in Phnom Penh. In response, ASEAN rallied together to find a viable solution to the crisis. ASEAN's diplomatic machinery worked hard to persuade countries to not recognise the Vietnam-backed regime in Kampuchea. They were in talks with India through Malaysia, which enjoyed good relations with New Delhi. Malaysia was putting in extra efforts to persuade New Delhi to refrain from supporting the PRK. The Indian government adhered to this expectation until Indira Gandhi's Indian National Congress (INC) came back to power in January 1980. In July, India officially recognised the PRK regime in Kampuchea. The decision came when Vietnam entered Thai territory, which coincided with the visit of a high-level Vietnamese delegation to Russia (Ayoob, 1990). These developments convinced the ASEAN countries that India's move was wholly influenced by Moscow (Ayoob, 1990).

The rationale behind the move was, to a great extent, embedded in India's master RCs of a security seeker and subcontinental power. According to John Garver—

> "Gandhi *realised* that if India were to become the paramount power in South Asia, it would have to prevent a Chinese advance into Southeast Asia. From *Gandhi's* perspective, if Beijing succeeded in breaking *Hanoi's* will and in restoring its Khmer Rouge clients to power in Kampuchea, China would be in a much stronger position to contest Indian pre-eminence in South Asia" (Garver, 1987, pp. 1207–08).

India's 1980 decision to recognise the PRK regime strained the Indo-SEA relations bringing them to their nadir. The regional response to India's move was strong and vocal. India's relations with its supporters in the region, such as

Malaysia and Singapore, witnessed a blow. As a result, there were minimal high-level contacts between India and ASEAN from 1980 to 1985–86, after which the relations saw some improvements (MEA, 1986). During Indira Gandhi's rule, the Indian government realised the futility of engaging with the ASEAN organisation (formed in 1967), given the roadblocks. However, the attempts to engage individual ASEAN countries bilaterally were ongoing. In October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her bodyguards. After that, her son, Rajiv Gandhi, took over the political reigns of the INC and was elected as the PM in 1984.

3.2.2 Failed Attempts at Re-engaging the East

During Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, India continued to perform the established RCs. However, in contrast to the preceding years, there was a keenness to improve relations with the ASEAN and EA countries. There was a growing awareness in New Delhi that the decision to recognise Kampuchea was counterproductive. ASEAN's official position had converged with China on Kampuchea, and the US and China stood on the same side to oppose Vietnam (Ayoob, 1990). India's support to Vietnam did not fetch any significant benefits for India. Instead, the cons outweighed the pros and brought China closer to the ASEAN countries and the US. India was also insulated from the positive changes taking place regionally and globally. With growing economic globalisation and liberalisation, the region's increased economic performance gained traction in global affairs. Asia was no stranger to this phenomenon. The Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan), other ASEAN countries, and most importantly, Japan displayed their economic strength. Hard power, despite its relevance, was no longer the defining factor in international politics. The success stories of Asian economies impacted the Indian decision-makers. New Delhi wanted to iron out the differences with ASEAN states and find a solution to their political impasse. There had been a window of opportunity for better economic ties when Rajiv Gandhi came into power. First, the new PM did not have the baggage of being pro-Soviet and pro-Vietnam. From 1985 to 1989, Indian officials (including the PM) undertook a number of diplomatic trips and exchanges with SEA and EA (MEA, 1986).

The relatively positive regional response to Indian overtures was embedded in economic considerations. SEA and EA's interest in India were piqued by spurts of liberal policy and reduced government intervention, as implemented by the Rajiv Gandhi administration. This enhanced the attractiveness of India's huge market. After enjoying two decades of economic growth, the Asian countries began experiencing external shocks such as fluctuating oil prices in the early 1980s. The recession in 1985/86 adversely impacted the East Asian economies, motivating them to diversify their economic ties with other

countries. Due to unfavourable economic policies in the West and the uncertain performance of Japan's Yen, the SEA and ASEAN countries looked to countries such as China and India (Sridharan, 1993). The India-SEA bilateral relations progressed incrementally, especially with Malaysia and Singapore. Japan invested heavily in India's automobile industry. What else was particularly striking was their mutual interest in finding a solution to the ongoing Kampuchea/Cambodia crisis. Even as there were genuine efforts from both sides, the enthusiasm dipped in the following years. Kripa Sridharan claims that persisting differences in political viewpoints between India and the non-communist SEA/EA countries and New Delhi's continued cooperation with the USSR led to a "lack of political conviction" from both ends (Sridharan, 1993, p. 132).

Besides, the India-SEA political climate was plagued (once again) by India's military activities in the subcontinent, including its growing naval power in the late 1980s. Under Rajiv Gandhi, India continued to pursue the RC of a subcontinental power and security-seeker. The modernisation of the defence forces continued apace, albeit with fluctuations due to paucity of funds. Perceiving land-based threats from China and Pakistan, and a seaward threat from the US, the Indian government expanded the defence budgets when the economic situation allowed. The defence budget, which was 3.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the pre-1985 period, jumped to 3.9% of the GDP in 1987–88 (Sridharan, 1993). Given the overall jump in defence spending and acquisitions, the Indian naval arm received a greater share. The funds were used for the acquisition of armed submarines and other relevant weapon systems. In a short time, the IN was poised to expand its reach in the IOR, which further caused concern among the SEA countries, particularly Indonesia and Australia.[17]

Besides, India's security policies and military actions in South Asia could not be overlooked. India intervened militarily in Sri Lanka against the warring ethnic groups in 1987. The Indian forces were initially dispatched for peacekeeping. Over time, New Delhi got directly involved in the already precarious and complex conflict and suffered a setback. The Indian forces withdrew in 1990.[18] In 1988, the Indian government sent troops to the Maldives in a bid to rescue the regime from an armed coup. New Delhi also imposed restrictions on the movement of goods to Nepal after a fallout over the Indo-Nepalese Trade and Transit Treaty. Devin T. Hagerty argues that New Delhi's regional security policy sent "an unambiguous message […] that India will not allow its preeminent position in South Asia to be compromised" (Hagerty, 1991, p. 363). These developments earned New Delhi the title of a 'regional bully' (R. K. Singh, 2010, p. 19). The SEA countries saw India's security avatar in South Asia as a yardstick to judge New Delhi's intentions towards the farther regions.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, India's economy suffered greatly, resulting in limited funds for the Indian military, which affected its ability to pursue both its master RCs. Despite some attempts at trade liberalisation, pro-

gress was slow due to intense political opposition. India's economic health worsened with growing domestic political instability, and the INC was routed out of power in 1989. A number of short-term governments came to power and used the coffers to finance populist policies (Haokip, 2011).

With failed attempts at greater liberalisation, the 1990 Gulf crisis acted as the last straw on the camel's back. The Gulf crisis shook the Indian economy, which lost an unprecedented number of remittances coming from the Indians working in the Gulf countries. By June 1991, India had a foreign exchange that could only support three weeks of imports (Vikraman, 2017). The dire situation pushed India to liberalise its socialism-driven economy and adopt massive market reforms under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. Amid a deteriorating economy, India witnessed the fall of the USSR in 1991. The end of the Soviet Union was one of the most serious developments of the decade, with severe implications for India's RCs and role change. The domestic economic crisis compelled the government to undertake a drastic reduction of India's military budget in 1991 and 1992 (Trading Economics, n.d.). It further stifled New Delhi's ability to perform the roles of a subcontinental power and security seeker.

3.3 Early to Late 1990s: Emerging Economic Actor and Benign Power

The early 1990s marked a period of significant transition in terms of India's RCs, both master and auxiliary. The fall of the USSR in 1991—an external development—combined with domestic factors compelled the policymakers to rethink India's role in the region and the new world order. Due to India's extreme dependence on the USSR militarily, economically, and diplomacy-wise, its sudden collapse led to innumerable challenges. The USSR was one of India's important trading partners and an important market for its products. Likewise, the Indian military relied on their supplies, with almost 70% of Indian inventory comprising Soviet weaponry, bought at 'friendship prices' (Malik, 1993, p. 69). India was now bereft of the Soviet backing it had enjoyed vis-à-vis the US, the US-backed defence blocks, and China. The US was now the sole superpower, and China's economic progress made it worthy of global attention and strengthened its position in the SEA and EA regions.

The international environment was transforming dramatically. In the post–Cold War world, a country's economic strength and ability to partner with others were crucial determinants of a state's relevance and weight in the new world order. When many countries were accepting liberalism as a new way of conducting business, India was sagging under the weight of a declining economy. There was also a sense of awe with the fast-developing economies of

China and the SEA countries such as Indonesia. India developed an inclination to emulate their success. Within diplomatic circles, discussions were rife on diversifying India's global partnership and getting increasingly involved with the global economic system (Malik, 1993).

After a period of political instability, P. V. Narasimha Rao of the INC became the PM in June 1991 and led the most crucial economic and foreign policy transformation in India's history.[19] Rao and his advisors understood the urgent need to carve out a new role for India in response to the changing regional and international environment. The immediate priority was to address the financial crisis at hand. Unlike previous cases of role change, which took place through incremental changes of the self-conceptions and role prescriptions, the change in 1991 involved a sudden and significant transformation of most RCs, i.e., a role restructuring.

The disintegration of the USSR compelled New Delhi to urgently seek new partners to preserve its strategic and economic interests. The years 1991–92 saw macro-economic, structural, and sector-specific economic reforms. India's economic thinking shifted from a preference for the state-regulated economy to a market-oriented, private sector-driven economy. Direct taxes on corporates and individuals and export subsidies were removed. Former Indian Ambassador PMS Malik underscores that economics had never featured in India's foreign policy as strongly as it did in the early 1990s (Malik, 1997). India's economic restructuring was following the near-global trend of cutting down on military spending and redirecting efforts towards greater economic liberalisation and globalisation. This trend acted as a bulwark for the US-led international economic order, characterised by free and open markets, multilateral institutions, and increased globalisation. To manage its domestic economic challenges and remain relevant in the new world economic order, India had to reimagine its role. These imperatives prepared the ground for the rise of India's new self-conception of an *emerging economic actor*.

In addition to this, India adopted another self-conception of a *benign and cooperative power*. The Indian leadership and political elites began noticing the growing relevance of regionalism in Asia. Any further insulation from these trends would have left India marginalised in the newly-emerging regional landscape. Limaye (2000, p. 122) believes that engaging Asia was "seen as a step to possible inclusion in the broader Asia Pacific community" and "deemed vital if India was to avoid over-dependence upon any one power … and escape isolation and marginalisation in a new world order". Furthermore, as Mohan (2013b) noted, New Delhi's historical obsession with economic autarky began to be replaced by a preference for greater economic and geopolitical interdependence with the outside world. It was increasingly difficult for India to pursue any economic or security policy in an isolationist manner.

To be accepted as an Asian country and establish cooperative relations with the (eastern) Asian countries, it was important for New Delhi to align with

them in terms of economic and security orientation. Efforts were needed to shed off India's image as a 'big brother' or 'regional bully' (Majeed, 1990, p. 1097). Before establishing security cooperation, it was important to dissipate the negative perceptions of India's intentions. In the context of the SEA and EA countries, this was most relevant in the maritime space of the IO. Vice Admiral GM Hiranandani, former Vice Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS), revealed that the strategic community realised that India's naval expansion [of the late 1980s] had resulted in 'misplaced fears' and 'unneeded consternation' (Hiranandani, 2009, p. 27). Given this background, he adds that India wanted to dispel the concerns and decided to let "other navies interact with India's Navy during joint naval exercises at sea". Therefore, New Delhi had to project itself as a 'cooperative' and 'benign' power in the region (Naidu, 2013). Z. D. Singh (2017, p. 26) argues that India, with a focus on the economy, began discarding its "Indo-centric leadership images" and developed an inclination towards notions of "interdependence and connectivity". New Delhi no longer subscribed to the traditional stand of disallowing foreign militaries near its neighbouring spaces, specifically the seas of the IO (Mohan, 2010a).

India could perform these self-conceptions vis-à-vis SEA and EA because there was a corresponding counter-role from external actors. Alter's (SEA and EA's) opinion of India had changed in the post–Cold War period. The political and ideological differences that had affected India's relations with the region during the Cold War years had lost their relevance. India without the Soviet Union was perceived very differently in the region. Simply put, India's self-conceptions received support from external actors, which enabled it to transition into full-fledged RCs and perform accordingly.

3.3.1 Look East Policy

As soon as New Delhi implemented the economic reforms, it began searching for new partnerships to further its economic growth. New Delhi's main priority was to "open India's markets to international competition … encourage private investment … [and] liberalise access to foreign capital" (Wadhwa, 2004, p. 266). For this, it was looking for new economic partners that could further India's economic growth. This was when the eastern Asian region became most salient. There was minimal economic integration within South Asia, and India's relations with the Middle East had not reaped many benefits. The possibility of establishing economic ties with Central Asia was impeded by the lack of geographical connectivity. This was unlikely to change because of India's complicated relations with Pakistan, which had to be bypassed for greater physical connectivity with the region. The only region worth establishing economic ties with was the East of Asia. That SEA and EA were home to thriving economies made it imperative for New Delhi to look east.

Primarily driven by economic motives, India introduced the LEP in 1992. This was India's first major foreign policy initiative after the fall of the Soviet Union. The policy was a crucial step towards cultivating economic ties with the ASEAN members and the EA region. India was hopeful that increasing economic links with the ASEAN region would eventually lead to positive political understanding and strategic connections. More importantly, New Delhi was keen to attract foreign investment from Japan in EA (Dixit, 1996). During PM Rao's visit to Singapore in 1994, he said,

> "India has already taken steps to liberalise its currency regime, open the economy to more imports, investment and educate its people on the benefits of exposure to the outside world. The Asia Pacific would be the springboard for our leap into the global market place" (Nanda, 2003, pp. 274–5).

India's eagerness to seek economic cooperation with the East was followed by institutional changes. A new division in the MEA was established to facilitate coordination between the MEA and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and was headed by a senior bureaucrat (Naidu, 2011). The increasing priority of the SEA and EA region could also be gauged from the fact that the FS was directly overseeing the region in late 1992 (Dixit, 1996). This was a change from the previous practice when this region came under one of the secretaries of the MEA (Dixit, 1996).

The region welcomed New Delhi's economic liberalisation. India received extraordinary support from Singapore, which pushed for its participation as a Sectoral Dialogue partner in ASEAN. When other ASEAN members were unsure about New Delhi's opening to the East, Singapore rallied for its inclusion. There were many meetings between the ambassadors and high-level officials of Singapore and India. Finally, India was accorded the status of a Sectoral Dialogue partner with a focus on tourism, commerce, investments, and science and technology at the 4th ASEAN Summit in Singapore in January 1992. Graduating ahead, it became a Full Dialogue Partner in 1996.

There was a greater emphasis on projecting India as an 'outward-looking' country that was "liberalising its economy" and was "economically and strategically interdependent and complementary" with the ASEAN countries (Jaffrelot, 2003, p. 47). Foreign investment, which was scorned in the pre-1991 years, was viewed as 'necessary' after the economic reforms. There were signs of progress in the first decade of the LEP. For instance, India's share in ASEAN's export, which stood at 1% in 1991, increased to 3.3% by 2001 (Srivastava & Rajan, 2004). Further, India gained in terms of foreign investment from EA. Between 1991 to 2000, Japan and South Korea stood fourth and fifth, respectively, in the top five countries investing in India (Nagaraj, 2003).

Despite the flurry of diplomatic activities in the early 1990s and reciprocation from some countries (especially Singapore), India and the SEA/EA countries could not reap meaningful economic benefits from the arrangement. Given its size, geography, and economic potential (due to its huge market and

population), there was a self-belief among Indian decision-makers that it was an essential economic player in the Asian region. Based on this conviction, the leadership expected India to be included in the Asia-centric regional institutions. However, India failed to earn membership in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). It was not considered an important member even of the East Asian Economic Group, an initiative proposed by the Malaysian PM, Mahathir Mohamad (Naidu, 2011).

There was a gap between the regional expectations from New Delhi and India's role performance as an economic actor. To expand, the success of the LEP depended on India's ability to integrate with the region economically and in terms of regional connectivity. Given India's slow economic reforms and sluggishness due to its bureaucracy, it could not meet the expectations of the ASEAN and EA countries. They were unimpressed by the pace and scale of India's liberalisation. Indian bureaucracy was anything but pro-active, and domestic markets and politics appeared complicated and chaotic to engage meaningfully (Malone, 2011).

On the other hand, China, with its business-friendly environment and better infrastructure, was a more attractive investment and business destination. Further ahead, the LEP was challenged by the 1997 Asian financial crisis as it brought out India's limited relevance in the economic and political affairs of SEA and EA. Besides, the crisis enhanced China's regional standing after Beijing emerged as a valuable economic partner who attempted to minimise the collateral economic damage to the region. The crisis and increasing interdependence with China further slowed India's economic ties with the region.

3.3.2 Benign Power

The end of the Cold War compelled India to reform its economy-related roles and security roles. New Delhi retreated from the former RC of a security seeker and reoriented itself to the new role of a benign and cooperative power. Since the early 1990s, India gradually expanded security cooperation with the SEA countries. The primary rationale behind the security cooperation was not to assume a security role but to remove any distrust emanated from India's security role performance during the Cold War, especially in the late 1980s. New Delhi introduced Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) through a series of naval initiatives. Focusing on the SEA region was necessary because some countries had been most anxious about India's maritime build-up in the 1980s. New Delhi's actions were driven by its aim to "accommodate concerns of its neighbours" and "project its benign role" (Jha, 2011, p. 47). Besides, New Delhi was eager to be a cooperative actor with proactive and positive security contributions.

To assuage the SEA countries' fears, India invited military attachés and other defence representatives from Indonesia, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, and Thailand to facilities in the Andaman Islands (Yong & Mun, 2009). Several high-level defence exchanges took place with Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, and the Republic of Korea. In 1994, India held joint naval exercises with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Das, 2013b). The India-SEA ties were also leavened through many bilateral MoUs on security and defence cooperation. Signed in February 1993, India inked an MoU with Malaysia on "defence infrastructure build-up, modernisation and training of ground forces, regular exchange of personnel, and limited joint production ventures in air and naval armament" (MEA, 1993, p. 28). It trained 100 Malaysian Air Force personnel and agreed to provide logistical support for the MIG-29 aircraft after Malaysia bought them from Russia (MEA, 1995).

India even expressed its interest in participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) when it was established in 1994. The Indian interest in the ARF marked a departure from its reluctance to participate in a multilateral institution devoted to security. Undoubtedly, India's thinking towards regional security multilateral forum shifted. It was no longer viewed as an arrangement that impinges on a country's strategic autonomy but as a forum for greater cooperation on regional matters. This was illustrated by the IN's involvement in leading multilateral naval arrangements. In 1995, the IN hosted 'Milan', a multilateral naval gathering of the SEA navies at Port Blair (the Andaman Islands, Bay of Bengal). This was a significant change from the previous decade when New Delhi persistently "denied visits by foreign warships" to the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Islands (Hiranandani, 2009, p. 28). 'Milan' in Hindi means the act of coming together or meeting. Milan 95 saw the participation of navies from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia. Since then, Milan has become a biennial affair with a growing number of participants.

Maritime diplomacy through a range of activities (port calls, staff visits, joint exercises, conferences, and workshops) created a favourable image of India. It also instilled a sense of bonhomie between the navies in the Asia-Pacific region. The changed political atmosphere in ASEAN helped its members cooperate better (Vietnam with other states) and facilitated ASEAN's security engagement with India. The Cambodian issue and the India–USSR partnership, which had stymied the India-ASEAN relations in the past, were no longer relevant. The fact that India and the SEA countries had no land or maritime borders disputes made the engagement more viable. As noted by Mak & Hamzah (1995, p. 131), "for ASEAN on the whole, the Indian naval 'threat' [was] relegated to the back burner", and India was "no longer as assertive as it used to be".

Establishing a stronger security connection with India was not a fundamental priority of the ASEAN region but a way to diversify its network of partners. Strongly advocated by Singapore and supported by some additional

ASEAN members, India was included as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner in December 1995. In 1996, three years after the ARF's establishment, India was invited to participate in its third session in Jakarta in July 1996 as an ARF member.

3.3.3 Indian Nuclear Tests: Transition Phase

In the late 1990s, India was suffering from political instability.[20] In 1996, India's national elections led to a hung parliament, followed by the formation of a coalition government formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The coalition government survived no longer than two weeks. Within two years, India saw three PMs. Interestingly, the preceding RCs and associated role performance continued even under the short stints of the incoming PMs—H. D. Deve Gowda (June 1996–April 1997) and I. K. Gujral (April 1997–March 1998). Notably, PM Gujral was not only keen to underscore India's role as a benign power but doubled down on establishing cooperative relationships in the neighbourhood and the extended neighbourhood. In 1998, another round of elections led to a BJP-led coalition government called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), headed by PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. During their campaign period, the BJP promised to "exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons" (BBC, 1998, para.8). After coming to power, India conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran (Rajasthan) in May 1998, followed by Pakistan's nuclear tests. The South Asian nuclear tests changed the security landscape of the region and impacted India's self-conceptions.

The nuclear tests proved to be a landmark event in India's foreign policy orientation and strongly affected their policymakers' perceptions of India's regional and global role. There was also a change in the attitude of the external powers and their perception of India. New Delhi had grabbed international attention like never before. Following the nuclear tests, India grappled with the global uproar, especially the opprobrium of the five permanent members (P-5) of the UNSC. More importantly, its role performance as a benign power got hampered because the external actors no longer saw India as a 'benign' actor. Immediately after the nuclear tests, India's main priority was to address its 'diplomatic isolation' globally (Krepon, n.d., para.10). After the Pokhran II tests, India's changing security interests were matched by its diplomatic repositioning and its dealings with outside powers. The US was the most important external actor in this regard. Also, ASEAN members and countries such as Japan in EA were of immense diplomatic interest.

India and Pakistan's nuclear tests were criticised globally, including by ASEAN members (UN, 1998). A few months after the nuclear tests, the ARF had its scheduled annual meeting in July 1998. At the behest of the US, Japan, China, and New Zealand, a new issue was added to the agenda—non-prolifer-

ation (Talbott, 2006). As expected by the Indian representatives, the ire against India and Pakistan was evident in the gathering. While a set of countries (Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) wanted to levy sanctions on New Delhi, the other group (Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia) urged for a tempered stand (Malone, 2011). Notably, the wordings of the final statement were changed from 'condemn' to 'grave concern' and 'strongly deplore' and both India and Pakistan were "not mentioned by name" (U.B. Singh, 1999, p. 1595). Prime Minister Vajpayee utilised the meetings during the ARF to establish 'active communication' to clarify India's "policy on nuclear disarmament" and "demonstrate our [India's] continued engagement in the economic and political stability of the region" (Lok Sabha, 1998). Rodolfo C. Severino, ASEAN's Secretary-General during that period, maintains that "ARF and its participating countries' concerns over South Asian nuclear tests quickly dissipated [and] […] quick change in mood was apparently made easier by the moratoriums" that followed soon after the nuclear tests (Severino, 2009, p. 81).

The nuclearisation of the subcontinent in 1998, followed by the India–Pakistan Kargil conflict in 1999, brought security matters to the forefront. To recap, in February 1999, India and Pakistan signed the Lahore Declaration, which was a milestone in their relationship. However, the improved bilateral relations were soon rocked by the Kargil conflict, initiated by Pakistan in May 1999 (Kanwal, 2009). New Delhi's restraint during the conflict earned it immense diplomatic support at the ARF meeting in July 1999. According to a senior official of the MEA, "most of the nations that today support us on the Kargil war […] were the same countries that had strongly condemned us last year. In that sense, their siding with us is a reflection of our diplomatic success" (Diwanji, 1999, para. 10).

After the conflict, the Indian government set up a committee known as the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) to investigate the failures during the conflict and offer recommendations to address the identified problems. Ambassador Arvind Gupta considers the KRC as an important threshold for India's new self-conceptions.[21] The leadership and policymakers wanted to address the weaknesses in the Indian security landscape. The suggestions of the committee and their partial implementation pushed New Delhi towards a more aspirational regional security role.[22] By the late 1990s, one could notice greater Indian attention on the region beyond its immediate neighbourhood. The MEA's 1998–99 annual report stated that "our [India's] concerns and interactions go well beyond South Asia. They include other neighbours, and countries immediately adjoining this region—our 'extended neighbourhood', as well as the wider world" (MEA, 1999, pt. iv). The extended neighbourhood comprised the countries in the ASEAN-Pacific region, Central Asia, the Gulf, West Asia and North Africa, and the Indian Ocean Rim (MEA, 1999).

Reasserting New Delhi's "wider global outlook and vision", the report clarified that the change was "not only in a geographical sense, but also in relation to the large issues of development, and security" (MEA, 1999, pt. iv). In other words, India under Vajpayee was stepping out of South Asia and embracing the extended neighbourhood not merely in economic and political terms but also security-wise. Reiterating India's enlarging areas of interest, the then EAM Jaswant Singh noted, "South Asia was always a dubious framework for situating the Indian security paradigm" (Singh, 2000 quoted in Siddique & Kumar, 2003, p. 464). He added, "considering her [India's] size, geographical location and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), India's security environment certainly includes the Persian Gulf in the West, Central Asia in the Northwest, China in the Northeast and Southeast Asia" (Singh, 2000 quoted in Siddique & Kumar, 2003, p. 464).

In 2000, one could notice the normalisation of political relations between India and the outside actors, including many ASEAN members, the EA countries, and the sole superpower, the US. One of the most extensive dialogues between New Delhi and Washington, D.C. had begun in June 1998. It was headed by the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, and the Indian EAM, Jaswant Singh. The success of the dialogue became apparent with President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000. The dialogue normalised the Indo-US relations and created an environment for greater security and economic cooperation. The improved Indo-US relations helped New Delhi to reposition itself as an important country in Asia. It also had "the potential for positive spill overs" for India in the SEA and EA regions (Yayha, 2003, p. 81).

Limaye (2000, p. 128) opines that 2000 was "a year of renewal in India's other Southeast Asian ties". In the early 2000s, PM Vajpayee undertook many trips to SEA, including his visit to Vietnam (July 2000), Malaysia (May 2001), Thailand (July 2001), Singapore (April 2002), Laos (November 2002), and Cambodia (November 2002). New Delhi pushed to normalise relations with the ASEAN states that responded positively to the Indian overtures. Compared to the previous years, India's stable economic growth and ongoing reforms despite economic sanctions piqued the attention of many countries (Limaye, 2000). During this period, anxiety was still looming large over the financial markets in many Asian countries, and in juxtaposition, India's growth story stood out prominently. India also directed efforts to reconnect with Tokyo. The Indo-Japan relations had reached a nadir after the 1998 nuclear tests. Two years later, there was a massive thaw with the Japanese PM Mori Yoshiro's visit in August 2000. This visit was the "first by a Japanese PM to South Asia in a decade" (Limaye, 2000, p. 125). Other high-level trips to India included the Indonesia President Abdurrahman Wahid's visit in February 2000 (the President's first foreign visit), followed by the Cambodian PM Hun Sun in the same month (the first visit by a Cambodian PM in two decades).

Even the ARF's criticism of India's nuclear tests had been minimised by its seventh meeting in July 2000. The changed perception of India enabled New Delhi to focus on other areas, especially the security realm. While Rao's government had pushed for India's inclusion in the ARF, the Vajpayee administration utilised the forum to expand India's strategic space (Yong & Mun, 2009). There was an increasing awareness in India about the fast-changing world order and the nature of global security. Indian leaders wanted to re-position their country to remain relevant to the changing landscape and shape it to suit India's interests. India was happy to play an active role in multilateral regional institutions, intending to have a stake in regional affairs. This was palpable at the ARF Senior Officials Meeting held in Bangkok in May 2000, when India distributed a concept paper on anti-piracy and even proposed to organise a workshop to address the topic in October the same year (Gaur, 2001).

The determinants of an eventual role change began shaping up in the late 1990s, especially after India's nuclear tests. However, the actual transition of self-conception into RCs happened at the turn of the century after India experienced an economic boom.

3.4 Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the trajectory of India's RCs and role performance from the early years of its independence until the year 2000. The foundation of the early RCs was set a little before India's official independence in 1947. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, its role performance was primarily informed by master self-conceptions of a non-aligned actor and an Asian power and auxiliary self-conception of a regional peacemaker. Acknowledged by external actors and supported by some, the self-conceptions transitioned into stable RCs. The role performances associated with these RCs were evident during the Korean crisis and the First Indochina War. From the mid-1960s, the RCs underwent a significant change due to the setback faced by India during the 1962 War, the disorientation related to the NAM movement, the change of national leadership and other associated factors. From the mid-1960s till the late 1980s, India's external conduct was aligned to the new self-conceptions of a subcontinental power and a security seeker, which eventually transformed into RCs. These new conceptions replaced the former peacemaker and Asian power roles. The non-alignment role was not discarded but relegated as an auxiliary RC from the former level of a master RC. The subcontinental power and security-seeker roles were manifested in New Delhi's conduct during the Kampuchea crisis. These roles remained relevant for more than two decades, and New Delhi's behaviour became a bone of contention with other regional countries of SEA (excluding

Vietnam) and EA. They only changed in the early 1990s with the fall of the USSR and India's economic opening.

Following the dissolution of the USSR, India was compelled to reimagine its role in the new world order. Policymakers undertook massive economic reforms and foreign policy overhauling. The sudden and enormous transformation that the country was subject to led to a major role restructuring. India embraced new self-conceptions of an economic actor and a benign power. Informed by these conceptions, India launched the LEP, which concentrated on establishing economic contact and trade ties with the ASEAN countries. Through maritime diplomacy, New Delhi strengthened security cooperation with the regions as well. These self-conceptions were most prominent in the first decade of the 1990s until India's nuclear tests in 1998 and the India–Pakistan Kargil conflict in 1999. These events reignited the domestic debate on security issues. Eventually, the former conceptions gave way to a new set of self-conceptions. The idea of a nearby regional space altered, as demonstrated in the official discourse related to the 'extended neighbourhood'. India's conception of its role within the extended neighbourhood changed as well. These circumstances created the ground for eventual changes in self-conceptions.

This chapter has demonstrated that since 1947, India's RCs have undergone periods of continuity and change. There were stretched periods of continuity in RCs as seen from 1947 to the 1960s, again from the mid-1960s till the late 1980s and then during the last decade of the 1990s. During this time, India witnessed a major role restructuring in the early 1990s, wherein the country's economic, foreign and security policy outlook altered substantially. Since then, it has gone through role evolution and not a role restructuring. The next chapter will analyse the contemporary role evolution from the early 2000s to December 2021.

4. India's Master and Auxiliary RCs: Emergence and Evolution

> "63 years after her 'tryst with destiny', India is now being seen as a major power."
> —Indian FS, 2010 (MEA, 2010a, pt. 1)

After a historical overview of India's role changes from 1947 to 2000, this chapter covers the incremental changes (role evolution) in RCs from 2001 until December 2021. As will be demonstrated below, India's master and auxiliary RCs have evolved over the last two decades. Cumulatively, these incremental alterations have led to variations in India's role performance, albeit with periods of conception-performance gaps. Unlike the previous one, this chapter does not examine the influence of domestic and external determinants, which are covered in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. This chapter covers RCs relevant to the Indo-Pacific region. For want of clarity, it examines the correlation between the change in RCs (IV) and role performance (DV) and MVs that result in conception performance gaps.

The initial part of the chapter covers the change in India's master RC—major power—beginning from 2001–02. Following that, the evolution of auxiliary RCs is examined from 2001–02. The two auxiliary RCs that have been examined are 'net security provider in the IO' and 'stakeholder in the security and stability of Indo-Pacific'. The influence of new RCs on India's role performance (the LEP Phase II) is duly examined. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on a relatively recent master RC, i.e., leading power. The continued evolution of relevant auxiliary RCs will be studied till December 2021. The chapter showcases the link between role evolution and India's policy actions, as reflected in the LEP and AEP, and identifies episodes of a conception–performance gap.

4.1 Major Power Role (2001 onwards)

As covered in the previous chapter, India's self-conception began transforming after its nuclear tests in 1998. The period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s was an important transition phase for New Delhi as it shaped its new master RC. The confluence of nuclear tests, economic progress, and sustained diplomatic outreach to major powers in the coming years influenced the thinking of Indian policymakers. In the early 2000s, the Indian leadership introduced what

can be considered a new master self-conception, i.e., India as a *'major power'* (MEA, 2002b). It is worth noting that India did not discard its RC as an emerging economic actor. Instead, the economic role consistently supplemented the master RC of a major power. In other words, New Delhi needed to continue to perform its economic role to realise its major power role aspirations. Without sustained economic growth, it would have been impossible for India to transition into a major power. Notwithstanding the fundamental link between India's performance as an economic actor and its major power role ambitions, the book will now focus on India's security RCs.

In 2002, the Indian FS referred to India (along with China) as a "major Asian power(s) with the actual or potential capacity to dominate the Asian landscape" (MEA, 2002b, point [pt.] 15). The aspirations to pursue the major power role strengthened with its economic emergence in the following years. India's economy gained momentum in 2002, which continued unabated until shortly after the global financial crisis of 2008. For New Delhi to inch closer to its self-conception as a major power, it was equally important for external players to perform a supportive or corresponding counter-role. The Indian EAM, Yashwant Sinha, stated that the shift in India's "self-perception [...] constitutes a huge mental leap for the country" (MEA, 2004, para. 15). However, as he added, "the rise of India will depend not just on India's actions but also on how the rest of the world responds to this development" (MEA, 2004, para. 25). Simply put, in the absence of external support, India's self-conception would not have transitioned into an RC. It would have failed to translate the self-conception into role performance.

As New Delhi grew visibly confident of its regional and international standing as an economic and political actor, a trend became conspicuous in its external orientation: a multi-alignment foreign policy approach. Through multi-alignment, the Indian leadership aimed to nurture strategic partnerships[23] with crucial actors while avoiding excessive proximity to one country or a set of countries (Wojczewski, 2017). Under this approach, there were two fundamental practices: seeking membership in multilateral institutions and establishing bilateral partnerships with multiple countries on a gamut of issues (Hall, 2016a). India saw this as beneficial both economically and security-wise. It also facilitated deeper Indian engagement with super/major powers. In the words of PM Vajpayee:

> "As the world seeks to fashion a new global order from the debris of the Cold War, India will creatively pursue her foreign policy to widen the web of friendly relations with all countries in the world. Our aim will be to secure for India a meaningful role in world affairs" (Archive Prime Minister Office [PMO], 2004, para. 17).

According to Ian Hall, Indian foreign policymakers view multi-alignment as the "best means to achieve what they perceive as its [India's] core interests and ideals in an increasingly uncertain global context" (Hall, 2016a, p. 2). The

multi-alignment approach, which was introduced under the Vajpayee government, continued under the next government, which came to power in May 2004 and was headed by PM Manmohan Singh. India witnessed steady economic growth, which progressed considerably in the coming years.

As India's annual GDP growth came close to an average of 9% annually, external actors became enthusiastic about engaging the country (see Chapter 6). Stable economic progress and military modernisation painted a new image—an emerging power with the potential to undertake a security role in Asia. With this, there was a global acknowledgement of India's emergence, and some countries even supported its pursuit of the major power role. One could see a fast-paced intensification of India's bilateral and multilateral political, diplomatic and security ties with other regions and countries, including the US, the European Union, Israel, China, and Japan. The SEA and EA countries also took notice of India as a power worth engaging. The union of these factors and developments made it possible for India to grow beyond the limits of South Asia and establish greater linkages with farther regions (Baru, 2013). Acknowledging this change, PM Singh remarked, "today, there is a greater willingness internationally to work with India and build relationships of mutual benefit and mutual inter-dependence. This augurs well for our development and security" (MEA, 2005c, para. 10). The external support of important powers for New Delhi enabled its self-conception to graduate to a well-established master RC of a major power, which at best could be regarded as an aspirational role.

4.2 Emerging Auxiliary RCs (2001–14)

As established above, from the early 2000s, Indian policymakers projected India as a major power. Under the umbrella of these aspirations, New Delhi witnessed the emergence of auxiliary security RCs that impacted its policy actions. At the turn of the new century, not only India but the world was preoccupied with the issue of terrorism. The terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001 and the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center had dominated the regional and global sentiments. As a result, security issues related to the maritime space did not receive much traction. This trend continued until the mid-2000s when India began experiencing changes within and in its interactions with the outside world.

As India's international trade ties and energy demand burgeoned in the early 2000s, new maritime security imperatives cropped up (for details, see Chapter 5). The economic development now depended more strongly on unhindered access to crucial SLOCs in the west and east of the IO, which facilitated its seaborne trade and energy imports. This compelled the political lead-

ership to recognise the importance of maritime spaces and invest appropriately in the sector. Two prominent security (auxiliary) RC emerged within this context—*net security provider,* which developed in the first decade of the 2000s and was officially acknowledged as India's RC in 2013; and a *stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific*. This conception began shaping up in the late 2000s but crystallised as a distinct auxiliary RC in 2014–15. Expectedly, the stipulated RCs supported India's master RC as a major power. These two RCs did not emerge abruptly but resulted from incremental changes over two decades.

4.2.1 Net Security Provider

The foundation of the net security provider role was manifested in subtle but significant developments related to India's potential as a regional maritime security actor. After the successful rescue of a hijacked Japanese merchant ship in 1999, the IN and Coast Guard ventured into anti-piracy operations in the IO. The Indian leadership realised the value of contributing to the Search and Rescue (SAR) missions and anti-piracy operations. It began cultivating its ability to assist in the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. India's maritime role in the IOR received a boost when the IN escorted American ships through the Straits of Malacca during 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan.

A landmark episode that highlighted India's power projection capabilities and its constructive regional role was its involvement in the relief operations during the IO Tsunami of December 2004. Indonesia was the most affected country, followed by Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, the Maldives, Myanmar, and Malaysia. India not only undertook relief operations at home but also functioned as the first responder for the region. It participated with 32 ships, seven aircraft, and 20 helicopters in five separate operations along India's south-eastern coast, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Sakhuja, 2005). These HADR operations were the "largest-ever [relief operation] mounted by New Delhi" and were decisive in shaping its self-conception (Berlin, 2006, p. 83). The synchronised functioning of the Indian armed forces in coordination with the MEA, the PMO and other relevant ministries was a positive sign of India's leadership potential and its maritime power. Equally important was India's coordination with other countries, namely the US, Japan, and Australia, which formed the Tsunami Core Group for international military assistance.

In the aftermath of these successful operations, New Delhi portrayed itself as a provider of HADR operations in the IOR. The encouragement from major powers (the US and allies) and some ASEAN countries strengthened the contours of self-conceptions. Looking to strengthen its profile as a contributor to the HADR in the IO, New Delhi purchased a Landing Platform Dock from the

US, which was commissioned in June 2007 as the Indian Naval Ship (INS) Jalashwa (Parmar, 2012). According to Parmar (2012, p. 94), this acquisition addressed the "inability of [Indian] amphibious ships to reach the debris-littered shores". In 2007, when Cyclone Sidr hit Bangladesh, India once again performed as a 'first responder' by undertaking relief operations. The Indian forces also carried out a massive evacuation of South Asian expatriates during the Lebanon War in 2006 and assisted Myanmar during Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Xavier, 2016). These instances confirmed the power projection capabilities of the Indian forces and their ability to shoulder security responsibilities in the extended neighbourhood. The IN's successful involvement beefed up the leadership's confidence to operate as a "major maritime power in the IOR" (Ministry of Defence [MoD] Navy, 2007, p. 54).

In addition to this, New Delhi assumed the role of a capacity builder in the extended neighbourhood. As a capacity builder, it was keen to assist littorals of the IOR and the ASEAN region through training and educational opportunities (Myanmar and Vietnam) and by granting permission to use Indian military facilities for training purposes (case in point, Singapore). While addressing the diplomats of ASEAN, the MoS for MEA expressed India's "readiness to share the experience gained in Mitigation of Natural Disasters and provide training for capacity building" (MEA, 2006b, pt. 4). As Indian interactions with foreign forces increased, there was a greater conviction to take up a larger security role in the region. For instance, in 2004, PM Singh communicated to the tri-service gathering that India's "strategic footprint covers the region bounded by the Horn of Africa, West Asia ... South-East Asia and beyond, to the far reaches of the Indian Ocean. Awareness of this reality should inform and animate our strategic thinking and defence planning" (Archive PMO, 2004, para. 3). New Delhi began reaching out to the SEA and EA countries to build cooperative security relations through defence exchanges, joint naval exercises and port calls, and CORPAT in close-by waters.

As New Delhi cultivated the ability to manage a range of security threats, defence planners realised the challenges of assuming a regional security role. First, India needed support from the regional littorals to operate in their nearby waters. Second, there were difficulties due to a complex maritime environment rife with traditional and non-traditional security threats, more so for an emerging country that faced massive developmental challenges at home. Such compulsions motivated the planners to establish cooperative security relations with external powers. This was a significant change from the Cold War years when India displayed a protectionist attitude and discouraged the involvement of foreign powers in the IOR. It was equally wary of developing security ties with foreign forces. In stark contrast, New Delhi was now looking to cooperate and coordinate with a number of foreign powers in areas of shared interests. Gurpreet Khurana points out that the "capacity of India's maritime security forces [was] clearly inadequate to cater to […] [India's] interests and responsibilities,

even within the IOR" (Khurana, 2007, p. 1). To meet its security challenges, Khurana notes, it was essential for New Delhi to forge "security bonds with major naval powers, grounded in a clear convergence of legitimate interests among partners" (Khurana, 2007, p. 2).

New Delhi inked bilateral security understandings with many countries and engaged in multilateral security institutions and forums. One of the important multilateral initiatives was the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). The participants included the SEA and EA countries and extra-regional powers such as the US and Australia. When ReCAAP came into force in 2006, it was the "first regional Government to Government agreement to promote and enhance cooperation against piracy and armed robbery at sea in Asia" ('About ReCAAP', n.d.). India was one of the 16 founding members of this initiative and provided financial support to run ReCAAP's Information Sharing Centre (MEA, 2011b). This projected India as a reliable maritime power in the region.

Another relevant initiative was the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)—a multilateral forum that brought together the navies/coast guards of the IOR littorals with rotating chairmanship. This initiative was envisioned by India and led by the IN. It aimed to enhance regional maritime security, establish interoperability between navies, and support littoral countries in capacity building for the HADR and SAR operations and other security threats (Ghosh, 2012). The IONS enabled India to position itself as a potential maritime leader in the region and get involved in discussions on regional maritime security issues. The membership of the IONS included countries of the SEA and EA regions such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and even Australia.

At a time when India was awakening to the importance of the maritime domain and nurturing itself as a maritime actor, China was experiencing a maritime resurgence as well. China's maritime reach was expanding from its previous focus on the nearby seas to farther maritime spaces. The PLA Navy's (PLAN) growing presence in the IOR was a cause of concern for New Delhi. Adding to the anxiety were China's infrastructure projects, including ports in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. As these projects vectored towards progress, they brought China closer to India's immediate neighbourhood. Addressing these issues, the EAM Pranab Mukherjee remarked, "India is fully alive to this shift [in regional maritime affairs] and the need to manage it not only in a non-disruptive manner but in a synergistic one as well" (MEA, 2007c, last para). He added, "India, with its growing capabilities and confidence, and its history of benign and active international engagement, is ready to contribute its maritime might to ensure such a positive outcome" (MEA, 2007c, last para).

After years of proclaiming its 'peaceful rise', China adopted a more muscular foreign policy. The regional security dynamics got increasingly complicated after the 2008 world financial crisis, which brought forth the weaknesses

of the liberal international economic order. The Chinese leaders felt that they could eventually take up a leadership role. China assumed a bolder security avatar, which was apparent in developments in Asia-Pacific (particularly in the SCS) and along the India–China land border (see Chapter 6). China's role performance motivated the US and its allies, some ASEAN countries, and even India to adopt an appropriate counter-role to safeguard their interests. This led to American expectations from New Delhi to perform a more active role in the region.

Until 2008, India's role performance towards the SEA and EA was not an active response to China's rise. Instead, it was relevant to New Delhi's desire to carve a niche for itself in the region and build on the extensive support it received from the US and some of its allies. However, in the post-2008 years, China's increasing forays in the IO became a source of consternation for Indian policymakers. China's conduct was now beginning to emerge as an important factor of consideration. The changes in India's perception of China, New Delhi's regional ambitions, and encouragement from the US to become a net security provider inspired the Indian leadership to assume an expanded security role in the region. These factors shaped the auxiliary RCs during PM Singh's second term (2009–14). The range of security roles India was already performing, i.e., a first responder, provider of the HADR/SAR operations, and a capacity builder, merged to form the broader net security provider role in the IO.

In late 2010, Indian officials made initial references to the net security provider role, although it was showcased as an external expectation rather than India's self-role. Addressing a gathering at the National Maritime Foundation, FS Nirupama Rao said that although "India is seen as a net security provider, we cannot carry the burden of regional security on our shoulders alone" (MEA, 2010b, pt. 10). She added that it was "unrealistic to expect that any single power can presume for itself the role of a sea-based balancer" (MEA, 2010b, pt. 11). The talk not only communicated India's guardedness in performing the expansive security role unilaterally but also its desire for support from regional and extra-regional powers to maintain regional stability. In a year's time, India was more willing to embrace the role. This was apparent in the next FS, Ranjan Mathai's statement that "a flexible but proactive maritime doctrine is essential to safeguard and protect our [India's] national interests overseas as a net security provider to several islands and littoral states in the Indian Ocean region and beyond" (MEA, 2011c, pt. 20).

The fast-paced systemic developments pushed India to position itself as a net security provider in the IOR and align its policy actions to the stipulated RC. The consequences of China's military rise and maritime expansion became increasingly evident, and India felt compelled to consolidate its position in the IOR (refer to Chapter 6 for details). In May 2013, PM Singh remarked that India was "well-positioned to become a net provider of security in our

[India's] immediate region and beyond" (PMO, 2013, para. 12). The endorsement by PM Singh confirmed New Delhi's official embrace of the net security provider role.

In hindsight, India's net security provider role was a natural corollary of its preceding self-conceptions and role performances. Anit Mukherjee (2014, p. 2) describes a net security provider as a country that "enhances mutual security" [of a region] by addressing common security concerns". He adds that this role entails four types of activities— "a) Capacity building, b) Military diplomacy c) Military assistance, and d) Direct deployment of military forces to aid or stabilise a situation" (Anit Mukherjee, 2014, p. 2). India was already performing the roles of a provider of the HADR operations and capacity builder for the littoral states. It had also accelerated its military diplomacy with countries in the IOR, SEA and EA. From 2010 onwards, New Delhi was prepared to graduate to the next level by assuming the role of a net security provider, more so considering the systemic changes and encouragement from crucial external (Alter) actors.

4.2.2 Contours of India's RC as Stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific

In addition to the net security provider role, an additional auxiliary RC—a "stakeholder in the security and stability of Indo-Pacific"— was taking shape (MEA, 2018d, pt. 5). Although the RC became most prominent from 2018–19, its contours began appearing much before. Like the net security provider role, even this RC was a progression of a series of smaller self-conceptions that began developing in 2007–08. This section traces the development cycle of India's RC as a 'stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific'.

After decades of focusing on the Indian subcontinent, New Delhi was keen to (re-)connect with the broader Asian continent in the 1990s. For a long time, the foreign powers had associated India with South Asia and not as an Asian country, which had been the case during the Nehru era. Much to the dislike of the Indian leadership, India and Pakistan's hyphenation became pronounced after the South Asian nuclear tests. With the advent of the new century, New Delhi pushed harder to de-hyphenate itself from Pakistan and re-hyphenate with the broader Asian continent and even the Asia-Pacific region.

From the early 2000s, India's conception of the 'extended neighbourhood' expanded to include farther areas. This change was discernible during the commissioning of INS *Brahmaputra* (a 3,600-tonne warship) in 2000. At the event, George Fernandes, then Defence Minister, asserted that "our area of interest extends from the North of the Arabian sea to the South China sea" (Fernandes as quoted in Sakhuja, 2011, p. 91). Even PM Vajpayee, during a speech in Singapore, said that "India's belonging to the Asia Pacific community is a ge-

ographical fact and a political reality. It does not require formal membership of any regional organisation for its recognition or sustenance" (MEA, 2002a, para. 17). Communicating the same sentiment, EAM Sinha affirmed that India was a part of Asian security, because of which it wished to "play an active role in promoting security within Asia in collaboration with fellow Asian countries" (MEA, 2003b, para. 23). All these statements from high-level officials indicated a growing interest in the Asia-Pacific region.

During the time, India was surfacing as a stronger economic actor with growing power projection capabilities (see Chapter 5). Concurrently, China's rise and its propensity to be assertive in its territorial claims brought some like-minded countries together. The US, Japan, and Australia were keen for India to assume a more active role in Asia-Pacific affairs because it had the potential to undercut China's fast-growing influence in Asia (in terms of size, economic performance and military capabilities). India's importance was palpable in its participation at the Shangri-La Dialogue—an inter-governmental security forum to discuss Asian security—which was established in 2002. During the first Shangri-La Dialogue, the US Deputy Secretary of Defence, Paul Wolfowitz remarked, "it's always been a little bit strange, and it gets stranger each year, to talk about East Asian security without bringing in India … India's such a big part of the East Asian equation" (Wolfowitz as quoted in Scott, 2007, p. 123). In 2005, New Delhi was finally offered a membership in the EAS, which confirmed its growing political weight in the region. Highlighting the need to reconceptualise the region, Singapore's Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong asserted—

> "India's rise compels us to look at our environment in new ways. It will be increasingly less tenable to regard South Asia and East Asia as distinct strategic theatres interacting only at the margins […] I believe it would be short-sighted and self-defeating for ASEAN to choose a direction that cuts itself off from a dynamic India" (National Archive of Singapore, 2005, para. 13).

Due to the favourable regional and international environment that it was operating in, not only did New Delhi position itself as relevant to Asian affairs but was enthusiastic in this endeavour. From the mid-2000s, there was a predominant emphasis in Indian speeches on the need for a cooperative security architecture for stability and security in Asia (MEA, 2007a; MEA 2007d). The EAM, Natwar Singh, called India "a force for stability within Asia". He added—

> "In all of Asia, in West Asia, in the Indian Ocean region, and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, India, given its size and economic reach, is an essential partner in any arrangement that wants to successfully promote stability and security" (MEA, 2005d, para. 33).

Around this period, there was growing cognisance of the implications of China's maritime expansion. China's rise was blurring the distinctions be-

tween geopolitical developments in the IO and the Pacific Ocean. As early as 2004, the Indian Maritime Doctrine (released by the IN) referred to the "shift in global maritime focus from the Atlantic-Pacific combine to the Pacific-Indian" (MoD Navy, 2004, p. 91). The idea of the Indo-Pacific was first alluded to by Japanese PM Abe in his speech at the Indian Parliament. He introduced the idea of a "broader Asia that broke away the geographical boundaries" (MOFA, 2007, line 9). He added that the 'broader Asia' was shaping up due to "the confluence of the two seas of the Indian and Pacific Oceans' (MOFA, 2007, line 8). When Japan laid the foundation of the Indo-Pacific concept, the US encouraged India to assume a larger mantle in Asian security affairs. The term Indo-Pacific was first introduced in the Indian context by an Indian naval officer, Gurpreet Khurana, who described it as the "maritime space comprising the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific" (Khurana, 2007, p. 150). He argued for greater India–Japan cooperation in view of the growing threats to navigational freedom in the Indo-Pacific region.

While the Indian leadership was seriously considering performing the net security provider role, it was also closely studying the regional developments. For instance, in 2010, FS Rao highlighted the interconnectedness between the IOR and the east of IOR. She was categorical in stating that the maritime balance in the IO was "linked to developments in South East Asia, the Pacific Rim and the Mediterranean [and] it is unrealistic to presume that we [India] would be able to insulate our region from instability elsewhere" (MEA, 2010b, pt. 11). It was clear that India, just like Japan, was no longer considering the events in the Pacific Ocean as mutually exclusive from the IOR. The Indian foreign policy articulations from 2010–11 reflected this metamorphosis. Officials regularly referred to India's "vital stake in the evolution" of the regional security architecture of the Asia-Pacific, where it was "poised to play a substantive and formative role" (MEA, 2011a, para. 16; 2011b, para. 5). Almost a constant theme, New Delhi championed the "emergence of an open, balanced, inclusive architecture that provides peace, security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific Region" (MEA, 2012d, para. 10; see MEA; 2012e).

There were frequent articulations on the SCS issue. Although New Delhi was not a party to the SCS dispute, it became vocal on the matter, confirming its intention to appear relevant to regional affairs. Indian officials spoke of the importance of "freedom of navigation and over-flight" and 'maritime commerce' according to the "universally accepted principles of international law, allowing freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of maritime territorial disputes" (MEA, 2010a, pt. 20). In 2011, India mentioned the SCS dispute and underscored the need to adopt the 2002 Declaration of Conduct and the 1982 UNCLOS as the foundation for a regional solution (MEA, 2011d; 2012e; 2014a). While New Delhi's primary interest lay in the IO, its attention was also drawn by developments in the Pacific Ocean, particularly in the western Pacific region. India's growing global trade, bud-

ding economic linkages with eastern countries and the importance of unhindered access to SLOCs heightened its interest in the regional developments (refer to Chapter 5). According to Smith, India's stand on the issue of freedom of navigation and its persistent inclusion in official speeches remained a "thinly-veiled code for opposing Chinese hegemony in the Western Pacific" (Smith, 2016, p. 9).

The term 'Indo-Pacific' was used for the first time by an Indian official in February 2012. Referring to the Indo-US partnership, FS Mathai underscored the importance of "building a stable, prosperous and secure Asia-Pacific region—or, as some here have begun to call it, the Indo-Pacific region" (MEA, 2012a, para. 23). While this usage was more an acknowledgement of the US' terminology than India's own conception, New Delhi was beginning to warm up to the new regional construct. This was clear by late 2012 when PM Singh used the term at the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit. He mentioned that India and ASEAN's "future is inter-linked and a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for our own progress and prosperity" (MEA, 2012d, para. 8). Further, during an address to the Japan–India Association, PM Singh stated that PM Abe's idea of "the confluence of the two seas—the Pacific and the Indian Oceans" was the guiding framework of the India–Japan relations (MEA, 2013b). These statements confirmed the change in New Delhi's thinking and its acceptance of the growing integration between IO and the Pacific in geostrategic terms. Scott argued that 'Indo-Pacific' fit well into India's 'geopolitical formulations', as it combined the "Look South (IO) and Look East (Pacific Ocean) settings" (Scott, 2012a, pp. 169,180).

Expanding on the Indian perspective, then Indian Ambassador to the US, Nirupama Rao (quoted in Scott, 2012a, p. 168), referred to the 'core Indo-Pacific' as the "stretch of oceanic space that links the Indian and Pacific Oceans". Adding to this, the Secretary (East) of MEA, who oversees the region, stated that the Indo-Pacific was a "logical corollary to India's 'Look East' Policy, and an extension of the region of interest to also include within its ambit the Western Pacific" (MEA, 2013a, para. 3). These articulations established the expanding scope of the LEP, which spurred changes in India's policy actions (role performance).

India's association with the Indo-Pacific, which began in 2012, matured with time and culminated in the RC of a stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific by 2018 (covered in section 4.3.1). The initial self-conceptions reflected India's desire to have a stake in the Asia-Pacific's regional security architecture. With the changing regional order and evolution of self-conception, India's budding interest transformed into a distinct RC in the next five years (transformation from 2014–15 till December 2021 is covered in section 4.3.1). The following sub-section demonstrates the impact of changing RCs (from the early 2000s to 2014) on India's policy conduct (role perfor-

mance) at the time and identifies the conception–performance gaps in the later years of the LEP.

4.2.3 Role Performance: Phase II of the Look East Policy

As India's RCs evolved from 2001–02 to 2014, a corresponding change was conspicuous in its role performance (policy conduct). The new conceptions were visible in the revisions made to the LEP. To recap, when the LEP was introduced, its primary considerations were economical, and the focus was limited to the ASEAN region. However, despite stronger linkages with ASEAN countries, their bilateral connections were not uniform and did not develop as expected initially. Besides, most ASEAN countries did not consider India relevant to regional security affairs. Nevertheless, these characteristics altered in the early 2000s alongside changing Indian conceptions and with the advent of phase II of the LEP. In 2003, the Indian government announced phase II of the LEP. Under phase II, security factors (protection of SLOCs and security cooperation) were dominant, and the geographical scope expanded in line with the expanding RCs. The EAM, Yashwant Sinha, announced—

> "India's 'Look East' policy has now entered its Phase-II. Phase-I was focused primarily on the ASEAN countries and on trade and investment linkages. Phase-II is characterised by an expanded definition of 'East' extending from Australia to China and East Asia with ASEAN as its core. Phase-II marks a shift in focus from exclusively economic issues to economic and security issues, including joint efforts to protect sea lanes, coordination on counter terrorism etc." (MEA, 2003c, para. 3).

The regional perception of India began altering in the early 2000s, particularly as Washington and its allies encouraged New Delhi to take up a substantial role in the Asia-Pacific (see Chapter 6). Some countries in SEA and EA began viewing India as a potential economic partner and even a potential counterweight to China in Asia. The regional quest for economic progress and equitable power balance offered India ample space to engage the SEA and EA countries. It was easier for the Indian leadership to focus on the eastern neighbourhood around this time because India and Pakistan had signed a formal ceasefire agreement in 2003. With the India–Pakistan border relatively stable, New Delhi had greater flexibility to focus on other areas.

Under the LEP Phase II, the Indian government reached out to many countries in SEA and EA. In due course, it finalised strategic partnerships with Indonesia (2005), Japan (2006), Vietnam (2007), Australia (2009), Malaysia (2010), and South Korea (2010). New Delhi explored areas of shared interest with regional actors in the security domain, institutionalised military exercises, and increased defence personnel exchanges. Military diplomacy and defence cooperation were utilised as tools to enhance relations with the SEA and EA

regions. The tools enabled high-level visits, educational exchanges, port calls, and personnel training. Dutta opines that such forms of cooperation conveyed a 'political commitment' to further ties with countries and "dispel mistrust and misperception" on security issues (Dutta, 2009, p. 31). In the context of military diplomacy, the role of the IN gained steam, and it developed cooperative links with other regional and extra-regional navies. According to Raja Mohan, "after decades of acting as a 'lone ranger', the IN steadily emerged as an important player in the construction of regional maritime security initiatives in the Malacca Straits" (Mohan, 2009a, p. 9; Berlin, 2006).

Signalling an interest in strengthening relations, New Delhi signed many security-related agreements with regional actors. In 2003, India and Singapore signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement. They also held their first air and ground Singapore–India Defence Exercise (SINDEX) in 2004 and 2005, respectively. For the first time, in 2005, the IN and Republic of Singapore Navy held their annual naval exercise in the SCS, affirming India's interest in the region. The countries also inked a bilateral agreement for the Conduct of Joint Military Training and Exercises in India. With this agreement, New Delhi allowed Singapore to use the Indian military facilities to train their forces (Jha, 2011). Subsequently, they finalised a logistical pact that granted Singapore the right to station its equipment in India. Even India and the Philippines signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2006, followed by a joint declaration for cooperation to combat international terrorism (Das, 2013a). India and Malaysia held their first bilateral consultations in 2006, and the IN carried out a goodwill visit to Malaysia (Limaye, 2007).

Other countries that earned greater importance under Phase II were Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand. Notably, all these countries share a maritime border with India. India and Indonesia signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2001, which revived their security links after decades. From 2002, the navies of both countries held CORPAT near the International Maritime Boundary (IMB) in the IOR. During the Indonesian President's visit to India in 2005, the two countries agreed to develop a new strategic partnership and hold a strategic dialogue annually.

Following a similar trajectory, New Delhi and Bangkok established a Joint Working Group on security cooperation that included issues such as counter-terrorism and maritime security. The institutional linkages between the IN and Thailand's Navy and Coast Guards got upgraded after an MoU was signed in 2005 (Berlin, 2011). In the same year, the IN and the Royal Thai Navy held their first CORPAT near the IMB, which has since become a regular affair. Defence MoUs and regular CORPAT between the navies aimed to improve coordination to secure nearby maritime spaces. There was also an uptick in the India–Myanmar security cooperation in the early 2000s, after the visit of Myanmar Commanders-in-Chief to India and a corresponding visit from the Indian Chief of Army Staff. The IN visited Myanmar and participated in a low-

level naval exercise in 2006. The Myanmar Navy also participated in the multilateral exercise, Milan 2006, held off the coast of Andaman (U.B. Singh, 2006).

In 2005, for the first time, India dispatched its aircraft carrier as a part of a maritime diplomacy mission to the SEA, particularly to Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Mohan, 2009a). This underscored India's growing naval prowess and its consistent interest in the region. There was a quantitative shift in India's naval interactions with the ASEAN countries. Between 1992 to 2000, India conducted 17 naval exercises with the ASEAN countries. By contrast, between 2001 and 2009, the number more than doubled to 35 naval exercises (data from Das, 2013b).

Security consultations between India and the EA countries strengthened as well. For instance, India–Japan relations gained impetus with the Japanese PM Koizumi's visit to India in 2005. There was a movement towards identifying and working on converging interests, such as counter-terrorism, the security of the SLOCs, and security developments in the Asia-Pacific (MEA, 2006a). The momentum in their bilateral relations accelerated after Abe Shinzō came to power (see Chapter 6 for details). In 2007, Abe became the first-ever Japanese PM to address the Indian Parliament. In addition to Japan, there was an increased vigour in India's military diplomacy with South Korea. India and Korea finalised a Long-term Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in 2004 (Lee, 2013). They agreed upon an annual foreign policy and security dialogues to map out potential areas of convergence and cooperation. The two sides signed important MoUs related to the defence industry, logistics and cooperation between the coast guards. Similarly, India–Australia security associations progressed. India and Australia signed an MoU on Defence Cooperation (in 2006), followed by a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2009.

Security linkages with SEA and EA—through port calls to various countries, joint exercises, CORPATs—enabled the IN' deployment in farther maritime spaces. Speaking on the subject, the then Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Arun Prakash remarked, "we [Indians] have also recognised the value of cooperative security and have consequently held over 24 joint exercises with foreign navies in the past two years" (Prakash, 2005, para. 11). He added that the "initiation of bilateral and multilateral exercises […] was not merely military interactions but also contained a certain political message" (Prakash, 2005, para.10). Given the expanding foreign interactions of the IN, appropriate institutional changes were introduced. The Naval Headquarters now had a Directorate of Foreign Cooperation. A new position of the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff-Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence [ACNS (FCI)] was established to coordinate various activities (Sakhuja, 2011; Bhaskar, 2012).

India also conveyed the importance of the SEA and EA regions in its regional outlook through symbolic political acts. The heads of state are hosted

as chief guests every year for India's Republic Day parade. The invitees are carefully selected to convey a political message and indicate India's foreign policy priorities. In 2010, India invited the President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) as the chief guest. It invited the Indonesian President and the PM of Thailand as chief guests in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The decision to continuously host heads of the states from the region was a symbolic assertion of SEA's importance in India's strategic outlook. Correspondingly, the Indian President visited Seoul in 2011 and discussed broader defence cooperation and prospects of opening a defence attaché office at the Indian Embassy in Seoul. Other high-level trips included the visit of the Indian Defence Minister to Indonesia in 2012. The involved parties held exploratory discussions on joint naval exercises, training programmes for Indonesian personnel, and spares for the Indonesian Air Force. In 2013, India and the ROK held their first Defence Policy Dialogue at the level of Deputy Minister, followed by an Agreement on the Protection of Classified Military Information in January 2014. In the same year, India and the Philippines established the Joint Defense Cooperation Committee and sought to enhance education exchanges and undertake military training programmes.

In 2012, India and ASEAN commemorated the 20th anniversary of their partnership and elevated their relations from 'partnership' to 'strategic partnership'. Security ties continued through institutionalised bilateral interactions and experienced movement in multilateral security interactions. India got involved in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) (inaugurated in October 2010), enabling it to engage more actively in regional security affairs. Headed by defence ministers of the participating countries, the ADMM-Plus focuses on specific security issues and military to military coordination. One saw participation from SEA in India's IOR-centric multilateral frameworks, including the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the IONS. The BIMSTEC brings along a mix of countries from the IO and the ASEAN regions—Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, and Bhutan—that depend on the Bay of Bengal for their livelihood.

Without a doubt, phase II of the LEP boosted India's security interactions with SEA and EA. However, despite the spurt in security cooperation in the initial years of the LEP II, the pace slowed down after 2008. Commentators and policy practitioners were hopeful that the re-election of Singh's political party (INC) would bode well for India's relations with the Asia-Pacific. Despite the re-election in 2009, the Singh government was unable to build on the momentum of the preceding years. The 2008 economic crisis impacted Indian economic performance in the coming years. Even as it tried to respond to the changing regional dynamics, domestic compulsions limited the scope of India's external conduct (see Chapter 5 for details). A stuttering GDP growth rate and growing unemployment gave rise to domestic discontent. With finan-

cial challenges, military spending was impacted (refer to Chapter 5). The domestic standing of Manmohan Singh's government suffered immensely due to slower economic growth and the revelation of corruption scandals and scams. His government's growing unpopularity in the second term made it difficult for him to take extraordinary foreign policy decisions.[24]

Even as the LEP II corresponded to the changes in India's self-conceptions in the early 2000s, a gap emerged from 2010 onwards. Based on the general expectations of role theory, RCs that culminated in the second decade of the 2000s needed to reflect prominently in the LEP II. However, after 2008–09, activities under the LEP II were limited to possessing symbolic values. There were limited policy announcements, meagre resource allocations to engage the region and insufficient on-the-ground progress. In simple words, while India's RCs expanded, the policy conduct did not progress accordingly. This created a conception–performance gap. This is not to state that there was no movement in India's ties with the SEA and EA countries after 2008–09. However, there was a general slowdown of the LEP, which raised questions about India's potential to be a regional power. According to Brewster (2013, p. 158), the lack of momentum and progress symbolised "New Delhi's systemic failures in strategic planning" and the absence of a "coherent regional strategy". Even the pace of India–US relations slowed down. New Delhi displayed limited enthusiasm towards the Obama administration's pivot (or rebalance) to Asia, leading to a sense of frustration in Washington (see Chapter 6). By the time India neared its next elections in 2014, the success it had achieved in the initial years of the LEP II was weaning off. In sum, the later years of the LEP (from 2008–09 until 2014) lacked operational substance and could not keep pace with the evolving RCs leading to a conception–performance gap. The ASEAN countries' perceptions of India got affected, and they doubted New Delhi's ability to translate its statements into sustained actions.

4.3 Master RC: Leading Power Role (2015 onwards)

In the 2014 national elections, the BJP came to power with a huge mandate, and Narendra Modi became the PM in May 2014. The Modi-led government faced an unfavourable regional and global environment. China's conduct in Asia was informed by its aspirational master and auxiliary self-conceptions of "great power with Chinese characteristics" and "great maritime power", respectively (see Chapter 6). Beijing's behaviour in the SCS turned more assertive, and its presence in the IOR increased substantially. The Indian leadership and policymakers needed a revised strategy to secure regional interests lest it should get overshadowed by China's growing clout. It was equally important for the new government to align policy actions to match the revised RCs and

introduce new RCs that synced with the contemporary regional and global situation.

In early 2015, PM Modi met the heads of Indian missions and urged them to 'shed old mind-sets […] and adapt to changing global situations to help India position itself in a *leading role*, rather than just a balancing force, globally' (PMO, 2015, para. 1). New Delhi wished to be seen as an important actor, both regionally and globally. Modi's words confirmed Indian aspirations to consolidate its position in Asia while also seeking a 'rightful' role in a multipolar global setting. From the policy point of view, India's self-projection as a leading power was to carve a distinct and unique role within the context of regional power dynamics.[25] The reframing also gave India the agency to respond to the external situation according to its own interest instead of responding to the action of external actors.[26] It is important to focus on the distinction made by PM Modi when he referred to India as a leading power and *not just a balancer*. This clarification, which was repeated periodically, conveyed a number of messages. First, it sought to communicate that India had a unique role, which was not determined by external expectations alone. It was a message to China and Russia that India was not a balancer as anticipated by the US. Second, it also conveyed that New Delhi would not accept a unipolar Asia dominated by China.

The leading power role was reiterated by FS S. Jaishankar, who highlighted a "more regional approach to engagement" and a "more energetic diplomacy that seeks a larger and deeper footprint in the world" (MEA, 2015d, para. 7). He added that "in so far as larger international politics is concerned, India welcomes the growing reality of a multipolar world, as it does, of a multipolar Asia" (MEA, 2015d, para. 7). Jaishankar also stated that Indian foreign policy actions showcase a 'transition' which was an "expression of greater self-confidence" (MEA, 2015d, para. 7). The leading power role was not a replacement of the major power RC but complemented it.

From 2014–15, India continuously positioned itself as a leading power (master RC), along with the auxiliary RC of net security provider in the IO and a budding interest in the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. Ashley J. Tellis decoded the master RC of a leading power. According to Tellis, great powers "define the configuration of the global system" and act as 'system makers' while leading powers are at best 'system shaper' (Tellis, 2016, para. 16). India's leading-power role aspiration signified an expansion from the Asian stage to a global one. Simply put, India remained a significant power in Asia and wanted to be considered a relevant power in the global scheme of affairs.

Just as the leading power role complemented the major power RC, there was a sense of continuity between the Singh-led government's foreign policy orientation and the Modi-led government's outlook. Modi continued with Singh's multi-alignment approach to pursue the RCs. Through the leading

power role, New Delhi sought to develop a distinct role while striking a balance between its major partnerships through multi-alignment and issue-based alignments. Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale articulated New Delhi's preference for issue-based alignment in 2019. In his words—

> "In the early part of our time, it worked with non-alignment. We have moved beyond that. I think at this stage, we are aligned, but the alignment is issue-based. It is not ideological. That gives us the capacity to be flexible, gives us the capacity to maintain our decisional autonomy" (Outlook, 2019, para. 1 & 3).

Gokhale stated that India has 'moved beyond' non-alignment and its "alignment is now issue-based … [and] not ideological", which provides greater 'decisional autonomy' to policymakers (Outlook, 2019, para. 1 & 3). Issue-based alignment is evident in how India balances its relations with various countries and groupings, including Japan–America–India and RIC. While India aligns with Japan and America to secure its interests in the Indo-Pacific, it also cooperates with Russia and China on the need for a multipolar world with multiple centres of influence (Xavier, 2019). Russia continues to be a reliable supplier of advanced military technology for India, connecting it directly with Indian military preparedness. The Indian leadership also fears pushing Moscow into China's orbit, for it would tilt the regional balance of power in Beijing's favour. Therefore, even as New Delhi gets closer to the West and its allies, it gives equal attention and priority to powers like Russia. O'Donnell and Papa (2021, p. 821) argue that India prefers "strategic partnerships over alliances" and has a proclivity to manage "multiple alignments rather than committing to a specific set of allies". This style of external policy provides policymakers with the flexibility they desire and an ability to balance contradictions. In a nutshell, multi-alignment and issue-based alignment allow India to remain an important stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific and secure its economic and security interests while maintaining a sense of decisional autonomy and some 'maneuvering space' (MEA, 2019e, para. 16).

During the first term of the Modi government, Ian Hall believes there was an "attempt to deliver what has [had] long been promised, rather than an attempt to set out a radically new course for India" (Hall, 2015, p. 249). This was visible in the government's efforts to minimise the conception–performance gap and match India's role perform to the stated RCs. New Delhi was quick to revive its attention to the eastern part of the Indo-Pacific region, as reflected in the transition of the LEP to the AEP. From 2014–15, the Indian conceptions matured, and there was a significant overlap between India's IOR policy and the AEP. The progressive integration between New Delhi's outlook towards the IO and the East shaped the national vision for the Indo-Pacific region.

4.3.1 Integration of Auxiliary RCs: Net Security Provider in IOR & Stakeholder in Indo-Pacific

Apart from additional master RCs, there were gradual but meaningful changes in India's auxiliary RCs from 2014–15 onwards. To recap, the RC of a net security provider in the IO and New Delhi's fledgeling interest in the Indo-Pacific emerged in 2010 and 2012–13, respectively. However, as stated above, India's role performance towards the SEA and EA regions did not conform to the revised conceptions, thus resulting in a conception–performance gap. Post-2014, the Indian government strived to reduce the gap through new policy formulations, reforms, and institutional changes. While this was ongoing, the auxiliary RCs continued to evolve in light of changing regional environment, domestic perceptions of these developments, and the internal situation. The net security provider role remained intact, although India upped the rhetoric by referring to itself as the "first responder in HADR situations" in the IOR within the context (MEA, 2017b, pt. 18). Simultaneously, India's RC related to the Indo-Pacific region underwent subtle but tangible alterations.

Beginning in 2012, India officially acknowledged the term 'Indo-Pacific', but there was a degree of hesitancy in espousing it. Because the concept was new and embryonic, the Indian government's understanding of it was developing and was not well-defined. One could discern reluctance in the Indian quarters over the term and its connotations (Menon, 2013; see Chacko, 2014). Nevertheless, with fast-occurring developments at the systemic level (see Chapter 6 for details), the concept gained currency. In a bid to respond to the regional security developments, countries warmed up to the idea of intensifying security cooperation and formulating a vision that captured the strategic realities of the present day. Indo-Pacific became a part of the lexicon of numerous countries, including India, Japan, the US, Australia, and some ASEAN countries. Each country developed a unique perception of the regional expanse and their vision for the Indo-Pacific region. Despite the differences, there was a shared understanding that the developments in the Indian and Pacific Oceans could no longer be considered mutually exclusive.

The coming together of two oceans (metaphorically) determined India's perception of the region and its role within. New Delhi's interest in the region gave way to a distinct auxiliary self-conception. It is worth noting that within the Indo-Pacific region, New Delhi has primary and secondary areas of interest. The IOR remains the area of primary interest where India sees itself as the dominant security actor and the provider of net security/net security provider. As stated by the former Indian FS, "the growing appreciation and acceptance of the concept of Indo-Pacific further underline the importance of IOR in global affairs" (MEA, 2017c, pt. 19). In terms of the eastern part of the Indo-Pacific (roughly the western Pacific region) that forms the secondary area of interest, India embraced a distinct RC. In 2018, Indian President Ram Nath

Kovind called India a 'maritime nation' and a "stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific" (MEA, 2018d, pt. 5). That the leadership identified India as a 'stakeholder' in the Indo-Pacific denoted an expanded auxiliary RC. In this context, Scott (2013b, p. 51) pointed out that in the secondary area of interest, India does not wish to be '*the* player' but '*a* player'.

The most prominent Indian endorsement of the Indo-Pacific region was during PM Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018. The Indo-Pacific featured numerous times (11 to be exact) throughout the speech. Explaining India's vision of the Indo-Pacific, Modi referred to the region as stretching "from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas" (MEA, 2018b, para. 47). He elaborated on India's security role by highlighting the part played by the IN in "building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region for peace and security" (MEA, 2018b, para. 25). He also mentioned India's contribution through HADR activities, training activities, military exercises, and goodwill missions (MEA, 2018b). Prime Minister Modi elucidated the fundamentals of India's Indo-Pacific vision, which included support for a "free, open, inclusive region", preference for ASEAN centrality, and cooperation with other actors towards "an architecture for peace and security" (MEA, 2018b, para. 36).

The speech was also noteworthy because it conveyed New Delhi's intent to strike a balance between its crucial partners—the US, Japan, Australia, China, Russia, and the ASEAN grouping. On the one hand, Modi clarified that India supports an 'inclusive' Indo-Pacific and that it "does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members, […] and by no means […] directed against any country" (MEA, 2018b, para. 37). This statement was seen as a message to placate China and Russia's concerns over Indian proximity to the US and their increasing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, hinting at Chinese activities, Modi mentioned the need for all to have "equal access […] to the use of common spaces on sea and in the air that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law" (MEA, 2018b, para. 41). Also, he affirmed India's preference for 'ASEAN centrality' in Indo-Pacific affairs. This aimed to alleviate the ASEAN countries' concerns over the Indian intent and relieve their fear of being sidelined by major power competition in the region.

As India's Indo-Pacific vision crystalises, it complements the leading power role. New Delhi seeks to establish a distinct role at regional and global levels while balancing major partnerships through multi-alignment and issue-based alignments. In the words of the Indian EAM, S Jaishankar, "In this world of all against all, India's goal should be to move closer towards the strategic sweet spot […] and must reach out in as many directions as possible and maximise its gains" (Jaishankar, 2020).

India's vision of the Indo-Pacific broadly overlaps with its strategic partners, the US, Japan and Australia. Nonetheless, there are differences in what

sub-regions comprise the Indo-Pacific and how to effectively maintain a rules-based order in the region (details in Chapter 6). Unlike some countries that concentrate on the maritime stretch of the Indo-Pacific, India tends to also include the continental area that falls within the space from the shores of Africa and the coast of the US. Therefore, on occasions, New Delhi has included the landmass of Asia, i.e., Russia and China, within its definition of the Indo-Pacific.

Because of the vast geographical stretch of the Indo-Pacific region, both the auxiliary RCs (net security provider and stakeholder in the security of the Indo-Pacific) have influenced India's conduct towards the SEA and EA regions. In recent years, an overlap between the RCs has become clear. This is reflected in the growing connectedness between India's IOR policy and its orientation towards SEA and EA. This was confirmed by the MEA's decision to establish an Indo-Pacific division that integrates the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the ASEAN region and the Quad and is headed by a Joint Secretary (a high-level non-political executive rank) (Bagchi, 2019). These institutional changes seek to streamline India's policy conduct (role performance) with its stated vision for the Indo-Pacific region. For New Delhi, the Indo-Pacific remains a "mix of going down the pathway of its own steady rise while also responding to the compulsions arising from the posture of others" (MEA, 2019b, para. 26). Since 2020, the Indo-Pacific region has appeared as a standalone section in the annual reports of the MEA. In late 2021, New Delhi identified itself as the 'strategic centre' of the region (MEA, 2021c, pt. 6).

The Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision offers insight into the growing synergies between India's RCs related to the IOR and Indo-Pacific. Envisioned for the IOR, the SAGAR vision was first outlined in 2015.[27] PM Modi, during the commissioning of an India-supplied coast ship in the National Coast Guard of Mauritius, had remarked,

> "We [India] seek[s] a future for Indian Ocean that lives up to the name of SAGAR—Security and Growth for All in the Region … Our [India's] goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation" (PM India, 2015, pt. 54).

It aimed to enhance India's regional cooperation and contribute towards capacity building in maritime security and uphold the principles of international law in the IOR (MEA, 2015c). The primary objective of the SAGAR vision is to aid other regional actors in maritime-security capacity building and capacity enhancement through a range of options, including asset sharing, technology transfer, and training (Gujjar, 2021). To realise the vision, India expanded its security cooperation with the IOR littorals through joint surveillance, the SAR operations, training and capacity building of regional navies and coast guards, and supply of naval assets. New Delhi even revived the India–Sri Lanka–Maldives Trilateral arrangement and expanded its scope (Chaudhury, 2019c; See

Samatha, 2015). In early 2019, India commissioned a new airbase—INS *Kohassa*—in the A&N Islands. The geographical location of A&N facilitates India's operational reach and strengthens its position in the IOR, specifically near the Malacca Straits, which is regarded essential, especially considering China's growing clout. The implementation of the SAGAR vision will allow India to effectively utilise its geographical advantage and cultivate a constructive leadership role in the region amid China's maritime resurgence.

Originally limited to the IOR, Indian officials, in recent times, began associating the SAGAR vision with India's Indo-Pacific strategy. India's outlook towards the IOR and the Indo-Pacific began fusing. This was most apparent in PM Modi's keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018. He stated that the SAGAR vision "is the creed we [India] follow to our East now even more vigorously through our AEP" (MEA, 2018b, para. 14). He also noted that SAGAR acts as the 'blueprint' for India's cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (MEA, 2019a, para. 35). Such sentiments were also corroborated in EAM Jaishankar's statement that India's "Indo-Pacific approach right rests on ensuring that it gets its Indian Ocean strategy even more correctly" (MEA, 2019b, para. 34). These official iterations signalled the growing overlap between the Indian government's vision for the IOR and the Indo-Pacific and indicated India's willingness to assume a more prominent security role in the east. As mentioned in the 2018–19 annual report of the MEA, "India's vision of the Indo-Pacific integrates our Indian Ocean policy of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) into an inclusive Indo-Pacific framework" (MEA, 2019f, p. 6). The 2020–21 annual report reiterated the sentiment and stated that the SAGAR vision remains the "genesis of our [India's] broader articulation of the Indo-Pacific" (MEA, 2021a, p. 148). One of the most pertinent confirmations of this trend came from the Indian FS in late 2021. The FS Harsh Vardhan Shringla referred to the Indo-Pacific as a part of India's 'extended neighbourhood', where New Delhi views itself as a "net provider of security, first responder and a development partner" (MEA, 2021e, pt. 8).

The growing sense of convergence between India's outlook towards the IOR and the Indo-Pacific is not just limited to the RCs and policy declarations but is noticeable in India's role performance under the next phase of the LEP, i.e., the AEP.

4.4 Act East Policy

Post-2012, the regional world order was changing even more rapidly, primarily owing to Beijing's role performance. The US-led regional security order was no longer potent to arrest the implications of China's military rise effectively. Amid these developments, New Delhi was losing the space and time to secure

its position and strategic interests in the region. As a new master RC emerged and the auxiliary RCs matured, the Indian government needed to minimise the growing conception–performance gap that was present in India's role performance after 2008. These attempts were most visible in India's policy towards the SEA and EA regions. Senior Indian officials utilised their participation at several meetings, namely the 21st ARF meeting, the 12th ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting, and the fourth East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers Meeting, to share the intention to engage the ASEAN grouping more enthusiastically. Conscious of India's image (especially among the ASEAN countries) as a "No Action, Talk Only" country, Indian officials mentioned the government's willingness to shoulder responsibilities in maritime security and "responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" (MEA, 2014b, para. 19; MEA, 2017a, pt. 19).

In November 2014, during the 12th ASEAN Summit, PM Modi announced that the Indian government was moving with a "great sense of priority and speed to turn our [India's] Look East Policy into Act East Policy" (MEA, 2014d, para. 2). The 'Look East' had now progressed to the 'Act East'. New Delhi also appointed a dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN in April 2015, which further confirmed India's resolve to improve relations. The importance of the ASEAN region was equally apparent in New Delhi's decision to host all the leaders of the ASEAN countries as chief guests for India's Republic Day parade in 2018.

Although not substantially different from the LEP in terms of the broader objectives, the AEP is distinct due to its expansive geographical focus, a greater emphasis on security and security cooperation, and well-defined instruments of diplomacy and capacity building. Through the AEP, India sought to instil greater energy into its foreign policy and increase the pace of security interactions with countries in the eastern Indo-Pacific region. Not only did the AEP have a steadier focus on security, but even the definition of 'East' expanded to include the Oceania countries and Pacific Islands. Explaining the characteristics of the AEP, the Minister of State (MoS) of External Affairs said:

> "Our [India's] AEP is not just a progression but a lead forward from the LEP. There are three key distinguishing elements of the AEP. First, the AEP is broader in scope geographically and covers the entire breadth of the Asia-Pacific region, while keeping ASEAN at the core. Second, the focus is beyond economic integration and included political-security and socio-cultural dialogue at a deeper level. Third, the AEP is more action-driven and result-oriented" (MEA, 2018c, para. 5).

Since the introduction of the AEP, India's policy actions expanded, and there was an uptick in high-level bilateral exchanges with states in SEA, EA, Oceania, and Pacific Islands. In addition to introducing the Indo-Pacific Wing in the MEA in 2019, the MEA created an Oceania division in September 2020 to strengthen India's commitment towards the region stretching from the Western Pacific to the Andaman Sea (Saha & Mishra, 2020). New Delhi has relied on

a mix of tools to realise greater security convergence with regional countries. Security features of the AEP include New Delhi's push to enhance MDA in the region, greater infusion of the naval element, and assistance to regional countries in capacity building through arms export, space diplomacy, and personnel training. Capacity building is an integral part of the AEP because the littoral states have limited technical skills or resources to secure the maritime order in their neighbourhood. Therefore, many have sought assistance from bigger powers in this regard. Responding to such expectations, India has emphasised this aspect and showcased itself as a reliable security partner and capacity builder in the Indo-Pacific region.

In 2015, India and Singapore elevated their relations to a strategic partnership and inked a WSA between their naval forces. The following year, they held their first Defence Industry Working Group meeting to increase cooperation in defence research and development (Parameswaran, 2016). In January 2021, the navies of India and Singapore finalised a submarine rescue support and cooperation agreement (The Hindu, 2021a). In addition, India and Vietnam signed a Joint Vision Statement on Defence Cooperation that covered the period from 2015 to 2020. They held their first bilateral Maritime Security Dialogue in 2018. In terms of India–Malaysia relations, they upgraded their joint training exercise *Harimua Shakti* to the company level. They even established a 'SU-30 forum' to exchange experiences regarding the training of pilots, maintenance and technical issues (Pubby, 2018b). The IN participated in search operations (in collaboration with other navies) for the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, thereby affirming its net security provider role.

Further ahead, India and Indonesia elevated their relations from a strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership. They presented a shared vision of Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and even held their first Security Dialogue in 2018. The Indian and Indonesian naval forces participated in exercise *Samudra Shakti*, which was an addition to the regularly held CORPAT and Passage Exercise. Similarly, India and Myanmar held their first joint army and naval exercise in 2017 and 2018, respectively. In recent years, India has increased cooperation to enhance MDA and undertaken frequent staff talks on maritime issues with countries including Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Australia, Vietnam, and the US. There has been a greater focus on information sharing for the HADR operations, signing agreements including WSAs, and institutionalising annual talks between Coast Guards of India and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Apart from the quantitative changes in terms of delegation exchanges and military exercises, there have been perceptible qualitative changes through policy reforms and institutional changes. To ensure greater coordination on this front, the Indian government introduced institutional changes and policy reforms (for details, see Behera, 2014). In this context, the new tools of security cooperation—arms sales and space diplomacy—deserve a detailed explana-

tion. One of the ways in which New Delhi hopes to strengthen its security role is through the export of military equipment. That India historically refrained from overtly associating itself with arms export speaks volumes about this new change. Traditionally, New Delhi maintained a “stand of not exporting defence equipment, which can indirectly fuel conflicts” (Guha, 2015, para. 3). By contrast, it now considers arms export a crucial component of its military diplomacy vis-a-vis the Indo-Pacific countries. The Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, was categorical in stating that India is willing to supply various types of missile systems, Light Combat Aircraft, helicopters, warships and patrol vessels, and electronic warfare systems to countries in the IOR (The Hindu, 2021b). Apart from the monetary gains, Indian planners believe that arms supplies will buttress its role as a capacity builder and image of a reliable security partner to regional states. Some examples of arms deals include the dispatch of lightweight torpedoes worth 37.9 million to Myanmar in early 2017 (Parameswaran, 2017). Reports confirm that a multinational Indian conglomerate, Larsen & Toubro Limited, is slated to work with the SEA countries to enhance their anti-submarine warfare capabilities (Airy, 2016). To facilitate arms sales, India offered LoC to countries in SEA (US $500 million to Vietnam and US $100 million to the Philippines) and the IOR (US $500 million to Bangladesh, US $100 million to Mauritius, US $50 million to the Maldives) to purchase Indian defence equipment and strengthen naval capabilities. New Delhi also handed over a Kilo-class attack submarine to the Myanmar Navy in October 2020.

Apart from defence sales, India utilised space diplomacy as a viable tool of cooperation. Space cooperation was relevant even under the LEP years, but it never received a sustained push and was not a crucial component of regional diplomacy. Through space diplomacy, New Delhi seeks to share its space expertise and assist regional countries in building capabilities in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and cyber-electromagnetic spectrum (cyber-EMS) (Jha, 2018). The ISRO possesses ground stations in Indonesia and Brunei to track Indian satellites launched from the east coast (Rao, 2016). In 2016, India and Vietnam inked a deal to station ISRO’s Data Reception and Tracking and Telemetry Station in Ho Chi Minh City, which will form a part of ISRO’s emerging network in SEA. The SEA countries can utilise the output from these facilities to track security developments in the region, including Chinese activities in the disputed SCS.

Furthermore, under the AEP, India revived its ties with the Pacific Islands Countries (PICs). In 2014, PM Modi visited Fiji and Papua New Guinea, making him the second Indian PM to visit the region after three decades (PTI, 2014). A forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation was established to institutionalise cooperation with the region. New Delhi chaired two leaders’ summits in 2014 and 2015, respectively. India and Fiji inked a defence agreement

for cooperation in the defence industry, military training, and the HADR operations (MoD, 2017).

In terms of the EA and Oceania countries such as Japan, South Korea and Australia, New Delhi focussed on joint production, complex military exercises, minilateral arrangements, and multilateral dialogues. India and Australia instituted a bilateral naval exercise, AUSINDEX, a biennial exercise held since 2015. During PM Modi's state visit to Seoul in 2015, the leaders intensified bilateral defence relations through active exchange of military officers for education, regular consultations between National Security Council (NSC) structures, staff-level talks between their navies, and cybersecurity cooperation. (MEA, 2015b). They even agreed to upgrade their defence and foreign affairs to the 2+2 format dialogue (which was held in 2019) and signed a military logistics agreement that would allow the IN to bolster its operational reach in the Indo-Pacific (MEA, 2015b). During PM Modi's visit to Japan in 2018, the two countries finalised the Implementation Arrangement for Deeper Cooperation between the IN and Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (PTI, 2018a). In a significant step forward, India, Australia, and Japan held their first-ever trilateral dialogue in 2015. This was the second such trilateral arrangement after the India–US–Japan trilateral dialogue. These dialogues exhibit the participating countries' intention to enhance mutual understanding of security issues. It also allows them to remain abreast with the nuances of regional perspectives on strategic issues, which is crucial given the fast-changing security landscape.

These developments were accompanied by the revival of the 'Quad'. After a hiatus of a decade, in late 2017, the leaders of India, Japan, Australia, and the US met on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Manila and initiated a working-level quadrilateral dialogue. These interactions were elevated to the ministerial level in September 2019. In November 2019, the Quad countries held a tabletop counter-terrorism exercise (PTI, 2019c). A new chapter began in March 2021 when the US, India, Japan and Australia met virtually and issued their first joint statement titled, 'The Spirit of the Quad' (The White House, 2021d). This was followed up by the first in-person Quad Summit that sought to further solidify the relationship between the four democracies and build on shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The in-person Quad concluded with a statement highlighting practical initiatives on a range of issues such as fighting the pandemic and the climate crisis and promoting cooperation on quality infrastructure, emerging technologies, space, and cybersecurity.

The Quad remains crucial to the success of the AEP because it is through collaboration and cooperation with the US, Japan, and Australia that India can better assist smaller countries and present an alternative to the China-led regional order. These moves are funded with the hope that a stronger maritime regional order cannot be easily dominated by China. While the Quad initiative currently includes these four countries, there have been attempts to collaborate with willing ASEAN members on security issues in the SCS. For example, in

May 2019, India, the US, Japan, and the Philippines conducted joint maritime operations in the SCS (Doornbos, 2019). Involving the ASEAN countries allows extra-regional powers to increase presence in the SCS and help allay regional concerns over being marginalised by major/great power competition.

Another intriguing feature of the AEP is its growing overlap with India's IOR policy. As argued above, the distinctions between the two RCs—net security provider in the IO and stakeholder in the security of the Indo-Pacific—have been blurring, which is noticeable in India's role performance. There is a realisation within policymaking circles in India that for the AEP to be effective, New Delhi must secure its position in the IOR. Without a stronghold in the IOR, India's influence towards the east will remain half-baked. Equally important is the recognition that the success of India's Indo-Pacific policy depends on the strength and effectiveness of the AEP. This also explains the relevance of the SAGAR vision for the ASEAN region specifically and the Indo-Pacific region at large. According to the EAM, "Indo-Pacific must be perceived as the further extrapolation of the Act East–Look East policy. The transition from one to the other was [is] itself indicative of India's deepening security stakes in the East" (MEA, 2019b, para. 28).

To fulfil its responsibilities as a net security provider and a first responder in the IOR, the IN has been carrying out continuous patrolling in the region since 2017. As revealed by a naval official, the IN roughly has "12 to 15 destroyers, frigates, corvettes and large patrol vessels on long-range deployments in the IOR at any given time" (official quoted in Pandit, 2017b, para. 2). The intent is to have "mission ready warships and aircraft along critical SLOCs and chokepoints" stretching from the Gulf of Persia to the Malacca and Sunda Straits (official quoted in Pandit, 2017b, para. 3). Since 2016, the IN has been deploying the P-8I long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft to Seychelles (Economic Times, 2018). India has also increased the level of assistance to the littoral states in maritime capacity building and prioritised regional collaborations. Instances include the Indian assistance to Bangladesh in the operationalisation of the Sittwe Port, their bilateral agreement allowing New Delhi to install a coastal surveillance system along Bangladesh's coast (Chowdhury, 2019); the decision to lease Dornier aircraft to the Maldives for maritime surveillance (Peri, 2019); and increase Indian aid to Mauritius. Other notable developments include the inauguration of the Information Fusion Centre (IFC)-IOR, which is tasked with collating data related to maritime activities in the region and sharing with multiple partners (PTI, 2018f). The data would assist other states by enhancing their MDA, which is important to address non-traditional security threats, undertake HADR activities, and coordinate maritime activities.

There are indications to confirm that the SAGAR vision (originally introduced for the IOR) is now being utilised as a template for India's interactions with the SEA and EA countries. One of the primary Indian objectives under

the SAGAR vision is to cultivate a regular presence in maritime spaces and beef up its operational reach towards the east. Apart from frequent naval deployments and joint naval exercises that are undertaken by the IN, the Indian Coast Guard has become relatively active. In March 2019, the Indian Coast Guard ship visited the port of Sabang (Indonesia). India even pledged assistance to Indonesia to build a deep-sea port in Sabang (Chaudhury, 2019a). Domestically, India focused on enhancing its operational capability of the A&N Command, which extends the operational reach of the IN in the eastern IOR and the SEA. In order to highlight its expanding reach, the IN landed its reconnaissance aircraft P-8i in Car Nicobar (the southern islands) in 2018. Further, INS *Kohassa* (the third naval airbase in the region) was commissioned at the Naval Air Station (NAS) Shibpur in early 2019 (Hindustan Times, 2019). This military facility, which is close to critical SLOCs in the SEA, will boost India's MDA capabilities in the region and further the IN's operational reach.

There are other indicators in the current policy conduct which confirm greater integration between India's IOR and Indo-Pacific policy. For instance, many SEA countries (Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Vietnam) participate in India-led initiatives such as the IONS and BIMSTEC. In 2017, the BIMSTEC established a Track 1.5 Security Dialogue Forum, which introduced an additional forum for interaction on security issues. Another forum that brings together countries from the IO and SEA is the Indian Ocean Conference. It is a prominent multilateral conference organised by an Indian think tank in association with other regional institutions and with participation from close to 30 countries to discuss issues relevant to the IOR. With time, the trend of cooperation with the SEA countries on the IO affairs is only going to intensify.

During the 2019 EAS, India announced the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). The IPOI is an "open and non-treaty based initiative" which aims towards "practical implementation" of the Indo-Pacific vision in the maritime domain (MEA, 2021d, para. 6 and 7). The initiative aims to utilise the existing regional frameworks and mechanisms more effectively as opposed to creating new parallel mechanisms. The focus of the IPOI is on the seven pillars identified by the Indian government— "Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Resource Sharing, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation and Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport" (MEA, 2021d, para. 7). There is an overlap between the SAGAR vision and the IPOI, yet again confirming that India's policy orientation towards the SEA and EA regions and the Indo-Pacific region is advancing simultaneously and is in consonance with each other. In recent years, there have been concerted efforts from India and ASEAN to cooperate on shared interests in the Indo-Pacific and build synergy between their visions and initiatives for the Indo-Pacific. During the ASEAN-India Summit in 2021, both the parties agreed to increase practical cooperation

on priority areas identified in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (including maritime cooperation and connectivity) and contribute to the peace and stability of the region.

Interestingly, during PM Modi's visit to Russia in September 2019, a corollary to the Act East was introduced—the Act Far East policy (Gupta, 2019). The Act Far East, which currently aims to develop economic ties with Russia's far eastern regions, can be viewed as a policy to incorporate Russia into India's vision of the Indo-Pacific. This development conforms with New Delhi's aim to not alienate Moscow, especially as India increases its cooperation with the US in the Indo-Pacific region. Russia remains a crucial defence partner for India despite the diversification of partnerships and inclusion of new suppliers such as the US and Israel. For India to beef up its security role performance in the Indo-Pacific, it has continued to rely on Russia for advanced weapon systems, defence technology, and maritime platforms.

A growing Russia–China partnership and Moscow's suspicion over India–US security ties required a greater infusion of energy into India–Russia relations. In December 2021, the two countries also inaugurated a 2+2 ministerial dialogue. For New Delhi, closer relations with Russia are pregnant with the hope that the Indo-Pacific's security order remains favourable to India's interests and not disrupted by Russia's proximity to China or Moscow's chequered relationship with Washington. As noted by Tellis, "Indian strategists fear that a Russia that is left out of the Indo-Pacific has increased incentives to move closer to China, and a deeper Russia-China partnership is unsettling from India's point of view" (Tellis, 2021, para. 5). Such a situation is deeply problematic for New Delhi. Receiving diplomatic and military support from Russia and keeping it away (as much as possible) from China is what suits India's strategic interests in the region. These objectives are best realised through the current Indian strategies of multi-alignment and issue-based alignment in the Indo-Pacific.

Although the altering master and auxiliary RCs were reflected in India's role performance towards SEA and EA, it is germane to mention that despite the increase in pace and intensity of initiatives and security interactions, there is a continuing conception–performance gap. India remains short of fulfilling the regional expectations regarding its role as a capacity builder or a 'reliable' security actor. This was clear in the 2019 survey of Southeast Asian foreign policy practitioners and relevant stakeholders. On being asked about India's political and strategic influence in SEA, it was ranked as the country with the least influence (Tang, Hoang, Chalermpalanupap, Pham, Saelaow & Thuzar, 2019). Similarly, when asked if India would "do the right thing in contributing to global peace, security, prosperity and governance", 45.6% of the respondents expressed either 'little confidence' (34%) or 'no confidence' (11.6%) (Tang et al., 2019, p. 28). Overall, India invited more negative perceptions among the political elites of SEA than positive ones, which confirms the gap

between India's RC as a stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific and how the region views it. Besides, during a Track II dialogue on security issues in the Asia-Pacific, some regional participants expressed their dissatisfaction with India's performance called India's 'Act East' 'At ease!' policy (Prakash, 2018, line 1).

While there are some successes in the security sector, the ASEAN members remain most disappointed with the lack of Indian performance in the economic, trade and infrastructure-related sectors. Since ASEAN's origin, its success has been underpinned by economic growth and regional integration. Security or military power has not been ASEAN's strongest point. In light of this background, the ASEAN members continue to give preference to economic interactions and non-security initiatives over the security involvement of extra-regional actors. This is where India's performance is disappointing. So far, New Delhi has worked towards building security relations in the absence of robust economic ties with the countries of SEA and EA. India, in recent years, has adopted an inward economic orientation dispiriting the regional business entities. This became clearer in November 2019 when New Delhi opted out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement due to domestic political and economic compulsions and challenges.

The other shortcoming that impedes the success of the AEP lies in India's inability to deliver on commitments it makes on paper. India holds a dim track record of delivering on its commitments in a timely manner due to its sluggish bureaucracy and domestic structural weaknesses. Even when numerous agreements are signed with the relevant countries, the implementation is slow, as seen in connectivity and infrastructure projects. For example, the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway, which connects the three countries via land, was approved in 2002 but is not operational despite its first deadline in 2016 (Mitra, 2021). Interestingly, despite the slow progress, there are plans to extend the highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Similarly, the India–Myanmar Kaladan connectivity project, which was first approved in 2008, crossed its initial deadline eight years ago and remains incomplete at the time of writing (Mitra, 2021). Even the Agartala–Akhaura rail link between India and Bangladesh has gone through two deadline extensions, with another one in the offing at the time of writing. There is a range of factors responsible for the situation, such as delays in government approvals of involved parties to the challenges faced due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the fact remains that most of the ambitious connectivity and infrastructure projects are not operational. This creates a sense of distrust among the recipient countries.

India's sluggishness appears all the more excruciating compared to China, which is known for timely and swift implementation of agreements, albeit the questionable practices and potential debt traps. Therefore, regional and extra-regional countries continue to view India as a relatively unreliable partner. In the security domain, despite India's agreement in principle to sell the BrahMos to SEA countries, there has been little progress beyond the recent agreement

with the Philippines. The lack of major progress fans speculations regarding New Delhi's hesitation to transfer sensitive military technology. The credit lines doled out by India to the ASEAN countries also remain grossly unutilised at the time of writing. In short, despite heightened energy, vigour and rhetoric under the aegis of the AEP, the Modi government has been unable to reverse the trend of the conception–performance gap.

4.5 Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter examined India's security role evolution from early 2000 until March 2021. As demonstrated, the 'benign power' role of the 1990s transformed into new auxiliary RCs—India as a net security provider in the IO and a stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific. This chapter aimed to map out the evolving trajectory of the master and auxiliary RCs. India's initial master RC was a major power role (beginning in 2002), followed by the leading power role (starting in 2015). The major power role started as a self-conception in the post-nuclear test years. Eventually, it became a well-established RC after external actors grew supportive in view of India's economic emergence and its security potential. The new RC was reflected in policy actions as the LEP graduated to a second phase in 2003. During the next phase, the Indian government concentrated on security issues and expanded its focus beyond the ASEAN countries and included the East Asian countries and Australia.

Simultaneous with the changes at the master RC level, new (security-relevant) auxiliary RCs emerged. The RCs pertinent to the Indo-Pacific region were covered in the chapter. Specifically, the RCs of a "net security provider/provider of net security in the IO" and "stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific" were identified and analysed. India's role in the IOR shaped up after the 2004 IO Tsunami crisis, where the Indian forces were substantially involved in the HADR operations. New Delhi grew more confident in its forces' ability to manage complex relief and rescue operations. Hence, it was keener to play a constructive security role in the region. This self-conception was supported by countries such as the US and Japan, which convinced New Delhi to assume a larger mantle. The mutual combination of India's self-interest and external support led to the development of the auxiliary RC as a net security provider role in the IO. This role cropped up in the official discourse in 2010. Simultaneously, India's interest in the western Pacific was budding, which became apparent in 2011. In general, China's military rise and assertive conduct began blurring the distinctions between the IO and the Pacific Ocean. This brought to life the concept of the Indo-Pacific, which was initially introduced as the 'confluence' of two oceans in 2007. This idea went on to become a regional construct of relevance in another few years.

Despite the introduction of new auxiliary RCs, there were limited changes in India's role performance. The limitations emanated from economic challenges post-2008 financial crisis and domestic political problems that curtailed the possibility of major foreign policy initiatives.

The next major period of evolution began in 2014–15 when the master RC of a leading power was introduced to the Indian lexicon. Notably, the leading power role did not denote a drastically new RC but represented a more sophisticated version that complemented the former major power role. As covered in the chapter, the leading power role has been projected as a distinct role. New Delhi hopes to shape regional and global affairs by partnering with multiple countries and not aligning with any one set of states. Alongside, the auxiliary RCs underwent subtle alterations. The confluence of these changes informed the contours of the AEP. While the net security provider role remained intact, India's self-conception in the Indo-Pacific shifted from a fledgeling interest in the previous decade to the RC of a stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. More importantly, in recent years, there has been a growing overlap between India's IOR policy and the AEP, even as there is a conception–performance gap.

This chapter suggests that India's current RCs (both master and auxiliary) did not crop up suddenly but emerged from a consistent evolution of roles in the last two decades. These incremental changes in the RCs are determined by a range of factors that emanate from regional, national, and sub-national factors and ideational and material elements. The factors that shaped India's role evolution are examined in the next two chapters. The chapter also denotes that a change in master or auxiliary RC does not imply an automatic and instant change in policy behaviour. Many a time, changes at the conceptual level take time before they get sufficiently reflected in policy action and decisions. Therefore, even as there is an upward movement in policy behaviour, and one comes across new policy initiatives, there is evidence of a conception–performance gap. During the periods of conception–performance gaps, policy actions do not align entirely with political rhetoric. The causes of this gap are covered in the next two chapters.

5. Self-Conception: Domestic Determinants of Role Conception

> "As our capabilities have grown, so too has our sense of responsibility."
> —EAM Natwar Singh (MEA, 2005a)

Having identified the evolving RCs (from 2001 to 2021) in the previous chapter, this chapter digs into the determinants (IV) of the role evolution and associated MVs. From this chapter onwards, India's security role evolution is regarded as the DV, and self-conception and role prescription are considered as IVs. This chapter studies the link between changes in self-conception (one of the IV) and the role evolution (DV). This is done by examining factors at the domestic level which shape India's self-conceptions. The chapter also examines MVs (role competition and domestic contestation) that cause the conception–performance gap (identified in Chapter 4). The focus is on endogenous factors that determine India's evolving RCs towards the Indo-Pacific region.

The first part offers an overview of the permanent domestic determinants followed by internal factors that have altered over two decades. The new domestic determinants identified in the chapter are India's growing economic potential and the rise of the IN. Subsequently, the chapter identifies MVs that inhibit India's security role performance—role competition and domestic contestation—and create a conception–performance gap.

5.1 Permanent Determinants

So far, it has been established that India's RCs began evolving in the early to mid-2000s. Because self-conception(s) constitute a vital part of the RCs, it is essential to understand the domestic changes in India that led to its alterations. Self-conceptions emanate from an amalgamation of constant and dynamic factors. Before delving into the aspects that spurred a change in India's self-conception(s), it is crucial to understand some permanent determinants that have historically shaped its master and auxiliary RCs.

One of the fundamental factors that allow Indian decision-makers to envision a role in the IO and the Indo-Pacific is India's strategic geographical location. India is a large landmass that stretches across the Himalayan Range in the north. Towards the south, the Indian Peninsula tapers into the IO with the Bay of Bengal in the east and the Arabian Sea in the west. With a coastline of

7500 km, India is located comfortably in the IO. Flanked by the Atlantic Ocean in the west and the Pacific Ocean in the east, the IOR sits at the crossroads of the global maritime trade and is home to crucial SLOCs and maritime chokepoints such as the Malacca Straits and the Persian Gulf. Indian planners accord importance to the SLOCs in the west and the east in terms of trade and energy flows. India's unique geographical location (seen in the map below) bestows an advantage in the maritime space. It allows the political leadership to envision a maritime role in the IO (first concentric circle) or the larger Indo-Pacific region (second concentric circle). Such references are rife in foreign policy officials' speeches to domestic and international audiences. FS Rao, for instance, stated the following:

> "India and the Indian Ocean are inseparable. In the midst of the third largest ocean in the world, India's location is in many ways her destiny. That is not just a statement regarding a fact of geography but of deeper civilizational, historical, cultural, economic and political linkages that have been forged between India and the Ocean that bears its name" (MEA, 2010b, pt. 2).

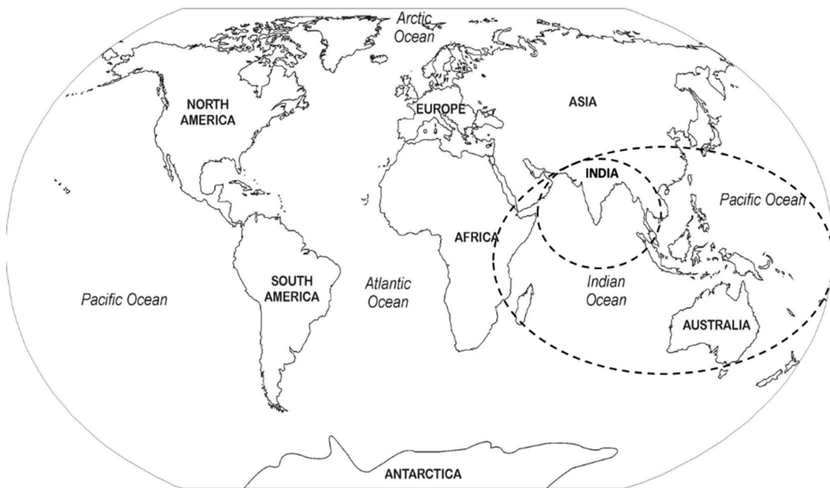

Figure 4: India's Geographical Location and Concentric Circles. *Source: Adapted from World Map (2009)*

Another factor that influences Indian self-conceptions is its civilisational history. The 5000-year-old Indian civilisational history went through phases of expansion and contraction. According to Cohen (2001), this has a strong influence on how the Indian leadership looks at their country's role at the regional and global levels. He argues that "the Indian elite holds fast to a vision of national greatness [...] the historical memory of a great Indian civilization has practical consequences. Indian officials believe that they represent not just a state but a civilization" (Cohen, 2001, p. 52). The ancient glory of the past remains embedded in the policymakers' sense of 'greatness', which informs India's perpetual search for a "rightful place in the comity of nations" (for more details, see Ayres, 2018; Pande, 2017; Basrur & de Estrada, 2017). This was apparent in historical and contemporary master RCs such as major power, leading power, or great power. Nayar and Paul (2003) believe that Indian planners have historically strived for a major power role driven by a status-seeking desire.

Looking back at India's role performance as an Asian power during the Nehru years, it becomes apparent that it wanted to perform an expanded regional role despite lacking the concomitant resources (see Chapter 3). Even under Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, when India acted as a dominant regional player, a sense of civilisational entitlement loomed large in the background. Expressing a similar sentiment, PM Modi, in 2014, said: "this [India] is a country that once upon a time was called 'the golden bird'. We have fallen from where we were before. But now we have the chance to rise again" (IANS, 2014, last para). Notably, whenever India possesses greater economic and military capacity to assume a larger role, its leaders seek to revive its historical and civilisational high status. As noted by EAM Jaishankar, "strengthening a sense of extended neighbourhood is part of India's reclaiming of history" (MEA, 2019b, para. 62). These statements reflect that the views of Indian leadership and policymakers are moulded by a combination of the country's geographical location and civilisational history. Overall, a dominant role in the IO or a stake in the Indo-Pacific falls within the gambit of India's ambition to revive its historical and civilisational pre-eminence. In recent years, as New Delhi seeks a more active regional leadership role, its definition of the extended neighbourhood has expanded. In December 2021, the Indian FS remarked, "for India, the Indo-Pacific region is part of our extended neighbourhood" (MEA, 2021e, pt. 2).

Apart from these factors, another near-constant ideational determinant of Indian external behaviour is its quest to preserve strategic autonomy. This attribute was dominant in the former RC of a non-aligned power and is equally relevant to its current multi-alignment and issue-based alignment strategy. The preceding chapters touch upon the connection between India's colonial experience and the idea of strategic autonomy. Given this context, it is worth reviewing the concept of strategic autonomy in ancient Indian literature on state-

craft. Some of the noted works are the *Arthashartra* written by Kautilya, the minister of the Maurya Empire in the fourth century BC, and *Shukraneeti*, named after the thinker and Hindu sage Shukracharyya, which covers the idea and practice of strategic autonomy (Sarkar, 1918). These works have been translated from Sanskrit texts to English. *Shukraneeti* emphasises the independence of the *Rashtra*, which roughly translates into English as the nation-state. As argued in the text of *Shukraneeti*, "great misery comes of dependence on others. There is no greater happiness than that from self-rule" (Gustav Oppert, 1882 cited in Sarkar, 1919, p. 400). The negative connotation attached to dependency on others is also echoed in the accounts of Kautilya (Sarkar, 1919). These ideas were revived and gained greater credence during the colonial era and complemented India's freedom struggle against the British empire.

The value of decisional autonomy was realised during the Indian liberation movement, giving rise to new concepts such as 'swaraj' (self-rule) and 'swadeshi' (indigenous) (Mohanty, 1991). Although famously associated with Mahatma Gandhi, the concept of swaraj, which eventually transitioned into *Purna Swaraj* (complete self-rule or undisputed independence), was adopted and advanced by freedom fighters such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bhagat Singh. These ideas dominated India's foreign and security policy conduct as a post-colonial country. Even after gaining independence, political elites (many of whom were involved in the freedom struggle) jealously guarded the newly-achieved decisional autonomy. While searching for its place in the new world order as a young country, India perpetually struggled with the practice of security cooperation with other powers (particularly the western powers). It was constantly wary of compromising on decisional autonomy. Ever since, this has remained a constant theme in the foreign policy and security discourse of the country.

The desire to preserve strategic autonomy was manifested in the NAM during the Nehru era. It was also pursued under the leadership of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi in different forms. Even when India partnered with the USSR in 1971, it strived to preserve its strategic autonomy. This obviated the possibility of an India–USSR alliance, although security cooperation was a vital element in their bilateral relations. Until the 2000s, India's quest for strategic autonomy had an unmistakable 'anti-Western edge' (Tourangbam, 2014). From the mid-2000s, when New Delhi inched closer to Washington, the anti-western sentiment substantially subsided but did not dissipate altogether. In the current day situation, the concept of strategic autonomy has become more flexible than in yesteryear. Still, it remains relevant in the context of India's foreign and security policy conduct.

5.2 New Determinant: Rise in Economic Potential

Whenever the economic capabilities of a country expand, it provides the decision-makers with greater resources to envisage ambitious roles or perform the existing roles more efficiently. This section demonstrates that India's economic progress has been a crucial driver of its expanded self-conception(s). In the pre-liberalisation era, New Delhi had performed as an Asian power (mid-1947 to the 1960s) and subcontinental power (the late 1960s to late 1980s) in the absence of a robust economic base. Contrastingly, a decade after its economic opening, India experienced sustained economic growth, which transformed its self-conceptions. Starting from the early 2000s, improved economic performance boosted the Indian leadership's confidence and enabled it to alter the strategic balance at the regional level. A brief chronological overview of the economic trajectory would help understand the relevance of economic factors for India's self-conception and role performance.

When India got independence in 1947, it was divided into two countries—India and Pakistan. At the time, its economic indicators were anything but positive. Plagued by extreme poverty, overpopulation, and recurring threats of famine, the country inherited an almost stationary economy. The government's priority was to iron out the economic inequalities, uplift the poor, focus on industrialisation and agriculture, and pursue economic self-reliance. The initial phase of economic planning was greatly influenced by the pursuit of self-reliance and non-alignment, drawn heavily from the master RCs of the time. There was a perpetual fear of foreign influence on the Indian economy. This fear emanated from India's experience with the East India Company, which had entered the subcontinent as a trading entity in 1757 and later metamorphosed into a colonial power that ruled for almost two centuries. Therefore, independent India "adopted a strategy of import-substituting industrialisation, which completely discouraged foreign investment" (Malone, 2011, p. 77). Circa 1950, it adopted a socialist model of the economy with elements of capitalism. There was optimism that the mixed economic strategy would provide the benefits of a pro-business environment while insulating the economy from the vagaries of the international market (Bhagwati, 1993). Overall, India's economic development policy was state-regulated, and the government-controlled and monopolised large-scale sectors such as arms production, defence, nuclear and power sectors, railways, telecommunications, steel and chemical industries, and mineral exploration. The government-regulated economy did not produce the desired results. An inward-looking economy offered limited indicators of stability, and the indigenous industrial base suffered. In the first decade of economic planning, i.e., from 1950–51 to 1960–61, India experienced an average growth rate (in real terms) of approximately 3.5 to 4% annually (Bhagwati & Srinivasa, 1975).

India's financial weakness limited the scope of its external security orientation. Amid the developmental challenges, PM Nehru paid little heed to the country's security role or its defence sector. Nehru hired P. M. S. Blackett, a British scientist, who advised the government to limit defence spending to 2% of the GDP (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2010). This suggestion gained traction among the decision-makers. As a result, the first decades saw meagre investment in the build-up or modernisation of the Indian armed forces. All through the 1950s, the defence budget was lower than the pre-independence defence budget and even lesser than the military spending of India's neighbours, China and Pakistan (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2010). Although New Delhi attempted to conduct itself as an Asian power, the role performance was bereft of any substantial security content.

Economic growth remained limited under Nehru (1947–64), his successor PM Shastri (1964–66), and, during the first tenure of the third PM, Indira Gandhi (1966–77). The economy bore the burden of the 1962 India–China War, followed by the India–Pakistan War in 1965. Each war implied greater defence spending, leading to increased economic inflation. After the military setback in 1962, the government diverted additional funds for defence spending. The injection of funds took the military budget to almost 4.5% of the GDP, but the trend did not continue because of impending economic woes in the late 1960s (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2010).

The growing Soviet–India military cooperation in the late 1960s made it easier for them to deepen economic and technological cooperation (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 1972). The USSR helped develop India's industrial base and offered advanced technologies. The Indian leadership's economic outlook too became heavily influenced by Soviet thinking. Despite these developments, the Indian economic growth was not very impressive. Prime Minister Gandhi's populist schemes compounded the situation in the 1970s. She grappled with immense domestic political opposition. To consolidate her control, Gandhi resorted to many political and economic measures, almost all of which either resulted in greater state control or economic populism. Interventionist policies resulted in red tape and rampant corruption in various government sectors. The economy suffered frequent fluctuations throughout the 1970s. The 1971 India–Pakistan War and the 1973 oil crisis arrested India's already precarious economic growth. With the economic performance plummeting, the military budgets got hampered (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2010). This, naturally, militated New Delhi's ability to exercise any security role beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

Added to the mix was acute domestic political instability. In mid-1975, Gandhi imposed a national emergency, which went on for 21 months until 1977. Shortly after the Emergency was lifted, Gandhi's INC lost power and was replaced by the Janata Party. India's economy gained some ground before dipping again in 1979–80, lowering the Gross National Product by 3% (Union

Budget, 1997). The sharp decline resulted from a combination of excessive public spending, a lopsided balance of payment due to increased crude oil prices, and a setback in industrial and agriculture output (Union Budget, 1997).

In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a landslide victory. Under Gandhi, state regulation on the economy was eased to some extent. There was also a relative shift from socialist economics to a market-driven economy. The government encouraged greater participation from the private players, even in the core industries. The move towards greater liberalisation continued under PM Rajiv Gandhi, who introduced some policy changes. Atul Kohli refers to those changes as "liberalisation by stealth" (Panagariya, 2004, p. 14). China and the SEA countries' economic rise at the time motivated the GOI to rethink its economic policies. The high economic growth of these Asian countries resulted from an export-oriented economic model and a focus on privatisation. After China introduced the 'Economic Reform and Open-Door Policy' in December 1978, it paced towards greater integration with the global economy, accruing economic growth to the tune of a 15% GDP growth rate in 1984 (Wong, 1995; The World Bank, n.d.-b).

Inspired by these trends, the Indian leadership implemented some policies towards liberalisation, although limited in scope compared to the 1991 reforms. Nevertheless, the policy changes facilitated improved trade flows and exports, a better import-to-GDP ratio, and increased private investment. India's industrial growth swelled, climbing from 4.5% in 1985–86 to 10.5% in 1989–90 (Panagariya, 2004). In 1988, the economy recorded an unprecedented 9.6% annual increase in GDP (Country Economy, n.d.). The soaring economic growth occasioned a golden period for the defence forces. As a percentage of GDP, the defence budget saw a rise of over 5%, which was utilised for massive military modernisation. This gave a fillip to India's role performance as a subcontinental power and security-seeker, as evidenced by its military involvement in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. There was an interest in building the naval arm, which was a change from the traditional emphasis on land forces. The sudden naval modernisation was not accompanied by a defined doctrine or strategic outlook. An unprecedented naval build-up sparked concerns among the littorals of SEA, who got anxious over India's potential as a regional naval threat. Nevertheless, this period was short-lived.

Panagariya (2004, p. 14) argues that India's economic progress in the late 1980s was 'fragile'. The generated revenue was sapped by increased public spending in the form of expanded defence budgets, subsidies, higher governmental wages, and payment of interests (Panagariya, 2004). Subsequently, New Delhi relied on foreign borrowings, which temporarily aided growth but was unsustainable. Soon after, the external debt shot up, and there was an increase in fiscal and current accounts deficits. The Gulf War in 1990 led to increased oil prices, and India lost a significant chunk of the remittances that it used to receive from migrants in the Gulf region (Saith, 1992). On top of this,

there was immense political instability at home with a series of short-lived coalition governments. A mix of these factors and the balance of payment crisis snowballed into a major financial emergency in 1991.

The GDP rate dipped from 9.63% in 1988 to a mere 1.1% in 1991 (World Bank, n.d.-a). The inflation rate rose to a whopping 12.1% in 1990–91 (Wadhwa, 2004). By July, the GOI faced an extreme liquidity crisis and was close to defaulting on its sovereign payments. Perforce, the caretaker government pledged its gold reserves to the IMF in return for a loan to cover the balance of payment debts (Vikraman, 2017). As expected, the military budget dropped substantially. In the coming years, the lack of funds restricted military growth and limited India's security role potential, even in the immediate neighbourhood.

When P. V. Narasimha Rao took over the political reigns and became the PM in June 1991, he led India's most crucial economic transformation. The reforms and restructuring initiated by PM Rao and his team (which included the future Indian PM Manmohan Singh) were extensive. They introduced macro-economic, structural, and sector-specific reforms. The economic outlook shifted from a preference for the state-regulated economy to a market-oriented and private sector-driven economy. Direct taxes on corporates and individuals and export subsidies were removed, and the focus shifted towards major disinvestment programmes and standardisation of the tax system (Wadhwa, 2004). In 1992, India adopted a fluctuating exchange rate, which meant that the market forces of supply and demand would determine the exchange value.

The economic opening became a cynosure for countries in a post–Cold War world. India was finally commanding some attention as a potential economic player. Indian firms were able to raise funds and compete in the global capital market. There was an influx of foreign direct investment from companies in the US, the United Kingdom (UK), Japan, and Germany (Malone, 2011). The domestic markets and private entities accelerated economic growth in the coming years. The growth rate was sustained in contrast to the 'unsustainable' growth rate of the 1980s (Ahluwalia, 2002). From 1992–93 to 2001–02, India logged an average growth rate of 6%, making it one of the "fastest-growing developing countries in the 1990s" (Ahluwalia, 2002, p. 67). With an increased focus on economic growth, New Delhi decided to perform a 'benign' power role and shed its image as a dominant security power. It needed a conducive periphery to grow economically. Therefore, it stressed forming cooperative security relationships in the immediate and extended neighbourhood.

From 1993–94, India went through a period of high growth rate averaging an annual GDP of 7.2%, until it was affected by the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The growth rate slowed down in 1997. After the nuclear tests in 1998, India was irrupted by western sanctions, and the economy fluctuated for a few years until it picked up the pace in 2003–04. Between 1992–93 to 2009–10, the In-

dian economy grew at an average rate of 6.86% per annum (Saikia, 2012). Home to the world's second-largest population, India possessed a massive consumer market and had immense potential to be a source of the global workforce. This attracted the interest of American and European companies. India went in for extensive trade diversification in the 1990s. The US, which was the top investor in India from 1991–99, was surpassed by Mauritius and Singapore in 2000 and it remained so until 2009. Likewise, the erstwhile Soviet Union, India's top economic partner in the pre-1991 era, was nowhere in India's top 15 trading partners. As of 2005, the US, the UAE, China, Singapore, and the UK were the top five trading partners. These trends spurred merchandise trade, contributing to higher economic growth (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya, 2011). India's merchandise trade, which was merely 13% of India's GDP in 1990, accounted for almost 42% of India's GDP by 2008 (Mohan, 2013a). This was indicative of the 'international component' in India's economic activity (Mohan, 2013a, p. 41). The Information Technology revolution further pushed India's growth. Its share of exports in IT output, which was 19% in 1991–92 rose to 49% in 2000–01 and touched 81% in 2014–15 (Maitra & Dissanayake, 2015). Between 2003–04 and 2007–08, India enjoyed an economic boom logging an average growth rate of almost 9% per annum, overtaken only by China.

An upward-looking economic trajectory heightened the confidence of the Indian leadership and political elites. They sensed that economic growth had enhanced their country's regional and global standing and transformed its international perception. India's economic progress enabled it to be bracketed with China as an important regional player. According to Sanjaya Baru, media advisor to PM Singh, "financial empowerment enabled India to bridge the gap between her strategic capability and potential as a major power" (Baru, 2002, pp. 2589–90). Singh himself acknowledged that economic liberalisation had altered the nature of India's "interaction with the world" and "shaped global perceptions of India" (MEA, 2005c, para. 10). The policymakers' perception of the changing external expectations informed the new self-conception of an emerging economic powerhouse. The new master and auxiliary self-conceptions were more aspirational in nature and expansive in scope. Two trends branched out from India's economic progress: new security imperatives and increased defence budget allocation.

5.2.1 New Security Imperatives

The unprecedented economic growth introduced new security imperatives, particularly in the maritime domain. India's emergence as an economic power enhanced its international (sea-borne) trade ties and swelled its energy needs. The total trade (as a percentage of GDP) jumped from 22.1% in 1996 to 53.7% in 2008 (World Bank, n.d.-a). To a great extent, the economic growth hinged

on foreign partners. The Indian policymakers were keen to expand it further. For instance, the trade with the ASEAN region jumped from US $2.3 billion in 1991–92 to US $70 billion in 2016–17 (Sinha, 2009). While these numbers were nowhere close to the actual potential of the India-ASEAN economic relations or the trade flows from the western waters, an upwards trend was evident.

Compared to previous years, India relied more heavily on maritime pathways or the SLOCs for international trade and energy imports. The growing dependency underlined the importance of freedom of navigation. Increased trade flows from the east made the SLOCs in the western Pacific worthy of attention. The SCS, which had historically not been a priority for India, gained greater attention in the mid-2000s. In 2008, India's sea imports from the SCS amounted to US $85 billion, expanding to US $123 billion in 2016 (China Power, n.d.). As of 2017, almost 50% of India's sea-bound trade transited through the volatile SCS and the Malacca Straits (Rajya Sabha, 2017).

India's economic rise was also accompanied by a surge in energy consumption, highlighting the need for energy security. Fuchs and Glaab (2009, p. 4) noted that India was traditionally self-reliant on its energy supply, but this changed in the 1990s after it became a "net importer of energy". From 1990 to 2011, India's "primary energy consumption more than doubled" (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2013c, para. 2). By 2013, it became the "fourth-largest energy consumer in the world" (EIA, 2013b, para. 1). Reasons for expanded energy needs included increased urbanisation and a build-up of residential and commercial infrastructure. With the rural population shifting to the cities for better jobs and economic prospects, the demand for energy-intensive products increased.

The SLOCs remained the primary medium of energy imports. As energy security became a priority, discussions were rife in the policymaking circles about the need to address the vulnerabilities of the SLOCs that were important to India. To maintain its economic growth and fulfil the objectives of eradicating poverty and focusing on human development, New Delhi needed to secure its energy supplies and tap new sources of energy. Ollapally (2016a) argues that from the mid-2000s, the government began stressing the need to establish stronger diplomatic relationships with supplier countries. India traditionally relied on oil supplies from the Middle East (63.5% as of 2017), but it now made concerted efforts to explore new supply sources. Many regions feature in India's energy purview. It was interested in the gas reserves in Africa, Latin America, the SCS region, untapped resources in waters near Australia, and supplies from Russia's Sakhalin-I oilfields. Government and private companies got involved in oil exploration in Myanmar.[28] The government firm, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited (OVL), looked to Vietnam for possible energy sources. According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, the SCS is estimated to possess approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190

trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proved and probable reserves (EIA, 2013a). In 2006, Vietnam offered OVL two exploration blocks (Block 127 and 128) in offshore Phu Khanh Basin in the SCS. OVL gave up Block 127 because of poor prospects but retained Block 128. The exploration continued despite periodic objections from China, which claimed that the region fell within the nine-dash line. Apart from Block 128, OVL operates in Vietnam's Block 6.1, where it owns 45% stakes (PTI, 2017b). In 2006, oil supplies from Russia's Sakhalin oil field reached India, traversing through the Pacific Ocean, the SCS, and the Malacca Straits. According to Malik (2014), this development made the Indian naval planners cognisant of the utility of the SLOCs in the faraway waters. Malik (2014, p. 10) adds that India's "dependence on the Pacific Ocean SLOCs will further increase" should it import shale gas and oil from the US and Canada.

India's energy mix shows heavy dependency on coal (58%) and oil (28%), trailed by natural gas (7%), renewables sources (2%), hydro (4%) and nuclear energy (1%) (Ratner, 2017). As of 2015, India held 5.7 billion barrels of proved oil reserves (EIA, 2016). Despite having fossil fuel resources and the second-largest amount of proven oil reserves in the Asia-Pacific region, India's domestic supply remains grossly insufficient to cater to its expanding needs. Therefore, it is compelled to import "almost three-quarters of its energy needs" (Ratner, 2017, p. 1). It imports almost 80% of its crude oil needs, and the figures are only expected to rise further (Verma, 2018). By 2035, India's overall energy consumption is poised to expand by 128%.

Alternate suppliers such as the US, Canada, and even the SEA countries are unlikely to replace or even come close to the volume of supplies from the Middle East. Nonetheless, the trend towards diversification of energy supplies and sources continues. Above all, India's interest in the SCS and the broader Indo-Pacific region is connected to its quest for energy resources, critical trade flows from the east, and concerns over freedom of navigation. These compulsions make the SEA and EA regions more salient from an Indian security point of view.

5.2.2 Resources for Defence Modernisation and Build-Up

India's economic growth led it to be acknowledged as an important regional power and spurred its confidence to embark on expanded foreign and security policy initiatives. With more funds, New Delhi was able to convert its financial resources into power projection capabilities. From FY 2004–05 to FY 2008–09, the defence budget increased by approximately 37%, with more than 8% growth every year (Behera, 2008). Between 2001 and 2013, military spending increased by 64% (Ganguly, 2015). The defence budget, which stood at US $11.8 billion in the year 2000, increased to US $30 billion in 2009 (Cohen &

Dasgupta, 2010). The capital budget (available for acquiring new weapon systems and developing infrastructure) rose from US $2.7 billion in 2000 to US $10 billion in 2009 (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2010). With increased military spending, the defence forces were able to expand their inventory and capabilities.

As argued in Chapter 4, after the nuclear tests and Kargil conflict in the late 1990s, the Indian leadership and policymakers took a greater interest in security matters. In the absence of a potent indigenous military-industrial complex, the best alternative was to import arms from foreign suppliers. India's ambitious military modernisation programme and appetite for imported weapon systems made it an attractive destination for foreign suppliers from the US, Russia, Israel, the UK, and France. Between 1999 and 2008, India became the second-largest importer of conventional weapons. From 2008 to 2012, its arms exports shot up by 59% compared to the export figures from 2003–07 (Menon, 2013). The trend continued. Between 2012 and 2016, India was the world's largest arms importer (SIPRI, 2017). With greater financial resources at hand (endogenous factor) and access to foreign military equipment and technology (exogenous factor), New Delhi was able to pace up its military modernisation and augment its security profile.

The IN benefitted from bouts of economic successes, as seen during the late 1980s and in the 2000s. It pushed for greater acquisition, procurements, and indigenous build-up. Through increased interactions and exposure levels, the IN assumed the role of a responsible naval power. It gained extensive experience in the HADR activities and protecting global commons in cooperation with foreign navies. The naval leadership worked on augmenting the force's security role potential in sync with India's evolving master self-conception. With time, the security tasks India undertook in the IOR expanded. The self-conception as a benign power gave way to a more distinct security self-conception in the form of the first responder for HADR in the IO.

5.3 Growing Salience of Naval Factor

In conjunction with economic growth, the new self-conception was also shaped by domestic institutions. The IN's growing salience was instrumental in pushing India's self-conception. Vennesson, Breuer, Franco & Schroeder (2009) claim that military organisations tend to influence policies even in a democracy where the military functions under civilian authorities. Military institutions in a democracy have a relatively limited agency compared to militaries in non-democratic arrangements. Despite this, the military leadership can influence the decision-makers by generating ideas, offering suggestions, and uniquely implementing policy directives. They can influence by prescribing or proscribing specific actions and ideas or by offering suggestions on effectively imple-

menting a country's self-conception (Krotz, 2002). Vennesson et al. (2009) argue that military institutions develop ideas and own RCs that emanate from their history, institutional memory, and culture.

Historically, the IN had minimal ability to inform India's broader security direction. However, over the last two decades, it earned greater agency to influence the state's self-conception. The naval leadership was cognisant of the IN's potential as a regional force and a viable instrument of foreign policy for the Indian government.[29] By pushing for a greater role in the national security and foreign policy outlook, it steadily carved a niche for itself. This becomes most apparent when surveying the IN's chronological evolution.

5.3.1 Historical Evolution of the Indian Navy

In the early years after India's independence, Nehru's preference for economic reconstruction and general indifference towards military matters meant that the defence forces were not a priority. Even when the military was utilised, it was used to consolidate India's control internally or in the immediate neighbourhood. The focus was primarily on continental priorities. That noted, the IN played a supporting role during the military operation in 1947 that led to the integration of the princely state of Junagarh with the Union of India. Similarly, its involvement in Operation Vijay (December 1961) led to the liberation of the Portuguese colonies—Goa, Daman and Diu—and their eventual integration with India. Despite the IN's role in these operations, India's security considerations focused on the continental theatre.

With the primary focus on Pakistan and other land-based threats (India–China border dispute), policymakers granted greater importance and funds to the IA and the IAF. This mindset matched the thinking of the British colonisers, who had paid little attention to the naval force (Tellis, 1990). Post-independence, decision-makers did not view any sea-based threat from Pakistan. China, the other potential adversary (with a coastal navy at the time), was too far and had limited capability to affect India's maritime interest. The IN could not offer a "satisfactory rationale for its expansion" to the policymakers of the time (Tellis, 1990, p. 78). It was not even seen as a "possible instrument of foreign policy" or a tool to ascertain India's security role (Bhaskar, 2012, p. 43). In short, the IN rarely received attention compared to its sister forces, the IA and the IAF.

The Indian government provided limited funds, offering little scope for a meaningful naval expansion. Despite being the most capital-intensive and equipment-oriented service, the IN received the smallest share of the defence budget. There were fluctuations in the naval budget from 1950 to 1965, and the force received only close to 4% of the budget in 1950–51 (Satyindra Singh, 1992). Significant portions of the available funds were used to build new in-

frastructure facilities for the IN, allowing meagre capital for new acquisitions. The percentage of the navies' share increased in between the years only to drop again after 1962. From 1963 to 1965, the numbers plunged even below the 4% mark.

After the 1962 India–China war, the Indian government centred its attention on military modernisation. Even then, the emphasis was on the IA, followed by the IAF. The lack of funds earned IN the title of the 'Cinderella service.' In the 1960s, India was strengthening its credentials as a non-aligned country and distancing itself further from the west. This had severe ramifications for the naval arm. London became extremely reluctant to offer naval platforms to India. Without any major acquisitions from the west, India turned towards the USSR and even explored the option of self-reliance. Beset with difficulties, the initial acquisition programme was guided less by India's security needs and more by what the Soviet Union could offer.[30]

The absence of a direct naval threat made it difficult for the IN to justify its expansion and, therefore, operated as a "custodial force" (Tellis, 1990, p. 78). During the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War, the naval brass felt left out of the military operations. It was instructed "not to initiate any offensive action against Pakistan at sea" (Pradhan, 2007, p. 117). The government's direction to restrain the IN from retaliating against the Pakistan Navy's shelling of Dwarka (Gujarat) further added to a sense of humiliation (Pradhan, 2007). It was only in 1971 that the force was able to salvage its reputation in the Indian security apparatus. The IN played a crucial role during the 1971 India–Pakistan War. The navy was active in both theatres of operations—the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. In the Arabian Sea, the IN was credited for innovative thinking after it attacked the Karachi Port and the Makran Coast by utilising missile boats (small 200-tonne boats equipped with cruise missiles). The IN also imposed a naval blockade of Pakistan, highlighting the utility of the navy in achieving strategic war objectives.

Despite their impressive performance, the IN was unable to instil maritime consciousness within the decision-making circles. The force suffered budgetary constraints considering the government's reluctance to beef up its role. The presence of strong extra-regional navies (the US and the USSR) in the IOR further made it difficult for the IN to carve a niche of its own. However, when India's economic situation improved between 1976 and the late 1980s, the naval leadership used increased funds to embark on a modernisation plan which included acquiring submarines. The quest for submarines was motivated heavily by the Pakistan Navy's acquisitions at the time (Hiranandani, 2009).

The IN received greater attention from the mid-1980s under PM Rajiv Gandhi. Gandhi sustained India's role performance as a subcontinental power and security-seeker. He utilised the military force as a crucial component of foreign policy. Unlike before, the naval arm became an essential instrument of India's external orientation. The IN contributed to India's peacekeeping oper-

ations in Sri Lanka from 1984 to 1989. It also played a dominant role during Operation Cactus in 1988, when New Delhi sent troops to Malé to rescue the Maldivian President Gayoom from an attempted coup (Gopinath, 2018).

With an improved economic situation, the IN received greater funds. Its share increased from approximately 8% of the defence budget in the early 1980s to nearly 12.5% in 1985–86 and 13.5% in 1989–90 (Scott, 2006). The acquisitions included aircraft carriers, destroyers and frigates, submarines, and long-range naval missiles. In 1986, news reports covered Indian plans to establish a major naval base in the Nicobar Islands (Ayoob, 1990). Given the Nicobar Island's proximity to Indonesia, the Indonesian leaders grew concerned because they were suspicious that the USSR could utilise the Indian facility. The commissioning of India's first aircraft carrier, the INS *Viraat* (acquired from Britain) in 1987 too grabbed headlines across the region. Further, the decision to lease a Soviet nuclear-power submarine (INS *Chakra*) in February 1988 exacerbated the SEA states' fear.

Amid these developments, the Indian naval leadership pushed for the articulation of a maritime strategy, a rarity in the Indian context. In 1988, the Naval Headquarters released the document, 'A Military Maritime Strategy 1989–2014'. This was the first such document that captured India's maritime interests and a potential vision. The maritime strategy included details about the maritime security environment during the Cold War period and India's "insular posture" (Prakash, 2008, para. 7). The 1988 document "triggered off a process" in the IN. The practice of articulating and releasing its maritime doctrine and strategy continued, albeit after a long break.

Due to domestic and international factors, the ongoing naval expansion soon lost its momentum. The dissolution of the Soviet Union proved to be detrimental to India's military modernisation plans. Not only were the defence transfers from the USSR impacted, but there were severe disruptions in the supply of basic spare parts. Also, New Delhi now had to pay higher prices for procurements when compared to the Cold War days. The 1991 Indian economic crisis worsened the situation. On top of this, reports about corruption (Bofors scandal) in military deals made the government wary of new acquisitions. Growing political apathy towards the IN was evident, and no new ships were commissioned for almost ten years. Naval planners refer to this period as the 'lost decade' because the focus shifted away from the IN once again. Nevertheless, the IN attempted to utilise the decade to nurture an indigenous shipbuilding programme.[31] In 1994, Shankul, an indigenous submarine, was commissioned into the navy, followed by inductions of patrol and coastal combatants (Mohanty, 2004).

Despite the challenges, the IN supplemented India's benign-power role performance by establishing cooperative equations with regional and extra-regional navies. After years of being an insular force, it was enthusiastic about reaching out to foreign navies and enhancing maritime diplomacy.[32] India's

naval initiatives were not restricted to the SEA countries and included others from the Asia-Pacific region, including the US. As a part of CBMs, the Indian and American navies held a limited naval exercise in October–November 1991 (Hiranandani, 2009). In 1992, they began the Malabar series of naval exercises that continues even today. These interactions were meaningful for the naval leadership to understand where the IN stood in the regional maritime landscape. These developments shaped the IN's institutional self-conception. Even though the naval leadership saw great potential in the navy as an instrument of foreign policy, there were limits to what could be achieved by the service alone. In the words of former CNS Admiral Arun Prakash, "the IN could not do much on its own. It works under the government and hence needs the support of the MoD and MEA. In the 1990s, there was no plan of action from the government on how to proceed in concrete terms when it came to maritime diplomacy".[33]

By the late 1990s, New Delhi's interest in a security role crystallised, and it attended to security matters more diligently. India's emerging master RC as a major power and increase in non-traditional threats shaped the IN's conception of its role. Naval planners studied the changing regional dynamics and deliberated on the IN's role in India's broader security outlook. In May 1998, the IN prepared an internal study titled, 'The Strategic Defence Review: The Maritime Dimension—A Naval Vision', which focussed on a timeframe between 1998 and 2014. It noted that—

> "The IN must have sufficient maritime power not only to be able to defend and further India's maritime interests, but also to deter a military maritime challenge posed by any littoral nation, or combination of littoral nations of the IOR, and also to be able to significantly raise the threshold of intervention or coercion by extra-regional powers" (Strategic Defence Review, 1998 as cited in Scott, 2006, p. 107).

Even though the focus was on "defensive limited coastal sea denial", the report reflected an ambitious vision for the IN (Pant & Joshi, 2015, p. 194). The vision was leavened by an expanded military budget. In 1998, the overall defence budget expanded by 14%, and the IN's share increased by 17% (Scott, 2006). The navy's operational capabilities expanded through new acquisitions and the commissioning of the INS.

The IN played a crucial role by posing as a "strategic deterrent to Pakistan" during the Kargil conflict (Mehta, 1999, para. 1). Conveying a strong wartime signal, the IN undertook a joint exercise of its eastern and western fleet in the Northern Arabia Sea (Mehta, 1999). As the conflict gained momentum, the force moved towards the Gulf of Oman, which houses Pakistan's key SLOCs. This move put additional pressure on Islamabad to not escalate the conflict further and withdraw from the Kargil sector. After a decade of limited developments, the IN re-emerged with a stronger profile.

5.3.2 Contemporary Transformation of the Indian Navy

The growing magnitude of piracy in the IOR and the farther seas sparked a domestic debate in India on the role of the navy. The rising cases of piracy attacks in the Straits of Malacca impacted the flow of commercial shipping. In 2001, the number of piracy incidents in the SEA jumped by more than 200% compared to 1991 (Hiranandani, 2009). The IN was forthcoming in cooperating with regional navies to manage the menace. India's role in anti-piracy was appreciated in 1999 after the success of its anti-piracy mission. The IN and Indian Coast Guard had successfully intercepted and captured a hijacked merchant ship owned by the Japanese. This operation boosted the confidence of the IN in its ability to protect the maritime commons. Even the Indian political leadership acknowledged the importance of the maritime sector and the crucial role the IN played in the context. With some support from the government, the navy began consolidating its position in the eastern waters of the IOR. A Tri-Services Command was set up in the A&N Islands in 2001. The development was part of New Delhi's plan to restructure its defence management and attain greater synergy within its armed forces. The A&N Command's strategic location in the Bay of Bengal enabled India to exert greater influence eastwards and strengthen its oversight of the important SLOCs such as the Straits of Malacca (The Hindu, 2001).

The IN continued to emphasise maritime diplomacy and the need to reach out to regional navies. In 2000, six capital ships, a submarine and a tanker were deployed in the SCS—a first for the IN. The naval flotilla visited many ports, including Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea, Vietnam, Japan, China, and Indonesia and held exercises in the SCS (Mehta, 2000). CNS Admiral Sushil Kumar (as cited in Mehta, 2000, para. 5) remarked, “India's national interest had been made coterminous with maritime security”. The IN's forays in the SCS helped familiarise it with waters beyond the familiar areas of responsibility. In the coming years, Indian maritime attention slowly drifted towards China—a marked change from the traditional thinking that centred on Pakistan.

In 2001, the IN organised its first International Fleet Review under the Western Command, showcasing India as a naval-oriented country. International Fleet Review saw participation from over 22 countries and 60 ships. In 2002, when Washington sought New Delhi's assistance to facilitate the transit of its supplies (for Operation Enduring Freedom) to Afghanistan through the Malacca Straits, India's relevance as a naval power surfaced. Other instances included the navy's involvement in the surveillance of Mauritius' EEZ at the request of the government of Mauritius in 2003 (Ghosh, 2015a). The thrust of military diplomacy continued with naval delegation visits, port calls, and Overseas Deployment (ODs) of the INS.

By 2003, India officially declared the expansion of its conception of the extended neighbourhood with the second phase of the LEP. Phase II of the LEP included the SCS in the broader definition of the 'extended neighbourhood'. These changes opened new avenues of opportunity for the IN. In 2004, the IN released its first maritime doctrine, largely a doctrinal primer. Traditionally, service doctrines are based on national security doctrines and strategies. In the absence of a national security doctrine and strategy in India, the IN sought to prepare its own doctrine. It was important for the naval leadership to articulate their force's role in the national security framework and synchronise its acquisitions and domestic shipbuilding programme according to an established vision for the next 10 to 15 years.[34] The 2004 Maritime Doctrine (MoD Navy, 2004) was prepared to communicate to the military and civilian planners, academics, and strategic analysts about the nature of threats faced by the country and ways to utilise naval power to pursue and defend national interests optimally. During the preparation stage, it was assumed that if there were any objections from the political leaders or other agencies such as the MEA or MOD, the document would be revised as per the feedback.[35] However, upon release, there was no official acknowledgement of the doctrine or objections from any Indian ministries.[36]

Compared to the maritime vision presented in 1998, the 2004 Maritime Doctrine denoted a significant change in the IN's approach to its aspirations. The 2004 doctrine referred to a "shift in global maritime focus from the Atlantic-Pacific combine to the Pacific-Indian" (MoD Navy, 2004, p. 63). Apart from references to Pakistan, the doctrine mentioned China's attempts to "strategically encircle India" and its "exertions that tend to spill over into our maritime zone in the Indian Ocean" (MoD Navy, 2004, pp. 54 & 71). While the 1998 document had viewed the IN's role in terms of sea-denial along India's coast, the 2004 doctrine stipulated the "arc from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca as a legitimate area of interest" (MoD Navy, 2004, p. 56). The spirit of the maritime doctrine was strongly connected with the country's economic trajectory and the need to create a conducive environment for economic growth (MoD Navy, 2004, p. 63).

Zorawar D. Singh believes that India's new self-image as an economic player and economic emergence inspired the naval leadership to assume the new role as an "active stakeholder in the maritime commons" (Z. D. Singh, 2017, p. 29). The strategic importance of the Malacca Straits brought out the relevance of SEA countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. The Indian government gave priority to increased interactions with foreign navies and more involvement in multilateral activities. The naval leadership was quick to recognise the potential and build on the growing momentum. The IN's engagement in bilateral and multilateral naval exercises expanded greatly with the SEA, EA and major powers such as the US. Its military exer-

cises with the ASEAN countries more than doubled between 2001 and 2009 compared to the years between 1992 and 2000.

The navy introduced institutional changes to facilitate interactions with foreign navies. The Naval Headquarters chose to extend the "concept of Operational Turn Around to select foreign ports wherein INS … could replenish fuel and rations as a routine activity" (Bhaskar, 2012, p. 45). By 2005, it established OTR protocols with almost 25 countries. In September of that year, the Directorate of Foreign Cooperation was established at the Naval Headquarters (Sakhuja, 2011). On top of that, a new position of Assistant Chief of Naval Staff-Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence [ACNS (FCI)] was created. The ACNS (FCI), a two-star Admiral, coordinated the decisions and actions of foreign naval interactions with the MEA and other relevant agencies.

The IN's interest in SEA was followed up by its actions. In 2005, INS *Viraat* (India's first aircraft carrier) visited SEA—Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia—for the first time (Suryanarayana, 2005). This deployment was high on symbolism and accentuated the SEA region's significance in India's naval purview. While there was goodwill between the navies, the IN lacked an underlying blueprint or directives from the MoD and the MEA. Resultantly, there was little to offer in terms of tangibles. Although the Indian government was happy to see the IN interact with foreign navies, it was reluctant to push further on offering any material support, perceivably due to political issues, sensitivities or inability. The former CNS states that the Indonesian counterparts had expressed an interest in the Indo-Russian BrahMos missile and shipbuilding technology during the visit. When the offer was communicated to the Defence Secretary and other officials in the government, they were non-committal.[37] From the theoretical point of view, this development highlights a notable aspect. It shows that the IN's interactions with other navies helped service personnel comprehend foreign counterparts' expectations and desires.

In some instances, the naval leadership took the lead and got the needed approvals from the government. During the CNS's visit to Myanmar in early 2006, the Myanmar Navy requested assistance in augmenting their aerial reconnaissance capability in the face of high incidents of piracy. In response, the IN decided to overhaul an old BN-2 Islander maritime patrol aircraft bought by India three decades ago from Britain. Upon seeking permission, the Indian government approved the transfer. The former CNS remarked it is relatively easy to get an idea approved by the civilian government if it involves limited financial implications or sensitivities.[38] The aircraft was supplied to Myanmar without any armaments at 'friendship prices', and the IN trained Myanmar's pilots and engineers to operate the aircraft (Unnithan, 2006). The IN also facilitated the supply of patrol aircraft to the Seychelles Navy and spare parts of Petya-class frigates to the Vietnamese Navy (Unnithan, 2006).

In the wake of the IO tsunami in December 2004, the IN and the IAF acted as a credible stabilising force in the region. During the Tsunami Operations,

the successful role of the IN enhanced its conviction to take more responsibilities in large-scale HADR and SAR missions. During the 2006 Lebanon War, the navy evacuated more than 2,000 civilians. Such large-scale operations highlighted the IN's ability to mobilise its strength and swiftly undertake operations in far-flung regions. These successes helped the naval leadership shape India's self-conception as a provider of HADR activities in the IOR.

It participated in a number of successful anti-piracy operations in various regions, including in the Gulf of Aden (October 2008). It also held joint anti-piracy operations with Japan and South Korea. Such operations allowed the navy to acquire experience operating in the Far Seas. Through such engagements, the IN transformed itself into an instrument of New Delhi's extra-regional outreach. The IN's involvement in the HADR activities and Non-combatant Evacuation Operations accentuated its profile and showcased its ability to support India's auxiliary RC as a provider of public goods in the region.

As a corollary to the 2004 maritime doctrine, the IN released a maritime strategy in 2007 titled 'Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy' (IMMS). To clarify, the maritime doctrine (released in 2004) was distinct from the 2007 maritime strategy. While the maritime doctrine is a "collation of principles that guide the actions of a force", a maritime strategy, on the other hand, is an "overarching plan that articulates the ways and means" for a military force to achieve the objectives (Khurana, 2016, p. 1). The doctrine is a guiding framework that provides a point of reference to formulate a country's strategy and presents ways to operationalise naval power.

The IMMS focused on 15 years from 2007 to 22 and exhibited the navy's conviction in pushing for a larger role. The IN wanted to establish a military profile corresponding with India's rise. In the document, then CNS Admiral Sureesh Mehta noted that India's "repositioning in the international geopolitics would call for a concomitant accretion of national power, of which the military power will be a critical dimension" (MoD, Navy, 2007, p. iii). The document acknowledged India as a "major maritime power in the IOR" and believed that "a large part of the responsibility for ensuring the safety of International Sea Lanes devolved upon the IN" (MoD Navy, 2007, p. 54). The IMMS argued that if India wanted to continue to grow as an economic force and ensure its development activities, it had to have "the freedom to use the seas … under all circumstances" (MoD, Navy, 2007, p. iii). The strategy document identified two regional subsets—the area within the IO and beyond the IOR, i.e., the waterways connecting India with the SEA and EA. The Straits of Malacca (the SLOC that connects the IOR to SEA) featured as one of the "primary areas of focussed interest" for the IN (MoD, Navy, 2007, p. 59).

The IN's strategic outlook was supported by a rising share in the defence budget. The attention that the navy received from the NDA government continued under the United Progressive Alliance government, which came to power in 2005. The enormous growth of the Indian economy during the 2000s

acted as a bulwark for higher defence spending. From 2004–05 until 2008–09, India's average annual GDP growth rate was above 9%. During these years, India's defence budget recorded a growth of 8% annually. Within the defence budget, the IN's share remained somewhat high compared to the preceding years. In the FY 2005–06, it received 17.3% of the defence budget, followed by a similar share (17.32%) in the FY 2006–07 (Scott, 2013b). The share rose to 18.26% in the FY 2007–08 (Scott, 2013b). Even when the Indian economy suffered in 2008–09 due to the global economic crisis, 18% of the defence budget was earmarked for the IN.

After phase II of the LEP was introduced, which featured a prominent security angle, the IN developed its eastern command and fleet, which swelled strength-wise within a decade. In 2005, New Delhi set up a Far East Naval Command (FENC) off Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, close to the SLOC of Malacca Straits (Maitra, 2005). Compensating for the "lack of a deep-sea fleet," the FENC naval base facilitated India's eastward reach and bolstered its potential for greater power projection (Maitra, 2005, p. 63). The facility catered to India's interests in the Malacca chokepoint and provided the ability to monitor foreign countries' maritime activities in the nearby waters.

Indian role performance was marked by increased naval engagements, which peaked in 2007. The political leadership was disposed to utilising the IN as a foreign policy instrument. The EAM Mukherjee in 2007 said,

> "After almost a millennium of inward and landward focus, we are once again turning our gaze outwards and seawards, which is the natural direction of view for a nation seeking to re-establish itself not simply as a continental power, but even more so as a 'maritime' power—and, consequently, as one that is of significance upon the global stage" (MEA, 2007c, para. 4).

The statement was indicative of the transformation that was taking place within the decision-making circle regarding the country's maritime outlook. With an expanding economy and greater dependency on the seas, there was a proportionate increase in India's maritime ambitions. A sense of maritime 'awakening' emerged slowly but steadily. The decision to join the US–Japan naval exercise (making it a trilateral exercise) off the coast of Guam in 2007 confirmed India's keenness to play a larger role in the region, commensurate with the objectives of the LEP II. Through the IN, India expanded its maritime forays beyond the SCS into the northern parts of the western Pacific. In the summer of 2007, the IN sailed up to Vladivostok (Russia) and held many bilateral and multilateral naval exercises with countries like the US, China, Russia and Japan (Mohan, 2009a).

Another initiative that ascertained the significant role of the navies as tools of foreign policy was the Malabar exercise. Malabar was originally a bilateral Indo-US naval exercise and expanded over time. The 2007 Malabar exercise saw additional participation from the navies of Australia, Japan, and Singa-

pore. It was the largest multi-national interaction of the IN to that date and was held in the Bay of Bengal (Garg, 2007).

China's critical reaction to the 2007 Malabar exercise led to a sense of discomfort within the Indian political circle. According to news reports, the then Indian Defence Minister, A. K. Antony, was reluctant to undertake multilateral or high-profile naval exercises (Mohan, 2009a). Commenting on the 2007 Malabar exercise, he said, "only last year, something different happened. Instead of an Indo-US bilateral exercise, a multilateral exercise took place. This year there is no multilateral exercise" (Antony as quoted in Dikshit, 2008, para. 3). Despite Antony's comments and the general political reluctance, Mohan (2009a, p. 10) states that "the naval leadership was not going to give up on its outreach to the Pacific and the idea of trilateral exercises". The IN deftly communicated the benefits of multilateral engagements to the political leadership. While the 2008 Indo-US Malabar exercise was bilateral, the 2009 exercise expanded the participation to include Japan, albeit due to geostrategic and political considerations.

In terms of policy actions, the naval leadership took the lead in promoting multilateralism in the regional maritime space through initiatives such as the IONS. The IONS was the IN's attempt to highlight its relevance as a pivotal force for India's external orientation and projected India as a more active security actor. The naval leadership pushed for a more active role and periodically shared ideas with the political leadership on how to effectively utilise the naval arm to achieve strategic objectives. The IN even broached the idea of anti-piracy patrolling to the political leadership in the early to mid-2000s, but the civilian counterparts were reticent. The eventual approval came after the hijacking of the Japanese-owned vessel MT *Stolt Valor* by Somali pirates, which had 18 Indians onboard. When the case grabbed national headlines, there was rising domestic political pressure on the Indian government (News18, 2008). This incident made the Indian government cognisant of the challenges of piracy in the IO and allowed the IN to undertake anti-piracy patrols.[39] After embarking on its first anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden in 2008, the IN went on to regularly undertake such operations (MoD, n.d.).

The maritime doctrine of the IN was revised in 2009 and showcased evolved institutional self-conceptions—a provider of the HADR efforts, a benign power, and a supporter of multilateralism. Apart from the core military roles, the revised doctrine focussed on diplomatic, constabulary, and benign roles. It stated that navies "lean towards performing a diplomatic role" because "their very presence in or off a certain area signals the nation's political intent and commitment to pursue national interests in that region" and is "calibrated to send a political message to potential friends and foes alike" (MoD Navy, 2009, p. 105). The navy's eagerness to carve a specialised role in military diplomacy was visible. The IN's leadership saw these opportunities as a way to advance the navy's role among the three services and justify the need for

greater funds (Limaye, 2017). As compared to the early 2000s, the MEA and the MoD were relatively more supportive of the idea of the IN as a viable instrument of foreign policy. There was improved coordination between the agencies in their understanding of India's foreign policy orientation and objectives (Limaye, 2017).

Even when the momentum of the LEP dipped after 2008, naval cooperation and exchange visits continued and kept the security cooperation steady. In 2009, the INS participated in China's first-ever fleet review and undertook port visits in Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Malaysia. In February 2010, the IN hosted Milan 2010, which saw the participation of navies from Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, and New Zealand. It is noteworthy that participation in Milan expanded from five navies in 1995 to 15 in 2018. Brewster (2013, p. 153) opines that the non-inclusion of the US or China in the Milan exercises acts as a "none-too-subtle reminder of India's assertion of regional leadership". As the IN looked to adopt a more outward-looking profile with greater interaction with foreign militaries, the navy leadership noted the need to acquaint its officers in maritime law. The efforts began around 2011 and led to the compilation of the primary Handbook on the Law of Maritime Operations for the IN (Khurana, 2017).

Within the AEP, which entailed an even greater share of the naval component, the IN upped the ante and became an active participant. China's maritime rise and concerns about freedom of navigation resulted in greater cooperation between the IN and the navies of SEA, EA, and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. In light of the changing regional and global dynamics, the IN revised its 2009 Maritime doctrine in 2015 and titled it 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy' (IMSS-2015). The IMMS-2015 received a 'sense' of endorsement from other services, government functionaries and the political class. Before its finalisation, the IA and the IAF reviewed the document. It was eventually released by the then Indian Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar, making a prominent political statement of support and endorsement of the document (Khurana, 2017).

The IMMS-2015 highlighted the IN's objective of achieving a favourable maritime environment by "providing net security in the maritime areas" (MoD Navy, 2015, p. 80). In the Foreword, CNS Admiral R. K. Dhowan referred to the "shift in worldview from a Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus" (MoD Navy, 2015, p. ii). The document addressed the expansion in the IN's primary and secondary areas of interest, both in the east and west. It communicated that the main focus of Indian naval planners is on the chokepoints that lead to, from, and across the IO. These SLOCs are—the Six-degree Channel, the Eight/Nine-degree Channels; the Straits of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Malacca, Singapore, Sunda and Lombok; the Mozambique Channel, and the Cape of Good Hope and their littoral regions (MoD Navy, 2015). Among these, the Straits of Ma-

lacca (the world's busiest shipping lane), Singapore, and Sunda and Lombok are in the SEA region. The IMMS-2015 noted the Andaman Sea as the navy's primary area of interest and referred to the South-East IO and the East China Sea as the secondary areas of interest.

Some revisions in the strategy document were connected to concerns regarding China's rise. For instance, the strategy document introduced the far-eastern SLOCs of the Ombei–Wetar Straits as the IN's secondary area of interest (MoD Navy, 2015). According to Captain Khurana, the Ombei–Wetar Straits is crucial because it is the "most likely route to be used by the Chinese nuclear submarines to enter the Indian Ocean" (Khurana, 2017, p. 10). China's increasing dominance in SEA, EA and forays in the IOR were a source of worry for New Delhi. Developments included the presence of the submarines (conventional and nuclear attack) of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in maritime areas that fell under the IN's primary area of interest, i.e., the IO (Ghosh, 2015b; Sen, 2017). The naval leadership even expressed concerns over the "permanent presence of the Chinese Navy in the IOR in the form of an anti-piracy escort force" (PTI, 2019a, para. 4).

Khurana (2017, p. 3) notes that the IMMS-2015 "implicitly assigns India the regional role of a 'provider of net security' rather than a net provider of security". He adds that this clarification was to avoid the perception that India is "seeking the role of a regional 'policeman' or a regional 'hegemon'" (Khurana, 2017, p. 5). One could argue that this distinction was made to communicate that New Delhi's security RC is not as expansive or extensive as anticipated by the external powers. The guiding principles of the vision of the IN, including full-spectrum capability and maritime cooperation, entailed bilateral and multilateral cooperation with foreign navies.

Despite falling in the category of secondary areas of interest, the IN's naval cooperation with SEA and EA countries has become increasingly active and substantial over the years. Abhijit Singh, an expert on Indian maritime issues, states that India's "nautical interactions" under the AEP are "characterised by an increasing emphasis on naval exercises and capacity-building programs" (A. Singh, 2018, p. 5). This opened new doors for the navy. Currently, the IN holds CORPATs with Thailand (since 2002), Indonesia (since 2005), Myanmar (since 2016) and Bangladesh (since 2018). It also undertakes regular bilateral or trilateral naval exercises with the SEA, EA and Oceania countries, such as Singapore–India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX), Australia–India Exercise (AUSINDEX), Multilateral Naval Exercise KOMODO (MNEK) and bilateral naval exercise *Samudra Shakti* with Indonesia, Japan–India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX), Malabar exercise with the US and Japan.

In May 2016, the IN demonstrated its operational reach by undertaking a two-and-a-half-month-long deployment of four INS to the SCS and Pacific Northwest (Indian Navy, n.d.). During the deployment, it made port calls in Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Russia and Malaysia. Exhibiting

its interest and outreach to the Western Pacific Ocean, the INS also visited Port Majuro (Marshall Islands) for an operational turnaround in August 2016 (Indian Navy, 2016). In 2017, the IN deployed its First Training Squadron, comprising Indian naval and Coast Guard trainees, to Malaysia and Indonesia.

All these activities are a testament to the IN's desire to perform a larger role among the three services. Through innovative suggestions and ideas, naval exercises, port calls, doctrines, and strategies, the naval leadership hopes to shape India's maritime (auxiliary) RCs and implement an effective role performance in the IOR and Indo-Pacific. As the IN consolidates its position in the IO, its ability to influence events and alignments in other maritime regions (such as SEA and EA) will rise exponentially. This, however, depends on the regional dynamics, India's master RCs, political willingness to use the navy, and the pace and scope of the modernisation of the IN.

5.4 Reasons behind the Conception–Performance Gap

For any country to perform a role, the political leadership and policymakers need to formulate an action plan and direct their energies towards realising it. A state's self-conception or even an established RC does not automatically translate into effective role performance. For any conception to operationalise, several relevant agencies need to coordinate with each other and work towards the realisation of the role. This process is riddled with challenges and unexpected turn of events. Policymakers are likely to confront factors that may constrain the state from performing the RCs effectively. Role theory identifies some of the potential MVs such as (inter- and/or intra-) role conflict, role competition, and domestic contestation.

In some cases, policymakers face structural or systemic challenges in the domestic arena (for details, see Oppermann, 2012). A combination of one or more factors can lead to a gap between the RC and role performance. As argued in Chapter 4, this gap persists in India's stipulated RCs and its security policy actions. Despite heightened security cooperation, institutional and policy changes, New Delhi has been unable to effectively perform its auxiliary RC of a net security provider in the IO and a stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. This section argues that the conception-performance gap exists due to a few MVs such as role competition and domestic contestation. The Indian leadership experience role competition and contestation between sub-state institutions, which together cause discrepancies in their country's role performance.

5.4.1 Role Competition

Role competition surfaces when the policymakers face restrictions regarding the time and resources needed to perform the range of roles. According to role theory, states experience role competition "when actions taken to honour one expectation compete in time and resources with actions necessary to meet another expectation" (Krotz, 2002, p. 7). This becomes a particular challenge during a state's role evolution. As new RCs crop up, they require greater resources for operationalisation. For an emerging country like India, the scale of resources needed to translate its ambitious RCs into policy actions remains insufficient. Indian policymakers go through the challenges of role competition in two major cases—guns versus butter trade-off and continental versus maritime priorities.

5.4.1.1 Guns versus Butter Conundrum

At the primary level, effective role performance hinges on the availability of resources and choices made by the political leadership. Because the available resources are always finite, decision-makers are confronted with the 'guns versus butter' dilemma. In macroeconomics, the 'guns versus butter' model refer to the relationship between a country's investment in the social sector development (butter) and the security and defence sector (guns). Both sectors are essential for a country, and both require adequate funds. Because the national resources remain limited, policymakers are incumbent to decide which areas to prioritise— development and welfare of the masses or maintenance and modernisation of the armed forces. This quandary is less severe in a progressing economy because of greater monetary resources that can be distributed towards both ends. However, when the economy slows down, this dilemma becomes acute.

After the economic liberalisation in 1991, the Indian economy was propelled by high growth rates. More or less, the government had adequate funds to invest in military modernisation and cater to domestic developmental needs. The Indian armed forces benefitted from the high GDP growth, which was instrumental in the evolution of India's auxiliary RCs. From 1990 to 2014, military expenditure expanded by 165.5% (Sandler & George, 2016). Between 2004 and 2009, defence spending saw an increase of 45% (Freeman, Fleurant, Wezeman & Wezeman, 2015). Additional resources for the security sector enabled the country to perform its existing security RCs more effectively. This was apparent in India's active security-related interactions with multiple countries at the time (see Chapter 4).

However, after 2008, the economic situation became less favourable. India was unable to maintain the GDP growth rate it recorded before. Even as New Delhi managed to insulate itself from an extreme economic meltdown, the

2008 economic crisis affected the pace of its economy's growth. In simple words, India's economic performance, which had initially facilitated the evolution of its RCs, eventually became a retardation factor and limited its ability to perform those same roles.

Due to financial challenges, the 'guns versus butter' dilemma has become more severe. The fundamental domestic priorities of the Indian leadership are human development, sufficient job creation to cater to the burgeoning youth bulge, and eradication of poverty. At the same time, they grapple with a range of security challenges emanating from China's military assertiveness and border dispute, the Pakistan-supported armed insurgency, fundamentalist terrorism, and non-traditional security threats. The challenge lies in fulfilling domestic developmental goals while simultaneously translating finite monetary resources into strategic and military capabilities.

Even as the Indian government struggles on the 'butter' side, the resources earmarked for the 'guns' have been negatively affected. Since 2009, the military expenditure has not seen much meaningful growth. The other challenge, particularly for Indian military planners, is that a huge chunk of available funds is consumed by revenue expenditures that cater to salaries, pensions, infrastructure for the personnel, spare parts, and ammunition. Almost 10–15% of the revenue expenditure of the three services is allocated for the purchase of spares, ammunition, stores, fuel and other associated expenditures. If one adds this to capital spending, much of the defence budget is used in maintaining national security and defence preparedness.[40] This leaves limited funds for capital expenditure, i.e., funds for weapons acquisitions and overall force modernisation. In terms of the share of GDP, the defence budget somewhat dipped from 2011 (Bergenwall, 2016). The defence budget for FY 2017–18 stood at 1.58% of India's GDP, the lowest ever since 1962. Although the 2017–18 budget was 5.91% higher than the previous year, the potential benefits were dampened by inflation and the depreciation of the rupee (Sushant Singh, 2018). Only 3.6% of the budget was available for military modernisation (Mahajan, 2018).

Scarcity of funds has remained a perennial problem for the Indian military planners in recent decades. To tackle the Chinese threat and address the military imbalance, the Indian government had taken a decision in early 2014 to raise the IA's first Mountain Strike Corps (with two infantry divisions under it). It was envisaged to provide "quick-reaction ground offensive capabilities" against China, as the other strike corps are oriented towards the security threats from Pakistan (Pandit, 2017a, para. 4). However, the plan was stalled in 2018 due to a lack of funds, and the 17 Corps exists today in a truncated form.

For the naval planners, the problem gets compounded because it already receives the smallest share among the three forces. Fiscal resources are indispensable for the navy to establish and sustain a viable security role in SEA and EA. The IN has been pushing the government to fulfil its resource requirements

to position itself as a credible navy in the IOR and beyond. Based on the IN's medium-term plans in the IOR (2012 to 2022), it seeks to gather "three aircraft carrier battle groups; coastal airbases and forward air bases in the island chains of Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar; and a mix of conventional and nuclear-powered attack submarines" (Shukla, 2012, para. 16). As per the maritime capability perspective plan, the IN needs to induct a total of 200 ships by 2027, including 120 capital ships (large ships) (PTI, 2015). Further, the 15-year plan requires approximately US $123 billion, which amounts to "an annual capital allocation of $8.5 billion" (Raghuvanshi, 2017, para. 2). The current allocation figures are nowhere close to this and stand at US $3 billion per annum (Raghuvanshi, 2017). On top of that, the current allocation gets consumed by previously inked contracts, limiting the available funds for new acquisitions.

5.4.1.2 Continental Defence vs Maritime Strategy

In addition to the classic 'guns vs butter' debate, there is a persistent debate over the continental defence and maritime strategy. Because of the paucity of funds available for the defence forces, it is challenging to decide which sector should be given greater attention and a greater proportion of resources. As early as 1955, Nehru remarked:

> "… there is the land consciousness in the north [of India] and the sea consciousness in the south [of India], and we have to be equally conscious of both land and sea apart from the air, which is common to both … for a country like India, the sea is most important from the defence point of view and obviously from the trade point of view" (Nehru, 2001, pp. 524–6).

Despite this, in the early years, the Indian government invested its energies and resources to consolidate control over the former princely states and secure its land borders with Pakistan. Needless to state, the land border issue was given a higher priority. Despite assertions by future Indian PMs of a shift from a continental focus towards the maritime domain (particularly from the 2000s), India's security concerns continue to weigh heavily on the continental threats. It would not be wrong to state that New Delhi continues to think in terms of the 20th-century type of warfare, especially given the 4000 km of disputed land frontiers with its two neighbours, namely China and Pakistan. Role theorists such as Stephen G. Walker postulate that in cases of role competition, policymakers opt for the option where "the probable reward is greater" (Walker, 1981, p. 275). In the Indian context, the priority is accorded to the continental security imperatives, which means that the maritime front remains secondary in focus. Several factors contribute to this.

India's territorial disputes and security concerns with China and Pakistan—both of which are nuclear-armed countries—remain unresolved. China

has been increasing its strategic proximity with South Asian countries, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, and persistently expanding its presence in the IO. There has been no let-up in Pakistan's proxy war against India since the 1980s. Incidents such as the Kargil conflict of 1999, the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, periodic flare-ups along the Line of Control, China–India skirmishes and bloody face-offs along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and the security situations in parts of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) consume significant defence resources and bureaucratic energies.

China's increased assertiveness along the disputed 3488-km-long border with India has had a strong bearing on India's political leadership and decision-making. According to Pushan Das and Harsh Pant, "for the first time in its [India's] independent history, the emergence of a great military power at its immediate frontiers now appears imminent" (Das & Pant, 2018, p. 6). In the last two decades, China has extensively ramped up its military infrastructure in Tibet, which is across India's northern borders. This has led to an augmentation of military deployment on both sides, with an increased likelihood of Indian and Chinese soldiers intersecting each other. The two countries have engaged in minor and major standoffs such as in Depsang (2013), Chumar and Demchok (in 2014), Yangtse (in 2015), the stalemate in Doklam on the China–Bhutan–India tri-junction in June 2017, the deadly clashes at the Galwan Valley in 2020 and the ongoing border tensions (for details, see Joshi, 2013; Pandit, 2014; Thakker, 2018; A Panda, 2017, Gokhale, 2021).

Another concerning factor is China's growing involvement in Pakistan. Since the Cold War years, Beijing and Islamabad have embraced each other as strategic partners. The logic of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' has proved to be a successful glue for their partnership, especially in the military context (refer to Small, 2015 for details). They have enjoyed extensive and comprehensive defence cooperation, illustrated by the Chinese supply of conventional weapons (including missiles) to Pakistan (see Paul, 2003 for details). China also offered scientific support for Pakistan's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. Their bilateral relationship has grown stronger with China's involvement in the deep-sea port of Gwadar, which enhances China's weight in the IO. On top of that, Beijing is involved in constructing the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Indian officials maintain that the CPEC "passes through parts of the Indian state of J&K under illegal occupation of Pakistan" (PTI, 2019b, para. 3; see Jacob, 2018).

Ever since independence, the Kashmir issue has received persistent attention from Indian security planners, which continued even after the Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution (which gave Jammu and Kashmir a special status) were repealed in 2019 (see Ganguly, Smetana, Abdullah & Karmazin, 2019). Furthermore, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the re-rise of the Taliban in the country refreshed India's security concerns in the

subcontinent. With these events, New Delhi's priorities and energies have remained concentrated on continental security. This is apparent in the trends of India's defence budget allocation over the years. Compared to the IA and the IAF, the IN continues to receive the smallest share. Laxman Kumar Behera notes that the IA accounts for almost 85% of the Indian armed forces personnel and consumed 56% of the total revenue budget in FY 2020–21 (Behera, 2020). The IA's revenue share is likely to follow the same trend, considering it will maintain a large standing army in the face of terrain realities. As argued by Zorawar D. Singh, threats in India's continental realm offer a "clear definable threat", which is lacking in the context of the maritime arena (Z. D. Singh, 2017, p. 40). He adds that there is a degree of "ambiguity and flux in India's regional [maritime] role—in terms of both defining [at the grand strategic level] and prioritising regional interests". Given the vagueness and absence of a direct threat from the sea, it has been a challenge for the IN to convince the political leadership to earmark more resources for maritime considerations.

Owing to its smallest and fluctuating share in the defence budget, the IN struggles to operationalise its fleet modernisation according to the maritime strategy. The inherent structural weaknesses of the Indian defence structure make it difficult to effectively utilise even the limited funds available to the IN. The imbalance in the force structure of the IN also emanates from tardiness in terms of execution and India's complicated weapons procurements process. Because of these challenges, the IN is compelled to operate ageing platforms and extend their lifespans. The Comptroller and Auditor General— auditor of the Indian government—highlighted in 2013 that IN has an ageing fleet with more than 50% of submarines having completed 75% of their operational life and some already outliving their maximum service life" (Comptroller and Auditor General report quoted in Bedi, 2013, para. 12). Despite new inductions, the problem of obsolescence persists. According to former VCNS, with the induction of 2–3 ships, one from the current lot is decommissioned (PTI, 2015). Adding to the mix is the spate of accidents suffered by the IN. Between 2007–08 and 2015–16, ships and submarines of the IN experienced 38 accidents, which affected the force's operational preparedness (PTI, 2017d). Due to a major fire and explosion in 2013, India lost INS *Sindhurakshak*—one of its diesel-electric submarines (Hindustan Times, 2013). In the following year, there was an explosion on board INS *Sindhuratna*.

It is equally important to understand that the operational commitments of the IN have expanded substantially in the last twenty years. To provide a fair idea of the responsibilities: the eastern and western fleets undertake fleet exercises monthly (comprising an average of 5–6 ships at sea for 15–20 days); most units of the IN participate in the annual naval exercise, which lasts for an average of 30 or 45 days; an average of 10–12 ships participate (for approximately 15 days) in the annual large-scale amphibious exercise; additionally, every year, for an average of 45 days, the western fleet undertakes overseas

deployment (of 4–5 ships) in the western IOR (the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean or East African coast) and the eastern fleet deploys assets (4–5 ships) overseas in the eastern IOR.[41] The resources and budget available to the IN have not expanded in consonance with the extended commitments, and hence, the current naval assets remain overstretched. For the IN to earmark its available resources towards more sustained operations in the east and pursue ambitious goals, it will require a greater budget and an expanded fleet.[42] In a nutshell, New Delhi faces operational challenges when enacting the security RCs in the Indo-Pacific, including lack of material power, budgetary constraints, and limited force levels of the IN. The weakness of the defence structure and procurement process are additional problems that widen the conception-performance gap.

5.4.2 Contestation between Sub-National Agencies

According to role theory, even when a state enjoys consensus in terms of its RCs, it may experience disagreements between sub-state agencies or internal institutions (Keane & Wood, 2015). In democracies, where several sub-state agencies are involved in policymaking and implementation, they develop their own institutional RCs. As per Keane & Wood (2015, p. 100), when individual agencies have their own RCs, incompatibilities may arise and hinder their function as 'unitary vessels'. Domestic institutions may hold varied perceptions of their role in the overall national framework and have different outlooks on the same issue due to differing institutional cultures and interests (Keane & Wood, 2015). This is a unique type of contestation where sub-state or sub-national agencies may have a broader consensus on the state's master and auxiliary RCs but disagree on the ways to implement them. This leads to poor interagency functioning and 'policy dysfunction', thereby inhibiting a state's role performance (Keane & Wood, 2015).

In India, the domain of foreign policy and security decision-making remains centralised at the level of the PM (Menon, 2016). This practice has persisted ever since the early years of Indian independence. Despite some intermittent reforms and new agencies such as the NSC and the Cabinet Committee on Security, the trend has not changed substantially. Besides, the effectiveness of such institutions depends on the leadership style of the PM and the political party in power (Menon, 2016). The highly centralised arrangement has resulted in a "weak institutionalisation of foreign policy implementation in India" (Menon, 2016, p. 192). Menon, in a few words, conveys it appropriately: "no single actor or hierarchy in India is sufficiently empowered or has the time to ensure that policy is implemented satisfactorily."

Individual ministries or agencies such as the MEA, the MoD, and the NSC rely on each other and a range of other ministries such as the MoF and the

Ministry of Home Affairs for policy implementation. The need to engage other ministries/agencies has become increasingly crucial due to New Delhi's growing involvement in regional and global issues. Cases that once fell on the turf of the MEA now require greater coordination with other agencies such as the MoD, the military heads, and the MoF. In the process, many times, interagency functioning and cooperation get hindered due to each agency's RCs that are linked strongly to their institutional thinking, culture, unique visions and ideas. Each institution guards what they consider their areas of responsibility and may not always keep other relevant agencies in the loop, making the agential functioning somewhat insular. The lack of robust institutionalisation of policy implementation and inharmonious interagency relations hinders policy implementation. Conflict and lack of understanding between sub-national agencies are normal in democracies. However, in India, it has produced policy inertia and a lack of resolution even of routine matters. This tends to seriously undermine the functioning when it comes to policy implementation. Apart from this, some of these agencies, particularly the MEA, remain constrained due to a limited workforce. Despite an increase in the number of recruits in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the MEA, they have the smallest cadre compared to other civil services (Bajpai and Chong, 2019). The limited workforce makes it challenging for them to pay sufficient attention to multiple and diverse external policy issues that a rising power like India deals with. These structural weaknesses, capacity problems, and vagaries of the political party in power impact the effectiveness of policy implementation.

India's security outlook and policy implementation are equally affected by the issues of the civil-military divide and the inter-service turf war. In India, there is a degree of dissonance between the civilian and military counterparts on how to operationalise auxiliary RCs (especially given the monetary limits) and to what extent. Even as India's RCs have transformed over the last twenty years, the domestic agencies (that facilitate the role performance) and interagency functioning have not evolved correspondingly. Despite embracing new security roles, the civil-military imbalance and apathy of the political class towards security matters persist. Expectedly, these factors have allowed the inherent systemic weaknesses to linger on and hurt the translation of India's RCs into practical policy actions.

The lack of harmony in India's civil-military architecture can be traced back to its early years. A decade after partition, in 1958, the Indian civilian leadership witnessed Pakistan's military coup with trepidation. The political elites in India felt that these events aggravated the risks of such a scenario playing out in the nascent Indian state. Therefore, the government worked towards a structure that ensured that the civilian authority supersedes the military, resulting in a 'coup proof' systemic programme (Alikhan, 2015). India was a success story in sustaining civilian rule, even as all its neighbours fell prey to coups d'état. Even today, while militaries have a primary say in security

and geopolitical matters in all of India's neighbourhood, New Delhi remains insulated from this trend.

The priorities of Indian leaders remain confined to economic, social, or other domestic issues unless jolted by a security crisis. They are generally disinterested in the security domain. This is evident in the absence of a coherent national grand strategy or a national security doctrine or strategy document. As is the case in democracies, the civil-military structure is skewed in favour of the civilian bureaucracy. The political leaders depend heavily on civilian bureaucrats to manage security issues or deal with the armed forces. Influenced by the Gandhian philosophy of non-aggression, the political leaders and civilian bureaucrats view the armed forces as a defensive instrument of last resort.

The civilian and military agencies have distinct and dissimilar institutional RCs and lack a healthy harmony. While the military views itself as a crucial component of India's overall security framework, the civilian agencies tend to differ. The 'coup paranoia' permeates within the Indian bureaucracy and, over the years, has led to the rooting of a mindset that is loath to accord too much primacy to military thought and the forces.[43] The military leadership hopes to be involved as a stakeholder in the decision-making process on security issues, but civilian leadership and bureaucrats expect it to remain at arm's length (Brookings, 2017). The military is largely expected to implement the bureaucracy's policy decisions (Brookings, 2017). Given the absence of military inputs in the early stages of security or defence planning, the formulated strategies tend to lack coherence.

Civilian oversight and dominance are a norm in democracies and essential benchmarks for it. What differentiates the Indian system from other (western) democracies is the lack of expertise within the bureaucracy on security or military issues (A. Mukherjee, 2020). Modelled on the British-era Indian civil service, the Indian Administrative Services officers comprise generalists who have limited expertise or on-the-ground understanding in specialised matters of security and defence. The civilian agencies rarely focus on the security strategy and are more involved in the procedural aspects. Despite the scant subject expertise in civilian bureaucracy, they seldom seek inputs from the armed forces, and in some instances, military advice is even ignored.[44] Pant and Bommakanti (2019) believe that because the MoD is organised exclusively along civilian lines with minimal input from the military, it hampers the efficiency of India's military modernisation and acquisition process.

Traditionally, the role of military brass in the overall national security decision-making structure has remained highly restricted. The Indian military has not been a part of national policy-making bodies, and therefore, its mandate to 'inform' security policies is limited. To expand, the GOI's Allocation of Business rules authorise only ministries or departments to formulate, review and execute policies, including undertaking responsibilities such as sanctioning of funds and approvals (GOI, 1961). As the headquarters of the three services

have no departmental or ministry status, they depend on the Secretaries of the ministries (such as the MoD) for routine matters and necessary approvals. Historically, there has been no government agency in India that brings together the relevant security agencies to adopt an integrated approach towards security or defence planning. Strategic decisions are mostly taken with limited or no inclusion of the military leadership. When the military is involved in the last stages of planning, its leadership feels under-equipped and ill-structured to support the tasks prescribed by the civilian agencies. The lack of integrated planning and minimal linkages between the civilian bureaucracy and the military leads to mutual distrust or even ridicule for each other.

The problem is exacerbated by the practice of these sub-national agencies to push policy actions and suggestions that align with their institutional RCs and thinking, with limited flexibility to factor in contrasting conceptions. Little efforts are directed towards finding a middle path, thereby hindering the process of translating security RCs into performance. For instance, military planners often lack knowledge of the foreign policy objectives, nuanced political considerations, or the leadership's strategic position towards a region or an issue. Therefore, they may formulate an aggressive roadmap, which is expectedly shot down by the diplomatic corps, signalling alarm over the 'outreach'.[45] Likewise, the civilian agencies' over-cautious approach to foreign policy and aversion to adopting an active security role leads to the armed forces missing fleeting opportunities for enhancing military to military cooperation or expanding its security footprints beyond the traditional regions of operation.

Apart from this, the civilian and military agencies face discord on other issues compounded by the absence of a dialogue between the involved parties. The armed forces remain unhappy with civilian functioning and bureaucratic processes regarding the military modernisation programme. Any proposal for procurement in India goes through several complicated stages. Instances of scams in defence deals (such as the Bofors scam in the 1980s) have compelled the government to ensure stricter checks and balances. The additional layers of checks and balances and the general fear of even 'perceived' corruption have made the process slower and extremely complex. The glacial pace of approvals at each stage, along with limited expertise within the bureaucracies, impede the pace of military modernisation.

Naval modernisation, in general, is a capital-intensive affair with long gestation periods. Due to the cumbersome processes in India, it becomes difficult to enforce long term planning with a specific focus on maintaining the timelines. Therefore, the IN suffers from delayed timelines, whether in terms of foreign acquisition or indigenously built platforms. To give an example, the Russia-supplied INS *Vikramaditya* was delayed by four years. Similarly, Project-75—under which the IN plans to acquire six diesel-electric stealth submarines through indigenous planning—only picked up pace after a 10-years delay. Initially approved in 2005, the first delivery of Project-75 was scheduled

for 2012 (Rana, 2018). However, it was only in December 2017 that the first submarine was inducted into the navy. The project is likely to culminate by late 2022 if it does not run into any complications.

Even in the case of indigenous defence shipbuilding programmes undertaken by the Public Service Undertakings, delayed timelines are a norm rather than an exception. In terms of indigenous production, there are other related deficiencies when it comes to an integrated civil-military approach. While the armed forces are initially brought on board to state their requirements, other entities involved in the production are not integrated at the planning stage.[46] This leads to a mismatch between the military's needs and the technology or military hardware under development. This is reportedly one of the reasons why the IN rejected the naval version of the indigenous *Tejas* Light Combat Aircraft, as it was too heavy to take off from the aircraft carrier when fully loaded (TNN, 2016).

The Indian defence forces are subject to heavy bureaucratic oversight with complex procedural and administrative stipulations—another point of contention relevant to the MoF's decisions to grant a limited defence budget.[47] Much to the consternation of the armed forces, the MoF tends to intervene in defence spending choices with the intention of cutting costs (Cohen & Dasgupta, 2010). Along with the military's discontent vis-à-vis their civilian counterparts, even civilian bureaucrats remain dissatisfied with the armed forces pushing their RCs. Civilian agencies believe that all three services prepare their exhaustive list of demands fulfilling which is far beyond the financial resources available to the ministry.[48] There have been attempts to undertake joint planning at the Integrated Defence Staff to arrive at a realistic list of demands, which can then be supported by an assured financial outlay. However, this may best be described as a "work in progress".

Another aspect of civil-military contention is the slow pace of approval of files at the MoD, whether for major acquisitions or minor replacements and repairs. Because the IN lacks the authority to undertake major repairs or refits in the Indian shipyard directly, it must go through bureaucratic procedures. Due to the cumbersome process and bureaucratic inertia, there have been instances of critical repairs getting delayed. During his term, CNS Admiral Joshi publicly expressed his frustration about the delays in replacing the batteries of one of the diesel-electric submarines (INS *Sindhuratna*) even though they were available locally (Rehman, 2014). Given the budgetary constraints and structural problems in the defence sector, the defence forces' ability to carry out the expected tasks gets stifled, impeding India's role performance.

There is also a lack of jointness among the three military arms—the IN, the IA, and the IAF. This emanates from turf wars that stem from differing RCs of their institutions. The phenomenon of turf wars and inter-service rivalry exists in all countries to varying degrees. However, in the Indian context, its negative implications multiply because of the limited political will to ensure

greater jointness. In the absence of a national security strategy, Indian defence planning is undertaken in silos, wherein each service or agency approaches defence planning through their perception of their role in the overall security framework.

Anit Mukherjee points out that isolated planning based on each force's "vision of war" not only hampers the effectiveness of India's overall strategy but is also monetarily draining (Mukherjee, 2016, p. 23). Each defence arm battles for its share in the defence budget and lobbies the bureaucracy to address its priorities (Mukherjee, 2016). While the IA aims to replace obsolete equipment without curtailing its workforce, the IAF eyes more fighters, and the IN seeks more platforms for power projection (Mukherjee, 2016). The lack of clear stipulations makes resource allocation ad-hoc in nature and is rarely based on a comprehensive and integrated national objective or outlook. Also, given the civilian agencies' limited expertise in security issues, they are unable to "arbitrate between competing parochial interests" to reach a Nash equilibrium (Mukherjee, 2009, para. 7). It is mostly during times of crisis that the agencies feel compelled to coordinate with each other more effectively, albeit with their fair share of challenges.

The differences among sub-national agencies have a negative impact on multiple counts—operationalisation of the RCs for the Indo-Pacific, defence preparedness, and operational efficiency. It becomes difficult to utilise the available resources effectively due to limited expertise within the bureaucracy, lack of jointness within the military, near-absence of integrated national strategic thought, and inter-agency contestations. The system's inability to adopt a unified and integrated approach to its regional role and lack of institutional harmony prevent India from functioning as an effective security actor. This precarious mix of factors acts as an impediment to successful role performance. Expectedly, these issues frustrate India's ability to perform its auxiliary RCs in the IOR and Indo-Pacific region. For India to pursue its stipulated security RCs, it needs "greater integration across the security sphere—in inter-service arrangements, in procurement processes, and in broader strategic thinking and planning" (Pant and Bommakanti, 2019, p. 836).

The post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) was created in late 2019 to promote jointness and improve coordination among the forces. Concurrently, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) was established and is headed by the CDS. The DMA is responsible for the military issues within the MoD, including the objective of the theaterisation of the Indian Armed Forces. The pursuit of theaterisation, which will bring specific units of the IA, the IAF, and the IN under one theatre commander, is seen as a crucial step towards jointness. This major restructuring is a step in the right direction despite the expected ongoing teething problems and will have major implications for India's Indo-Pacific security policy in the coming decades (for details, see Mukherjee, 2021).

5.5 Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter sheds light on the domestic determinants of role evolution and identifies inhibiting factors that create the conception–performance gap. It began with a brief overview of the permanent endogenous factors—India's geographical location, civilisational history, and the quest for strategic autonomy—which form the base for India's security self-conceptions. The identified factors that led to an evolution in India's self-conceptions over the last twenty years include increased economic potential and the growing salience of the naval factor. The chapter also identifies ideational factors such as the quest for strategic autonomy and global status.

To recap, India experienced economic progress almost a decade after its economic opening in 1991. The economic emergence increased its interactions with the global economy through increased mercantile trade. It became relatively more reliant on imported energy supplies to sustain its economic growth and development. These trends gave birth to new security imperatives such as the security of the SLOCs and energy security. With new maritime security considerations, the role of the IN heightened. In the absence of an overarching national security strategy, the naval leadership built upon their service's newfound importance. They strived to establish the IN as a viable instrument of Indian foreign policy. This was communicated through naval doctrines and strategy documents. The IN enthusiastically supported naval cooperation with foreign navies and participated actively in the HADR and SAR operations. India's improved economic performance meant that it had more funds for military modernisation and could invest more in the naval arm. All in all, economic progress, new security imperatives, and the rise of the IN transformed India's self-perception in the region. It also altered the perspectives of external powers vis-à-vis India.

Changes in self-conceptions led to alterations in the RCs. Role evolution is linked to role performance (established in the preceding chapters), and this was apparent in the Indian context. Nevertheless, a gap still existed between the RC and role performance, and some of its causes emanated at the sub-national level. Some endogenous factors responsible for the conception–performance gap include role competition, contestation between sub-national agencies and structural challenges. As is argued in the chapter, sub-state agencies are driven by their own institutional RCs. Each one pushes their own conceptions on how to think about India's security role and its operationalisation. Because every agency's function is based on its distinct self-conceptions, it leads to domestic disharmony, structural weaknesses, and policy dysfunction. The chapter highlighted that contestation between relevant institutions and turf wars between military services have led to the absence of an integrated security outlook. This has resulted in sub-optimal policy actions, creating a chasm be-

tween rhetoric and policy implementation. The Indian leadership also faces challenges due to limited resources that compete with other necessary actions and priority areas. In this context, the chapter focussed on role competition related to the 'guns vs butter' issue and the 'continental priority vs maritime strategy.'

The chapter gave credence to the argument that developments at the national and sub-national levels provide an insightful account of what drives and inhibits a country's external policy. Foreign policies are not immune to ideational attributes, material factors and structural settings at home. Simply put, what happens inside the black box of the state has implications for external policies. It is pertinent to explain why a country is unable to implement its vision into action. Peeking inside the state also helps appreciate the challenges policymakers face and their dilemmas due to limited resources and multiple areas requiring attention. It is equally important to realise that the domestic dimension does not function in isolation but interacts with the international sphere, leading to the interplay between the Ego and the Alter, which co-constitutes the RCs. After an understanding of the domestic factors (Ego), the next chapter examines the influence of the Alter or external actors on India's RCs.

6. Role Prescription: External Determinants of Role Conception

> “The rise of India will depend not just on India’s actions but also on how the rest of the world responds to this development.”
> —EAM Yashwant Sinha, 2004 (MEA, 2004, para. 25)

This chapter identifies and examines the external determinants of India’s role evolution. The primary focus is on the influence of external actors and their role prescription towards India. It is unfortunate that the foreign-policy role theory initially viewed the external dimension as a secondary aspect and, therefore, gave minimal attention to it (Holsti, 1970; Le Prestre, 1997; Shih, 1990). Nonetheless, there has been a significant change in recent decades. Some notable works have given appropriate weightage to the Alter’s influence on an actor’s RC (see Elgström & Smith, 2006; Wehner, 2011; Stolte, 2015; Harnisch, Bersick & Gottwald, 2015). This chapter argues that role prescriptions and external players’ role performances have considerably facilitated India’s role evolution. The chapter is divided into four parts beginning with China, followed by the US, Japan, and the ASEAN region, within which the case of Vietnam is examined. Each case demonstrates the nuanced manner in which the identified external actors, through role prescription and role performance, influence RCs. Concurrently, the impact of MVs, particularly intra- and inter-role conflict, and divergence in role compatibility, are evaluated.

6.1 India and China

6.1.1 Historical Years: Understanding the Intra-Role Conflict

After India gained independence in 1947, it inherited a boundary dispute with China from the British Raj. In their early years, both India and China were preoccupied with domestic priorities. India was grappling with issues of internal cohesion after its partition and fought a war with Pakistan in 1947–48. Likewise, China was busy managing an internal struggle between the Kuomintang forces of Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist forces led by Mao Zedong. As a result, the two neighbours did not let the boundary dispute determine their bilateral ties and worked on establishing a working relationship. By 1949, the

Communist forces came to power in Peking, and Chiang Kai-shek fled to Formosa (now Taiwan). Following the emergence of communism in China, its relations with India turned complex and experienced fluctuations.

New Delhi grew slightly concerned over the communist takeover in China. Nevertheless, the Indian leadership viewed the Cold War as a greater threat. After failed negotiations with China over the boundary and its annexation of Tibet in 1950, there was an animated debate in India over reassessing the threat perspectives vis-à-vis their northern neighbour. However, given Nehru's desire for Asian unity and the RC of a regional peacemaker, New Delhi focused on sustaining a positive relationship with China. Nehru believed that New Delhi needed to have a working relationship with Beijing and could not risk a war (Madan, 2020). It is pertinent to note that, even before Nehru's rise to power, he had developed a sympathetic attitude towards China because of the Asian connection and China's humiliation at the hands of imperial powers (Guha, 2011). In his worldview, an India–China conflict could result in circumstances that would be exploited by the major global powers and even spark a World War (Chakravorti, 1964). Beijing's support was crucial to obviate the possibility of Asian countries getting involved in the Cold War and aligning with one of the two superpowers, the US and the USSR. Hence, New Delhi accommodated Beijing's regional concerns and even pitched for its entry into the UNSC. Nehru was convinced that PRC's legitimate interests had to be "acknowledged in order to reduce international tensions" (Harder, 2015, p. 2).

Although bilateral disagreements were managed diplomatically in the initial decades, there was a visible incompatibility between China's role expectation from India and New Delhi's self-conception. The Chinese leadership did not see India as an equal peer and was wary of Nehru's intentions. In Beijing's mental map, India was a developing country in South Asia which did not pose a significant security threat. However, it was seen to have the potential to create trouble for the Chinese government in Tibet and possibly weaken China's position as an Asian power and a leader of the developing world. China was uncomfortable with India's master RC as an Asian power (refer to Chapter 3) because it could possibly challenge China's preeminence in the region. China wanted India to remain confined to the immediate neighbourhood and not expand its political influence beyond South Asia (also see Vogel, 2010). During that time, the India–China relationship was a classic case of intra-role conflict. There was an implicit struggle for influence at the regional level, particularly during and after the Bandung Conference of 1955, where India had successfully introduced China to the rest of Asia (Acharya, 2017). There was a subtle but observable contest for Asian leadership between the two Asian powers in the coming years.

Following a brief spell of close ties, which was characterised by the rhetoric of India–China brotherhood ('*Hindi Chini bhai-bhai*'), their relationship soured, particularly after India gave refuge to the Dalai Lama in 1959. That the

Tibetan government-in-exile functioned from India became the primary source of contention for the Chinese government. In 1962, the two countries had a major conflict over the disputed land border after India's Forward policy and China's decision to invade to "teach India a lesson" (Pathak, 2017; Ghoshal, 2013). The existing intra-role conflict was exacerbated by the 1962 war, creating deep mistrust between the two sides (for more on India–China relations, see Paul, 2018b). Even today, India "bears psychological scars", termed by many as the '1962 syndrome' (Menon, 2016, p. 20). After the military confrontation, the India–China ties were frozen until the two sides re-established Ambassadorial-level ties in 1976.

After Deng Xiaoping became China's Paramount Leader, Beijing's RCs began altering. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on a new approach in 1978. It was a combination of market economics and economic opening while retaining state control and the official rhetoric of communism. In terms of its foreign policy orientation, China was keen to foster partnerships that could further its economic growth and undermine the Soviet Union's global influence (following the Sino-Soviet split). To counter the USSR's influence in South Asia, China also reached out to India. Beijing expressed its willingness to have a comprehensive settlement of the dispute to the Indian FM Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his trip to China in 1979 (Raghavan, 2018). However, the trip was cut short by India to protest the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, which coincided with Vajpayee's visit. India–China bilateral relations saw little progress until the next landmark event in 1988.

By the mid-1980s, Beijing's role was transforming into a 'development-seeker' that was "opening to the outside world" (Xiaoping, 1984, para. 1). In December 1988, the Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi was welcomed to China, making him the first Indian PM in 34 years to visit the country. Because both the countries focused on their economic situations at the time, they sought a "peaceful external environment to do so" (Raghavan, 2018, p. 8). Both sides chose to focus on diversifying their relationship and kept the contentious border dispute on the back burner. When exploring possibilities, trade relations became the main priority.

As the Cold War neared its end, the international world order transformed suddenly. Following the fall of the USSR, the US became the sole superpower and led the liberal world order. Once again, New Delhi and Beijing were preoccupied with domestic issues and adjusted their self-conceptions and role performance. India faced immense challenges after the fall of its most important partner, the USSR. The year 1991 was a turning point for India's economic orientation and foreign policy outlook. Already plagued by political instability at home, New Delhi chose to liberalise its economy and undertake massive economic reforms under the guidance of the IMF. In terms of foreign policy, India needed to diversify its relationship and build new economic and political partnerships. In the early 90s, India's new self-conception centred on the

'emerging economy' and New Delhi projected itself as a 'cooperative' and 'benign' actor (see Chapter 4 for more). Its new role performance was visible with the introduction of the LEP, fundamentally motivated by economic considerations. Engaging the SEA and EA countries was important for India to bolster its economic position.

Almost simultaneously, China's RCs were altering. The end of the Cold War coincided with the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 when the Chinese troops killed scores of pro-democracy protestors. The Tiananmen incident tarnished China's international image, leading to diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions. In view of these developments, as noted by Sven Bernhard Gareis, China adopted the strategy of "*taoguang yanghui* (to bide one's time) and *budangtou* (not to claim leadership)" (Gareis, 2013, p. 1). This strategy aimed to alleviate regional worries over Beijing's intentions and ensure a conducive environment for China's sustained economic growth and development (Gareis, 2013). In conjunction, it embarked on peripheral (*zhoubian*) diplomacy that projected China as a 'good neighbour' and an 'economic partner' (Hsiung, 1995). As a corollary to peripheral diplomacy, Beijing introduced the New Security Concept (*xin anquan guandian*) at the ARF conference in March 1997 (Thayer, 2003). The then Vice President Hu Jintao described the idea of the New Security Concept as common security among participants that worked through "mutual cooperation, consensus through consultation and peaceful settlement of disputes, rather than bullying, confrontation, and imposition of one's own will upon others" (Hu Jintao as quoted in Chinwanno, 2005, p. 154). China's role performance corresponded with these RCs reasonably well in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was visible in India–China relations.

Intending to improve trade relations, Beijing and New Delhi inked deals on air connectivity and cultural exchanges. In December 1991, the Chinese PM Li Peng visited India on an official visit, and the two countries agreed to reopen consulates in Bombay and Shanghai (Ahmed, 1996). Li's meetings with the Indian PM Narasimha Rao led to landmark agreements such as a trade protocol (including the establishment of border trade), cooperation in space research and technology, and a decision to initiate the Joint Working Committee meetings to discuss the border dispute (Ahmed, 1996). When PM Rao visited China in September 1993, the two sides signed a crucial deal—the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement. According to the former Indian FS Shivshankar Menon, this agreement "effectively delinked settlement of the boundary from the rest of the relationship" and "formally renounced the use of force to settle the issue" (Menon, 2016, p. 20). Throughout the 1990s, the disputed border remained relatively stable, and bilateral trade picked up steam. There was budding cooperation despite an intra-role conflict, which demonstrates the relevance of the convergence–divergence dynamics.

Despite improved relations, the inherent intra-role conflict persisted through the 1990s. With a view to keep India preoccupied in the immediate

neighbourhood, China's South Asia strategy focused on nurturing Pakistan as a counterforce (see Paul, 2003 for a detailed explanation). Similarly, when New Delhi made diplomatic incursions into the ASEAN organisation under the LEP, China's discomfort became pronounced. Ranjit Gupta, former Indian Ambassador to Thailand, revealed that "China was absolutely livid when India was invited to become a full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN (in 1995) ahead of China, and it conveyed its anger to ASEAN countries in no uncertain terms" (Ambassador Ranjit Gupta as quoted in Ghoshal, 2013, p. 40). He added that China even "tried to prevent India from being included in the ARF".

Beijing's role performance as a trustable 'good neighbour' and 'economic partner' was most effective during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The Asian economies (the SEA countries together with South Korea), also known as 'tiger economies', experienced a financial meltdown and their currencies dipped instantaneously. While the western countries and Japan appeared reluctant to respond with solutions, China played a decisive role in minimising the collateral damage. It chose not to devalue its currency, which saved the regional currencies from a further devaluation. The leadership also supported the recovery of the crisis-hit economies by encouraging the SEA countries to export (Naarajärvi, 2017). Bao Kexin, Director-General of China's Department of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, called China a "safe island that would provide financial stability to Asia in the midst of the crisis" (Kexin quoted in Greenburg, 2004, p. 8). Through the 1997 economic crisis, China enhanced its regional standing and allayed doubts over its intentions in the SEA and EA regions.

India–China relations got hampered in the late 1990s following India's nuclear tests. This was especially after the Indian PM Vajpayee's letter to US President Clinton got leaked. In the letter, the PM had justified nuclear tests and pinned down the motivating factor to China without naming it but referring to it as "an overt nuclear state" in its neighbourhood "which [had] committed armed aggression against India in 1962" (The New York Times, 1998, para. 2). Raghavan (2018, p. 9) argues that the nuclear decision was less to do with China and was largely pushed by India's scientific establishment in the wake of the international "debate on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)". To salvage the India–China relations from dipping further, New Delhi embarked on proactive diplomacy. The Indian FM Jaswant Singh visited China in 1999, and they agreed to not pose a threat to each other. High-profile exchanges took place and incrementally built upon the diplomatic momentum (for details, see MEA, 2012b). The fruition of New Delhi's diplomatic outreach to Beijing was captured in PM Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003.

6.1.2 New Millennium: Simultaneous Role Evolution

With the advent of the new millennium, signs of an altering regional and world order began surfacing. The next two decades proved crucial for many countries, including new rising powers such as India and China. Almost concurrently, both countries experienced role evolution, and their role performances expanded regionally and globally. The mix of internal and external determinants fuelled the changes in their RCs. The relevant factors included their economic rise, the availability of material resources for military modernisation, expanding energy needs and a sense of maritime awakening, India and China's deep-seated desire to reclaim their status, the weakening US-led world order, and their interactions with external actors.

China's economic growth continued unabated all through the late 1990s and early 2000s. Its annual GDP growth logged an average above 9% and enjoyed more than a 4% share in world trade by 2003 (Rodlauer & Heytens, 2003). China replaced the US as the leading economic partner for several ASEAN countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia (Ikenberry, 2015). China's economic rise enhanced its influence and political say in many regional and international forums. These developments heightened Beijing's self-confidence and inspired the leadership to embrace RCs that befitted China's arrival on the international stage.

In March 2003, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao assumed power in China. The fourth-generation leaders were more willing to highlight China's rise in economic, political, and military terms. At the same time, they did not want to spark possible fears over their country's emergence. Beginning in late 2002, Chinese scholar and General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao referred to their country's progress as China's 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi*) (Suettinger, 2004; Zheng, 2002). The new terminology denoted China as a rising power that was also peaceful. The usage of 'peaceful rise' was prominent for a few months and intensely debated within China. By 2006, it was replaced with a more benign expression, 'peaceful development' (*heping yu fazhan*), which was also used in the title of China's 2005 White Paper (Gareis, 2013).

Simultaneously, India was emerging as a potential economic powerhouse. Beijing's economic reforms predated New Delhi's by more than a decade, and therefore, it was much ahead of India economically. Compared to China's per capita gross national income of US $980 in 2001, India's was a mere US $460 (TNN, 2002). Between 2003 and 2007, India recorded an average GDP of 9%. India's high growth rates, combined with its potential to be a "geopolitical swing state" in Asia, attracted many regional and international actors' attention (Twining, 2006). The first decade of the 2000s was a critical transition period for India's self-conception, which shifted from a 'developing country' to an aspirational 'major power'. India equated itself with China as one of the "two

major Asian powers" (MEA, 2003a, pt. 13). Impacted by the expanding self-conceptions, New Delhi adopted a more ambitious foreign policy outlook. It implemented an active multi-alignment policy and cultivated ties with all major powers and countries in the extended neighbourhood, as seen under phase II of the LEP (see Chapter 4).

China was closely following India's emergence and its newfound recognition among major powers. For instance, after many decades of detachment and mistrust, US President Bill Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 marked a turning point in Indo-US ties. Beijing had long-held fears about Washington's intentions towards China. Given India's geographical location and potential, Beijing saw the American outreach as a plan to nurture a counterweight to China in Asia. New Delhi and Washington's converging views on terrorism brought them closer in the wake of the Global War on Terror after the 9/11 attacks. This prompted Beijing to sustain the pace of improved ties with India, lest Washington should gain leverage. Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003 was an important event that reset the India–China equation. In a remarkable development, both sides agreed to appoint a Special Representative to resolve the boundary dispute, an upgrade from the former official-level joint working group talks (Joshi, 2018).

Despite these developments, Beijing only grudgingly acknowledged India's rise as an important Asian player. As mentioned previously, the Chinese leadership did not view New Delhi as an equal. India had rarely featured as a credible security threat to China. This trend, however, began altering by the mid-2000s as the US support for India grew, bolstering New Delhi's regional and global standing. The Chinese government was chary over the India–US Strategic Partnership, their defence relationship agreement of 2005, and the civil nuclear deal. This does not imply that India posed an existential security threat or matched the level of China's threat perceptions from the US or Japan. Having stated that, India gained greater traction from the Chinese leadership for its political and military potential than it ever did before. These concerns coincided with the beginning of global discussions on the India–China competition. From January 2005, to allay Chinese concerns, the Indian government persistently mentioned in official speeches that there was "enough space and opportunity in the region for both India and China to prosper". (MEA, 2005b, para. 10).

Both sides wanted steady and uninterrupted economic development to continue performing their RCs as economic powers. For this, they needed to remain stable and cooperative. During the 2005 meeting between the Indian PM Manmohan Singh and the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, they established a Strategic and Cooperative Partnership. In conjunction, they signed the agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for Settling the Boundary Question. According to the former Indian FS Shyam Saran, this agreement reflected their shared intention to resolve the boundary dispute early (Saran,

2017b). At this time, in the words of Saran (2017b, p. 260), "China adopted, at least rhetorically, a more balanced stand on India–Pakistan relations".

To some extent, Beijing saw value in India's emergence because it provided additional support against American unipolarity, especially at multilateral forums. As non-western developing countries, China and India shared common interests regarding the World Trade Organisation, climate change, and reformation of the structure of global governance. This was evident in 2009 when Beijing and New Delhi coordinated their positions closely on climate change during the UN climate conference at Copenhagen (Ramesh, 2009). Leung and Depp (2018) note that China and India also share similar views on Iran. Their opinions on Iran differ from that of the US, partially due to their shared interest in energy security. Therefore, New Delhi and Beijing have had to work together when it comes to Iran (Leung & Depp, 2018).

Even as India maintained a delicate balance with China, their intra-role conflict remained prominent in the background. For example, New Delhi's increasing association with the ASEAN members was an unwelcomed development from Beijing's perspective. In the run-up to the formation of the EAS, Beijing tried to obstruct India's inclusion as a member. The Chinese government was vocal about its objection and sent its Ambassadors to many ASEAN countries to dissuade them from supporting India's candidacy for the EAS (Ghoshal, 2013). Having noted that, the role conflict was at a manageable level and not intense enough to invite any major overt responses from either side.

In line with progressing master self-conceptions, India and China's auxiliary self-conceptions were becoming more ambitious. This was apparent in the maritime sector. Traditionally, India and China were continental powers. However, post-2000, both countries saw a greater infusion of the maritime element in their national security strategies. Their scaled-up (auxiliary) maritime self-conceptions were a confluence of multiple factors such as the availability of additional financial resources, economic imperatives, growing maritime interest, and a quest for energy security and natural resources.

For China, the maritime bent was a natural progression after it had resolved land border disputes with many of its land neighbours, excluding India and Bhutan. Just like India, China's unparalleled involvement with the global economy, ecurity imperative to protect sea-bound trade and energy supplies motivated it to look beyond the near seas. Li (2009) argues that China's naval strategy, which was focused on 'near-seas active defence' (*jinhai jiji fangyu*) since the late 1980s, advanced towards 'far-seas operations' (*yuanhai zuozhan*) strategy in the 2000s. Under Hu Jintao, China's maritime-related self-conception and strategy advanced steadily. When Hu became the General Secretary in 2002, he discussed the need to "make the gradual transition to far-seas defence, enhancing the far-seas manoeuvring operations capabilities (*yuanhai jidong zuozhan nengli*)" (Hu Jintao as quoted in Li, 2009, p. 160). The Chinese

officials subsequently fished out the idea of focusing on what was termed as the 'far-seas operations'.

According to Li (2009, p. 160), operationally, 'far seas' refer to the "vast area that stretches from the northwest Pacific to the east IO". China's interest in the IO was not new. During the 1990s and even before, it had explored opportunities to access the IO through Myanmar. After China's sea-borne trade and energy imports swelled, its planners attended more seriously to its interests in the IO. In particular, the leadership grew worried about their dependency on the Malacca Straits (a vital chokepoint that connects the IO to the Pacific Ocean), which was termed the 'Malacca Dilemma' by Hu Jintao (for more details, see Ji, 2007). The CCP earmarked more resources to operationalise the 'far-seas operations' strategy and gain a stronger foothold in the IO. In 2006, Hu called China a 'great maritime power' and underscored the need to pursue blue water capabilities (Hu quoted in Erickson, 2008, p. 656). China's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10) set the direction for implementing improved maritime awareness; protecting China's rights, interests, and maritime environment; and developing the maritime economy (Xinhua, 2006).

It is noteworthy that China's self-conception and strategies were advancing at a time when New Delhi recognised the need for a seaward focus. India enjoyed a geopolitical advantage in the IO, which was strengthened by the IN's experience of operating in the maritime space, especially during the 2004 IO Tsunami, the Lebanon War in 2006, and Cyclone Sidr in 2007. Key Indian officials cited India's self-conceptions as a 'benign' actor in the IO and a 'potential stabiliser' with repeated references to its contribution to "regional HADR operations" and maritime capacity-building (MEA, 2007c, para. 21, 22 & last para).

As India's role performance enhanced to match its evolving RCs, it was motivated to expand its forays further ahead. Even as China's interest in the IO increased, Indian naval planners were steering towards securing interests in the east of IO. This change was attributed to the vital SLOCs in the area, potential energy sources, and concerns over freedom of navigation. In the early 2000s, India enjoyed greater financial and material resources compared to the preceding decades and had increased support from major powers. This allowed New Delhi to feel more confident in pushing its strategic frontiers. It deepened security-related engagements with SEA and EA during the second phase of the LEP, which commenced in 2003. India inked defence cooperation agreements with Singapore and the Philippines in 2003 and 2006, respectively and signed MoUs on defence with Thailand (2005), South Korea (2005), and Australia (2006). New Delhi's eastward interest was also palpable when India and Singapore held a naval exercise in the SCS (in 2005) instead of the traditional choice of the Bay of Bengal. Additionally, the Philippines, a country that was not prominent in the first phase of the LEP, gained attention in the second phase. India and the Philippines signed a significant Defence Cooperation

Agreement in 2006 (Cabalza, 2013). All these trends pointed to India's interest in strengthening security cooperation with the SEA and EA countries.

At this juncture, it is relevant to discuss the degree to which China shaped India's early maritime self-conceptions. It would be safe to state that until the mid-2000s, Chinese activities or, as assumed, the China threat factor was not the primary driver of New Delhi's RC. India was closely observing Chinese involvement in the IO, but the scale of China's activities had not warranted major alterations in India's RC. The evolving RCs, at the time, were demonstrative of India's desire to assume a well-defined maritime role and showcase its soft-power projection abilities in the IO. The IN's experience in the HADR and SAR operations and soft-power projection capabilities in the IO inspired Indian policymakers to establish a distinct maritime RC. Overall, India was keen to attract greater regional and global acknowledgement of its emergence as a maritime power, which naturally supplemented its pursuit of the master RC of a major power.

6.1.3 China's Role Performance and India's Counter-Role

So far, it has been established that India and China's self-conceptions were advancing simultaneously and transitioning into stable RCs. When compared to India, the Chinese role performance aligned more closely with its auxiliary security RCs and the naval strategy of 'far-seas operations'. To put it in perspective, China's military spending increased by 195% between 1997 and 2006, making it the largest defence spender in the Asia-Pacific region (Pant, 2009). In terms of the naval build-up, it commissioned 36 submarines between 1995 and 2006 (O'Rourke, 2007; as cited in Erickson, 2008). Beijing explored opportunities by engaging the IOR littorals. It negotiated an agreement with Bangladesh to construct a container port in Chittagong, an advanced port at Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and a deep-sea port in Gwadar, Pakistan.

All these projects, located at the three geographical corners (east, west, and south) of India, were seen as Beijing's long-term strategy to encircle India (Khurana, 2008). From 2007-08 onwards, New Delhi's anxiety over Chinese intentions increased. Patrolling by the PLA along the disputed India–China border grew more aggressive. In 2007, the Chinese forces destroyed the IA's makeshift bunkers near the Sikkim–Bhutan–Tibet tri-junction (Chellaney, 2008). The change in China's role performance towards India and in the IO was perceptible.

The China threat factor began surfacing, but New Delhi was still ambivalent about an adverse prognosis. Security planners were observing growing Chinese dominance in other regions such as the SCS. According to Chubb (2016, p. 102), there was a qualitative change in Chinese behaviour in the SCS, which saw a "sevenfold increase in the most dangerous type of assertive ac-

tions from 2007 onwards". The Chinese conduct in the SCS provided some insights to the Indian policymakers on Beijing's propensity to be forceful on maritime security issues. New Delhi responded positively to overtures from the US and its allies (Japan, Australia) to explore opportunities for cooperation in Asia-Pacific. These countries' interest in involving New Delhi was a testament to its growing relevance in regional affairs, a change that Indian policymakers welcomed. India got involved in the initial meeting of the Quadrilateral dialogue with the US, Japan, and Australia in 2007. The Quad countries and Singapore participated in the 2007 Indo-US Malabar naval exercise, which was held off Japan's Okinawa Island in the East China Sea.

The Chinese government was closely studying India's involvement in the region. It felt threatened by the multilateral arrangement and saw it as a coordinated attempt to contain China's rise. Beijing was quick to criticise the grouping and even served an official démarche to New Delhi (and other involved countries) for its participation. The angry reaction rekindled discussions in India over its growing proximity to the US (and its allies) and what this meant for India–China ties.

Despite India's attempts to alleviate China's concerns, there was little progress. During PM Singh's visit to China in January 2008, the two parties hailed a 'Shared Vision for the 21st Century'. They reiterated a shared commitment to "resolving outstanding differences, including on the boundary question, through peaceful negotiations" (MEA, 2008, para. 18). However, Beijing's role performance did not match the sentiments of the 'shared vision.' Instead, its position on Arunachal Pradesh (a state in India that it began claiming as 'South Tibet') hardened. There was also a change in its previously neutral stance on Kashmir. In 1996, China accepted the Kashmir issue as a bilateral affair between India and Pakistan. This changed in 2008 when Beijing refused to issue official visas to travellers from J&K and Arunachal Pradesh and instead stapled the entry papers on Indian passports. Garver (2018, p. 280) avers that "Beijing's on-again, off-again exercise of intimidation against India" over the territorial issues exacerbated concerns in New Delhi. China's activities along the McMahon Line, in addition to the usually precarious India–Pakistan Line of Control, motivated then Defence Minister A.K. Antony to issue a classified directive ordering the Indian "forces to prepare for a two-front war" (Unnithan, 2010, para. 4).

Until 2008, India's maritime role evolution had taken place in a relatively stable regional environment, marked by American global dominance. The broader Asia-Pacific region depended on Washington to provide public goods (Asian maritime order and protection of global commons). Although India had been dissatisfied with the US hegemony, especially in the 1990s, it also benefited from the status quo. New Delhi had hoped to utilise the status quo to fulfil its self-conceptions at a gradual pace. However, the 2008 financial crisis gravely impacted the Indian economy, with its GDP growth rate plunging from

9.80% in 2007 to a mere 3.89% in 2008 (Planning Commission, 2014). Although India's annual GDP climbed above 8% the following year, it fluctuated in the coming years.

The events in 2008 were a stark reminder that the world order was changing faster than anticipated. The financial crisis underscored the US' limitations to remain the predominant leader in the Asia-Pacific. Washington's security commitments were overstretched due to its involvement in the Middle East and Afghanistan, thus impacting its security role performance in the Asia-Pacific (Menon, 2017). 2008 was a defining year for China because it added to the leadership's conviction that Beijing could now abandon the strategy of 'biding one's time' and utilise the opportunity to become a more influential global player. After 2008, China's expanding self-conceptions and ambitions were visible in its role performance. In terms of its naval conduct, Beijing exhibited a greater willingness to send its vessels to farther maritime spaces signifying its presence and interest in the far seas. There was a surge in PLAN's presence in the western IOR in the forms of port calls and anti-piracy operations. In 2008, China dispatched PLAN warships for an anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, which was its "first out-of-area operation" (Marantidou, 2014, p. 3). Discussions in China about the need to establish overseas military bases emerged. This added to the Indian distrust of Beijing's intentions in the IOR.

China's increasing economic involvement and presence in the IO was a serious challenge for New Delhi because 90% of Indian trade and energy sources came through the IO. There was growing concern that Beijing would eventually establish a dominant foothold in the IOR if it remained uncontested. The historical intra-role conflict fuelled the anxieties of Indian security planners. Many felt that a lackadaisical approach to the IOR would make it increasingly challenging to address China's influence in the near future. Such an eventuality would potentially diminish India's geopolitical leverage in the region and undercut its ability to perform as a major power. There was an added unease due to China's dominance in the SCS, which could bring it closer to the Malacca Straits (which connects the IO to the Western Pacific). The concerns were solidified by 2010 when China began referring to the SCS as its 'core interest', making it equivalent to the cases of Taiwan, Tibet, and internal stability (Medcalf, 2020).

Due to the US' relatively decreasing ability to perform its traditional roles in the Asia-Pacific (see next section) and China's expanding role performance, New Delhi felt an urgent need to secure its interests and reinstate its role in the region. In terms of the timeline, from 2007–08, Beijing's expanding role performance in the IO set in motion India's oppositional counter-role. Supportive role performance from the US (and allies) provided a conducive environment within which India felt more confident to assume a net security provider role in the IO. By 2010, Washington not only encouraged India's regional geopolitical aspirations but prescribed a much larger role in the IO and towards the

east of the IO (for details, see the next section). The Indian leadership was aware of the limitations of securing its regional interests unilaterally, especially given the scant material resources and competing priorities. Therefore, New Delhi continued to partner with external powers such as the US and its allies to pursue shared objectives. In 2010, India's former self-conceptions culminated in the RC of a net security provider in the IO. To sum up, in conjunction with domestic factors, this change was fuelled by the external determinants, including China's role performance, the US' (and its allies') role prescription and corresponding counter-role towards India.

Through naval engagements in the IOR and the SCS, India and China were pursuing ambitious role performances and venturing into each other's areas of primary interest. This also meant that their navies were now encountering each other in 'overlapping peripheries' (see Z. D. Singh, 2014, para. 21). In July 2011, in the international waters of the SCS, when INS *Airavat* was returning home from a port call to Vietnam, the Chinese navy ordered it to "move out of Chinese waters" (Bagchi, 2011). Such interactions between the Asian navies underscored the risks involved at operational levels when expanding role performances in overlapping peripheries. The incident brought home the implications of Chinese role performance in the SCS, making it tougher for Indian policymakers to ignore.

The SCS dispute, which had rarely featured in India's official statements in the past, became prominent from the year 2011 onwards. This issue gained traction after China grew more assertive in its claims of almost 90% of the SCS (the nine-dash line). For the Indian government, the primary maritime interest still lay in the IO. However, overlooking the Chinese actions in the SCS was harmful to India's energy and economic interests in the region. India needed to ensure unhindered SLOC passages through the SCS and the Malacca Straits. Also, energy needs warranted New Delhi to tap into new areas for potential energy sources beyond the IO. The SCS was a favourable region because of the high estimates of oil and gas reserves (see EIA, 2013a). This motivated India to partner with Vietnam for oil and gas exploration in the SCS.

Although not confrontational at the time, China periodically objected to India's oil exploration activities with Vietnam. Beijing's role performance in the SCS, including objection to Indian activities in the region, made New Delhi distrustful of China. China's confrontational behaviour along the India–China disputed border only added to the concerns. New Delhi believed that there were immense risks in allowing China to dominate the regional maritime order and claim exclusive rights over waters that were crucial for trade supplies and energy sources. Responding to China's objections, the Indian EAM SM Krishna said, "India maintains that SCS is the property of the world. I think those tradeways must be free from any national interference" (S. M. Krishna as quoted in PTI, 2012a, para. 2).

India's best bet to shape a favourable regional maritime order was to cooperate with regional actors and extra-regional powers that shared similar concerns. This is when the Indian military diplomacy gained ground. The IN made regular port calls to the SEA and EA countries, undertook frequent overseas deployment to the region, and participated in joint or multilateral naval exercises in the SCS. Also, from 2011–12, official Indian statements repeatedly voiced support for "freedom of navigation", 'uninterrupted commerce', "access to resources" and called for the implementation of the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the SCS (MEA, 2011d; 2012e).

6.1.3.1 China's Role Evolution: Great Power and Great Maritime Power

Beijing went through another phase of role evolution. More ambitious self-conceptions surfaced after a leadership transition in 2011–12. By the time Xi Jinping took charge as the CCP General Secretary from Hu Jintao at the National Congress in 2012, China had progressed by leaps and bounds compared to the previous decade. When Hu Jintao was the Paramount Leader (2002–12), Beijing had undergone a preparatory phase to enhance its Comprehensive National Power. Compared to the US $212 billion foreign exchange reserve China held in 2001, it had US $4 trillion by mid-2014 (Neely, 2016). Despite China's assertive avatar in the last six years, scholars such as Peter Ferdinand point out that Hu Jintao was still "risk averse and largely preoccupied with maintaining domestic economic growth" (Ferdinand, 2016, p. 941). Making a similar argument, Clarke (2017, p. 76) believes that China's foreign policy approach under Hu aimed to "do something or striking some successes (*yousuo zuowei*)" while retaining the fundamental goal of "economic modernisation and development". In essence, even though China grew more forceful on security issues, it had not completely abandoned the strategy of "bide one's time" and "not take leadership". Instead, it was undergoing a transition period trying to balance its former self-conception of 'peaceful rise' and its eventual aim of global leadership.

In 2012, Beijing revealed its intent to assume leadership and perform an active strategic role that stretched beyond the Pacific and EA into the IOR and Eurasia. The year Xi Jinping took over the CCP, the tone and tenor of China's foreign policy and security activities (role performance) turned more combative. Under Xi, China was shedding its inhibitions and seeking a role that was equivalent to the US. The new master self-conception was first publicised during Xi's (as Vice President) visit to the US in early 2012. During the visit, Xi proposed that China and US should "find a completely new way for the new type of Great Power relations (*xin xing da guo guan xi*)" (Xi Jinping as quoted in Zeng & Breslin, 2016, p. 774). The conception of 'Great Power' was repeated by Chinese leaders, officials, scholars, and academics from 2012 on-

wards (China Daily, 2013; Zeng, 2016; Zeng & Breslin, 2016). China's great power aspirations implied that it no longer wanted to be boxed in the Asia-Pacific region or perceived as *just* a regional power. Many Chinese scholars argue that an American acknowledgement of "new types of Great Power relations" would be considered Washington's acceptance of China as a great power at par with the US (Zeng, 2016). Gareis (2013) makes an important argument that China's quest for global leadership is reminiscent of its desire to reclaim the glory of the 'Middle Kingdom' era.

It should be noted that when China refers to itself as a great power, it seeks to project this role with a nuanced connotation that is distinct from the concept of great power used in the western context. Given China's experience with the European great powers of the 19th and 20th centuries and the US' hegemonic global leadership, the term 'Great Power' holds a negative connotation in China. Beijing always differentiates itself from other great powers and proclaims itself to be a "great power with Chinese characteristics" and a "responsible great power" (Naarajärvi, 2017, pp. 2,11). Michael Swaine lists some of the fundamental 'persistencies' of Chinese characteristics, as revealed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Hua Chunying:

> "1) uphold[ing] the leadership of the CCP; 2) continuing peaceful development without sacrificing legitimate rights and core interests; 3) democratisation of international relations; 4) pursuing win-win cooperation as a new type of international relationship; 5) maintain a correct balance between justice and profits particularly with developing countries; and 6) to continue the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of others" (Swaine, 2015, p. 8).

Equally important is the understanding that China's self-conception as a great power is aspirational. The Chinese government seeks to assume this role by 2049, the year that would mark a century of the founding of the PRC. According to Gareis (2017), the year 2049 holds considerable foreign policy implications for China. Previously, 2021 was an important year as the CCP marked its centenary. By 2021, China had hoped to finish building a "moderately prosperous society in all respects … and work tirelessly to realise the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation" (Xinhua, 2017, para. 2). China aims to become an undisputed regional power and work towards the ultimate great power role, which it hopes to realise by 2049.

There are two very pertinent components of China's grand strategy in the pursuit of the great power role: the 'China Dream' and the aim to be a "great maritime power". The concept of the China Dream cropped up in Chinese discourse in November 2012 and is connected to the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Xi Jinping quoted in Callahan, 2016, p. 3). Xi, in his first Presidential speech in 2013, remarked that to "fulfil the China Dream … we must achieve a rich and powerful country, the revitalisation of the nation, and the people's happiness" (Xi Jinping as quoted in Callahan, 2016, p. 3). Although the general focus of the China Dream is on domestic politics, it is

equally applicable when examining external policies (Callahan, 2017). As noted by Gareis (2019, p. 89), the China Dream reflects the country's aim to "bring back to its historical position of a leading power in world politics".

Maritime power is a fundamental element of the great power role performance. During the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the CCP officially introduced China's long-term goal of becoming a great maritime power (*haiyang qiangguo*) (Embassy of the PRC in the USA, 2012; also see Bickford, 2016). In the language of role theory, this can be categorised as an auxiliary self-conception. Tobin (2018) notes that Xi connects the maritime strategy as a crucial element to achieving the 2049 objective of the China Dream. Beijing feels the need to achieve supremacy in all aspects of maritime power and to become a "modern maritime military force structure" to ensure the protection of its "national sovereignty, maritime rights and interests, the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests" (Xinhua, 2015, para. 7).

Even the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—the world's largest infrastructure program—is connected to President Xi's China Dream. The BRI is an umbrella initiative of multimodal transport infrastructure and connectivity projects that stretches from Asia, Africa, and China to Europe. It has two parts—land-centric projects known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and a maritime component called the Maritime Silk Road (MSR).[49] After the BRI became President Xi's pet project in 2013, the CCP added a strategic angle to it. Through the BRI, China envisages greater involvement in the global economic, political, and maritime orders and seeks to offer a Sino-centric model of development to other countries. The MSR, the maritime component of the BRI, focuses on the maritime connectivity between China and SEA, South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe through the SCS and the IOR (Tobin, 2018). Some of the vital nodes of the MSR fall in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood, such as Sri Lanka (Hambantota Port), the Maldives (Feydhoo Finolhu Island), Pakistan (Gwadar Port), Myanmar (Kyaukpyu Port), and Bangladesh (Payra Port). China's increasing dependence on the IOR for energy and natural resource supplies from Africa and West Asia became another reason to expand its involvement. These developments began creating new pockets where China's economic and energy stakes lie. From 2012–13, the scale of Chinese investments in the IO littorals expanded considerably.

India began to perceive the MSR as a threat to its regional interests and role performance in the IOR. From December 2013 to February 2014, Chinese activities in the IO included the deployment of its nuclear-powered submarine for a two-month-long operational patrol. The PLAN berthed its submarine and a warship at the Colombo harbour in 2014, even after New Delhi expressed its concerns (Aneez & Sirilal, 2014). Also, there were reports of the PLA secretly docking its nuclear submarine in Karachi (Pakistan) in May 2015. Adding to the mix were China's plans to set up a maritime logistics facility in Maran and a naval base and airfield in Jiwani (Pakistan). These plans aggravated Indian

fears about the PLAN's involvement in the region. China's transfers of naval weapons and systems to Pakistan (stealth attack submarines and frigates), Bangladesh (submarines, maritime patrol vessels and corvettes) and Myanmar posed long-term strategies to challenge India's position in the IO.

Some Indian observers argue that under the pretext of securing its economic interests in the IOR, China may cultivate sustained military presence in the medium and long term. This prognosis was affirmed by China's 2015 white paper, which stated that the PLAN "will gradually shift its focus from offshore waters defence to the combination of offshore waters defence with open seas protection" (Xinhua, 2015, section iv). According to McDevitt (2016), this statement indicates that the protection of China's overseas interests and the SLOCs remain very crucial for the PLAN. In addition to the IO, Indian planners studied the Chinese strategies and tactics in the maritime spaces in their 'near-seas', i.e., in the SCS. The year 2012 was considered the "most assertive year since 1970", with nine cases of assertive activities in the SCS (Chubb, 2016, p. 101). Following that, China, in late 2013, began establishing control over disputed areas of the SCS by reclaiming land through island-building and militarising these artificial islands. Beijing resorted to the "grey zone tactic" in the SCS —deployment of non-military vessels belonging to the Chinese Coast Guard and Maritime Militia—to significantly stretch China's presence and authority within the nine-dash line and confront foreign entities (Erickson & Martinson, 2019). New Delhi feared that Beijing could pursue similar strategies and tactics in the IOR after consolidating control in the SCS. Such a prognosis was plausible if China's economic stakes in the IOR expanded and motivated it to take greater control of the region. India could no longer view the developments in the SCS and IOR as mutually exclusive.

For New Delhi, Beijing's role performance in the SCS offered pointers into possible Chinese behaviour as a great maritime power. Abhijit Singh argues that the SCS can be viewed as a "test case for international maritime law", which has serious implications for the future of maritime Asia (A. Singh, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, India felt increasingly obligated to support freedom of navigation and the principles of UNCLOS (A. Singh, 2016). For Indian security planners, extending India's strategic reach into the SCS may serve as a tit-for-tat response (oppositional counter-role) to China's role performance in the IO (A. Singh, 2018).

6.1.3.2 India's Oppositional Counter-Role and Intra-Role Conflict

By aligning its performance with the expanded RCs, China was reshaping the regional order faster than expected. New Delhi felt compelled to respond to the changing dynamics and assume an appropriate oppositional counter-role. Indian policymakers wanted to reiterate their country's importance at the regional and global levels. From 2014–15 (covered in detail in Chapter 4), there

were additions to India's set of roles. It embraced a new master self-conception of a leading power, which complemented the major power RC. Alongside, India grew determined to assume a more active role in the Indo-Pacific. Although the Indian PM and officials had begun using the concept of Indo-Pacific in 2012 in their statements and speeches, New Delhi truly began embracing its role in the Indo-Pacific region from 2014–15. This is when the RCs, net security-provider and stakeholder role in the Indo-Pacific, became more integrated and better reflected in policy actions.

When compared to China's role performances, there was little doubt that India was lagging in converting its conception into ground actions. In short, despite the intent to perform an oppositional counter-role, India exhibited signs of a conception–performance gap. New Delhi and Beijing's concurrently expanding role performance in the 'overlapping peripheries' resulted in new issues and areas of contestation (Z. D. Singh, 2014). Their intra-role conflict was intensifying. India wanted to perform as a net security provider in the IO and a stakeholder role in the security of the Indo-Pacific, which contrasted with China's role prescription towards India. China reluctantly conceded to India's rise but continued to prescribe it a modest regional role (PTI, 2018d). To limit New Delhi's ability to perform its ambitious self-conceptions, Beijing persistently worked towards beefing up the naval power of other regional countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. The presence of potential challengers in the IO would bind India to the nearby waters and restrict it from expanding its maritime frontiers.

Furthermore, Chinese firms leased strategically vital ports in the IO, especially after the recipients of the BRI projects failed to repay the loans handed over by China. Through the government-supported companies, China leased the Feydhoo Finolhu Island from the Maldives for 50 years, the Gwadar Port from Pakistan for 40 years, and the Hambantota Port from Sri Lanka for 99 years (see Maldives Independent, 2016; PTI, 2017c; Schultz, 2017). Until mid-2018, Chinese companies under the BRI were involved in building and operating a total of 42 ports in 34 countries (Suokas, 2018). Observers questioned the nature of Chinese involvement in these projects and whether it would eventually use these ports for military and logistical purposes (Green, 2018). The Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in 2018 remarked on Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka: "whether China will confine itself to only port activities in Hambantota port is a question" (The Hindu, 2018, para. 2).

The suspicion over Chinese intentions magnified after Beijing officially established the PLA's first overseas military base in Djibouti (in 2017). According to American Admiral Harry Harris, this military base could "support Chinese force projection through the IO and into the Mediterranean and Africa" (Congressional Research Service, 2018, p. 34). As more countries fell into the 'debt trap' under the BRI, New Delhi got worried that Beijing may be able to leverage its political and economic influence over the IO littorals to

maintain a sustained PLAN presence in the coming decades. A retired PLA officer, Colonel Yue Gang, substantiated such fears by noting that "the PLA in the future will need to go abroad to protect China's overseas interests in countries along the BRI" (Gang as quoted in Zhen, 2019, para. 8).

India's oppositional counter-role towards China gained momentum following their border confrontation, which began in May 2020 and resulted in fatal clashes in June 2020 (20 Indian military personnel and unknown Chinese soldiers). For the first time in 45 years, shots were fired along the India–China border in September 2020, violating the mutual agreement to bar the use of firearms. Given the clashes and the border tensions, India began shedding its hesitation on some aspects and recalibrated its approach towards China and the Indo-Pacific region (Pant & Saha, 2020). From July 2020, New Delhi adopted a firmer stand on the SCS (while continuing the trend of overseas deployments in the SCS) and referred to it as "part of global commons", and called for freedom of navigation and overflight in the maritime space (Economic Times, 2020). Further, after evading the request to include Australia in the Malabar exercise for the last few years, New Delhi finally approved it for the 2020 exercise (A Panda, 2020). Australia participated again in the Malabar 2021 exercise. Ever since 2020–21, New Delhi has incrementally increased its involvement in the Quad initiative and facilitated its securitisation through regular military exercises and greater interoperability with members.

When it comes to the Indo-Pacific region, there are stark divergences between India's and China's perspectives. Expectedly, Beijing is wary of and opposed to the concept of 'Indo-Pacific' and dismisses its utility by highlighting the different connotations that each country assigns to the concept. Chinese officials and scholars continue to identify the region as 'Asia-Pacific', where China holds primacy. They view the Indo-Pacific as an American ploy to "constrain China's rise from a geopolitical perspective and safeguard its own leadership and interests in the region" (Chen, 2018, para. 2). Along similar lines, Beijing views the IO as a distinct, separate, and smaller entity with no linkages to the Asia-Pacific. China remains averse to accepting New Delhi's relevance in the broader region and is uneasy with its deepening associations with the US, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries. Despite its discomfort, Beijing "consistently feigned indifference" to New Delhi (Tellis, 2019, section 4). The incompatibility between China's role prescription towards India and New Delhi's RC evinces an intra-role conflict in the Indo-Pacific. The ties are further complicated by periodic encounters and interactions in overlapping peripheries of the Indo-Pacific due to their simultaneously expanding role performances.

China's forays in the far seas, i.e., the IOR, are more substantial when compared to India's conduct in the SEA and EA regions. There is a gap between India's RCs and role performance towards SEA and EA (refer to Chapter 4). Contrary to that, China's role performance is more aligned with its stip-

ulated RCs. Beijing's effective role performance is undergirded by its deep pockets and the ability to forge interdependent economic ties and deliver massive infrastructural projects. Some IOR littorals and ASEAN countries are becoming economically dependent on China, more so after its massive investments in infrastructure projects in the recipient countries. India still enjoys the geographical advantage in the IO and continues to be the preeminent power, but this may somewhat change in the long term. When the PLA expands its role performance in the IOR, it is bound to undermine New Delhi's current regional standing. It may also stifle India's ability to function as an effective maritime power and net security provider in the region.

6.1.4 Convergence despite Intra-Role Conflict

Despite simultaneous role evolution and incompatibilities, there are areas of convergence between India and China, mostly on non-security roles. India–China bilateral ties are multi-layered. Their intra-role conflict in terms of the master RC and in the Indo-Pacific does not apply across the spectrum to all RCs. For example, China is supportive of India's role performance in transforming structures of global governance and has even provided support on issues such as climate change. In specific roles, they have displayed a cooperative relationship with each other. Both are stakeholders in global climate change, and their concerns and perspectives have converged at different points in time. They also cooperate on specific issues at international forums such as the BRICS and G20. The two countries are equally involved in other multilateral arrangements such as the SCO and RIC. Furthermore, India gains from the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), where it is one of the largest borrowers (Stacey, Mundy & Feng, 2018). Besides, China is one of India's biggest trading partners. Not only does Beijing benefit from their economic partnership, but it also facilitates India's economic rise, allowing New Delhi to inch closer to its aspirational RCs. Having noted that, it is worth mentioning that India's trade deficit with China has consistently widened over the years (US$ 44.02 billion in the FY 2020–21) (PTI, 2021).

Bilateral convergences exist despite New Delhi's oppositional counter-role towards China. With the convergence–divergence dynamics at play, India has traditionally been wary of adopting an adversarial posture in the classical sense. The demands of simultaneously performing two contradictory roles—'cooperative partner' and 'competitor' to China—results in an inter-role conflict, which poses a challenge for policymakers in India. This inter-role conflict limits the range of policy actions New Delhi can undertake when performing other roles, such as the role of a net security provider, stakeholder in the security of the Indo-Pacific, and defence partner to the US. By performing some of its roles more effectively, India may create the potential to overtly challenge

China and invite a stronger oppositional counter-role from Beijing. The Indian policymakers have sought to adopt measured policy conduct to not spark a strong counter-reaction from China. This explains why India, despite greater cooperation with the Quad mechanism, is opposed to using it "as an instrument for the military confrontation of China" (Tellis, 2021, para. 3).

Prime Minister Modi's speech at the Shangri La was quite telling because he avoided any mention of the Quad and even stated that "we [India and China] have displayed maturity and wisdom in managing issues and ensuring a peaceful border" (MEA, 2018b, para. 20). The speech was a testimony to India's inclination to continue cooperation with all major powers. This thinking was also reflected in a speech by the EAM S. Jaishankar when he mentioned the "proliferation of frenemies" in "both categories, allies who publicly turn on each other or competitors who are compelled to make common cause on issues" (MEA, 2019e, para. 9).

During the Trump era, the need to sustain cooperation with China emanated from India's scepticism over his administration's mercurial nature. Other issues had included Trump's uncompromising stands on economic issues and uncertainty about the future trajectory of the US foreign policy commitment to the Indo-Pacific. Despite the change in leadership in the US, India remains wary of putting all its eggs in one basket. Traditionally, New Delhi has wanted to keep its options flexible and wishes not to burn its bridges with China. This also explains India's choice to 'reset' its relations with Beijing in April 2018 and its decision to continue engaging China at the RIC, BRICS, and SCO forums despite an ongoing border standoff. Although New Delhi has hardened its stance towards Beijing following the 2020 border clashes and the ongoing border infrastructure buildup, there is little to indicate that New Delhi has drastically altered its interactions with China in areas of shared interests. The combination of inter-role conflict and imperatives of the India–China intra-role conflict is why the Indian policy conduct tends to appear contradictory and, at times, puzzling to outside observers.

6.2 India and the United States

6.2.1 Historical Overview

Throughout the Cold War, Indo-American relations remained relatively frosty (see Chapter 3 for details). Washington's strategy of alliances ran contrary to New Delhi's master RC of a non-aligned country. India's tilt towards the USSR, beginning in the late 1960s, widened the gap further, minimising the possibility of a partnership between the two democracies.

With the end of the Cold War, Washington emerged as the sole 'superpower' and became the world's largest economy. The material power fueled America's global outreach, eventually transitioning into global hegemony. The regional actors of the Asia-Pacific were supportive of the American leadership, for it leashed Japan's power through the US–Japan defence alliance (Gareis and Wolf, 2016). To recap, the US had defeated the Japanese empire in the Second World War and, ever since, enacted the role of a "primary security provider in the Asia-Pacific" (The Straits Times, 2016, para. 26). The US security dominance was sustained through the hub-and-spoke system,[50] which helped its military "overcome the tyranny of distance" by deploying troops in allied countries. This component was fundamental to the US strategy of containing the spread of Communism during the Cold War (Bush, 2016, p. 1). With the end of the Cold War, however, Washington pursued a "policy of flexibility and strong bilateral relations, guaranteeing enduring peace, a type of Pax Americana" (Gareis and Wolf, 2016, p. 141). In this way, the US continued to be the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific.

The fall of the USSR and India's economic liberalisation in the early 1990s gave way to new avenues of India–US political and economic associations. The economic reforms pushed India's GDP growth rate from approximately 1.5% in 1991 to more than 7% in 1996. After taking cognisance of the upward economic trajectory and overall potential, the CIA-affiliated think tank assessed that New Delhi could become a crucial 'swing state' at the international level (Brewster, 2012). Regardless of such an assessment, Washington viewed India as a "regional power in South Asia with little global weight" (Feigenbaum, 2010, p. 76). American policymakers approached India through the prism of South Asia, primarily represented by the hyphenation of India and Pakistan (Jaishankar, 2013). The last decade of the 1990s was characterised by Indian opposition to the US hegemony and Washington's serious concerns over India's nuclear weapons programme. The nuclear tests in 1998 piqued Washington's attention towards the region. In the words of Strobe Talbott, former Deputy Secretary of State, "India was no longer merely important" (Talbott, 2006, p. 3). After the nuclear tests in South Asia, India (along with Pakistan) became the 'principal target' of American and America-led sanctions (Talbott, 2006, p. 73).

The years from 1998 to 2000 were critical for New Delhi as it sought to revive relations with major powers and project a positive image globally. The foremost priority was to improve ties with the US. The Indian government was keen to explain its positions and explore areas of convergence through a dialogue with Washington. Even the American leadership found it difficult to overlook a nuclear India and agreed to enter into talks hoping to convince New Delhi to sign the CTBT. The Indo-US Dialogue headed by Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh, which began in June 1998, resulted in President Clinton's much-publicised visit to India in 2000. Clinton's visit, which was the first by

an American President in 22 years, signalled a "significant realignment in India's geostrategic and foreign economic relations" (Yahya 2003, p. 81).

India felt that the US finally acknowledged its relevance as a significant actor in the international system (Beasley, Kaarbo, Lantis & Snarr, 2013). Twining (2014) concurs that the American leaders' perception of India had changed by then. It was now viewed as "a nuclear weapons state on track to become, within a few decades, one of the world's largest economies, with a power potential that could reshape the Asian balance in ways that supported US interests" (Twining, 2014, pp. 19–20). Over the next two decades, Indo–US ties changed substantially alongside greater role compatibility. Washington turned out to be one of the strongest supporters of India's rise, and American role prescription emerged as a crucial external driver of India's role evolution.

6.2.2 Emerging Role Compatibility

Washington viewed India's emergence with great interest, particularly in the 2000s. Several factors prompted this—sustained economic growth, the attractiveness of the Indian market to American businesses, expanding security profile, increased power projection capability, democratic credentials, and potential to emerge as an alternative to China in Asia. Although Washington's RCs as the Asia-Pacific leader and primary security provider remained unchanged, its ability to perform the role weakened due to fiscal challenges at home, overstretched military commitments abroad, and China's rise (for details, see Gareis & Wolf, 2016). China's emergence had the potential to single-handedly contest America's (economic and military) ascendancy in the Asia-Pacific.[51] Hence, Washington sought new partners that could share the security responsibilities in the region. Within this context, India emerged as a viable choice.

After spending decades as estranged democracies, a favourable situation finally emerged in the early 2000s. President Bush wanted to build on the momentum created by Clinton and issued a directive in 2001 to "transform the strategic agenda" with India (Wikileaks, 2005h, pt. 2). Washington came to appreciate India's capacity as a maritime actor in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In 2002, the IN facilitated the US Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan by escorting the American ship "through the Straits of Malacca into the Bay of Bengal" (Scott, 2012b, p. 97). During the 2004 IO Tsunami, New Delhi's confidence and ease in dealing with foreign powers were visible. India participated with the US, Japan, and Australia in the 'regional core group', created in response to the Tsunami disaster (Wikileaks, 2004; 2005d). Washington considered the Indo-US military cooperation during the crisis as a "template for … Indo-US cooperation to manage crises and address common threats" in parts of Asia (Wikileaks, 2005e, pt. 2). Senior US officials described India's large-scale assistance and relief operations as a demonstration of its "regional force

projection capability" and a sign of an "emerging global power, capable of meeting both its domestic needs and those of the region" (Wikileaks, 2005e, pt. 4; 2005a, pt. 11). They also discerned India's potential to be the "primary contributor to Indian Ocean security" (Wikileaks, 2005e, pt. 41).

The US' role prescription towards India converged with New Delhi's self-conception as a 'major power' in Asia (see Chapter 4). The Bush administration tried to encourage and support New Delhi's transition into a major power through a series of landmark steps. In September 2004, India and the US signed the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership initiative. They inked a landmark 10-years defence agreement titled 'New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship' (NFDR) in June 2005. The NFDR set the pace for bilateral interactions through a range of activities such as joint military exercises, naval pilot training and arms sales. During PM Singh's visit to the US in 2005, the two sides signed the 123 Agreement, which culminated in the 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal.[52] The political efforts that pushed the civil nuclear deal in the US as well as in India signified a major change in bilateral relations and demonstrated their mutual enthusiasm to build stronger ties.

By the mid-2000s, Washington expected New Delhi to assume a greater mantle in regional leadership in Asia. The then serving US Ambassador to India, David Mulford, hoped for the US to eventually have the "ability to influence IN decision making" during a crisis and in managing common challenges in Asian stability, even though he considered the process "slow and painstaking" (Wikileaks, 2005e, pt. 46). It was clear the US was prescribing a larger security role (particularly maritime roles) to India and hoped for greater cooperation in addressing shared security concerns in the region. High-level US officials expressed interest in fostering military-to-military relations with India to secure American interests in the region from "Southeast Asia to the Arabian Gulf and East Africa" (Wikileaks, 2005e, pt. 2). In 2006, a US official stated categorically that the "goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century" (US official as quoted in Mian & Ramana, 2006, p. 3). He added that "we [the US government] understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement" (US official as quoted in Mian & Ramana, 2006, p. 3). Washington was supportive of New Delhi's emergence and was trying to "push India onto the world stage" (Wikileaks, 2006b, pt. 17).

The US' role prescription was generally seen positively in New Delhi due to its convergence with India's self-conception. The landmark Indo-US nuclear deal, finalised in 2008, provided New Delhi with a sense of nuclear 'legitimacy' and instilled unprecedented goodwill in India vis-á-vis the US. The historical cautiousness towards Washington subsided considerably compared to the previous decades. The Indian leadership viewed the US as a potential security partner but was still ambivalent due to the zealously guarded concept of strategic autonomy (Mohan, 2008). In the Indian decision-making circles, there was still immense institutional memory of the Cold War years when

Indo-US relations went through prolonged periods of intra-role conflict. India was subjected to American sanctions, and many of the diplomats and bureaucrats who had served during the period found it difficult to shed their wariness towards Washington. The quest for 'strategic autonomy', which had formed the most intrinsic part of India's non-aligned role during the Cold War, remained an enduring feature of its foreign policy outlook. Even after the Cold War, when India embraced a new RC, the spectre of the former RC of non-alignment lingered on and even influenced the new RCs, causing a minor inter-role conflict.[53] Therefore, despite improved relations, it was "very difficult in Indian politics to be seen as openly embracing America" (Harsh Pant quoted in Anand, 2015, para. 4). Nevertheless, the inter-role conflict was minor and did not hamper the broader Indo-US ties, although it slowed the momentum at different stages.

By and large, the US decisions and actions (role performance) towards India facilitated the implementation of evolved RCs. Even the IN got greater exposure due to its association with the US. For example, in 2005 and 2006, Indian observers participated in the US Navy-led Rim of the Pacific Exercise. Further, observers from the IN were invited to the Exercise Valiant Shield in the Pacific Ocean (off the coast of Guam) in 2006 and in the US naval exercises off the Hawaii coast in 2004 and 2006 (Scott, 2012a). According to US officials, India benefited from the support of American partners, including Singapore, South Korea, and the Philippines. These associations helped New Delhi undercut China's predominance at the EAS in late 2005 (Wikileaks, 2006a).

The US wanted to foster a "distinctly alternative model" to China in Asia and saw value in "closer trilateral cooperation" between the US, Japan, and India (Wikileaks, 2006g, pt. 7,5). It also favoured greater cooperation between Australia and India (Wikileaks, 2006b). These preferences were connected to the growing awareness in Washington about its limits and weakening influence in the Asia-Pacific. Domestic factors such as fiscal challenges, cuts in defence spending, and overstretched military presence in other regions were limiting America's dominance in the region. These simultaneously occurring domestic and international developments compelled the US government to revisit its Asia-Pacific strategy. China's increased investment in maritime capability and its intention to graduate from the near-seas operations to the far-seas operations was closely watched. American planners were concerned that Beijing could challenge the US' security position in the coming decades. In 2007, there were more signs of Chinese assertiveness in the SCS, the East China Sea, including diplomatic rows with the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam. Regional security frictions heightened with Beijing asserting its maritime claims based on the nine-dash line and imposing periodic fishing bans in the SCS. (Thayer, 2010). These developments posed an implicit Chinese challenge to America's regional security leadership.

The US responded by strengthening its network of allies and fostering new partnerships with states that shared similar strategic interests. This way, Washington could continue to play a central role in the long-term and prevent a scenario wherein a single power (read, China) would dominate the Asia-Pacific (Dormandy & Kinane, 2014). Within this context, India was important because of its geographical location, size, economic progress, and growing power projection capabilities. Washington wanted to bolster New Delhi's security potential by selling arms and weapon systems, which was also beneficial to American businesses. In Washington's view, the IN could extend its presence in EA and the Pacific in association with the US through joint military exercises, coordinated patrolling, and intelligence sharing. (Wikileaks, 2005e). For New Delhi, American political, diplomatic, and material support for an active maritime role in Asia was worthwhile.

There was a greater keenness to cultivate multilateral cooperation among four democracies (the US, Japan, India, and Australia), especially as China turned more confrontational in its territorial claims. Leaders of the four countries met on the sidelines of the 2007 ARF meeting to discuss areas of common interests and possibilities for cooperation. The quadrilateral grouping came to be known as 'the Quad'. The idea of the Quad was rooted in the success of the Tsunami Core Group in 2004, which foregrounded the value of combining the resources of the four democracies (Varadarajan, 2007). Discussions were rudimentary in the initial stages, and there was limited consensus among the participants on the scope and pace of the initiative. Although the talks were inconclusive and none of the participants wanted to present the Quad discussions as an arrangement directed towards China, it was considered an anti-China grouping. In a related development, the 2007 Indo-US Malabar exercise included the navies of Australia, Japan, and Singapore. The 'China threat' factor loomed large in this naval exercise (see Khurana, 2007). The arrangement drew criticism from China (see Case I). Even as India was rethinking and gauging the pros and cons of the Quad, Australia withdrew from the arrangement, and the four-party dialogue fell into oblivion. According to the former Indian FS Shyam Saran, even before Australia pulled the plug on the Quad, the US was wavering on the issue. This was because Washington needed support from Beijing (and Moscow) at the UNSC on the Iran nuclear issue and six-party talks on the Korean nuclear issue (Saran, 2017a).

China's assertiveness persisted and expanded in scope after the 2008 global financial crisis. According to Shivshankar Menon, former Indian NSA, the 2008 crisis altered many "fundamental assumptions and realities in Asia" (Menon, 2017, p. 128). He believes that the crisis not only displayed the "fragility of the global financial system" and risks of America's overstretched military commitments abroad but also exposed the limited capability of the "western international order to deliver security". Amid the worsening global environment, China and India adjusted their strategic postures. New Delhi "reacted

defensively" because the pre-2008 status quo would have allowed it "many more years of internal transformation" (Menon, 2017, p. 199). Having survived the economic crisis much better than most countries, Beijing felt that its "moment had come". The CCP seemed convinced about the eventual western decline and went on to assert China's primacy in the Asia-Pacific. In 2010, China eclipsed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. After 2008, Beijing displayed an uncompromising stance on maritime and territorial claims and used coercive means to assert its claims in the SCS. Countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, and India witnessed the assertiveness first-hand.

After President Obama came to power in January 2009, there was a temporary period when the US' role performance towards India diverged from the role prescription set by the Bush presidency. In the initial months, the Obama administration was keen to cooperate with China on economic issues and climate change. It sought ways to gain Chinese support to address the challenges related to Iran and North Korea. Because of Obama's outreach to Beijing, some in New Delhi felt that Washington appeared to be more sensitive to China's concerns than India's sensitivities (Raman, 2009, para. 3). There were qualms in New Delhi over the Obama administration's approach on subjects that affected India, such as China, nuclear non-proliferation, and the US strategy in AfPak. A sense of distrust towards the new US administration surfaced within the Indian policymaking circle and political elites. These were signs of friction between the Ego (India) and the Alter (the US), but this was temporary.

Obama's visit to China in November 2009 did not go as expected. Beijing did not reciprocate American role expectations. Discord in the Asia-Pacific continued with incidents including harassment of the US Naval ship (*Impeccable*) by Chinese officials in the waters off Hainan (see Lockett, 2016; Reuters, 2009). Also, there were objections over the US joint exercises with other littorals in the SCS. After the not-so-successful diplomatic charm offensive, American disposition towards China changed, and Washington adopted a more muscular posture. President Obama even approved arms sales to Taiwan, symbolising America's second thoughts on the 'One China' policy (Wong, 2009). America's most pertinent security challenge in the Asia-Pacific was China's quest for a blue water navy (see Case I). The PLAN was formerly restricted to a regional role with a brown water navy due to resource restrictions and a continental mindset. It had limited ability to expand beyond the Pacific due to the First and Second island chains, which Chinese analyst Li Hongmei believes, act as a "protective screen for US maritime hegemony in the region" (Hongmei, 2010, para. 9). Through its naval progress, the Chinese leadership sought to break the perceived maritime restrictions posed by the island chains. Altogether, Beijing's blue water ambitions sparked a China–US intra-role conflict in the Pacific Ocean.

By early 2010, Washington declared the intent to renew its leadership in Asia. The plan aimed to revitalise alliances, strengthen new partnerships, and operate through a web of bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral arrangements. Washington wanted its allies and partners to share security responsibilities and compensate for degraded American capacity to perform its traditional security role. Implementing this plan was relatively complicated because all the US allies and partners were economically interdependent with China.

Following the same rationale as the Bush administration, President Obama reversed the benign neglect of New Delhi and revived its primacy in the US' Asia policy. Within the Asia-Pacific region, Washington hoped to intensify cooperation with New Delhi in the IOR, SEA and EA. In addition to India's democratic credential, economic emergence, advantageous peninsular location in the IOR and an expanding naval reach, its 'benign' image in the ASEAN region was considered favourable. Concerns over sovereignty or extra-territoriality did not concern the ASEAN countries as much when dealing with India as it does with the US and Japan. Buttressing India's position in the region was an insurance policy vis-à-vis China's dominance in Asia. Statements from American officials reflected their role expectations from New Delhi. For example, during the 2009 Shangri-La Dialogue, the US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, asserted that "in coming years, we look to India to be a partner and net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond" (US DoD, 2009, para. 14). In April 2010, India saw the first-ever visit by a US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia. During the visit, political discussions contrasted with the traditional talks that used to be dominated by proliferation issues, counter-terrorism, and South Asian geopolitics. Now, the discussions centred on subjects of Asian security, China, and Japan (Mohan, 2010b). This spoke volumes about the changed perception of India and its prominence in Washington's new Asia-Pacific policy.

During Obama's visit to India in November 2010, the key themes included concerns over Chinese activities and the strategic flux in EA. While addressing the Indian parliament, President Obama affirmed the need for India to strengthen its engagement in the SEA and EA. In his words, "we [the US] want India to not only 'look East,' we want India to 'engage East'—because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations" (The Hindu, 2010, para. 40). Simply put, America wanted India to assume a stronger maritime role that stretched beyond the IO to the eastern parts of Asia. Months before Washington announced the US Pivot to Asia, Hillary Clinton (during a trip to India) reiterated American expectations and urged the Indian government to "not just look east, but continue to engage and act east as well" (AFP, 2011, para. 2).

The Indian policymakers evaluated the compatibility of Washington's role expectations with New Delhi's self-conception and shared areas of interest. They also analysed issues/areas where American support could supplement Indian RCs and role performance. Role compatibility was most apparent in the

IO. India's primary maritime interest lay in the IO, where it witnessed a creeping Chinese presence. From the mid-2000s, New Delhi positioned itself as a "mature and responsible maritime power" (MEA, 2007c, para. 21). American backing in the form of diplomatic support and assistance with material resources could bolster India's ability to perform its (maritime) security self-conceptions.

The compatibility between India's self-conception and US role prescription led to the emergence of the auxiliary RC of 'net security provider'. For the first time, in May 2013, PM Singh declared that "we [India] sought to assume our responsibility for stability in the Indian Ocean Region" (PMO, 2013, para. 12). He added, "we are well-positioned … to become a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond" (PMO, 2013, para. 12). The reference to the net security provider role became a recurring theme in Indian speeches, with periodic clarifications on the specifics of the role. In November 2010, then Indian FS Nirupama Rao clarified that although India was "seen as a net security provider", it could not "carry the burden of regional security on our shoulders alone" (MEA, 2010b, pt. 10). The talk communicated that New Delhi needed greater international and regional cooperation to address multiple security challenges (MEA, 2010b). The statement also demonstrated that India did not consider it viable to focus on the IOR all by itself and alluded that this responsibility needed to be shared by other like-minded powers (read the US).

Indo–US security cooperation increased incrementally in the backdrop of role compatibility. India procured weapon systems from the US. The United States Navy and the IN held joint (bilateral and multilateral) exercises. There was headway in areas of convergence, including the issue of freedom of navigation in the SCS. To recap, India's trade ties with SEA and EA had shored up in the 2000s leading to growing dependence on the SLOCs in the SCS (see Chapter 5). India's interest in the region deepened due to its quest for energy security. With rising stakes in the SCS, New Delhi grew sensitive to the concerns of Washington and its allies over the challenges to the freedom of navigation. Indian discussions with the US and Japan covered maritime disputes in the SCS. The SCS dispute and its potential resolution based on the 2002 Declaration of Conduct and the 1982 UNCLOS were repeatedly mentioned in official Indian speeches.

Washington fostered favourable conditions for India to advance its maritime role performance. The American leadership encouraged stronger associations between India and US allies in the Asia-Pacific through joint exercises, periodic dialogues, and minilateral arrangements. Minilateral arrangements were expected to "build consensus around policies with friends and allies" (Rogin, 2011, para. 9). One such arrangement was the US–Japan–India trilateral dialogue at the Assistant/Joint Secretary level, which began in December 2011 (Rogin, 2011). The trilateral dialogue was an upgrade from the Indo-US bilateral dialogue on Asia (commenced in March 2010) (Bagchi, 2010). In

2012, India and the US signed the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). Through the DTTI, the two sides aimed to cultivate defence trade ties, and generate possibilities of co-production, co-development, and cooperation in Science and Technology (US Department of Defense [US DoD], n.d.).

6.2.3 Divergences within Role Compatibility

As Washington worked towards rolling out a comprehensive plan for the Asia-Pacific region in the coming years, its expectations from India became more defined. In 2011, Hillary Clinton wrote an essay outlining the detail of what came to be known as the US 'Pivot to Asia' (Clinton, 2011). Soon after, it was rechristened 'Rebalance to Asia' (Weitz, 2012). The 'Rebalance to Asia' strategy aimed to minimise American involvement in the Middle East and Afghanistan and hoped to divert the military resources, foreign policy focus, and economic imperatives towards EA, SEA, Australasia, and the coastal areas of South Asia (Manyin et al., 2012). The strategy represented an expanded geographical scope, i.e., a "broader geographic vision of the Asia-Pacific region that includes the Indian Ocean and many of its coastal states" (Manyin et al., 2012, p. 1). India fell within the ambit of the Rebalance to Asia strategy. With time, the US limited the usage of the term Asia-Pacific and referred to the region as the Indo-Pacific. The conception of Asia-Pacific combined with the IO led to the emergence of a new geopolitical construct, the Indo-Pacific. Washington encouraged New Delhi to adopt an active maritime security role in this region and complement the Rebalance to Asia strategy.

India's response to the rebalance strategy was somewhat muted. Despite stronger security cooperation and India's adoption of the net security-provider role (denoting role compatibility), New Delhi was undecided on supporting the Rebalance to Asia strategy. This was despite the Indian PM officially using the term 'Indo-Pacific' in December 2012 at the Plenary Session of the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit (MEA, 2012d). Ollapally (2016b) observes that the initial US strategy was military-oriented. Washington expected the Indo–US partnership (along with other allies) to counterbalance Beijing's military power in Asia.[54] Ollapally reasons that India's dilemma was linked to its quest for strategic autonomy, unclear defence strategy towards the Indo-Pacific, and "wariness of provoking neighbouring China" (Ollapally, 2016b, p. 4). At the time, New Delhi struggled with inter-role conflict vis-à-vis China (see previous case study for detail). Apart from not wanting to provoke Beijing, New Delhi did not want to alienate Russia or push it closer to China by appearing to align with the US.

There were divergences when Indian policymakers evaluated American expectations in the context of the Rebalance to Asia strategy. First, an active security role prescription did not merge with India's self-conception in the

Indo-Pacific region at the time. Second, it was difficult to accommodate Washington's expectations in view of its convergence-divergence dynamics with China and Russia. India was unwilling to go overboard in cooperating with the US in the SCS or signing the key enabling (legal) agreements for a strong defence partnership such as the Communication and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA), the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), and the Logistics Supply Agreement (LSA). Despite growing role compatibility, existing divergences limited India–US cooperation at the time.

When Narendra Modi entered the PMO in 2014, China was firmly focused on realising its auxiliary RC as a 'great maritime power'. Its extensive involvement in the IOR through the BRI posed serious challenges for New Delhi. The Indian leadership began carving out an oppositional counter-role to China and revived its focus on the IOR, and began engaging the east of Asia. New Delhi introduced the SAGAR vision for the IOR, which overlapped with the US objectives. Simultaneously, Washington was strengthening partnerships with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal. With the AEP, New Delhi was trying to bring its role performance closer to the evolved RCs. Hence, foreign policy interactions and security cooperation with SEA and EA regained pace.

The Modi government gave an impetus to India–US relations and established greater role compatibility in the Asia-Pacific. Prime Minister Modi's first visit to the US in 2014 resulted in a joint statement that underlined their shared interest in Asia-Pacific's regional stability and expressed concerns about the "rising tensions over maritime territorial disputes" (MEA, 2014f, para. 41). The statement mentioned the SCS dispute and urged the involved parties to resolve the dispute based on principles of international law, including the UNCLOS (MEA, 2014f). The reluctance to openly embrace the US was relatively minimised after PM Modi came to power. After their first meeting in September 2014, Obama and Modi held seven additional meetings until Obama left the Oval Office. President Obama was also invited to New Delhi as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day ceremony in January 2015. The 2005 Framework for the US–India Defence Relationship was renewed for another ten years, from 2015 to 2025 (US DoD, 2015). The two sides also finalised four pathfinder projects under DTTI and sought cooperation on aircraft carriers and jet engine technology.

Although India's main priority was in the IO (SEA and EA were secondary) and the US' core interest was in the SEA and EA (IOR was secondary), they were willing to build upon areas where they shared a similar outlook. In a first for them, New Delhi and Washington signed a 'US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region' in January 2015 (The White House, 2015). In the same year, American Defence Secretary Ashton Carter scheduled a trip to India and visited the Eastern Naval Command. His

visit to the naval command was symbolic of a growing understanding of the eastern IO.

More importantly, New Delhi signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)—one of the four fundamental agreements that operationalised the India–US defence partnership. The LEMOA was the India-specific version of the LSA that allowed both militaries to formally manage their logistical arrangements during various interactions. The decision to sign the LEMOA was a break from the past. In 2016, the US designated India as a Major Defence Partner paving the way for deeper military cooperation and security coordination. Apart from this, trilateral dialogues and security arrangements between India, the US and its allies gained currency. In late 2015, the India–US–Japan trilateral dialogue was elevated to the level of the foreign ministers (Parameswaran, 2015b). The following year, Japan became a permanent participant in the Indo–US bilateral exercises.

Despite greater vigour in the Indo–US ties, New Delhi was wary of projecting itself as aligning closely with Washington lest it should create discord with Beijing and Moscow. India was aware of the limits of Obama's Rebalance strategy. The US faced fiscal constraints, had budgetary challenges in the long term and had problems with resource allocation. The multifaceted relationship that US allies or partners shared with China was another area of attention. The circumstances were compounded by a lack of American political vision on addressing its perceptual decline or managing relations with China. Given these issues, the Indian policymakers were wary of any possible American proposition to choose one side. New Delhi decided to assert its unique identity in the changing and uncertain world order. In July 2015, the FS S. Jaishankar prominently emphasised India's aspiration to be a "leading power, rather than just a balancing power" (MEA, 2015d, para. 7). The repertoire of Washington's role prescription towards India had the inherent bias of viewing it as a potential 'balancer' to China. Through this clarification, New Delhi subtly subverted Washington's implicit role prescription as a balancer. It is worth noting that despite India's disagreement with the US' role expectation of a 'balancer', unilateral Indian actions to counter China would amount to balancing it (regardless of the effectiveness). As argued by Tellis, even if India pursues an independent foreign policy, its objectives would "concord with larger US interests" in the region (Tellis, 2016, section 4).

All in all, India grappled with multiple inter-role conflicts even as its partnership with the US strengthened. As a 'leading power' and 'not just a balancing power' role, India hoped to address the inter-role conflict it faced. The 'leading power' role displayed New Delhi's unwillingness to be identified as a 'balancer' and provided an underlying message to China and Russia that India was not aligning with the US but carving a distinct global role for itself. Notably, the new master RC was in line with India's established master RC of a major power and was even supported by the US.

Indian reservations over getting 'too close' to the US increased after Donald J. Trump became the American President. During the campaign, Trump's political rhetoric of 'America first' was an overt acknowledgement of an already persisting trend of an inward-looking US. To illustrate, in the preceding years, Obama had asserted the need for "nation-building here at home" and asked the US allies to shoulder greater responsibilities (Obama quoted in Sestanovich, 2016, para. 3; Also, see Townshend, 2017). Obama had also unsuccessfully aimed to cut down America's stretched military commitments abroad. The 'America first' turn became conspicuous after Trump came to power in 2017. Soon after assuming the presidency, he declared the Rebalance to Asia strategy irrelevant and pulled out of the TPP (Smith, 2017). Trump's foreign policy orientation was characterised by transactional equations and driven by narrow definitions of American self-interest. The vagaries of American domestic politics that impacted the external policy made it increasingly difficult for New Delhi to depend on Washington.

From early on, the Trump administration adopted a muscular approach towards China, motivated to an extent by zero-sum calculations of geopolitics and hard power (Townshend, 2017). The contours of Trump's Asia policy first appeared in November 2017 when he shared the US' vision of a FOIP at the APEC CEO Summit in Vietnam (The White House, 2017a). The FOIP was, more or less, a continuation of the strategic and military portions of Rebalance to Asia strategy with stronger references to a 'free, 'open' and 'rules-based order' Indo-Pacific (Jha, 2017). Unlike the Obama administration, Trump had a relatively limited interest in pursuing liberal internationalism. Under him, Washington reneged on a strong economic component except for some fledgeling ventures such as the BUILD Act, Asia EDGE, and Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity (Samaan, 2019). On the economic front, the Trump-led US remained critical of allies, partners, competitors, and rivals alike.

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) accorded the highest priority to the Indo-Pacific in terms of American national interests and described it as the region stretching from the "west coast of India to the western shores of the US" (Trump White House, 2017b, pp. 45, 46). The strategy document highlighted "China's challenge to American power". It also noted Beijing's "efforts to build and militarise outposts in the SCS" and undertake a "rapid military modernisation campaign designed to limit U.S. access to the region [Indo-Pacific] and provide China a freer hand". Kurlantzick (2018) states that the Indo-Pacific strategy was principally aimed at checking China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific maritime space and hinterland, concentrating on the Western Pacific region (Kurlantzick, 2018).

Washington continued to look at India as a crucial pillar to provide military, economic and ideological support. Alex N. Wong of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (US) minced no words in communicating that the US wanted India to "play an increasingly weighty role in the region" and trans-

form into a “more influential player” over time (US Department of State, 2018, Q&A section). These statements were accompanied by a supportive US role performance towards India. In May 2018, the US Pacific Command (PACOM)—the oldest and largest military command—was renamed the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) (Neuman, 2018). The Trump administration replaced the term ‘Asia-Pacific’ with ‘Indo-Pacific’. These changes captured the conceptual shift in American thinking towards the region and acknowledged the IO’s geopolitical significance.

Trends in India–US security relations suggested increased role compatibility and cooperation in different parts of the Indo-Pacific. New Delhi posted a naval representative at the US Navy’s Central Command in Bahrain. This decision came soon after the PLA established a military base in Djibouti in 2017. Cooperation in the western IO was a slight change when compared to Washington’s consistent focus on the eastern IOR/western Pacific. This move, according to Abhijit Singh et al., indicates greater “harmonisation of strategic outlooks” and “eager(ness) to accommodate reciprocal concerns” (A. Singh, Pande, Saran, Joshi, Lohman & Smith, 2018, p. 51). Having noted that, India’s inability to reform its stagnant military-industrial complex or address the long decision-making processes and bureaucratic red-tapism continued to be a factor of annoyance for the US (refer to Chapter 5).

Nevertheless, in September 2018, India and the US held their first ministerial-level 2+2 dialogue. On the sidelines of the dialogue, India signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)—an India-specific version of the CISMOA. With COMCASA, New Delhi had signed three of the four enabling agreements that guide the US’ relations with allies or close defence partners. These agreements allowed greater interoperability and easier technology transfers. According to a serving Indian senior national security officer, New Delhi’s disinclination towards alliance-style partnerships was “seemingly dissipating but in a graduated manner”.[55] With the emerging geopolitical realities, he added, “in years to come, New Delhi may likely embrace a robust military partnership with the US, even if they do not agree to form an alliance in its classical sense”.[56]

In a remarkable change, Washington agreed to share cutting edge technology with India. In 2018, the US granted India a Strategic Trade Authorisation Tier 1 status, which brought it to par with the NATO allies. The Tier 1 status gave access to a range of military and dual-use technologies without applying for specific licenses (US DoD, 2019). To illustrate, the US agreed to offer crucial category one Unmanned Aerial Vehicle technology (Predator drones) to the IN and the IAF (Siddiqui, 2017). In 2019, India was also included in the US’ Maritime Security Initiative, which offers funds to countries for maritime capacity-building. The initiative aims to build the maritime potential of regional countries to manage non-traditional and traditional security threats. Further ahead, in late 2020, New Delhi and Washington signed the long-overdue

BECA pact, allowing both to exchange real-time geospatial intelligence (Krishnankutty, 2020). With the BECA, India gained access to an advanced Global Positioning System, which could enable precision targeting and navigation.

Under the Trump administration, Washington was explicit about its intention to shore up military cooperation with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. However, it came with a caveat that other parties needed to share the security burden more equally and not indulge in 'free-riding' (Townshend, 2017; see Pomfret, 2017; Landler, 2017). The US Indo-Pacific Strategy categorically stipulated the expectations from allies and partners, which even applied to India. The strategy document mentioned that the US expected its allies and partners to contribute by—

> "resourcing and investing sufficiently for their own defence to ensure deterrence and mitigate vulnerabilities; cooperating in building partner capacity for third party partners in the region; upholding a rules-based international order (i.e., flying, sailing, and operating to uphold international laws and norms); providing access needed for contingency response and resiliency; strengthening interoperability, including information sharing, with the US and other like-minded countries in the region; and, promoting and actively participating in region-led initiatives to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific" (US DoD, 2019, p. 54).

With strategic flux in the Indo-Pacific, the Indian leadership perpetually evaluated the American role performance in the region, its role expectation from India, New Delhi's capability to fulfil those expectations, and implications for India–China and India–Russia relations. Notwithstanding the mixed signals emanating from the Trump administration on foreign policy matters, India remained at the heart of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. This became clearer with the declassification of the 2018 strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific. The strategic framework document instrumental in implementing the 2017 NSS stated in clear terms that "a strong India, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China" (Trump White House, 2021, p. 2). One of the stated American objectives in the region was to "accelerate India's rise and capacity to serve as a net provider of security and Major Defense Partner" (Trump White House, 2021, p. 5). Washington also looked to "encourage India's engagement beyond the Indian Ocean region" and support its 'Act East' policy, which included working with New Delhi towards its "increased leadership role in the EAS and ADMM+" (Trump White House, 2021, p. 5).

The US keenly pushed for quadrilateral cooperation with India, Japan, and Australia (The White House, 2017b). The revival of the Quad arrangement in November 2017 rekindled discussions on the potential militarisation of the arrangement (Grossman, 2018b, also see B. Singh, 2018; Conley, Green, & Szechenyi, 2021). American interest in bolstering India in the Indo-Pacific region continued under US President Joe Biden, who assumed office in January

2021. The Biden administration continued his predecessor's hardened policy approach towards China and the Indo-Pacific. The continued focus on India's role in the region indicated bipartisan consensus in Washington on the issue. Under Biden, there were concerted efforts to restore confidence in American leadership, "repair alliances and engage with the world once again" and communicate that "America is back" (The White House, 2021a, para. 5 & 6). President Biden's focus on the Quad and the formation of a new security alliance with the UK and Australia, AUKUS, signalled a serious pursuit of Indo-Pacific interests. The importance of India in America's Indo-Pacific strategy remained equally visible. In February 2021, during President Biden's first call to PM Modi, the discussion revolved around "close cooperation to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, including support for freedom of navigation, territorial integrity, and a stronger regional architecture through the Quad" (The White House, 2021b, para. 1). The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, during his visit to India in 2021, reaffirmed Washington's commitment to deepening the Indo–US strategic partnership and reiterated that the partnership was "critical to delivering stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond" (Roche, 2021, para. 8)

While Trump had helped revive the Quad arrangement in 2017, Biden doubled down on it. The Biden administration facilitated the March 2021 virtual Quad summit with the prime ministers of India, Japan, and Australia, which concluded with the first joint statement of the Quad. He proposed and hosted the first-ever in-person Leaders' Summit of the Quad in September 2021 in Washington. The Quad countries sought to maintain a shared understanding between members and coordinate their activities to maintain free, open, and inclusive, rules-based orders. Despite no official mention of China, there was little doubt that the Quad countries had shared concerns over China's military activities and what looks like Beijing's intention to replace the US-led rules-based world order with a Sinocentric order (Tarapore, 2018).

In conjunction with closer security cooperation, the Quad countries hoped to coordinate and collaborate to provide regional countries in the Indo-Pacific with an alternative to the BRI. This was pursued through joint investments in infrastructure projects (India–Japan–Sri Lanka joint project to expand Colombo port) and stronger trade links based on international standards and free, fair, and reciprocal practices (Chaudhury, 2019b; Al Jazeera, 2018). This, in the view of Quad countries, could help diminish China's influence over the recipient countries and avoid the possibility of a debt trap. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Quad countries expanded the scope of their engagement to include non-traditional security issues such as the COVID-19 vaccine availability and distribution, and climate change (The White House, 2021c). The Quad's involvement in broad-ranging initiatives matched India's desire to not limit the Quad arrangement to security or military aspects. While the Quad arrangement is still shaping up and maturing incrementally, it is notable that

India holds 2+2 dialogues with all Quad countries.[57] The series of above-stated developments hint at considerable convergence between US role prescription and India's current self-conceptions.

6.2.4 Key Areas of Divergences

Despite the strong India–US role compatibility, their relationship cannot be characterised as an equation of seamless understanding. There are fundamental differences that continue to linger despite converging areas of interest. So far, the differences in regional issues have been managed effectively through diplomatic means and have not disrupted the overall role compatibility. However, one cannot deny that the divergences tend to limit the effectiveness of the US' role prescription towards India and their bilateral security cooperation.

At the conceptual level, there are differences in the Indian and American visions of the Indo-Pacific. For India, the concept of the Indo-Pacific involves upholding a rules-based order and unified efforts against non-traditional threats. For New Delhi, it is desirable that the Indo-Pacific region is not seen as an exclusive grouping of countries or directed against any third country (read China).[58] By contrast, the US views China as a 'revisionist power' and seeks to "improve collective ability [with allies and partners] to compete, deter, and if necessary, fight and win together" in the Indo-Pacific (US DoD, 2019, pp. 7,16). New Delhi refers to the Indo-Pacific as an 'inclusive' region and at times even signalled that it views China and Russia as a part of the region. In 2021, the EAM said that India "see[s] a more active Russian presence and participation in the [Indo-Pacific] region as something very very important" (MEA, 2021b, pt. 10). In this manner, the Indian leadership wishes to balance its multiple partnerships and communicate that its involvement in the Indo-Pacific is not targeted at any country. Washington, in contrast, considers the Indo-Pacific as a region that not only excludes China and Russia but is aimed to undercut their influence in the region.

Furthermore, the US and India have different priorities in the Indo-Pacific. New Delhi's primary focus is on the IO, while the US emphasises more on the Pacific Ocean. India's fundamental security concern in the Pacific is limited to the issue of navigational freedom due to China's claims. This concern does not "necessarily involve a military containment in tandem with the US and Japan" (Granados, 2018, p. 2). For the US, the Pacific Ocean is crucial for its strategic, security and geopolitical interests. Washington's regional concerns are not just limited to the freedom of navigation but also relate to potential Chinese military threats to American bases in the region or its allies. Ultimately, the presence of a regional hegemon in the Pacific topples the US from its predominant position.

Another point of divergence that hinders seamless role compatibility between the US and India in the Indo-Pacific is their contrasting conceptions of 'maritime order' and 'freedom of navigation'. India has historically been sensitive to foreign powers in nearby maritime spaces and holds precise positions on the UNCLOS. To expand, the Indian government seeks "greater control and oversight over foreign military activities in their EEZ", and this is embodied in domestic Indian legislation (Rehman, 2017, p. 1). The Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and other Maritime Zones Act of 1976 requires foreign warships to "enter or pass through the territorial waters after giving prior notice to the Central Government" (GOI, 1976, p. 1).

In stark contrast to India, Washington has not even ratified the Convention and tends to interpret the UNCLOS very broadly. It maintains that the American forces are allowed to perform a range of military activities in any state's EEZ that may include "military manoeuvers, flight operations, military exercises, surveillance and intelligence gathering, and weapons testing and firing" (Fahey, 2017, para. 4). Based on this logic, the US undertakes frequent Freedom of Navigation Operations in waters close to many countries, including India (Rehman, 2017). India does not accept Washington's expansive interpretation of the UNCLOS and has even protested American naval activities in its EEZ through diplomatic notes on multiple occasions (Rehman, 2017). Interestingly, India's interpretation of the UNCLOS is closer to China's stand, if not the same. Both India and US have distinct understandings of what is allowed or prohibited based on their interpretation of the UNCLOS. This has the potential to create some operational hurdles in their naval interactions. So far, both have dealt with their differences amicably, thereby avoiding the possibility of a major disagreement.

India's persistent discomfort with foreign powers in nearby waters is one of the reasons why its observers remain divided on whether the AUKUS alliance is in Indian interests or detrimental in the medium term. On the one hand, some consider the AUKUS alliance as complementing the Quad arrangement, therefore favourable to Indian interests. The nuclear submarine technology that Canberra will receive from Washington will help undercut Chinese maritime dominance in the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, there is palpable wariness over "increased foreign submarine presence in India's near-seas" that can potentially erode New Delhi's "influence and authority in the neighbourhood" (A. Singh, 2021, para. 5).

Furthermore, given the strengthening partnership with the US in the Indo-Pacific, Indian policymakers worry about a scenario where the decisional autonomy is compromised. For instance, New Delhi's decision to procure the Russian S-400 missile systems despite US objections sparked the domestic debate on strategic autonomy. According to Mohan (2019, para. 10), the "fear of alliances" has shaped India's thinking on strategic autonomy. It fears the possibility of an 'entrapment' if it gets closer to Washington, especially consider-

ing the potential of US overbearance and heightened expectations from India on a range of issues. The Modi government appears less attached to non-alignment and more willing to partner with the US on areas of shared security interests. The Indian FS Vijay Gokhale acknowledged that New Delhi has "moved beyond" non-alignment (Outlook, 2019, para.1). However, and more importantly, he added that now India's "alignment is issue-based… [and] not ideological", which provides policymakers with the "capacity to be flexible" and maintain "decisional autonomy" (Outlook, 2019, para. 3). Needless to state, the philosophical rationale behind the former RCs of non-alignment, i.e., the quest for strategic autonomy, remains relevant even today. This has the potential to cause a minor inter-role conflict within the Indo-US security role compatibility.

In recent years, the trade-related disagreements and America's insistence to drastically reduce oil imports from Iran refreshed Indian discussions on strategic autonomy. Washington's concerns over India–Russia defence relations, particularly in terms of the acquisition of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system and potential penalties under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act puts additional pressure on Indian policymakers (Philip, 2019). Adding to the complex mix are the US' pulls and pressures on India to buy more arms.[59] As argued by an Indian military officer, "the US has invariably pursued its interests with resoluteness without much concern for its allies. This imposes major constraints on India's ability to take independent decisions and its strategic autonomy" (Gupta, 2013, p.39).

Some in the Indian decision-making circuit are sensitive to the idea of entering the US strategic realm because they fear that coordinated Indo–US security activities and agreements can antagonise China even when India does not intend to. The fear of provoking China was discernible in discussions over the implications of the AUKUS for the regional security dynamics. India's dilemma towards China emanates from the inter-role conflict (described in the previous section), and this scenario is also relevant to India–Russia relations. India's defence partnership with the US is beneficial for its effective security role performance but also sends alarming signals to Beijing. New Delhi's constrained enthusiasm towards the Quad, especially in preceding years, was due to India's apprehensions about alienating China. Equally important, Indian planners tend to be concerned about getting unnecessarily drawn into the US' battles or conflicts that are not of its choosing or in India's interest. During the Trump presidency, there were qualms over the direction of US foreign policy. Hence, New Delhi was chary about committing to a level that impinged the country's contemporary interests. While the Biden administration has concentrated heavily on the Indo-Pacific, Indian concerns related to overcommitting loom large, especially given the growing US–Russia frictions in Europe and events in Ukraine.

Lastly and equally important, India's domestic compulsions and priorities in the immediate neighbourhood trump American role expectations from India regarding the Indo-Pacific (see Chapter 5 for details). There is also a view that if New Delhi was to correspond to the American role prescription, it might increase the burden on India's finite resources, thus aggravating the challenge of role competition (see Chapter 5 for details). In sum, the confluence of divergences complicates the Indo–US role compatibility and creates a gap between Washington's role prescription and New Delhi's self-conception.

6.3 India and Japan

6.3.1 Historical Overview: Contrasting Role Conceptions

The end of the Second World War began a remarkable phase for India and Japan. When India gained independence, Japan was reviving from the fall of imperial Japan (Mukherjee & Yazaki, 2016). In the initial years, both countries were connected by a sense of Asian solidarity and established contemporary relations after signing a peace treaty in 1952. However, Asian solidarity did not translate into greater cooperation, and the two drifted apart during the Cold War years. Japan transformed into an American ally, and India positioned itself as a non-aligned actor (see Chapter 3). Resultantly, there was limited congruence between their RCs. Because of India's socialist and closed economy, Tokyo, an economic power, had little interest in engaging at the economic level. Through the years, both countries remained indifferent towards each other and had minimal political engagement.

Despite being Asian countries, their security interests or concerns differed substantially, especially from the mid-1960s. After the 1952 treaty of San Francisco, Japanese foreign and security policies were guided by its master RCs of an 'antimilitarist' actor and a 'peace' state. These RCs emanated from Japan's constitution (embedded in Article 9), which disallowed the possession of a traditional military force. It only possessed a Self Defense Force (SDF) with a restricted military role. On the one hand, Tokyo's primary focus was economic development, and whatever security concerns it had were limited to Northeast Asia. Its traditional security issues were managed through the US–Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. On the other hand, India was preoccupied with events in the immediate neighbourhood from the mid-1960s, when it sought to perform the role of a subcontinental power (see Chapter 3). Therefore, it paid less heed to events in the EA region.

The end of the Cold War motivated both India and Japan to adjust their RCs to the changing systemic, regional, and domestic circumstances. The Jap-

anese leadership re-evaluated the role of a 'peace state' following the 1990–91 Gulf War. When the US-led multinational forces fought to evict the Iraqi military from Kuwait, Japan did not contribute its troops due to constitutional restrictions but infused considerable funds. Tokyo's inability to participate presaged the possibility of a weakened US–Japan alliance and revived the domestic debate over Japan's irrelevance during an international crisis (Honda, 2002). The Japanese leadership confronted a similar conundrum during the North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993–94 when the US discussed plans for a possible war. Although the plans were not implemented, the event sparked a rethink of Japan's potential security role in the new world order (Kelly & Kubo, 2015).

Almost concurrently, New Delhi experienced a role restructuring. Policymakers in India envisaged a new role in the changing world order, which led to its economic opening and search for new economic partnerships. Japan was a definite choice in this context. Even Tokyo's interest was piqued by Indian economic reforms and its vast market. The bilateral engagement began in 1995 when the Japanese Minister of International Trade and Industry visited India. A strategic dimension was introduced to their bilateral relations in 1997 (Ghosh, 2008). In the absence of historical baggage or territorial dispute, the two countries were expected to come closer due to their shared values of democracy and a free market. However, the Indian nuclear tests in 1998 thwarted the mutual efforts to cooperate and resulted in an instantaneous slump in India–Japan ties.

India's nuclear tests were regarded as an affront to Japan's traditional conception of a 'peace' state with a non-nuclear weapons policy.[60] Tokyo's responses sufficiently reflected its disappointment with India. The grant aid to India was frozen (except humanitarian-related aid), and loans for new projects were stalled. Japan temporarily recalled its Ambassador from New Delhi and adopted a hardened posture against India at international forums, including at the UNSC, the G-8, and the ARF. New Delhi tried to assuage international concerns by releasing a draft nuclear doctrine that affirmed credible minimum deterrence and a No First Use policy (Arms Control Association, 1999). It also vowed to maintain a unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests. Nonetheless, India–Japan relations remained frosty. During the India–Pakistan Kargil conflict, Japan adopted a neutral stand even as most major powers supported New Delhi.

As the Indo-US diplomatic understanding grew with the progressing Talbott-Singh Dialogue, Tokyo warmed up to the idea of reviving its official interactions with India (Ghosh, 2008). The restoration of ties began with ministerial-level exchanges in October 1999. During the Japanese PM Yoshiro Mori's visit to India in August 2000, they announced a 'Global Partnership' (MOFA, 2017a). Indian PM Vajpayee's follow-up visit to Japan in December 2001 reaffirmed their interest in seeking cooperation. Despite the high-level

exchanges, the bilateral relations remained embryonic. Within Japan, there was little consensus on its role expectation from India, except on nuclear issues.

6.3.2 Emerging Role Compatibility

The 2000s were a transformative period for Japan and India's self-conceptions. Both countries were responding to new stimuli in the domestic and international environment and adjusted their conceptions accordingly. Japan experienced a deteriorated security environment, changes in domestic politics, and rising nationalism. Tokyo's ability to use economics as a tool of international politics was diminishing. These shifts, along with periodic worries over the US abandonment of their alliance, created conditions that altered Japan's self-conception and performance. Japan's traditional role as a 'peace state' was now shifting towards an 'international state' role. Bhubhinder Singh notes that domestic political changes were among the many factors that determined a transformation (B. Singh, 2008). The socialist movement in Japan had weakened in the mid-1990s, and power began swaying towards the revisionist camp within the Liberal Democratic Party. The revisionist camp believed in revising Japan's constitution and espousing active security and military roles. Some of the prominent PMs from this camp were Hashimoto Ryūtarō (1996–98), Mori Yoshirō (2000–01), Koizumi Junichirō (2001–06), and Abe Shinzō (2006–07; and 2012–2020) (B. Singh, 2008). Naturally, as revisionists came to the fore, Tokyo's perception of its regional and international role altered.

The domestic debate on Japan's roles and responsibility as a US ally revived after the 9/11 attacks and the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Having learnt lessons from the Gulf War, PM Koizumi Junichirō passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law in October 2001. Following this, Japan sent Aegis destroyers to the IO when the US commenced its operations in Afghanistan (Envall, 2017). Tokyo also dispatched the SDF for humanitarian missions during the US operations after passing Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq. This was the first time that the SDF had participated in an ongoing conflict in a foreign land. Even though the change was de facto and not de jure (providing permanent legal cover), it was a break from past traditions (Hughes, 2004).

India, too, was looking ahead to assume a major power role. New Delhi, under PM Singh, enthusiastically engaged many countries. India–US relations were on an upward trajectory that facilitated greater convergence with US allies such as Japan and Australia. The IO Tsunami crisis of December 2004 was a defining moment that altered Japan's perception of India. New Delhi's effective coordination with the US, Japan, and Australia while independently managing the crisis at home confirmed its potential to be a regional maritime actor. Prime Minister Koizumi visited India in April 2005 and signed the 'Japan-

India Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of a Japan-India Global Partnership' (MOFA, 2005). There was a push from both sides to transcend the differences in their outlooks on nuclear issues and work on areas of joint interest in economics, regional politics, and security.

To understand the conditions that created complementarities between the two sides, it is worth noting the incremental changes in Japan's diplomatic, political and security thinking. By the mid-2000s, Japan's regional order had become more complex. China's enormous growth diminished Japan's influence as an economic, political, and diplomatic actor in the broader EA region. Beijing was relatively confrontational in its claims over the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea. North Korea's missile tests also added to Japan's distress. Tokyo wanted to consolidate its position in Northeast Asia and beyond. However, due to its constitutional restrictions, there were limits to espousing an active security role. To compensate for this, it increased cooperation with the US because it was Tokyo's strongest ally. Despite this, the Japanese leadership feared the possibility of US abandonment due to America's overstretched military presence and fluctuating priorities in the Asia-Pacific region.

While its alliance with Washington was foremost, Tokyo felt the need to foster relations with like-minded countries that shared similar values such as democracy, free trade, and adherence to the rule of law. India's economic rise, growing maritime prowess and active regional diplomacy had drawn Japan's attention. Washington's unprecedented strategic relations with New Delhi also boosted Japan's interest. Amid America's active role prescription towards India, the potential for India–Japan role compatibility emerged. Japanese officials viewed India as a country that could facilitate "joint US-Japan democratisation of good governance promotion in the Pacific region" (Wikileaks, 2005f, pt. 26). They wanted India to be more 'integrated' in the region (Wikileaks, 2005f, pt. 26). Tokyo and Washington shared an interest in bolstering India's position in the region. Japan began exploring prospects with the US to invite India to take up a "larger role in the Asia-Pacific region" (Wikileaks, 2006e, pt. 9). Overall, Tokyo's role expectation from New Delhi matched India's master self-conception as a major power. Japan's actions from the mid-2000s led to increasing role compatibility with India. Indian officials duly acknowledged Tokyo's attitudinal change towards New Delhi during interactions with their American counterparts (Wikileaks, 2005g).

Japan (backed by Singapore and Indonesia) endorsed India's entry into the EAS. During the EAS's inaugural session in 2005, Tokyo supported New Delhi's positions indicating a strengthened bilateral understanding of strategic issues (Wikileaks, 2005g). India earned increased attention as a 'strategic priority' as testified by the MOFA's decision to form a South Asia department (Wikileaks, 2006c). Discussions on instituting bilateral defence cooperation

cropped up during Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Japan in May 2006.

Like India, Japan harboured concerns over traditional and non-traditional security threats to crucial SLOCs and chokepoints such as the Malacca and Hormuz Straits. India's strategic location in the centre of the two straits was crucial. Equally important was Japan's belief in India's maritime capabilities, as evidenced by the IN's successful rescue of the Japanese vessel MV *Alondra Rainbow* in 1999 and extensive HADR operations during the 2004 Tsunami. Tokyo hoped to rely on the IN and the Indian Coast Guard to accommodate its security interests in the IOR, either independently or in combination with other friendly maritime powers. It is notable that the 'China factor' was not the primary or the only driver of Japan's interest in India in the mid-2000s. This was captured in the MOFA Asian Affairs DG Sasae's interaction with American officials. During the exchange, Sasae remarked, "We would like a true strategic partnership … not simply a counterbalance to China" (Wikileaks, 2006d, pt. 10). It must be kept in mind that in the mid-2000s, India and Japan were working on improving ties with China.

After Abe Shinzō became the PM in 2006, there was a push to change the direction of Japan's traditional foreign and security policy outlook. Abe embarked on his political agenda to change Japan's post-war conception of a 'peace state' and its passive style of diplomacy in EA. Abe wanted Japan to perform an ambitious and leading role that befitted its global status as a major power (Kuroki, 2013). Under his leadership, Tokyo introduced institutional, legal, and military changes to inch closer to the aspirational 'international state' role. During PM Abe's first tenure (2006–07), the National Diet (Japanese Parliament) passed legislation that resulted in the promotion of Japan's Defense Agency (which had a lower bureaucratic status) to a cabinet-level ministry, thus offering it greater power and control (Yoshida, 2007). This institutional change revealed the growing salience of defence issues in Japan's external policy outlook. In late 2006, Japan introduced a new dimension to its diplomacy—the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (MOFA, 2006). The Arc encompassed an expansive geographical landscape from North Europe to Northeast Asia, traversing through the Baltic States, Central and Southeast Europe, the Caucuses, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent. Abe introduced 'proactive policy', which comprised the vision of Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and additional pillars (PM of Japan and his Cabinet, 2007; Kuroki, 2013). Other pillars included "creating an Asia that is open and rich in innovation and contributing to global peace and stability" (PM of Japan and his Cabinet, 2007, section 8).

India was indispensable within the ambit of Japan's diplomatic vision and the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. Abe, a revisionist and an Indophile, took a personal interest in India–Japan relations. On his invitation, Indian PM Singh visited Japan in December 2006. Singh addressed a joint session of the Na-

tional Diet, and the 'India–Japan Global Partnership' status was elevated to 'Strategic and Global Partnership'. During the trip, Abe shared his vision of a quadrilateral dialogue comprising the US, Japan, Australia, and India. The India–Japan joint statement stressed the "usefulness of having dialogue among India, Japan and other like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region" (MEA, 2006a, pt. 46; See Wikileaks, 2006h).

Growing maritime cooperation between India, Japan, and the US was visible with their first trilateral exercise in the Pacific Ocean in April 2007 (The Hindu, 2007). In the same year, the first meeting of the Quad countries, intended as an "informal, senior official level talks", was held on the sidelines of the ARF Summit in Manila (Wikileaks, 2007a, pt. 1). Japan even joined the Indo-US Malabar naval exercise of 2007 along with Singapore and Australia. The congregation of the Quad countries (plus Singapore) in the naval exercise heightened Chinese concerns. The Chinese government issued démarches to the participants seeking clarification on the nature of the arrangement. Abe's brainchild soon fell apart after Australia's retreat, only to be revived a decade later. Regardless of the Quad's demise back then, India–Japan bilateral ties progressed unabated.

In August 2007, PM Abe Shinzō visited India and addressed the Indian Parliament, making him the first Japanese PM to do so. In his speech, he reaffirmed Tokyo's vision of a "new broader Asia" and spoke of the "confluence of the two seas", i.e., the symbolic coming together of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. He also highlighted India's 'pivotal' role in the pursuit of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (MOFA, 2007). The speech conveyed the conceptual integration of two seemingly separate maritime regions and demonstrated Japan's intention to bring India closer to the Pacific. In hindsight, Abe's idea of the "confluence of the seas" informed the contemporary concept of the 'Indo-Pacific'. It was easier for Japan and India to forge closer security ties because Japan did not spark any opposition or concerns within the Indian political spectrum, as was the case with the US (Jaishankar, 2016). An additional reason for the bonhomie was the absence of historical baggage in India related to Japan's colonial years, a sentiment that remains prominent among countries of the SEA and EA.

Even after Abe resigned from his position in September 2007, the momentum of India–Japan relations continued. During PM Singh's visit to Tokyo in October 2008, the two countries signed the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. The following year, they agreed on the 'Action Plan to advance Security Cooperation based on the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation' (MOFA, 2009). Under the action plan, Tokyo and New Delhi agreed to hold an annual Strategic Dialogue at the FM level, senior officials 2+2 dialogue, and exchange information and coordinate their security policies in the Asia-Pacific region. (MOFA, 2009).

Despite attempts by India–China and Japan–China to improve their bilateral ties in the mid-2000s, the relations turned glacial by the late 2000s. In 2010, the Japan Coast Guard seized a Chinese trawler that collided with Japanese patrol boats in the disputed maritime region. The incident sparked a major diplomatic row, and reports emerged about China's embargo on the export of rare earth material to Japan (Bradsher, 2010). Between 2010 and 2013, maritime confrontations between Chinese and Japanese maritime law vessels increased (Nagao, 2018). In 2013, Beijing declared an Air Defense Identification Zone in the ECS, which included the disputed region of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Simultaneously, India–China relations suffered. In 2010, Beijing issued stapled visas to habitants of J&K for travel to China. At the same time, it refused a visa to an IA officer heading the command of J&K. Following a row over these events, India cancelled its defence exchanges with China. The Chinese military increased its presence in the IO under the pretext of anti-piracy operations and deepened engagement with the littoral countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Myanmar, causing disquiet in the Indian quarters.

China's role performance became a salient component in India and Japan's security calculations and motivated them to rethink their regional roles. With China's emergence as a security power, Washington wanted its allies to share the security burden. Despite the Japanese leadership's willingness to share some responsibilities and undertake reforms, Tokyo was constricted by constitutional restrictions. Japan and the US were looking to India to shoulder more security responsibilities in the IOR and the ASEAN region. India also sought support from external actors to address the implications of China's military rise and facilitate the performance of its evolved RCs. The regional affairs created greater harmony between Japan's role prescription and India's self-conception. Japan's National Defence Programme Guidelines of 2011 noted the need to "enhance cooperation with India and other countries that share common interests in ensuring the security of maritime navigation from Africa and the Middle East to East Asia" (Government of Japan, as cited in Mukherjee, 2018, p. 11). In December 2012, the Indian PM officially used the term 'Indo-Pacific' at the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, acknowledging the changing regional dynamics and New Delhi's willingness to be a part of the broader regional milieu (MEA, 2012d). Indian and Japanese navies commenced their annual bilateral naval exercise, JIMEX, in 2012. Tokyo also participated as an observer in the IONS. In addition to the India–Japan role compatibility, there was a reasonable trilateral understanding between Tokyo, New Delhi, and Washington on security issues. In 2011, the US, Japan, and India held their first-ever Foreign Ministers' trilateral meeting.

Abe Shinzō's return to power speeded Japan's role evolution towards an 'international state'. From 2012, the government actively attempted to 'normalise' Japan's international RC and performance. The defence expenditures rose continuously, year after year, even as they remained below the stipulated

cap of 1% of GDP (Nippon, 2018). In a landmark development in 2015, Japan passed a new law that permitted the SDF to fight overseas, a departure from its long-standing stance of using force only in self-defence (BBC, 2015). Wilkins (2011) observes that Japan's security role evolution appears in many sectors, some of which include a) increased participation in international security missions, b) shouldering greater responsibilities in the Japan–US defence alliance, c) diversifying foreign policy and security partnerships, and d) advancing engagement in the regional security architecture of the Indo-Pacific (Wilkins, 2011).

Japan's internal reforms were supported by an active outreach to other countries. India emerged as one of the most crucial partners. Soon after returning to power, Abe, in an editorial, reiterated the 'inseparable' nature of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and broached the idea of getting the Quad countries together to ensure regional peace and stability (Abe, 2012, para. 1). In the very candid editorial piece, he noted the "Chinese government's daily exercises in coercion around the Senkaku Islands" and its intentions to turn the SCS into a 'Lake Beijing' (Abe, 2012, para. 4). With this background, Abe called India "a resident power in EA" and stated that Tokyo and New Delhi should "shoulder more responsibility as guardians of navigational freedom across the Pacific and Indian oceans" (Abe, 2012, para. 6). With Abe (from 2012) and Modi (from 2014) in power in their respective countries, India–Japan ties received a boost. Modi's personal chemistry with Abe dated back to the time when the former was the Chief Minister of Gujarat (a state in western India).

After becoming the PM, Modi's official visit to Japan in September 2014 was his first visit outside the immediate neighbourhood. The two countries upgraded their relations to 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' (MEA, 2014e). During the trip, in a veiled but certain reference to China, Modi said that the region was witnessing an "18th-century expansionist mind-set: encroaching on another country, intruding in others' waters, invading other countries and capturing territory" (Modi as quoted in Schuman, 2014, para. 7). This statement denoted heightened Indian rhetoric on China (Schuman, 2014). Further, during PM Abe's official visit to India in December 2015, the political heads signed the 'Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World'. The joint statement affirmed the importance of safeguarding the global commons and the SLOCs in the SCS and called for implementing the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS (MEA, 2015a). In a break from the tradition, North Korea was mentioned in their joint statement with the leaders expressing concern over its uranium enrichment and missile developments (MEA, 2015a). Even the trilateral understanding between Japan, India, and the US was beginning to get more institutionalised. In 2016, Tokyo was included in the Indo-US bilateral Malabar exercise as a permanent member.

Furthermore, both the countries began negotiating the sale of Japan's US-2i amphibian planes to India to strengthen the IN's capabilities in the Indo-Pacific (Nagao, 2016). However, the deal did not get finalised due to technology transfer issues and the lack of funds with the IN. If the deal had been finalised, the approximately US $1.65 billion defence deal would have been Japan's first major foreign defence export after the Second World War. Further, Tokyo and New Delhi signed the India–Japan Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy that entered into force in July 2017 (The Hindu, 2017). The agreement demonstrated that both countries had come a long way compared to 1998, when New Delhi's nuclear tests had invited the harshest response from Tokyo.

As the Indo-Pacific region witnessed a precarious strategic flux, new developments shaped the responses of regional countries. When there were uncertainties regarding the US commitment to the region under the Trump administration (particularly after the US withdrawal from the TPP), Tokyo stepped up to fill the vacuum and performed as an 'international state'. In 2016, Japan introduced its FOIP strategy. It hoped to introduce a stronger economic leadership in the Indo-Pacific and provide the regional countries with an alternative to China's BRI model. The geographical scope of the FOIP included SEA and EA, parts of the IO and the Pacific Ocean, and the vast maritime stretch up to East Africa. The strategy aimed to "improve connectivity between Asia and Africa through free and open Indo-Pacific, and promote stability and prosperity of the region as a whole" (Mission of Japan to ASEAN, n.d., p. 1). The focus was on undertaking infrastructural development, forging stronger economic partnerships and security cooperation, and assisting through capacity building.

Given the vast maritime space in the purview of the FOIP, Japan required unhindered maritime pathways and a secure rules-based maritime environment to operationalise its strategy. The constitutional restrictions and limited resources for defence modernisation meant that it needed external support to safeguard the maritime spaces. India was one of the countries that fell within the geographical scope of the FOIP and shared Japan's vision of a rules-based, inclusive, free and open Indo-Pacific. More importantly, New Delhi had the potential to facilitate Japan's maritime security objectives in the IOR by promoting capacity building among the regional littorals through "maritime law enforcement, HA/DR cooperation." (Mission of Japan to ASEAN, n.d., p. 2).

In September 2017, during PM Abe's much-publicised visit to India, he discussed the FOIP strategy with the Indian leadership (Salim & Sundaryani, 2017). Abe's visit took place days after New Delhi and Beijing ended their two-month standoff on the disputed tri-junction between Bhutan, China, and India. The 2017 India–Japan joint statement titled, 'Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific' showcased their maturing role compatibility in the region. The statement included the intent to "align Japan's FOIP Strategy with

India's Act East Policy, through enhancing maritime security cooperation, improving connectivity in the wider Indo-Pacific region, and strengthening cooperation with ASEAN" (MOFA, 2017b, p. 1).

An inward-looking America under President Trump (2017–2021) intensified Japan's motivation to deepen security cooperation with India. Given the transactional nature of the Trump presidency, Tokyo's fear of 'abandonment' gained currency, prompting it to diversify its security relations. The Japanese leadership was aware of the US' resource constraints and extensive military commitments overseas. Although the next US President, Joe Biden, has managed to rekindle the US–Japan ties and assuage the uncertainty over American commitment to the region, Japanese security planners remain worried that Washington may renounce its treaty commitment to Tokyo if American national interests demanded so. If such a scenario plays out, Japan would be left with limited alternate choices and insufficient capabilities to defend itself unilaterally.

After Abe resigned as the PM due to health issues, his successor, Suga Yoshihide (September 2020– October 2021) and the incumbent PM, Kishida Fumio, continued to focus on Japan's security role. With the growing threat perceptions from China, North Korea and Russia, PM Kishida's cabinet approved a defence budget of approximately US $53 billion for 2021 (Tsuneoka, 2021). The unprecedented figures breached the long-standing guideline of limiting Japan's defence spending to 1% of the GDP (Takahashi, 2021). Defence Minister Kishi Nobuo indicated the country's intention to do away with the 1% capping, given the mounting security threats and China's aggressive behaviour in the region (Kobara, 2021).

Along with defence buildup, Tokyo is diversifying its partnerships as an insurance policy. India and Australia remain the most suitable choices for Japan. There are no countries in SEA or EA that can boast of the military potential to challenge China that the Quad members have. Tokyo is already deepening ties with Canberra and New Delhi. This is not to state that India (or Australia) could replace the US as Japan's foremost security partner. No other country can parallel the position that the US holds in Japan's strategic thinking. There is little doubt that Japan's vision for the region is aligned with the American outlook. Tokyo's traditional rivalry with Beijing has a common layer of empathy with the US. Together, Japan and the US view India as a viable security partner in the region and are keen to establish robust understanding and security cooperation. By virtue of its maritime capability and overall potential, India can share security responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific that were originally performed by the Japan–US duo with the US as the lead (Nagao, 2018).

India and Japan's support for each other's role evolution have resulted in stronger role compatibility. Jaishankar (2016, p. 2) argues that India facilitates Japan's transition to a "more 'normal' military power through joint exercises and military diplomacy". Similarly, India–Japan's military diplomacy enables

the IN to go beyond the IO and get acquainted with maritime spaces in the EA, thereby furthering New Delhi's role performance. In the last five years, security and defence cooperation has emerged as a salient part of India–Japan bilateral ties. This was reflected in Tokyo's decision to post two defence attachés (belonging to the Air Force and Coast Guard) to India and New Delhi's move to place a permanent naval attaché in Tokyo (PTI, 2018b; Jaishankar, 2018b). In late 2018, the leaders of India, the US, and Japan held their first-ever trilateral interaction. The India–US air exercises (in addition to the Malabar exercise) were converted into a trilateral format by including Japan (Peri, 2018). New Delhi, Tokyo, and Canberra instituted a high-level trilateral dialogue, which began in mid-2015, and has continued since (Parameswaran, 2015a). Australia (for the first time after 2007) joined the India–US–Japan Malabar naval exercise in 2020 (Associated Press, 2020). Further, the senior-level official 2+2 dialogue got elevated to the levels of foreign and defence ministers, with the first meeting held in November 2019 (Rajagopalan, 2019).

India and Japan have been working on synergising their FOIP with the AEP. Examples include bilateral collaboration on infrastructure connectivity in third countries, such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and the continent of Africa. They are also cooperating in cybersecurity in 5G technology, critical information infrastructure and Artificial Intelligence. The bilateral cooperation across sectors is set to have a cumulative and progressive influence on the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. In October 2021, PM Modi and PM Kishida elevated their special strategic and global partnership to a 'new level' (Kyodo News, 2021).

6.3.3 Divergences within Role Compatibility

The role compatibility notwithstanding, there are some areas where New Delhi and Tokyo's views diverge. There are potential irritants to the India–Japan bilateral relations at the broader level, such as lacklustre economic ties, Japan's 'nuclear allergy' and India's nuclear policies (for details, see Loh, 2019). This section, however, examines the constraining factors in their role compatibility at the strategic and security levels.

India and Japan have different perceptions of the form of the emerging multipolar world order. According to Manjeet Pardesi, since the end of the World War, Japan has comfortably operated under America's leadership as a part of the hub-and-spoke model (Pardesi, 2018). In contrast, New Delhi prefers a more "independent role for itself in the emerging multipolar order" (Pardesi, 2018, p. 39). Despite the Indo-US strategic partnership and security cooperation, New Delhi stresses maintaining "strategic and decisional autonomy", a by-product of its former RCs that remain relevant in the contemporary Indian strategic culture.

In light of Japan's commitment to alliances (for example, the US–Japan alliance), there have been some concerns in New Delhi over Tokyo's possible expectation of an alliance with India. To alleviate such apprehensions, the Japanese Finance Minister Tarō Asō clarified in 2013 that Tokyo understood the negative connotations attached to the concept of 'alliance' in the Indian context (Garver, 2014). He added that Japan did not view India as an ally but as "two vibrant democracies in Asia [who] share the same outlook in many respects" (Asō as cited in Garver, 2014, p. 10).

The two countries also differ on the fundamental question of addressing China's military rise and its assertive conduct. Neither side is comfortable with a China-led security order in the Indo-Pacific or globally, and both strive to obviate such a possibility. Still, they hold distinct ideas on the appropriate ways to meet their objectives. By dint of its alliance with Washington, Tokyo encourages greater US involvement in regional affairs. New Delhi, contrastingly, holds concerns over this trend, especially in the IO. Despite a greater willingness to partner with extra-regional powers, India is unlikely to welcome greater domination of the IO by the US or any other major power.

Furthermore, both countries vary in terms of the required pace of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Japan was keen to include Australia in the Malabar naval exercise for a while, but New Delhi was reticent (until 2020). By comparison, Indian policymakers preferred to adopt a calibrated approach to security cooperation, especially in terms of the Quad arrangements. Even today, New Delhi appears more enthusiastic about utilising the Quad for non-traditional or soft security issues such as vaccine diplomacy and infrastructure building and is less eager to cooperate on traditional security and military issues. Considering India's inter-role conflict (on the issue of China), New Delhi's measured approach aims to assuage Beijing's concerns over the Quad. India's reluctance also flows from the role competition it experiences (see Chapter 5). Indian planners remain uneasy about overstretching their security commitments to areas beyond the primary area of interest (the IO) because of the limited resources at hand. They are also aware of the structural weaknesses and inefficiencies at home.

New Delhi and Tokyo also face conceptual differences that can potentially result in complications at the operational level. Japan and the US share similar interpretations of the UNCLOS (covered in the US case study), whereas India is an outlier. New Delhi's perspective on the issue aligns more closely with Beijing than Japan or the US. These issues can act as irritants in the India–Japan security cooperation, especially as they seek to align their vision, strategies, and policies in the Indo-Pacific. India's absence from the US-led alliance may also pose potential complications in interoperability with the Japanese forces. Unlike Japan, India's military platforms, communication and information systems are not entirely integrated with the US systems (Jaishankar, 2018b).

There are additional factors that can potentially impede a seamless security relationship. For instance, despite India's agreement (in principle) to buy the US-2 amphibian aircraft, the two sides failed to actualise the deal due to a combination of problems on both sides. From Japan's side, impediments included the lack of cost-competitiveness of their defence systems, limitations in sourcing defence technology or undertaking joint production due to restrictions on Japanese industry. Issues emanating from the Indian side were their long bureaucratic processes, inefficient defence procurement system, and complex policies of offset and technology transfer (Basu, 2018).

With a background of diverging aspects, it is worth noting that both countries are still adjusting their role performances to their evolving RCs. Both are wrestling with structural and ideological problems at domestic and international levels. Once India and Japan's role performances align more closely with their RCs, their complementarities may be converted into increased congruence on the Indo-Pacific security issues in the coming decades.

6.4 ASEAN Countries and India

6.4.1 Overview of ASEAN's Role Conception and Strategy

One of the most complex and intriguing actors in the Indo-Pacific is the ASEAN grouping of states. The ten ASEAN member countries are located between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The countries have different cultures, geographies, sizes, political systems, and histories. As a result, they seldom have a consensus on strategic matters such as regional security. Before examining Vietnam's case, it is worthwhile to overview the ASEAN organisation's regional role and its security role prescription towards India.

During the colonial era, the SEA countries had a limited agency to conduct their foreign policies. Even after gaining independence, they grappled with the harsh realities of Cold War geopolitics, making their policy choices limited. The region remained under the shadows of great power competition and experienced the ramifications of rising and declining powers. Amid the Cold War, the SEA countries aligned their positions based on ideological leanings and security threat perceptions. The non-communist entities sided with the US-led bloc while the communist countries aligned with the USSR–China camp. During the 1950s and 1960s, the external orientation of the SEA countries was based largely on zero-sum calculations and alignments with their preferred bloc. The regional dynamics became increasingly complicated after the Sino-Soviet split, the US–China rapprochement, and the drawdown of Western forces from the region. In 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singa-

pore, and Thailand founded the ASEAN organisation. It aimed to ensure greater regional coordination in politics, economics, technical, and cultural aspects. Together as a regional grouping, the ASEAN countries hoped to negotiate more effectively with great powers and maintain greater autonomy over regional affairs. From the 1970s, their black and white alignments became more mixed. Some countries established diplomatic ties with communist China while sustaining their military relations with the US (Kuik, 2016).

The regional security landscape altered dramatically after the fall of the USSR. The ideological divide and ongoing conflicts became less relevant. Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia in 1989, bringing an end to the decades-long crisis. Security threats to the ASEAN countries became less direct, and their interactions with major/great powers became more multi-layered. In the absence of a communist threat, American interest in the ASEAN region receded, and it withdrew from the Philippines' naval bases in 1991–92. There was growing uncertainty over American commitment to the region and qualms about its willingness to remain the "primary security provider" in the Asia-Pacific. Washington's military interest in the region was replaced by economic considerations in the form of greater market access, preference for free trade, and multilateral institutions (Mauzy and Job, 2007). Mauzy and Job (2007, p. 623) refer to the US approach towards SEA through the 1990s as a policy of "benign neglect".

Another relevant development of the 1990s was China's economic emergence, which benefitted the ASEAN countries and led to deeper trade interdependence and integrated supply chains. While the economic linkages bourgeoned, some countries, namely Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, were bothered about China's posture in the SCS. In 1992, Beijing promulgated the Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone. Through the law, China asserted its claims and sovereign rights over the U-shaped or nine-dash line in the SCS, which covers almost 90% of the SCS (Kurlantzick, 2015). This became a source of consternation for other claimants in the region.

The post-Cold War years provided ASEAN countries with greater flexibility to conduct their relations with regional and extra-regional actors. Doubts over the US commitment to the region and China's rise accentuated the need to diversify ties. The ASEAN organisation adjusted to the changing regional dynamics by affirming its diplomatic leadership. As argued by Yates (2016, p. 1), ASEAN performs the roles of the "regional conductor of Asia-Pacific" and "primary manager of SEA order". These roles are persistently performed by ASEAN (at the organisational and country-level) through the 'Omni-enmeshment' strategy (Goh 2008, p. 121).

According to Evelyn Goh, Omni-enmeshment is the strategy of engaging a state (or states) by "enveloping it [or them] in a web of sustained exchanges and relationships, with the long-term aim of integrating" them into the regional society (Goh, 2008, p. 121). This strategy seeks to build a regional structure

that includes many regional and extra-regional powers enmeshed together. This, as Goh maintains, is expected to provide greater value than associating closely with a single power or bloc to the point of excluding others. It is worth noting that Omni-enmeshment differs from realism's proposition of balancing powers. The primary aim of the Omni-enmeshment strategy is to utilise the space created by competition between different powers and create a 'positive-sum' influence for the region (Goh, 2008, p.129). According to the former Singaporean Ambassador, Bilahari Kausikan, the ASEAN countries prefer an "omnidirectional state of equilibrium between all major powers that allows the countries of the region maximal room to manoeuvre and autonomy" (Kausikan, 2017, p. 6).

In practice, ASEAN enmeshes multiple powers by building economic, political, diplomatic and security relations. In terms of security, Omni-enmeshment is done by involving many major powers with the hope that they "act as mutual deterrents against adventurism by one another" (Goh, 2008, p. 130). This arrangement obviates the possibility of a power vacuum or a situation where a single power exercises unchallenged authority. In the words of a Malaysian official, "what we really want to do is help the 'elephants' get to a point where their interests are so intertwined that it would be too costly for them to fight" (as quoted in Goh, 2008, p. 123). A network of countries enables the ASEAN grouping to reassert their collective relevance, exercise greater autonomy over regional issues, and benefit from the strategic flux. ASEAN's role performance as the 'regional conductor' and "primary manager of SEA order" is reflected in its persistent attempt to safeguard the regional security order by socialising the US and China into remaining the "offshore great power guarantor'" and "responsible regional great power", respectively (Yates, 2016, p. 2). ASEAN members engage closely with other powers such as Japan, Australia, India, and Russia. The practice of Omni-enmeshment is not limited to the organisation level but is followed by most ASEAN members at the country level. This will become apparent when examining the case of Vietnam.

One of the earliest illustrations of security-related Omni-enmeshment was the creation of the ARF in 1993. The ARF was created to discuss peace and security issues and undertake durable engagement based on the 'ASEAN way'—a "consensus-based, non-conflictual and informal decision-making process" (Masilamani & Peterson, 2014, section vi). The US, China, and other ASEAN Dialogue Partners were invited to join the forum. ASEAN countries were looking to inspire greater US involvement in the region and encourage other powers such as China and Japan to have a stake in regional security. Simultaneously, ASEAN tried to socialise China into a multilateral setting, foster shared interest, and shape Beijing's behaviour as a responsible power. Over time, ASEAN succeeded in institutionalising interactions with major powers through regular defence exchanges and involving them in ASEAN-led forums such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus and the

EAS. It is noteworthy that all great and major powers have acceded to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), thereby acknowledging 'ASEAN's centrality and agreeing to follow the spirit of the ASEAN way (at least in principle).

6.4.2 Lack of Unanimous Role Prescription

For much of the 1990s, India did not feature as a crucial actor for most ASEAN countries. Therefore, it was not invited to participate in the first meeting of the ARF in 1994 despite New Delhi's pronounced interest (MEA, 1995). It was not until the ARF's third meeting in 1996 that India was invited to participate. Indian officials had little to showcase as an economic and security actor except for a good prognosis based on economic reforms and fledgeling defence diplomacy. Raja Mohan believes that despite its inclusion in the ARF, "there was an explicit understanding that India would play a low-key role for the moment" (Mohan, 2009a, p. 6). Daljit Singh provides two broad explanations for this. First, India's geopolitical and security priorities were centred on the immediate neighbourhood, i.e., Pakistan and China. Second, for robust security cooperation with the eastern region, it required greater naval potential and power projection capabilities (D. Singh, 2001).

It was only in the 2000s that India began to emerge as a relevant actor in the eyes of ASEAN members. To come closer to the role performance of a 'major power', New Delhi was keen to expand the scope and pace of its interactions with the ASEAN region under the LEP phase II. Likewise, for the ASEAN members, the regional environment—characterised by a weakened US and China's growing dominance—warranted the involvement of additional extra-regional actors. Some in the ASEAN grouping recognised India's potential as an emerging economic power with expanding power projection capabilities. Despite the fledgeling role compatibility between India and some countries in ASEAN (Singapore and Vietnam), there was continued scepticism over India's inclusion in regional forums. The lack of consensus over New Delhi was on display in the run-up to the formation of the EAS.

To provide a background, the EAS was touted as a "precursor to a larger East Asian Community" (Malik, 2006, p. 2). China was initially keen on its formation because it could provide Beijing with greater leverage and leadership, which was difficult at the ASEAN Plus Three arrangement due to Japan's presence. Japan soon blighted China's enthusiasm by suggesting the inclusion of Australia, India, and New Zealand in the EAS (Malik, 2006). Among the ASEAN countries, there was a lack of unanimity on India's participation. Singapore was one of the few countries that openly supported India's candidacy. Other countries were either unwilling to endorse India publically or were opposed to it. South Korea and Thailand told Indian officials that New Delhi

needed to be engaged with the region to "prevent China from dominating" but were wary of expressing these opinions at "multilateral fora where China is present" (Wikileaks, 2005g). Finally, with the collective diplomatic push from Japan, Singapore, and Indonesia, India was included in the EAS.

In the 2000s, there were episodes of fruitful association between India and ASEAN countries. New Delhi signed the TAC in 2003 and got involved in the framework of ADMM Plus. It established regular defence exchanges, training programmes for defence personnel, bilateral and multilateral military exercises, and CORPAT with select ASEAN countries. Compared to the 1990s, when India had three defence agreements with individual ASEAN countries, it finalised 18 such agreements between 2000 and 2010 (data from Das, 2013a). Acceptance by ASEAN countries "legitimise[d] India's status as a great power in Asia as well as its role in security affairs" (Pardesi, 2015, para. 8). Over the years, New Delhi grew more comfortable in engaging the ASEAN region multilaterally, a marked shift from its preference for bilateral interactions in the preceding decades. That some ASEAN countries were participating in India-led naval exercises such as Milan, and initiatives like the IONS indicated movement and some headway.

Despite the progress in twenty years, even today, India is not considered equivalent to other important powers. The ASEAN grouping views India as *one* of the nodes and not an exclusive actor in their regional security architecture. While some regional players repose faith in India's potential to eventually become a crucial node in ASEAN's network of partners, their optimism is not shared by all. In keeping with the ASEAN tendency, there is little consensus among members on what security role should New Delhi perform in the region and how. While some countries, for instance, Vietnam, Singapore and Myanmar, remain very supportive of India's security presence, other actors such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia appear less enthusiastic. Even when Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila seem receptive to venturing into security cooperation with New Delhi, they fear that the political impression of such activities may complicate ties with Beijing. Other ASEAN countries, i.e., Thailand and Brunei, are undecided over India's utility in regional security. Laos and Cambodia, which are heavily dependent on China for their economic, political and military well-being, oppose India's security presence in the region.

Succinctly put, the lack of unanimity among ASEAN members and a divided role prescription towards New Delhi results in vague communication (demands or cues) for Indian policymakers.[61] Even when some regional states discuss the need for India to contribute to the ASEAN security architecture, they generally fail to provide specific suggestions on what is expected from New Delhi.[62] Overall, there is an ambiguous security role expectation from India, which makes it challenging for the Indian officials to conceive a medium or long term trajectory. In the absence of clear demands from ASEAN countries, there are limits to what New Delhi can offer the regional littorals. When

there are certain defined role expectations, the ASEAN countries are "more subtle and discreet in voicing their requirements when compared to the bigger nations. Since discussions on this [security] subject are at a fairly nascent stage, they [ASEAN countries] mostly voice their concerns and apprehensions rather than projecting concrete requirements".[63]

The situation is also impacted by China's influence in the region. Beijing enjoys strong leverage in the ASEAN region. It holds sufficient weight in the region and can create divisions within ASEAN and exploit the 'ASEAN Way' to its advantage (R. Mukherjee, 2020). Already, the ASEAN grouping remains incoherent on security issues. On top of that, when some countries push Beijing's agenda (due to their compulsions and dependence on China), the already precarious ASEAN unity is hampered, and the grouping loses its bargaining leverage. This is most common when addressing the case of the SCS dispute vis-à-vis China. Even if ASEAN members were to intently work towards a coherent view of India as a security actor, the pressure from China on regional actors might shape the situation otherwise.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, one cannot overlook India's own structural and domestic weaknesses, which hampers its ability to meet the non-security role expectations from some ASEAN countries. The supportive ASEAN countries have felt at different points in time that New Delhi does not 'do enough' in the region. In the run-up to the formation of the EAS, a diplomat from Singapore expressed that despite being encouraged by some regional actors, New Delhi was "not trying very hard" for its inclusion in the EAS (Wikileaks, 2005c, pt. 3). Regional countries also feel that India can be more effective in engaging the ASEAN organisation and other ASEAN forums to shape regional consensus instead of opting for its preferred bilateral route. The pulse of the region can be gauged from remarks made at a Track II dialogue on security issues in the Asia-Pacific, where India's 'Act East' policy was referred to as "At ease!" adding that "India is not performing" (Prakash, 2018, line. 1). In the words of a SEA ambassador, "there is no substance behind the rhetoric, and little prospect of substance materialising in the foreseeable future" (unnamed SEA ambassador quoted in Blank, Moroney, Rabasa, & Li, 2015, p. 79).

Since there are lesser expectations of India's ability to deliver what it promises, the ASEAN countries remain unwilling to embrace New Delhi more openly, especially not at risk of antagonising China. China is viewed as a much stronger player with significant economic and political leverages in the region and greater military strength as well.[64] The regional dilemma also holds water because ASEAN countries are geographically most exposed to China and its actions. Beijing's discomfort with India's presence in the region, especially in association with the US and Japan, is apparent. Almost all ASEAN countries are wary of involving India (or any other power) in security affairs beyond an acceptable limit. Even pitting India and China against each other does not bode

well for regional stability. For that reason, the regional actors remain uneasy with the major power-generated concept of 'Indo-Pacific' and the 'Quad' arrangement of which India is a part. The ASEAN states fear the possibility of the formalisation or securitisation of the Quad. Such a development, in their view, could reintroduce great power rivalries in the region and dilute 'ASEAN centrality', thus making it difficult for the grouping to effectively perform its traditional RCs as the 'regional conductor' and "primary manager of SEA order".

When crucial powers, including the US, Japan, India, and France, declared their visions of the Indo-Pacific, the ASEAN countries felt compelled to reiterate their relevance and convey their perspectives and outlook related to the region. After more than a year-long Indonesia-led discussion, rife with disagreements and internal divisions, the ASEAN presented a unified outlook of the Indo-Pacific at the 34th ASEAN Summit in June 2019. The organisation attempted not to choose sides or endorse any other countries' vision for the region. The outlook document reiterated 'ASEAN's centrality', the importance of adhering to the TAC and ASEAN-led mechanisms, and the need for ASEAN's "collective leadership" in shaping the "vision for closer cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" (ASEAN, 2019, p. 1). It was clarified that they did *not* view the Indo-Pacific as a "contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role" and instead saw it as a "region of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry" (ASEAN, 2019, p. 2).

Despite releasing the ASEAN vision for the Indo-Pacific, the members have not yet developed a coherent view of the region or internalised it. Because their collective view is still evolving, ASEAN's expectation from India as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific is at a stage of infancy and lacks unanimity. Nonetheless, India's public articulation of upholding ASEAN's primacy in the Indo-Pacific merges with the ASEAN outlook and preference. New Delhi has consistently maintained that "the ASEAN should continue to be in the lead" and direct efforts towards the evolution of an Asian security architecture (MEA, 2013c, para. 8). As reiterated by EAM Jaishankar in September 2019, "the ASEAN region will always remain central to our [India's] vision of Indo Pacific. And, it would suit everyone's interests if ASEAN's unity and centrality is maintained" (MEA, 2019d, para. 33). India prefers the notion of ASEAN centrality and adheres to the consensus-based ASEAN way because if that is effectively implemented, it minimises the possibility of a single power (China or the US) dominating the region. According to Srinath Raghavan, it is pivotal for New Delhi to have a security architecture that is "neither dominated by China nor explicitly aimed at it" (Raghavan, 2013, p. 64). Also, an ASEAN-guided security architecture is likely to preclude the need for New Delhi to choose a particular side or confront China overtly.

Having covered the India-ASEAN relations and New Delhi's growing comfort in dealing with the countries in multilateral settings, the most prominent progress is still seen at the bilateral levels. One such case, i.e., the ties between India and Vietnam, is covered in the sub-section below.

6.4.3 Vietnam and India

6.4.3.1 Understanding Vietnam's Omni-enmeshment Approach

Almost all ASEAN members follow the Omni-enmeshment strategy at the country level by fostering ties with multiple major/great powers. Even as most ASEAN members individually want to diversify their relationship, each country has a specific set of policies. Individual countries' policies are influenced by their geographical location (maritime or mainland SEA), historical experience, national objectives, threat perceptions, and bilateral equations with the two most influential actors in the region—the US and China. The members utilise the ASEAN organisation to push their unilateral interests and, at times, their shared interests with extra-regional partners. It is clear from the previous sub-section that India shares stronger cooperation with a few ASEAN countries as opposed to the grouping as a whole. Among the 10 ASEAN member countries, two countries stand out as the strongest supporters of India's regional security role—Singapore and Vietnam. This part delves into the subject of Hanoi's role prescription towards India.

Vietnam's foreign policy conduct is an apt illustration of Omni-enmeshment at the country level. This section examines how Vietnam implements its Omni-enmeshment strategy, which informs its role expectation from India. Vietnam takes a measured and nuanced role prescription for India. On the one hand, Hanoi encourages New Delhi to take an active regional role while preventing it from going overboard.

The early traces of Vietnam's Omni-enmeshment strategy go back to the fag end of the Cold War. Hanoi's foreign policy was driven by communism, socialist ideology, and its struggle against imperialism throughout the Cold War. When the USSR was experiencing internal transformation driven by '*glasnost*' (openness) and '*perestroika*' (reconstruction), Vietnam was going through an economic crisis and was concerned about a regime collapse (Thu, 2018). This forced Vietnamese leadership to drastically change its economic orientation and foreign policy outlook. In 1986, Hanoi embarked on '*Đổi Mới*' (renovation), which ushered in economic restructuring and market reforms. In 1988, the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) Politburo adopted Resolution No. 13, which along with other things, emphasised the need to have more friends, fewer enemies ('*thêm bạn, bớt thù*') (Thayer, 2017b).

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Vietnam had to recalibrate its worldview and carve up a new regional role. It managed to cope with the changing world order and addressed the strategic uncertainties by overcoming regional and global isolation. In 1991, the Seventh Party Congress adopted a multi-directional foreign policy that aimed to diversify relations with foreign countries and multilateral institutions (Chapman, 2017). Vietnam's diplomatic ties expanded from 23 countries in 1985 to 163 countries by 1995, including normalised ties with the US (Chapman, 2017). Through the diversification of partnerships, Vietnam hoped for more diplomatic support, economic growth and help in capacity building. The VCP was aware that their country's economic development and growth needed a peaceful regional environment, which matched ASEAN's fundamental objectives (Collin, 2013). In 1995, Vietnam became the first Indochinese country to join ASEAN and acceded to the TAC. In the ensuing years, ASEAN enabled Hanoi's integration within the region and with other significant players.

Vietnam's Omni-enmeshment strategy grew prominent in the backdrop of increasing Chinese influence and waning American power in the region. Between these two simultaneous developments, Hanoi was worried about Beijing's possible aggression in the SCS. This was despite their improved bilateral relations in 1991 when Vietnam's President and General-Secretary of the VCP visited Beijing. Hanoi's concerns vis-a-vis China stemmed from their complex and challenging history. They shared a cultural past, and close ideological affinities and fought as comrades during most years of the Cold War. However, their ties dipped after the Sino-Soviet split, and the two fought a major conflict in 1979. They were even involved in major clashes in the SCS in 1974, followed by another skirmish in 1988 at Johnson South Reef. In 1994, China and Vietnam had a naval clash over oil exploration blocks in the SCS. Considering this situation, Vietnam hoped to utilise the "collective diplomatic power of ASEAN" and continually tried to place the SCS dispute on ASEAN's agenda (Shoji, 2011, p. 3). It engaged other members to finalise and implement a Code of Conduct in the SCS, albeit with limited success.

In retrospect, there were spurts of progress in the Vietnam–China relationship. For example, Beijing's willingness to negotiate a Code of Conduct with ASEAN (in 1999) alleviated Vietnam's distress to some degree. The two even ratified the Sino-Vietnamese Boundary Delimitation Agreement in the Gulf of Tonkin in late 2000. Nonetheless, when the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS was finalised, Hanoi was left dissatisfied. The VCP wanted the Declaration to include the China–Vietnam dispute in the Paracel Islands, which Beijing declared as a closed and finalised case (Chalermpalanupap, 2017). Vietnamese naval planners and scholars such as Do Thanh Hai believed that China's long-term aim was to gain "absolute control" of the SCS (Hai, 2017, p. 2).

Despite security threat perceptions from China, Vietnam never identified it as an enemy. Hanoi did not want to confront or overtly challenge Beijing, not least because of their asymmetric military capabilities but also because of China's economic leverages in Vietnam. For the current regime, the fundamental priority was (and is) the stability of the VCP, economic progress and socio-economic development. Since its economic opening, Vietnam gained immensely from its trade ties with China, Chinese loans, and assistance in building factories. These benefits substantially fueled the socio-economic development of Vietnam. The bilateral trade grew from US $32.2 million in 1991 to as high as US $50 billion in 2013 (Tran, 2015). Despite their disagreements, both the countries owe allegiance to the ideology of socialism, with similar political systems and a shared history. Their ideological leanings also instil a sense of ease in their bilateral interactions. Given these congruencies, the VCP wishes to avoid crossing any Chinese red lines (perceived or real) because that could impinge on their country's interests. The financial crises of 1997 (and later in 2008) reminded the VCP of the economic risks that a small country like theirs faces. Given the asymmetry of capabilities between China and Vietnam and the latter's economic dependence on Beijing, any Vietnamese attempt at challenging China could prove detrimental. A major crisis has the potential to derail Vietnam's stable economic trajectory or/and even hamper the stability of the VCP. Therefore, adopting a black-and-white approach towards China may not correspond with VCP's primary goals and Vietnam's interests.

After the Cold War, the world functioned under the US-led liberal international order, and bilateral ties were multifaceted. Hence, Vietnam had a range of options for coping with China. Hanoi integrated with important powers economically and diplomatically and gradually built a web of enmeshed major powers. The strategy of Omni-enmeshment was manifested in the policy of 'diversification and multilateralisation', which became a guiding principle for Vietnam's external orientation from the early 2000s. In 2001, at the Ninth Party Congress, the VCP underscored the need to embark on "proactive integration into international and regional economies in order to maximise the country's strength, autonomy, raise international cooperation and safeguard national interest" (the VCP, as quoted in Chapman, 2017, p. 32). Through this, Vietnam sought to build deterrence against China while championing diplomacy for dispute resolution in the SCS.

Parallel to embracing diversification and multilateralism, Vietnam decoupled its economic, political, and security relations. This gave the policymakers greater flexibility to pursue a multifaceted foreign policy that captured the essence of Omni-enmeshment. In 2003, the VCP introduced new terminologies of '*doi tac*' (object of cooperation) and '*doi tuong*' (object of struggle) (Thayer, 2017b). Previously, the leadership viewed countries as either friends or opponents. Through the Cold War years, China (by dint of its ideology) was considered a friend and the US an opponent. With *doi tac* and *doi tuong*, Hanoi

could cooperate with a country and struggle against it simultaneously. It could now engage China as an economic partner and friend while contesting it or countering it in areas where Vietnam's national security interests were at stake (Thayer, 2017b).

Similarly, Hanoi could cooperate with and struggle against Washington based on specific issues of interest. This cooperation-cum-struggle approach benefitted Vietnam because it facilitated the formation of strategic partnerships without provoking China. Vietnam cultivated many strategic and security partnerships, including with Japan (2006), South Korea (2009), Australia (2009), the UK (2010), and Germany (2011). It finalised comprehensive strategic partnerships with three countries, namely China (2009), Russia (2012) and India (2016). Carlyle A. Thayer believes that strategic partnerships give "each country equity in Vietnam" and prevent Hanoi from "being pulled into a rival's orbit" (Thayer, 2017a, p. 186). By not relying on a single power, the VCP's multi-directional foreign policy allowed Vietnam to retain its strongest principle—strategic autonomy and an independent foreign policy.

The quest for 'strategic autonomy' is connected to Vietnam's experiences as a colony of France and a victim of Cold War geopolitics. It fears being entangled in other countries' conflicts (see Ministry of National Defence Vietnam, 2009). Therefore, Vietnam upholds its 'Three-Nos' defence policy, which remains a guiding principle of its defence policy. The policy strictly forbids Hanoi from forming any military alliance(s), allowing foreign military bases on its territory, or relying on any country to counter a third party (Chapman, 2017). Notably, Vietnam's quest for decisional autonomy matches India's thinking on this subject.

6.4.3.2 Emerging Role Compatibility

India and Vietnam enjoyed historical ties, but their equation reached a fruitful level of engagement only with the turn of the century. During the Cold War, when most SEA and EA countries saw India with suspicion, Vietnam was an exception. New Delhi and Hanoi were united by their shared experience of colonialism and their proximity to the USSR. In the 1990s, India assisted Vietnam in military upgrades and supplied helicopters, fast patrol boats, and spare parts. It also overhauled Russian MiG aircraft in the Vietnam People's Air Force and trained pilots. Because India's military inventory was majorly sourced from the USSR, it was easier to develop defence ties with Vietnam. Still, their ties were rudimentary and not institutionalised. In March 2000, for the first time in the history of India–Vietnam relations, New Delhi sent its Defence Minister, George Fernandes, to Hanoi, and the two parties signed defence agreements. The diplomatic engagement and security cooperation gathered steam. However, it was not before the mid to late-2000s that strong role compatibility emerged. Soon, New Delhi became a salient partner to Vietnam.

The shift from the mid-2000s was related to the developments at the agency and systemic levels. In addition to Vietnam's internal transformation, systemic determinants included China's changing RCs, assertive role performance in the SCS and India's self-projection as a major power.

Vietnam–China relations were complicated throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. The SCS dispute was always an irritant in their bilateral relations. This, however, changed in the mid-2000s, after the dispute transitioned into a major security threat. Tensions erupted in 2004 when China and the Philippines finalised a deal to undertake joint seismic soundings in the disputed maritime region without keeping Hanoi in the loop. The Sino-Vietnam relations deteriorated further from 2007, given China's expanding military strength and assertive conduct in the SCS (Chubb, 2016). This drove the VCP to focus on military modernisation. Despite their political willingness, Vietnam's defence modernisation plans were intermittently challenged by fiscal constraints and competing priorities such as economic and developmental needs. Above all, military build-up and modernisation were considered insufficient to deter China or actively defend Vietnamese interests in the disputed region. In response to this situation, Vietnam did not follow the route predicted by BoP theorists. It did not balance China by aligning with the US despite the rising China-America competition in the Asia-Pacific. Alternatively, it chose to rely on security cooperation with a number of major powers and implemented dexterous military diplomacy best encapsulated in the concept of Omni-enmeshment.

Apart from China's role performance, the other driving factor for India–Vietnam role compatibility was New Delhi's self-conception as a major power and its scaled-up power projection capabilities. Compared to the previous years, India held greater economic potential, and had additional resources and naval power to become more involved in the region. From 2001, Vietnam fostered a multilateral network of five major powers—Russia, India, Japan, China, and the US. This framework was nurtured with the hope that these countries would check each other's dominance while allowing Hanoi sufficient space to manoeuvre and retain its strategic autonomy (Thayer, 2017a).

Hanoi's role expectations from New Delhi converged with India's self-conception as a major power and a relevant actor in the Asia-Pacific security architecture. To reach closer to its master and auxiliary role performance, India needed the support of regional partners such as Vietnam to 'legitimise' its strategic and security involvement. Indian policymakers wanted political and diplomatic support from ASEAN members to expand forays in organisational forums, including the ASEAN-India Summit meetings and the ARF. Hanoi's support for India's membership of the EAS in 2005 was noteworthy. Vietnam was initially unenthusiastic about a China-dominated EAS as it would dilute ASEAN's centrality and impinge on Vietnam's regional interest. To avoid

such a situation, it supported the inclusion of extra-regional actors, India, Australia, and New Zealand (Wikileaks, 2005b).

The Vietnamese leadership was keen to see New Delhi as an 'active player' and expected it to strengthen economic ties, expand its security presence and forge stronger ties with the ASEAN organisation.[65] From Hanoi's standpoint, greater diplomatic coordination between India, Japan, Australia, and the US could pressure China into becoming a more responsible regional actor. Following the same logic, increased Indian security presence (along with other powers) could potentially impede Chinese attempts to attain a de facto control of the waters of the SCS.

India–Vietnam relations received an impetus after China stepped up its claims and showed a willingness to use force in the SCS. In 2007, New Delhi and Hanoi finalised a Strategic Partnership, which rested on five pillars—diplomatic-political cooperation, defence-security cooperation, economic cooperation, science-technology cooperation, and education-culture cooperation. From these pillars, defence-security cooperation gained prominence in the following years. Cooperation was institutionalised and regularised through annual strategic dialogues at the vice-ministerial level, annual security dialogue at the defence secretary level, regular port calls, high-level defence exchanges, capacity building, defence supplies, training programmes, and information exchange on the security of the SLOCs. They held their first strategic dialogue in 2009 and inked an MoU on defence cooperation. There was an uptick in maritime interactions (at bilateral and multilateral levels) and Indian assistance to Vietnam in maritime capacity building. The frequency of the INS visits to important ports of Vietnam soared and enabled the IN to get better acquainted with the waters of the SCS and expand its presence in the farther seas. In 2011, India provided the Vietnamese Navy with 150 tonnes of warship components along with accessories worth US $10 million (Jha, 2011).

India's active interest in the region was apparent in its official statements from 2010 when the Indian Defence Minister, during the first ADMM Plus in Hanoi, stressed Indian commitment to the security of the SLOCs in the Asia-Pacific (Vinh, 2013). This was one of the earliest Indian articulations on the issue. After Chinese ships warned INS *Airavat* over the radio to leave the 'Chinese' waters in July 2011, New Delhi's support for freedom of navigation and security of the SLOCs became a consistent theme in its official statements. In another related trend that began in 2011, the Indian government replaced 'SCS' with 'East Sea' ('*Biển Đông*') in bilateral documents with Vietnam. The 'East Sea' is a term used by the Vietnamese government to denote the same region.

There was a push for joint oil and gas exploration activities in the SCS. India–Vietnam energy cooperation in the SCS dates to the 1980s. However, their energy cooperation came under a brighter spotlight after Beijing became more forceful in its objections to unilateral or joint exploration (except when it involved China) in the SCS. In 2011, Hanoi and New Delhi signed an agree-

ment to promote oil exploration. This agreement was built upon Vietnam's 2006 decision to grant two blocks to the Indian company OVL in the SCS. Following the 2011 agreement, China protested the India–Vietnam joint exploration activities, and a newspaper close to the CCP termed it 'illegal' and a violation of 'China's sovereignty' (Reuters, 2011). Regardless of the Chinese reaction, the joint exploration activities continued. It is notable that China was more vehement in opposing Vietnam's joint exploration initiatives when compared to other regional countries (the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia) that indulged in similar acts (Wikileaks, 2007b).

It is crucial to recognise that even though commercial considerations and energy interests drive the India–Vietnam energy cooperation, the collaboration legitimises Vietnam's position in its claimed waters and symbolises an Indian endorsement of Hanoi's claims. New Delhi's participation in energy exploration in the SCS also creates new economic and maritime imperatives that may determine the trajectory of its future maritime role performance in the region. This was discernible in a statement by CNS Admiral Joshi in 2012. Commenting on Indian assets in the SCS, the CNS said—

> "When the requirement is there, for example, in situations where our country's interests are involved, for example, ONGC Videsh, etc., we will be required to go there, and we are prepared for that … Now, are we preparing for it? Are we having exercises of that nature? The short answer is yes" (CNS as quoted in Unnithan, 2012).

This statement echoed the sentiment of the updated 2009 Indian Maritime Doctrine, which affirms that the primary area of interest of the IN includes the protection of "vital energy and resource interests" (MoD Navy, 2009, p. 68). This implies that although India may not be a claimant in the SCS, its energy and economic stakes in the region may possibly shape its auxiliary (maritime) RCs in the future.

India–Vietnam security cooperation received a further boost under the AEP. China's growing military clout in the Indo-Pacific motivated New Delhi to step up its role in the region. Likewise, the oil rig crisis of 2014 between China and Vietnam was a watershed moment that convinced Hanoi to beef up its maritime capabilities and augment security cooperation with crucial actors. The oil rig crisis began in May 2014 when the Chinese state-owned company moved its oil platform (named Haiyang Shiyou 981) into Vietnam-claimed waters in the Paracel Islands. Hanoi resisted this move to prevent China from "establishing a fixed position" (Brummit, 2014, para. 9). The crisis marked a new low in the China–Vietnam ties with accusations and counter-accusations over the issue of ramming each other's ships. Although Vietnam received immense support from some ASEAN countries and the US, the incident drove home the risks of challenging China. It also sparked what can be categorised as an oppositional counter-role, wherein Hanoi concentrated on strengthening security cooperation with the network of powers, including India.

With reciprocal interests, stronger role compatibility surfaced. Vietnam's role prescription towards India crystallised, and so did India's willingness to deliver. Hanoi counted on New Delhi's assistance to bolster the People's Army of Vietnam's (PAVN) naval and aerial capabilities by overhauling defence platforms, undertaking arms transfer, building ISR capabilities, and training pilots and submariners. The role expectations from India as a capacity builder were met with sufficient response. The pace and scope of high-level interactions increased as both sides made mutual efforts to strengthen security ties.

When Indian President Pranab Mukherjee visited Vietnam in 2014, he signed agreements including defence and energy cooperation. In May 2015, defence ministers from both sides signed a Joint Vision Statement on Defence Cooperation for 2015–20 alongside an MoU that aimed at greater cooperation between their Coast Guards (National Defence Journal, 2015). In a rare move towards a non-IOR country, New Delhi offered an LoC worth US $100 million to Vietnam to buy offshore patrol vessels. There was steady interest in New Delhi towards meeting Vietnam's expectations in the area of capacity-building.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Vietnam in 2016 boosted ties. During the trip, the first by an Indian PM in 15 years, bilateral relations were elevated from Strategic Partnership to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. India became the third country after China and Russia to share this level of partnership with Hanoi. Many deals were finalised in 2016, including agreements on White shipping information, construction of high-speed patrol vessels by an Indian company, and space cooperation. New Delhi offered an additional credit line worth US $500 million to Vietnam to buy defence equipment (Minh, 2016).

That India continued to provide Hanoi with credit lines for defence procurement reiterated the bilateral bonhomie. New Delhi sought to fulfil its role as a capacity builder for receptive regional powers through a credit line. India saw value in buttressing the PAVN to defend its strategic position and maritime claims better and favourably shape the regional dynamics in SEA and SCS. A strong PAVN may undercut China's dominance to some degree and create prospects of unhindered freedom of navigation. Even Vietnam was looking to diversify its predominant arms suppliers. India was one of the potential arms exporters apart from other credible suppliers such as Israel, Canada, and France. Indian assistance in training Vietnamese personnel on various Russian platforms provided an impetus to Hanoi's decision to seriously consider India as an arms supplier.

To have a better understanding, it is germane to expand on the issue of arms exports from an Indian point of view. As New Delhi embraced more ambitious RCs, it became increasingly apparent that a lethargic military-industrial complex with a track record of being one of the largest arms importers blighted India's regional credibility and impeded its performance as a security actor.

The former Indian Defence Minister Arun Jaitley accepted, “India has third-largest armed forces in the world. We are also one of the largest importers of defence equipment in the world. This definitely is not a label we are happy with” (IANS, 2017). The Indian leadership and decision-makers wanted to push domestic defence reforms and venture into arms exports. For India, Vietnam offered a potential market for its military exports. Planners in New Delhi felt that arms transfer to Vietnam (and other receptive countries) might boost India’s largely stagnant military-industrial complex. The Vietnam military’s Soviet/Russian-supplied inventory made it an ideal recipient for spare parts and weapon systems because of technical compatibility and ease of operations. There was potential for greater India–Vietnam cooperation in this area, given their shared interest in arms transfer.

India emerged as a capacity builder to Vietnam in space technology as well. Through space cooperation, India aimed to plug the gaps in Vietnam’s ISR capabilities. In 2016, New Delhi and Hanoi agreed to establish ISRO’s Data Reception and Tracking and Telemetry Station at Ho Chi Minh City. Upon completion, the tracking station is scheduled to be connected to the already present Indian satellite tracking station at Biak in Indonesia and perhaps even in Brunei (Rao, 2016). The network of stations in SEA offered regional states the ability to track events in the SCS continuously. Although the project remains categorised for civilian purposes, the generated imagery can also be utilised for security purposes.

Apart from arms transfer and space cooperation, there were attempts to harmonise India’s and Vietnam’s maritime outlooks. Some examples include the participation of the PAVN Navy in India’s International Fleet Review of 2016. Hanoi also hosted the third Indian Ocean Conference in 2018, confirming its relevance to the IO. Significantly, there was coordination between New Delhi and Hanoi on their understanding of the ‘Indo-Pacific’. During the Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang’s visit to India in late 2018, the joint statement noted their mutual interest to “cooperate in maintaining peace, stability and development in the Indo-Pacific region” (MEA, 2018a, pt. 27). Grossman (2018a) points out that this was perhaps the first time a Vietnamese leader used the term Indo-Pacific.

New Delhi got more involved in the ASEAN region through its association with regional actors such as Vietnam. Policymakers in India became comfortable with their evolved auxiliary RC, i.e., a stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific (details in Chapter 4). Hanoi welcomed this role. In the words of a senior Vietnamese diplomat, “India has not only the vision and willingness but also the resources, economic ability, and naval power to play the role of an active player in Indo-Pacific”.[66] It is noteworthy that this RC was distinctly stated for the first time during the Indian President’s address to Vietnam. In his address to the National Assembly of Vietnam in late 2018, President Kovind noted that India (along with Vietnam) was a “stakeholder in

the commerce, security and stability of the Indo-Pacific Region" (MEA, 2018d, pt. 5). He reaffirmed their shared vision for 'Indo-Pacific' and underscored the need for a "rules-based order that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity, [and] ensures freedom of navigation and over-flight" (PTI, 2018c, para. 4). Kovind expressed an understanding of Vietnam's sensitivities by clarifying that New Delhi does not require Vietnam to "make choices but rather expand choices and expand opportunities for all" (PTI, 2018c, para. 6). This could be seen as India's support for the VCP's practice of Omni-enmeshment.

India and Vietnam beefed up the working relationship between their defence forces through regular military exercises. 2018 was an eventful year in this regard. For the first time, in January, their armies participated in a bilateral exercise, VINBAX, followed by the first bilateral naval exercise in May, which was held off Da Nang in Vietnam. In 2018, another maiden bilateral exercise was held between their Coast Guards in the Bay of Bengal in India. The trend continued with the second edition of the bilateral naval exercise in 2019, held in Cam Rahn Bay. India–Vietnam naval cooperation also included a Composite Training Programme in Submarine, Aviation, and Dockyard training. These initiatives enhanced interoperability between the armed forces and signalled a mutual interest in regional security. Vietnam utilised the India-offered defence credit line LoC for the 'High Speed Guard Boat (HSGB)' manufacturing project. In December 2020, the Vietnam Border Guard Command received the first of the 12 high-speed boat orders from India.

Overall, despite stronger role compatibility from the mid-2000s, there is an embedded limit in Hanoi's role prescription towards India. While Vietnam encourages India to perform a larger and more active security role in the region, it also limits the role performance to a level that does not provoke China or/and escalate tensions in the SCS. The dichotomy of opportunities and anxiety that results from China's rise is an enigma that continues to challenge the VCP. Collin (2013) opines that Hanoi is likely to support a regular Indian military presence in the region but will be averse to any permanent Indian deployment in the sensitive area.

Vietnam's measured role prescription has not been a challenge for India–Vietnam relations because even the Indian government is wary of going overboard in the SCS, thereby inviting China's ire. India sees little value in overtly challenging China in its backyard, given their multifaceted and complex equation. India's current objective in the SCS is to ensure the sustenance of freedom of navigation with no desire to establish a permanent military presence there. Indian policymakers wish to leverage intermittent Indian military presence in the SCS to deter China from assuming an assertive avatar in the IO or gaining de factor control of the SCS. So far, China has not threatened India in the IO but signals the potential to do so. Until such a situation crops up, India will be coy about involving its military too much in the SCS lest it should anger Bei-

jing or entangle New Delhi in an unwanted conflict. Earmarking resources in the SCS for any near-permanent or sustained maritime presence will thin out the IN's presence in the IO, where its primary maritime interests lie.

6.4.3.3 Limitations to Security Cooperation

The preceding section showcases the trajectory of growing compatibility between Hanoi's role prescription towards India (driven by the omni-enmeshment logic) and New Delhi's self-conception. However, as noted in other case studies, role compatibility does not automatically translate into seamless cooperation. There are limitations in exploiting congruencies and implementing them on the ground. In the case of India–Vietnam ties, there are reasonable limitations at the strategic and operational levels that can limit India's role performance as a stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific.

First and foremost, Vietnam regards India as one of the important states in the network of five major powers and not an exclusive country of choice. Instead, if push comes to shove and Vietnam is compelled to ever 'balance' or contain China, India is unlikely to be the first choice. In such a circumstance, Vietnam is more likely to rely on other powers such as the US or Japan. Vietnam (and other ASEAN countries) rightly feels that India is preoccupied with issues in the subcontinent, the IO, and its engagement with major powers. This leaves limited diplomatic energies and military resources to be directed in a sustained manner towards security issues related to the ASEAN region and the SCS.

Furthermore, some challenges in converting their role compatibility into policy actions are connected to India's domestic weaknesses. One cannot overlook India's inability to deliver commitments timely. There were instances of delays due to a sluggish bureaucracy and limited capacity to sell sophisticated weapon systems. Indian arms transfer to Vietnam is an apt example in this regard. Hanoi has received India-supplied spare parts, air and naval upgrades, and other platforms such as patrol vessels. Having noted that, there are limits to what India can offer Vietnam. For instance, Vietnam has requested India to sell Prithvi, a surface-to-surface missile, and BrahMos, an Indo-Russian co-produced supersonic missile. In the case of co-produced systems such as the BrahMos with Russia, New Delhi also relies on a third party for permissions or some supplies (S. Singh, 2017). While the case of BrahMos may be deemed complex, the case of Prithvi is comparatively uncomplicated. India agreed 'in principle' for the sales of Prithvi as early as 2003 and the sale of BrahMos in 2011, but there are no official updates on any of the deals so far. India's uncompetitive civil-military industrial complex is limited in its ability to produce completely indigenous advanced defence equipment and sell it abroad. In cases where India is building sophisticated systems (T-90 tank, Su-30 aircraft), the Intellectual Property Rights rest with foreign firms, making it difficult for New

Delhi to export easily (S. Singh, 2017). These challenges limit the cooperation at the level of arms transfer, which is a crucial part of India–Vietnam security cooperation.

6.5 Summary and Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter aimed to explain the complex interplay between role prescriptions of the external actors and India's self-conceptions. It sheds light on how external actors, through role prescription and role performance, shape India's RCs. For this purpose, four case studies were selected, i.e., China, the US, Japan, and the ASEAN region (focus on Vietnam). Through these cases, the chapter elucidated the concepts of role compatibility and intra-role conflict and showcased them in the context of India's interactions with other regional actors. The chapter ascertains that in both situations, i.e., in the case of role compatibility or intra-role conflict, the impact of the convergence–divergence dynamics is pertinent. This is because, despite role compatibility, the convergence–divergence dynamics result in inter-role conflict and challenges. This combination leads to a conception–performance gap.

Each of the four case studies provides intriguing perspectives into India's interactions with relevant external actors. To summarise, India–China relations have traditionally seen intra-role conflict on a range of issues, especially security. The Chinese leadership does not accept India as an equal in Asia and generally prescribes a limited subcontinental role to New Delhi. In the 2000s, their bilateral ties got complicated after India and China simultaneously experienced the evolution of their self-conceptions. With Beijing's active role performance visible in the IO from the mid to late 2000s, New Delhi responded with an oppositional counter-role. This was denoted by increased Indian interest in SEA and EA and the willingness to assume a more vocal stand on the SCS issue. In 2012, when China assumed more ambitious self-conceptions and aligned its performance to the aspirational roles, India stepped up its role performance to match its stipulated RCs and even adopted more evolved RCs. With simultaneously advancing role performances, New Delhi and Beijing have, in recent years, begun stepping into each other's traditional areas of interest and operations.

The cases of the US and Japan provide equally stimulating insights, especially because both countries did not have fruitful ties with India until the 2000s. Washington's and Tokyo's role prescriptions towards New Delhi crystallised with New Delhi's economic emergence and adoption of ambitious master and auxiliary self-conceptions. Its major power role aspirations were complemented by similar role expectations from the US and its ally Japan. This

resulted in role compatibility. Support from external actors facilitated the transformation of the self-conceptions into stable RCs.

As noted in the chapter, the US and Japan's role expectations from India are linked to their own interests and RCs. While Washington's RCs within the Asia-Pacific remained unchanged, its ability to perform the traditional roles diminished over time. China's rise and expanded role performance warranted the US to look for viable partners that could share its security responsibilities in the region. Given India's emergence and new self-conceptions, Washington prescribed New Delhi the master role of a 'major world power' and an active security role in the region. In spite of their role compatibility, there are divergences in relation to their evolving visions of the Indo-Pacific and conceptual understanding of freedom of navigation. Indian policymakers also suffer from inter-role conflicts: 'cooperation vs competition with China', 'strategic autonomy (part of non-alignment) vs security/defence partnership with US'. These factors tend to inhibit India's security cooperation with the US and its own role performance as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's role expectations from New Delhi emanate from Tokyo's changing RCs. In the face of altering domestic and international circumstances, Tokyo's conceptions have transitioned from a 'peace state' to an 'international state'. While its role performance expanded in the last two decades, there were limits to Japan's policy actions owing to the constitutional restrictions. Compelled by China's role performance and its changing RCs, Japan endorsed a more significant role for New Delhi in the Indo-Pacific region. Even as their role compatibility led to heightened security cooperation, areas of difference remain. Like India–US relations, conceptual differences with Japan and New Delhi's inter-role conflicts have affected New Delhi's ability to perform as an active stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific security order.

The final case study looked at the ASEAN region. It demonstrated that the ASEAN grouping lacks a unanimous security role expectation from India. The regional countries have pursued an Omni-enmeshment strategy since the 1990s. Their primary focus was on major/great powers such as China, Japan, and the US. India was deemed irrelevant until its economic emergence in the early 2000s. Despite the enthusiasm of some members to involve India more actively in the regional security architecture, there is limited consensus among the members. The absence of a uniform role prescription tends to limit New Delhi's security involvement in the region.

Following the overview of India's equation with the ASEAN grouping, the final section examined the trajectory of the India–Vietnam role compatibility. Hanoi's role expectations from New Delhi remain connected to the logic of Omni-enmeshment manifested in its multi-directional foreign policy. While Vietnam embarked on this policy in the early 1990s, it received a fillip after China's conduct in the SCS grew assertive in 2007. Another ominous development in Vietnam–China ties was the 2012 oil rig crisis. From thereon, Vi-

etnam concentrated on expanding its defence capabilities, accelerating its diplomatic outreach and enhancing security cooperation with crucial major powers. For Vietnam, India emerged as one of the nodes in the web due to its economic emergence and growing military potential. Vietnam sought to enmesh India more deeply in the region and make it one of the many stakeholders in regional security. Hanoi expects New Delhi to be a capacity builder and increase its engagement with the region. While the VCP encourages India to be an active security player in the region, it does not wish to antagonise China at the same time. Its role expectation from India is connected to the idea of deterring China but not challenging it blatantly. The limits of India–Vietnam security cooperation is also attributed to India's domestic weaknesses when it comes to arms transfer.

The chapter captured the various shades of India's interactions with other actors in the system. It showcased the influence of role prescriptions on India's RCs and examined the complexities that emerge from the interplay between self-conception and role expectations. Some key takeaways from this chapter are covered in Chapter 7.

7. Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, but most prominently in the last two decades, India's involvement in regional affairs has increased economically, politically, and security-wise. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than in the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific region is experiencing several simultaneously-occurring developments—the rise of China and India, the resurgence of Japan, the diminishing power of the US, China's assertive conduct, and the evolving partnerships between India, the US, Japan, and Australia. With the emergence of a clear-cut shift in the regional dynamics, it would not be wrong to state that the region is a microcosm of the changing world order. The changes underway are bound to determine the course of regional and global dynamics for many decades to come.

One of the most prominent phenomena in the Indo-Pacific has been India's growing security cooperation with the SEA and EA regions. Its military potential has swelled in the last 20 years, and its security-related interactions have expanded exponentially. Despite these developments, from within the two Asian emerging powers, most of the literature focuses on China. In comparison, India has received relatively limited attention. Before the implications of the regional developments are felt at the global level, it is worth studying the contemporary trends and focusing on relatively understudied actors such as India. From the economically-motivated LEP of the early 1990s, New Delhi has come a long way. India's stakes in the region have increased, and so has its ability to shape the regional order. New Delhi's rising security interest in SEA and EA is manifested in its active engagement with the regional states. Given India's relevance in the security affairs of the Indo-Pacific, there is an urgent need to understand the determinants of its foreign policy.

Despite some attempts to produce an informed study on India's regional security conduct, the subject has not been appropriately addressed in contemporary scholarship. Most of the literature explains Indian actions through the BoP theory and provides a purely systemic explanation. Such an explanation glosses over the intricacies of Indian policy, which results from a complex mix of endogenous and exogenous factors. As demonstrated in the book, Indian foreign and security policy conduct is also affected by persistent dilemmas in the face of finite resources and contestation between domestic institutions. All in all, relying solely on the unit of relative power or structural theories to explain changes in foreign policy produces a facile characterisation that paints a misleading picture (see Groten, 2019). Likewise, the variable of identity, which is the second most favoured theoretical approach in mainstream research, also results in an insufficient explanation of the issue at hand.

Unlike the current zeitgeist, this work has used the unique conceptual framework of role theory. Role theory captures the strength of the existing literature while plugging their gaps and delving into the understudied aspects. The book provides a thorough investigation of Indian policy conduct in the Indo-Pacific. It was guided by the following fundamental question: '*What explains the expansion of India's security cooperation with the SEA and EA regions over the last two decades?'* As presented in the book, the expansion of India's security cooperation is explained by the change in RCs. The central focus was to understand the role evolution over the last two decades and correlate it with its foreign policy actions. The work also explores the domestic and external factors, and the ideational and material determinants which facilitated the evolution. At the same time, it covers factors that constrain the transition from the conceptual plane to the policy implementation level.

7.1 Contributions

This section briefly presents the theoretical and empirical contributions of the book. One of the primary theoretical contributions is the development of the conceptual framework of role theory. It provides a guide to understanding the determinants of foreign policy and the transition from conceptualisation to policy implementation. Despite the resurgence of role theory, there was no well-established conceptual framework making it challenging for scholars to use the theory. By applying the conceptual framework to examine India's external behaviour, the book provides methodological and analytical guidelines to explain other cases. In doing so, the work demonstrates how theories can be utilised to explain empirical phenomena and contribute to the development of the theory.

Second, this work enriches the discipline of role theory by advancing concepts that have been touched upon in present literature but rarely explained in detail or developed further. Some of those neglected concepts, which have been elucidated in the book, include the conception–performance gap, role compatibility, the convergence–divergence dynamics, and the oppositional and corresponding counter-roles. Chapter 6 enhances one's understanding of how the convergence–divergence dynamic operates in situations of role compatibility and intra-role conflict. Further, the concepts of master and auxiliary RCs have been dealt with in detail. These distinctions are also applied to the context of self-conceptions. The study also improves one's understanding of the link between role conflict (both inter- and intra-) and the conception–performance gap. By building on these concepts, the book contributes to the advancement of role theory.

Third, the book highlights the potential of role theory to act as a viable middle ground between the IR and the FPA by including material and idea-

tional determinants of foreign policies and bridging multiple levels of analysis. Fourth, the work implicitly underlines the merit of drawing from other disciplines and using their concepts and propositions to enrich the debate on the causes of external behaviour. The foreign-policy role theory has its origins in the fields of sociology and social psychology, which provides an innovative perspective on real-world developments. The book makes significant contributions to the burgeoning literature that utilises non-traditional explanatory variables or resorts to theoretical eclecticism to examine the determinants of foreign policies.

The empirical contributions can be summed up in three broad points. First, the work fills a substantial gap in the current literature on Indian external behaviour, particularly towards the SEA and EA regions. The construct of the Indo-Pacific is very recent, and the regional dynamics are still evolving. As a result, there is scant scholarship on the subject and a limited understanding of the intricacies of India's Indo-Pacific policy. The specific issue of security cooperation with SEA and EA remains equally underexplored. The focus on the Indo-Pacific region in general and on SEA and EA makes this work not only timely but also relevant and significant. Overall, it contributes meaningfully to the literature on the Indo-Pacific and India's foreign and security policies.

Second, this is one of the few works that offers a multi-faceted analysis of India's foreign policy. It provides a much-needed explanation of the internal and external drivers of security behaviour and its impediments. In a similar vein, the inside-out view produced through a comprehensive analysis of official speeches (from 2001 to 2021) makes this one of the few works that provide a non-western perspective (see Appendix B). This adds fresh perspectives to the ongoing debate on India's emergence as a regional security actor. The insights generated from the analysis have value for scholars and practitioners alike.

Third, the book offers a sound understanding of factors that determine the trajectory of India's external policy actions and decision-making towards the Indo-Pacific region. The all-encompassing details with which the subject has been examined in the book remain unprecedented. Finally, the author offers several policy-relevant recommendations for actors relevant to the Indo-Pacific security dynamics, affirming the policy relevance of this work.

7.2 Changing Role Conceptions

Role theory begins with the recognition that a country's foreign and security policy conduct is correlated to its RCs. To reiterate, RCs are an "actor's perception of … [their] position vis-à-vis others and the […] role expectations of others" (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011, p. 8). It results from the interplay

between the actor's self-conception and the Alter's role prescription. RCs are rarely constant and are subject to alterations—incremental or sudden— that emanate from internal and external dimensions. Changes in self-conception and role prescription may spur a change in an actor's RC and, in turn, affect its foreign policy conduct (role performance). States do not have a single RC that drives all their policies. Instead, they hold dominant ones (master RCs) and supplementary ones (auxiliary RCs). The mix of these RCs is reflected in policy actions, as seen in India's case.

Chapters 3 and 4 show that India's RCs have changed since its independence in 1947. During some phases, New Delhi assumed expanded RCs with an enlarged geographical and policy scope. In other periods, it performed relatively limited roles concentrated on specific geographical areas and had a restricted policy focus. Also, roles initially emerged as self-conceptions but transformed into substantive RCs after India gained sufficient external support.

New Delhi, under Nehru, began as a non-aligned Asian power that was keen to play the role of a regional peacemaker. These RCs influenced India's conduct towards SEA and EA at the time (see Chapter 3 for details). During the Korean crisis, New Delhi attempted to be a peacemaker between China and the West. It effectively performed as a non-aligned actor when appointed as the custodian of non-repatriated Prisoners of War (POW) in Korea. Similarly, during the Indochina War, India gathered the support of other Asian countries and urged the western countries at the Geneva conference to be sensitive to Asian perspectives. Finally, to acknowledge India's credentials as a non-aligned actor, it was appointed the chair of the International Control Commission (ICC).

Notably, none of these RCs remained constant and were subject to expansion and contraction due to domestic and external developments in the coming decades. For instance, by the mid-1950s, there was a period of conception–performance gap when India could not effectively perform its original RCs due to the regional divisions amid the Cold War and the rise of new alliances (see Chapter 3). By the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the master and auxiliary RCs experienced a period of flux that was further complicated by India's military defeat at the hands of China in 1962.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, under the regimes of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, India adopted a relatively limited RC of a subcontinental power (refer to Chapter 3). Situated amid a heightened Cold War, India guarded its regional security interests and transformed into a security-seeker and a partner of the USSR. This brought its former peacemaker role to the back-burner. The new RCs were starkly apparent in Indian foreign policy choices and its rise as a security power. Naturally, its policies towards SEA and EA also contrasted with its conduct during the Nehru years. India's security-seeking tendencies brought it closer to the USSR, hoping to contest the combined influence of China and the US. The newfound proximity to the So-

viet Union influenced New Delhi's policy towards North and South Vietnam. Instead of being neutral (as previously), New Delhi supported the Soviet-backed Hanoi (North Vietnam) and upgraded its relations to the ambassador level. This decision blighted India's image among the SEA and EA powers and made it challenging for New Delhi to engage the region.

At the fag end of the 1980s, New Delhi's ability to project power and sustain its security RCs was stifled by domestic financial challenges and political instability. The situation was further impacted by changes at the systemic level, i.e., the disintegration of the USSR, which stripped India of its reliable partner. The blend of internal and external factors forced the leadership to open the economy and introduce massive structural economic reforms. The country needed greater economic partnerships to ensure its economic development. Therefore, in the early 1990s, India relinquished its security-seeking role and its role as a subcontinental power and a staunch Soviet partner. These were replaced with new RCs of an emerging economic actor, benign and cooperative power. Once again, the changes in Indian RCs informed its policies towards SEA and EA. The LEP was driven by New Delhi's new economic-oriented RCs. It also initiated cooperative security interactions with the ASEAN countries to project a benign image.

The next period of role change came in the late 1990s after India tested its nuclear tests in 1998 and was compelled to refocus on security issues due to the Kargil conflict of 1999. The coming years were a transition period and changed India's perception of its role in the region and the world. With a revision in self-conception(s) in the early 2000s, New Delhi began to view itself as a major power (see Chapter 4). In the following years, the major power role strengthened with India's economic emergence (covered in Chapter 5) and greater recognition from the regional and global actors (refer to Chapter 6). This master role was also supplemented by incrementally evolving auxiliary RCs.

The analysis displayed the value of studying the trajectories of auxiliary RCs because that offers an informed perspective of a country's policy actions. Within the umbrella of the master RC of a major power, India experienced the rise of new complementary RCs that matured over two decades. This makes one infer that the auxiliary RCs, in normal circumstances, do not change suddenly but evolve over a stretched period. For instance, the RCs of net security provider and Indo-Pacific stakeholder did not appear out of the blue. They were a natural progression of a series of auxiliary self-conceptions and role performances over two decades.

India's master RC (major power) and auxiliary RCs (net security provider and stakeholder in regional security of the Asia-Pacific) shaped its role performance. The trajectory of the LEP II drew extensively from the evolving auxiliary RCs. The LEP II was relatively heavy on its security focus and featured an expanded geographical scope. There was greater Indian cooperation with

regional countries on security issues through joint exercises, anti-piracy drills, and high-level political and defence exchanges (Chapter 4). From the mid-2000s, India projected itself as a relevant security actor and expressed its interest in having a stake in the regional security architecture. With greater encouragement from crucial actors (read, the US and its allies), it inched towards a more active association with the region. From late 2010 and early 2011, official statements included the issue of the SCS dispute. By 2012, the Indian PM, Manmohan Singh, had begun embracing the usage of the term, Indo-Pacific.

Following a period of conception–performance gap, India experienced another phase of role evolution from 2014–15 when the leadership introduced another master RC (leading power) to the existing set of roles. The auxiliary RCs continued to go through metamorphosis. The new leading power role is similar to the major power role but more multi-layered and better reflects India's multi-alignment foreign policy. Another trend is that the two simultaneously evolving auxiliary RCs have become more integrated than before. The net security-provider role was initially limited to the IO. However, in the last few years, as the concept of Indo-Pacific gained currency, the RC expanded. India has actively and persistently projected itself as an Indo-Pacific player with stakes in the stability and security of the region. All these developments manifested in the institutional and policy changes under the rechristened version of the LEP, i.e., the AEP (see Chapter 4 for details).

7.3 Drivers of Changing Role Conceptions

That RCs tend to evolve is a fundamental assumption of role theory. There is an ongoing discussion on what precisely causes these alterations. Addressing this question using the Indian context, the book examined various factors that have spurred changes in master and auxiliary RCs over the last two decades. Chapters 5 and 6 present the relevance of self-conception and alter expectations in detail. The combined influence of these two variables ascertained a change in India's RCs. It is essential to understand that self-conception and alter expectations were not stand-alone units but resulted from a range of factors. While self-conception reflects the actor's domestic dimension and internal desires, role prescriptions are the external expectations. As reflected in the book, not all factors influence the policymakers equally. However, a cumulative effect of multiple factors produced a change in the thinking of Indian policymakers. Some of the relevant factors were endogenous, while others were exogenous.

7.3.1 Internal Factors

Developments in the domestic dimension shape an actor's self-conception (refer to Chapter 5). Within the set of relevant domestic factors, some have been constant throughout India's contemporary history, while others are more recent. The constant factors responsible for India's recent master and auxiliary self-conceptions include geographical location and civilisational history. If the Indian Peninsula had not been strategically placed in the IO, New Delhi might not have envisioned the regional role it holds today. Similarly, the 5000-year-old civilisational history informs India's sense of 'greatness' and its desire for a major/great power role. It affects the policymakers' view of their country in comparison to the other countries.

Apart from these, some factors emerged with the turn of this century. India's economic emergence and the rise of the IN led to the incremental evolution of security RCs. Beginning in the early 2000s, the economy enjoyed sustained growth and became one of the fastest-growing economies. This changed how India perceived its position vis-à-vis others in the system. New Delhi became more confident and wanted to be recognised as a major power.

Interestingly, the economic emergence produced new security imperatives for Indian planners. High economic performance expanded Indian interactions with the world economy, with growing dependence on seaborne trade and increasing demand for energy imports. Hence, policymakers became more sensitive to the issue of navigational freedom. They realised the importance of protecting crucial SLOCs. As a result, the maritime dimension gained greater currency.

After decades of neglect, there was greater recognition of the IN in India's security outlook. With additional resources at hand due to economic growth, the government invested in the naval force. Not only did India's annual defence spending rise, but so did the share of the IN in it. Needless to state, domestic energy requirements and the quest for energy security influenced its relevant self-conceptions and security outlook. The naval leadership quickly responded to the changing dynamics and pushed for greater responsibilities such as the HADR operations and the SAR missions. The naval leadership projected the IN as a viable instrument of foreign policy to the civilian leadership. They utilised the available opportunities and helped shape Indian leadership's self-conceptions in the maritime space. Without the effectiveness of the IN, it would have been tougher to inch closer to a net security-provider role performance. Over the years, the coordination between the IN and other government arms improved compared to the preceding decades. Through the release of naval doctrines and strategy, the naval leadership provided insights into the force's maritime priorities and challenges.

Chapter 5 attests that sustained economic growth and the salience of the IN as a foreign policy instrument shaped India's self-conception. It indicates

that when an actor's domestic capabilities (economic or military) expand sufficiently to perform greater regional or global roles, it expands the country's self-conception. However, most importantly, these changes must be accompanied by a conducive background. Because India already desired to play a major regional and global role, the increase in its domestic abilities led to an altered self-conception. Had this aspect been missing, or if India was not in its current geographical location, its propensity to have ambitious self-conceptions in the Indo-Pacific may have been unlikely.

7.3.2 External Factors

In addition to the internal factors, this book has advanced arguments on the interplay between self-conception and role prescriptions, which results in a well-established RC. With greater support from external actors and corresponding role prescriptions, it becomes easier for countries to perform their self-conceptions. There are three prominent takeaways on the influence of external powers on India's RCs (refer to Chapter 6).

First, each external actor has a varying degree of influence. Some actors (such as China and the US) are more successful than others when influencing the Indian policymakers. States like Japan, followed by the ASEAN countries such as Vietnam, have a relatively lower degree of impact. Based on this understanding, it can be deduced that the influence of external actors is determined by their position in the global hierarchy.

Second, and related to the first point, each actor impacts the Indian policymakers differently. For example, Beijing's role performance in the IOR and towards India led the leadership to revise its self-conceptions and embrace more ambitious roles after 2007–08, and again in the post-2012 years. That the countries are engaged in an intra-role conflict only makes India's oppositional counter-role to China more likely. By contrast, the US shaped India's RCs through active role prescription and supportive role performance towards New Delhi. When discussing the ways of influence, the case of Japan is intriguing. Tokyo's role prescriptions towards India resembled Washington's role prescriptions. Notably, Japan's influence on India in the mid-2000s was more a function of its coordination with the US than a unilateral role prescription. It would have been difficult for Japan to single-handedly prescribe a role to India and expect a corresponding response at that time. Japan's impact remained relatively lesser than the US but was made more effective due to its active collaboration with the US. Having noted that, Tokyo deserves attention for introducing the ideas of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad arrangement. Japan provided India with an enabling environment to perform its RCs. In the following decade, when their bilateral relations strengthened significantly, Japan developed a greater ability to influence India's RCs and thereby the role performance.

Likewise, Hanoi did not actively influence India at the conceptual level but subtly shared its role-related expectations. Hanoi incrementally encouraged New Delhi to adopt a measured role performance in the ASEAN region. For this, Vietnam, just like Japan, provided a conducive environment (enabling port calls or joint energy exploration) for India to perform the expected roles. Lastly, as captured in Chapter 6, each actor's role prescription and performance towards India resulted from their RCs or their ability/inability to perform some roles. Needless to state, external powers' RCs were also shaped by systemic, regional, and domestic factors. By way of example, China's role performance—which eventually sparked an Indian oppositional counter-role— emanated from Beijing's own changing RCs, which were connected to massive economic growth and a changing domestic landscape.

Somewhat similar, Japan's role expectations from India were connected to the changes in Tokyo's own RCs. Japan's RCs were affected by changes in domestic politics and China's role performance in the region. In contrast, the US' motivation to prescribe ambitious roles to New Delhi was linked to Washington's increasing inability to perform its traditional RCs in the Asia-Pacific, especially in the face of domestic compulsions and China's rise. Coming to the specific case of Vietnam, Hanoi's limited role prescription is attributable to the increasingly relevant Omni-enmeshment strategy, which helps manage the role of multiple powers in the region. Like India, Vietnam attempts to strike a balance between struggle and cooperation with China. Therefore, Vietnam's role expectation from India is comparatively limited compared to other countries examined in the book. Also, Vietnam's role prescription is not very straightforward as it wishes India to play a more significant security role while ensuring that its activities do not antagonise the Chinese government.

All in all, the US, Japan, and Vietnam developed oppositional counter-roles (of varying degrees and with differing strategies) to China's role performance. In the bargain, India emerged as an actor of consideration. Interestingly, because India was developing an oppositional counter-role to China in the IOR, its self-conceptions corresponded with alter prescriptions to create new RCs.

7.4 The Conception–Performance Gap

Some studies on foreign policy tend to equate official government statements to foreign policy conduct. This premise can be misleading. The analysis clearly shows that changes in the RCs do not transition into role performances by default. Chapters 3 and 4 have showcased periods when Indian RCs (captured in government statements) were not adequately reflected in the role performance. This discrepancy, as communicated through the concept of conception–perfor-

mance gap, is created due to constraining or moderating variables, which either reduce the effectiveness of role performance or hamper the ability to perform a specific role. This is when a country's foreign policy behaviour may appear discrepant to outside observers. This is clear in the case of India's Indo-Pacific security policy.

On the one hand, New Delhi has become more active within the region, and its security cooperation with SEA and EA has expanded in scope and pace. These developments reflect New Delhi's attempts to match its policy conduct to the evolved RCs. On the other hand, India remains short of performing the roles effectively. It appears to be a reluctant or relatively ineffective security actor in the region. The dichotomy in India's actions results from various moderating variables that have been identified and examined in this work. The factors causing the conception–performance gap emanate from domestic (covered in Chapter 5) and international realms (see Chapter 6 for details).

On the domestic front, role competition and contestation between sub-state agencies impede India's ability to perform its revised RCs. Because it is both an emerging power and a developing country, the finite resources available to the policymakers compete with other priorities. The most fundamental conundrum faced by the Indian planners is the competition between developmental preferences and security needs. From 2002–03 till 2008, India had greater resources and thus greater ease at distributing to both areas. However, after the 2008 financial crisis, its economic trajectory has not kept pace. With lesser resources at hand, policymakers find it challenging to earmark sufficient funds for security considerations, which is apparent in the limited defence spending compared to preceding years. Not only has the defence budget dipped in recent years, but the funds available for military modernisation have also gone down.

Whatever funds are available for the military are subject to competition between continental priorities and maritime outlook. At the current stage, India's enthusiasm to assume a maritime role remains unprecedented compared to the former decades. However, its main priority rests on the continental front regardless of this shift. Any significant change in this regard is unexpected because of India's persisting land border disputes with China and Pakistan and a growing security nexus between the two countries.

Another domestic challenge in implementing India's RCs is the contestation between sub-state agencies (for details, see Chapter 5). Each sub-agency pushes for policy actions and suggestions corresponding to their institutional RCs and thinking. These contestations are visible at the civil-military level and manifest in turf wars between the three armed forces. On the one hand, there is dissatisfaction within the military with the bureaucratic processes of the military modernisation programme and limited funds handed out by the MoF. On the other hand, the civilian bureaucrats feel that the three services push ambitious plans that cannot be realised in the current economic scenario. The situation is made worse by the turf wars between the IA, the IAF, and the IN, the

structural weaknesses of India's military-industrial complex and the limited domestic ability to produce defence equipment. The negative implications of structural challenges and complicated bureaucratic system also cropped up in relation to India's interactions with the external actors (covered in detail in Chapter 6).

Over and above the domestic challenges, the role-conception gap exists because of complex interactions at the systemic level as well (see Chapter 6). When examining India's interactions with external players, an important take-away is the presence of the convergence–divergence dynamics. Whether there is role compatibility between the countries (India–US, India–Japan, and India–Vietnam) or an intra-role conflict (India–China relations), there are areas of both cooperation and disagreement. Chapter 6 establishes that none of India's bilateral equations analysed in the book can be characterised as an equation of seamless cooperation or pure rivalry. Instead, all bilateral ties sport varying degrees of agreement and differences. This makes the bilateral and multilateral interactions more intricate than what meets the eye.

Regarding India–US and India–Japan relations, where role compatibility is well established, divergences exist. While the two allies, Japan and the US, have somewhat congruent views on the Indo-Pacific, their perspectives differ from India's outlook. Although the differences are not prominent enough to hamper role compatibility, it tends to limit possibilities of coordination and cooperation. Further, India–China interactions show some areas of convergence despite an apparent intra-role conflict between them. As argued in Chapter 6, there has been a persistent incompatibility between China's role prescription and India's self-conception in the IOR and the Indo-Pacific. Despite this, Beijing and New Delhi have cooperated in a range of other roles, whether related to China and India as economic partners, investors in Iran, or partners when dealing with the issue of climate change. This confirms that an intra-role conflict does not amount to incompatibility across the spectrum of roles that countries perform. Therefore, the Indian policymakers deal with inter-role conflict, i.e., incompatibility between the set of RCs related to China. For example, the RC of an economic partner to China clashes with the net security provider role in the IO. This dichotomy limits the choices of actions Indian decision-makers have. In addition, India's ability to perform as a security actor is limited by the lack of consensus among the ASEAN members on a prescribed role for India. There are limits to what India can do in the region without a concrete regional demand for its security role. The cumulative effect of these factors results in the conceptual–performance gap.

This work has demonstrated that role change is not simple. It is fraught with multiple challenges policymakers face involving complex interactions, competing priorities and difficult choices. At the same time, they are subject to varying expectations from external actors, particularly in a changing re-

gional and world order. Therefore, it is increasingly challenging for India to persistently match its security RCs with actions.

7.5 Implications of the Study

Having summarised the findings above, it is crucial to appreciate their implication for theory and policy. Apart from the main findings, other relevant discoveries hold theoretical and empirical implications. Together, they are covered in the sections below.

7.5.1 Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical implication can be appreciated by revisiting the original premise of the shortcomings in extant literature. Even though India's foreign and security policy has attracted theoretical attention in recent years, it continues to be limited to a select few IR theories such as neorealism and constructivism. It is baffling that there is a near absence of alternate theories or frameworks. Against this background, the study showcases the necessity to minimise dependency on traditional variables and go beyond the confines of established scholarship. By relying on traditional variables, scholars tend to neglect aspects with greater explanatory value, limiting their discoveries and understanding of the topic.

As communicated in the book, India's real-world behaviour does not entirely align with the propositions of neorealism and constructivism. The BoP theory believes that a regional power balances another state in case of an unfavourable balance of power. As is apparent in the preceding chapters, Indian security behaviour is not solely driven by the idea of balancing but by the objective of carving a distinct role for itself and securing its interests in the changing regional order. In doing so, the act of balancing emerges as a by-product and is not the fundamental driver of policies. One can discern that structural theories base their explanations on narrow concepts of the 20th century. It is precisely for this reason that some developments in Asia seem anomalous to the expected trends, and the behaviour of rising powers such as India appear irrational to structural theorists. As Bennett and Stam put it, "it is not that the actors are not rational. […] Rather, they simply are not playing the same game with the same preferences" (Bennett & Stam, 2003, p. 174). To sum up, the somewhat inflexible concepts of structural theories need to be revised to match the changing trends and dynamic global order.

Similarly, there are specific weaknesses in the assumptions of constructivism. Constructivists propound that identities change from one form to the

other. They do not adequately discuss any potential complications in the process, suggesting that the translation from identity change to foreign policy change is automatic. This work affirms that such a presumption is misleading, for it gives rise to expectations that do not match the real-world workings. Although identity has not been chosen as an explanatory variable in the book, going by the literature on constructivism, one can roughly equate 'identity' with the concept of 'self-conception'. Based on this rough equation, insights from the study related to conceptions can also be applied to identity. It is easily discernible from the analyses in the previous chapters that identities do not switch neatly from one form to another. In usual cases, changes do not happen suddenly but take place incrementally over a stretched period, of course, unless an actor experiences role restructuring (like India experienced in 1991–92). Equally important is the understanding that a single or maximum of two identities cannot explain the vast spectrum of an actor's external behaviour. Countries are complex entities, and their decisions are based on careful calculations of numerous factors. Considering multiple determinants and intricate internal functioning, it is difficult to believe that one or two identities inform all foreign policies. Instead, the change in conceptions (equated with identity here) may not get effectively manifested in policy actions due to dynamics at play at the regional, national, and sub-national levels. Therefore, for constructivism to provide a more perceptive account of empirical developments, it can factor in some of the findings of this book.

Second, the insightful accounts made possible by multilevel analysis (systemic, regional, national, and sub-national levels) confirm its strength and suggest that it may be valuable for the disciplines of the IR and the FPA to encourage such an approach. Based on the literature analysed formerly, it was clear that most studies limit their analysis to a single level, particularly the systemic level. Undertaking systemic level analysis is equally problematic because it implies that nation-states are homogenous. Disregarding the heterogeneity of actors in the system means that theoretical propositions are merely generalisations of broad patterns, which fail to provide deeper insights about a particular actor and its interaction with the system. Such accounts cannot explain causes except those linked to the system's influence on an actor.

The study shows that apart from India's interactions at the regional level, the developments at the sub-national level were relevant to its external behaviour. As argued in Chapter 5, the rise of the IN was one of the determinants of expanding security role. The leadership of the IN played a part in incrementally pushing the political leadership to allow the force to adopt and perform more innovative security roles. Such influences cannot be discounted when seeking to understand the causes of a country's behaviour. Equally germane are the dilemmas of the policymakers in the face of limited resources and multiple priorities, and structural challenges due to poor inter-agency functioning.

The real-world policymaking and policy implementation processes are more complicated than what is captured in traditional theoretical propositions. The findings drawn from underexplored facets imply that the theoretical scholarship could improve significantly by incorporating multilevel analysis. That would allow significant insights into the working of the system and the structure-agent interactions. It will also throw light on how other levels (such as regional, national, sub-national, and individual) affect the behaviour of an agent.

Third, this work highlights the dangers of applying western concepts and understanding to non-western cases. Neglecting the actor's domestic, cultural, and historical context leads to misleading results. This was clear when analysing the cases of India and China. In the current literature, the roles of India (major power and leading power) and China (great power) tend to be conceptualised based on the western understanding of these concepts. On the contrary, these RCs are nuanced and do not have the same connotations as presumed by western scholars. India's 'leading power' role is much more nuanced than its desire to be a 'system shaper' (Tellis, 2016). It also reflects New Delhi's desire to pursue a role wherein it partners with various powers and does not resort to balancing any one country or a set of countries (see Chapter 4).

Similarly, when analysing China's RC as a 'great power', it is crucial to understand the context of 'Chinese characteristics' that inform it. For this, theorists and scholars ought to open the 'black box' and peek inside the state to understand historical, cultural, and social settings. Such a practice would also prevent the possibility of infusing bias in the initial stages of inquiry. Overall, the findings imply that the behaviour of powers, especially emerging powers, can be grasped effectively by examining the combination of suitable material and ideational factors. Any analysis that is bereft of such details may portray an incomplete picture of the drivers of policy actions.

Fourth, this work has demonstrated the need to question the widespread practice of equating a country's official statement with its policy action. While it is common knowledge that government statements tend to be infused with virtue signalling, many theories still fail to clarify the distinction between political rhetoric and policy actions in their framework or concepts. Apart from theory-informed work, the practise of equating the two is also prevalent in policy-relevant research. As indicative in most cases, changes in RCs do not translate effectively into role performance. For instance, Chapters 3 and 4 identified episodes when Indian RCs were sufficiently reflected in their role performances. There were also episodes where gaps between the conception(s) and performance were apparent. Focussing on the conception–performance gap is essential because only then can one probe its causes. By advancing the concept of the conception–performance gap, this book provides a much-needed theoretical foundation to delve into the issue and incorporate it into future works.

Fifth, the work provides fascinating insights relevant to the theories of power transition and neorealism. While neorealism considers that contestation between two major powers leads to balancing, the power transition theory anticipates war as the final outcome between competing powers. Chapter 6 has showcased that a clash between an actor's self-conception and expectation of the alter does not always result in the default options of war or balancing. Instead, as is seen in India–China relations, even when there is an intra-role clash, the two countries tend to cooperate on specific issues where their interests converge. Standard explanations (see Joshi & Mukherjee, 2019; Chand, 2019; Malik, 1995; 2012) focus heavily on either the India–China conflict of 1962 or transgressions at the border without explaining their reasons for ongoing cooperation on other issues. Taking a cue from this work, scholars and theorists need to appreciate that countries can continue to compete against each other while also cooperating on areas of common interests.

Similarly, countries that enjoy strategic convergence—such as India–US and India–Japan relations—do not always share the same outlook on all issues. Instead, partners can have different perspectives or areas of divergences, even in matters of convergences. This was showcased in the context of freedom of navigation, where India shares interests with Japan and the US but differs on the issue of military activities in a state's EEZ. Likewise, even though New Delhi has embraced the construct of the Indo-Pacific, it differs from the other Quad countries when it comes to the geographical expanse of the Indo-Pacific (Chapter 6). These observations need to be incorporated into contemporary theoretical scholarship to explain the complex empirical trends cogently.

The sixth point is related to India's foreign policy under PM Modi. Several studies and commentaries argue that India's foreign policy under the Modi-led government has transformed significantly (examples include Tremblay & Kapur, 2017; Chaulia, 2016; Paskal, 2016). Contrary to the impressions presented in these studies, this work affirms that Indian foreign policy has displayed continuity rather than a major change, despite the introduction of the AEP. India's policy actions under the Modi administration have not changed the fundamentals but complemented the foreign policy outlook of the predecessor, Manmohan Singh. As demonstrated, the connotations of the master RCs of major power and a leading power are not very different, and both complement each other. The master RCs communicate India's desire to have its unique role in the changing world order and the flexibility to partner with varying countries at any given time. To go back further, even the Manmohan Singh-led government had continued the strategy of multi-alignment, which had been introduced under the preceding Vajpayee-led government. Having noted that, the attempts to minimise the conception–performance gap are notable under the Modi government. This, however, cannot be termed as a fundamental policy change or a major policy transformation. All things considered, the trajectory

of Indian foreign policy has not changed radically over the last 20 years but displays prominent indications of a steady evolution.

Lastly, the findings have implications specifically for role theorists as well. Foreign policy role theory has expanded substantially in the last few years and is significantly advanced compared to its early days. Despite this, the current generation of role theorists has neglected some crucial concepts that can add greater conceptual richness to the theory. Some of these concepts have been identified and fleshed out in this work. For example, all RCs cannot be deemed equal but instead need to be branched out in the categories of master and auxiliary RCs.

It would be a valuable exercise to map out the trajectories of the auxiliary RCs because that can better explain a country's conduct on specific policy initiatives or issues. Chapter 4 has shown that within the broader umbrella of major and leading power RCs, India witnessed the rise of new auxiliary RCs—net security-provider role and stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. The master RCs are insufficient variables to discern the intricacies of an actor's pattern of action towards a sub-region or a specific issue. This can best be done by examining the auxiliary RCs. These findings must be mainstreamed in the role theory literature to beef up its explanatory value and produce testable hypotheses.

7.5.2 Empirical Implications

The empirical implications can be divided into four fundamental points. First, the findings identified in the book have implications for engaging India more successfully. When foreign political leaderships, policymakers, and diplomats seek to engage New Delhi, they need to pay attention to the causes of India's regional behaviour and the conception–performance gap. This cannot be gauged through material factors alone but by grasping the domestic context within which the policymakers operate. This will allow them to appreciate the gradations in Indian foreign policy behaviour.

It is critical to apprehend that although India projects itself as a stakeholder in the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region, its policy actions do not always align perfectly with the political rhetoric. To expand, even as RCs have evolved over the last two decades, New Delhi continues to be plagued by substantial developmental challenges at home along with other land-centric security priorities. One needs to be equally aware of the dilemmas (guns vs butter conundrum, continental vs maritime strategy, inter-role conflict vis-à-vis other partners) faced by the national leadership. Structural weaknesses due to poor inter-agency cooperation impede the translation of India's conceptualisation into policies. Overall, the confluence of these factors has resulted in the ongoing gap between political rhetoric and its actions. These factors make it chal-

lenging for New Delhi to embrace responsibilities that arise from the regional and global acknowledgement of India's emergence. To put it differently, even as New Delhi appears keen to be recognised by external actors as a significant regional power, it is wary of embracing the expectations that come along with it. Without this realisation, foreign governments, especially other Quad countries, may attach unrealistic expectations to New Delhi, which may not always be fulfilled, leading to complications in bilateral or multilateral ties.

Second, when approaching New Delhi, foreign leadership must be cognisant that India's bilateral relations cannot be viewed in the simple binaries of friends or rivals. When other countries such as the US and Japan expect India to balance China, they do so with the belief that India and China are rivals because of their historical contestation and border dispute. Although India has contentions with China, they continue to be economically fused—though New Delhi seems saddled by an overwhelming trade deficit in China's favour. India engages the China-led AIIB despite their differences. They also share similar views on aspects ranging from climate change to global governance reforms, as both face common challenges of over-population, poverty, environmental degradation, and resource crunch. This brings one to the point that most of India's bilateral relationships are complex and multi-layered.

By the same token, other countries, especially China and Russia, need to recognise that even as India has converging interests with the Quad countries in the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi does not seek a traditional security alliance. Besides, India has conceptual and operational differences with the said countries, making the possibility of an alliance bleak (explained in Chapter 6). Simply put, India's external interactions are intricate, as captured in the convergence–divergence dynamics. Hence, formulating strategies based on simplistic binary thinking of conflict and cooperation will result in suboptimal strategies, creating more discord than harmony in the region.

Third and related to the previous point, foreign counterparts need to realise that India will continue to partner with various countries based on its interests. Indeed, it has come a long way from the RCs of non-alignment and has embraced multi-alignment. However, the principle of maintaining strategic autonomy remains strong. New Delhi is unlikely to choose one side or set of countries or act as a balancer until the regional dynamics become acute and reach a point where the leadership is compelled to change the fundamental principles of India's strategic culture and policies. Until then, India will continue to secure its interests by continuing the strategy of multi-alignment and by aligning with countries on specific issues.

Fourth, countries that seek to encourage India to take an active security avatar can do well by engaging domestic institutions such as the IN through extensive defence diplomacy. As is covered, the Indian naval leadership has played an essential part in slowly but steadily pushing the boundaries of RCs and, thereby, role performance (see Chapter 5). Apart from traditional security

roles, the naval leadership envisaged various security roles for their force, presented them to the political leadership through strategy and doctrine documents, and sought to implement the final vision effectively. Over the years, these incremental developments shaped India's RCs and made them more expanded in scope. To sum up, sub-national institutions have been influential in determining India's RCs, and this link is worthy of attention for policymakers and practitioners. Here too, the engaging countries would do well to moderate their expectations as there is a gap between what the IN might propose and the GOI's readiness to accept those recommendations.

7.5.3 Policy Recommendations

The following paragraphs offer specific recommendations for the actors covered in the book. These recommendations flow from the insights in each chapter, the key findings, and other relevant discoveries that go beyond the scope of fundamental research questions.

7.5.3.1 Recommendations for the Quad Members (The US, Japan, and Australia)

First, approaching India purely from the standpoint of countering the China threat can be counter-productive even though Beijing is an underlying reason for the member countries to embrace the grouping. While there is cognisance of the looming China threat in the maritime spaces, New Delhi also expects major powers to be sympathetic to its other priorities, such as the land-based security threats perceptions from China and Pakistan; security challenges such as terrorism; and especially in the face of resource constraints. By pushing India to deliver against China, New Delhi may feel compelled to calibrate its approaches towards the concerned major powers. Second, the Quad member countries must continue diversifying engagement beyond security. That would allay India's perpetual concerns of compromising its strategic autonomy or fears of entering a security alliance. The Quad vaccine partnership during the Covid pandemic is an apt example and a step in the right direction. A cross-sector engagement may also nudge India to cooperate more on security and increase confidence that it is not being propped up solely as a bulwark against China.

Third, exercising patience is the key. Due to the differences in culture, traditions, understanding of security concepts, and historical experiences, India is more reluctant towards western role prescriptions. For instance, its reluctance towards the Trump administration had increased, given Trump's transactional foreign policy and perpetual pressure to 'do more' or buy more US weapons. Given this, it is recommended that continuous engagement and not

being overtly persistent at the same time will help in realising a common end-state on crucial security issues in the Indo-Pacific.

Fourth and related to China, the US and its allies need to accept Beijing's legitimate desires as a rising power and should accommodate peaceful effects/desires of its rise. Having noted that, they should also guard against Chinese actions that directly threaten regional and global security interests, such as Beijing's ambitions of establishing political and military control over the SCS. More importantly, guarding against the security threats should not amount to the 'containment' of China as propounded in the classical security sense because that would have profound negative implications for the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

7.5.3.2 Recommendations for the ASEAN Countries

The primary recommendation is related to ASEAN countries' discontent with India's limited regional engagement. It is crucial for the ASEAN countries (especially the ones that want India to play an active security role) to be cognisant of the limitations that New Delhi faces, mainly due to the lack of unanimity in the ASEAN region's role prescription. As is argued in Chapter 6, some ASEAN countries are receptive to India's increased involvement. Still, the region has no consensus on what they expect from India as a security actor. Local and regional factors, such as the proclivity of the region, are essential for the Indian decision-makers. That encourages them to expand the scope of security interaction with all the regional actors. Without sufficient support from the region, the potential for New Delhi to enhance its security role will remain limited. The extent of the ASEAN countries' relations and comfort levels with China will also determine India's readiness to expand its security interaction with them. While the ASEAN centrality and unity are the desired end state, it is far from being achieved due to persistent challenges in recent years. Apart from the inherent contradictions, China has successfully punctured the semblance of the ASEAN unity on critical concerns, such as the UNCLOS and the Code of Conduct for the SCS. In light of this, the ASEAN countries could attempt to project issue-based unity towards India. At present, the key areas of cooperation fail to reach fruition due to the lack of unanimity or agreement among the ASEAN member countries.

Besides, given ASEAN's limited capabilities against China, the regional countries should realise that the Omni-enmeshment strategy may become unviable if China becomes a major security threat. In such a scenario, the ASEAN region may need to resort to greater security involvement with the Quad countries, including India. In the present context, it may be worthwhile for the ASEAN countries to focus on intra-regional interaction to build consensus on potential responses to various prognoses.

7.5.3.3 Recommendations for China

First, China needs to be mindful of the consequences (intended or otherwise) of its actions in the IOR and other parts of the Indo-Pacific. One understands that the rise of a new power results in a change in the status quo, creating concerns among other countries. Having noted that, China will need to exercise patience and be more considerate of external actors when performing its expansive RCs. Also, its role performance cannot be inconsiderate towards external actors in the system. Some Chinese moves tend to rightly raise suspicions in the region and compel regional actors to collaborate with extra-regional actors. While this prospect is considered unfavourable from Beijing's viewpoint, such practices will gain credence if China's assertiveness and aggressive activities continue unabated. Therefore, Beijing needs to assess the regional situation before it ups the ante on security-related issues, lest that should invite unwanted reactions from the major and secondary powers combined.

Second, it is recommended that Beijing calibrate its view on the global commons and not approach it solely through the lens of Chinese history or assert claims of historical rights that are inconsistent with international law. This is exemplified by the case of the SCS with China's expansive maritime claims based on the nine-dash line. Such an approach sparks oppositional counter-roles from states that are not direct stakeholders in the dispute but require unhindered freedom of navigation and overflight over maritime spaces such as the SCS. Should China expect other countries to be understanding of its concerns, in which case, Beijing will need to be equally considerate of the sensitivities of regional countries and respect their legitimate interests, especially about the global commons.

Third, it would serve the Chinese leadership well to recognise that India's security activities are not driven solely by the idea of balancing China. Instead, New Delhi is securing its interests in the changing regional and world order. India is not opposed to China's peaceful rise but is greatly concerned about the enhanced security threat from the northern neighbour, particularly on land and even at sea. By objecting to India's growing cooperation with the Quad countries, Beijing may only strengthen factions in India that view the India–China relations through the single lens of rivalry. Beijing could also contribute to bettering bilateral relations by addressing less contentious issues such as trade deficit and supporting India's case for a permanent seat at the UNSC. Finally, Beijing needs to rethink its support to Pakistan politically and militarily, which aims to restrict India's emergence in South Asia. Such actions create disharmony within South Asia, which can potentially spill into the IOR. This prospect is not in China's interest or the interest of regional stability.

7.5.3.4 Recommendations for India

First, the GOI needs to nurture an integrated security outlook that involves a national approach instead of the current outlook dominated by select sub-national agencies. This can be done by developing a national security strategy so that Indian security policies can be informed by it. The current strategy and doctrine documents are prepared by sub-national agencies such as the IN, the IAF and the IA. Previous attempts at formulating a comprehensive national security strategy have produced nothing tangible. By creating an overarching national security strategy, the GOI will provide an informed guide for the security institutions in India and offer greater clarity to its strategic partners. Concurrently, the GOI will do well to address the lacunas at the domestic level and improve inter-agency functioning to ensure that conceptions are implemented into actions more effectively. This would require structural reforms, which can only be done by a determined leadership. All in all, if domestic weaknesses are not addressed timely, the undying support for India as a security actor is likely to diminish among the regional and extra-regional actors.

With the romanticism of the India growth story slowly evaporating, the leadership will have to quickly assess its strengths and weaknesses to balance its self-conceptions and external role prescriptions accordingly. Even if the China factor transforms into an imminent security threat in the maritime space, India cannot afford to (like most other countries) independently invest resources to bolster its security in the IO and the Pacific end of the Indo-Pacific construct. In such a scenario, a severe capability crunch will restrict New Delhi's ability to enter bilateral cooperation with the ASEAN or Quad countries. The most possible and likely option would be greater security engagement with the Quad countries and the ASEAN. With this in mind, the Indian policymakers need to deliberate over various permutations and combinations and assess what such a prognosis may mean for resource allocation and ideational determinants such as strategic autonomy.

Second, New Delhi's main security priority remains the land-based challenges despite the recent tilt towards maritime considerations. The quantum of challenges in both the continental and maritime domains will continue to increase concurrently for the policymakers. Simultaneously, there is now growing integration between the challenges in the IO and the Pacific Ocean and between the continental and maritime domains. This implies that action in one domain can result in reactions in the other domain. Undoubtedly, India is faced with the challenge of limited resources, financial challenges and many security areas that require attention. No country feels satisfied with the available resources or funds, given that almost all states face different sets of security challenges or threats. India needs to remain alive to the range of security priorities that will become more imminent in the coming years. It cannot afford to hope for a best-case scenario, wherein it waits for the primary threats to diminish on

one front to then concentrate on the other. Resources need to be allocated in recognition of this reality, and policies need to be formulated keeping this aspect into consideration.

Third, as mentioned in Chapter 6, the other Quad countries' expectations from India (among shared interests and concerns) to play a more active security role are also linked to its benign image in the ASEAN region. Given its non-threatening image, New Delhi should look to play a more frontal role by earning support from ASEAN. For this, it is recommended that the GOI go beyond its bilateral engagement with select ASEAN countries and nurture its association with the organisation. This will enable deeper integration in the region and eventually lead to greater regional support for Indian involvement. Needless to state, New Delhi would do well by delivering effectively and timely on finalised agreements, lest it should strengthen the current impression of being an unreliable capacity builder and partner. This is not only true for security agreements but equally applicable for India's dealings related to infrastructure development, economic integration and fusing of supply chains.

Fourth, while India has embraced multi-alignment by increasing its outreach towards major and secondary powers of the world, it must learn to live with differences and complementariness. New Delhi should not expect major powers to be fully receptive to all its concerns. Even major powers are constrained with resources and have different regional priorities. Similarly, in the current security backdrop, clinging onto the strictest interpretations of strategic autonomy and apprehensions towards security cooperation can become a liability if not managed with alacrity and foresight. India may do well to override the historical-political opposition to enhance security cooperation with major powers without compromising on sovereignty.

Finally, it may be worthwhile to revisit the practice of determining the scope of its security cooperation with other actors based on possible Chinese reactions. In this regard, a realistic cost-benefit analysis of India–China relations should be done to quantify the ratio of convergences and divergences. A detailed review would help understand the challenges and opportunities in the bilateral equation. When it comes to Beijing's concerning activities in the Himalayas and IO, New Delhi can be vocal about its fears and relevant dilemmas with the Chinese leadership and explain the dangers of continuing such trends. At the same time, it needs to regularly engage China at various levels and understand Beijing's predicaments and (altering) worldview.

The Indian leadership needs to undertake exhaustive discussion and define clear red lines, crossing which would invite a response and envisage the various types of responses. Such a stocktaking could help establish the primary and secondary priorities based on which India can conduct its relations with China. Overall, it will need to manage the contentious issues related to the border dispute and trade imbalance with China. New Delhi also needs to plan to safeguard its vital security and economic interests—a substantial part of the

latter directly connected to developments in the maritime sphere. All these aspects need to be factored in to make sound judgements of the future of India–China relations.

7.6 Limitations of Study and Directions for Future Research

Using the conceptual framework of role theory, the book has explained factors that have led to India's role evolution in the Indo-Pacific region. This work has substantially improved upon past research and provided comprehensive insights on the drivers of Indian behaviour and constraints thereof. Having noted that, this work is not an end in itself. Instead, it is an important stepping stone towards new areas of empirical and theoretical research.

The conceptual framework that has been established in Chapter 2 can be utilised to examine a range of other policy issues in India (such as the conceptual–performance gap in its climate-change policy) or even focus on other countries. It is worthwhile to build upon this by going beyond the levels of analysis (regional, national, and sub-national level) employed here and factor in the individual level. One could also explore India's interactions with other regional countries of the Indo-Pacific, such as Australia, Singapore, and Indonesia, that were not covered in the book. These are some of the suggestions, but the prospects of research based on the conceptual framework presented here or a more advanced version are endless.

That said, the empirical findings should be considered in light of some of the weaknesses. Despite theoretical advancements, there are certain limitations of the book that could be addressed in future works. While the explanatory value of the convergence–divergence dynamics was demonstrated in Chapter 6, it fell short of establishing a stronger theoretical foundation on the issue. To reiterate, the convergence–divergence dynamics propounds that divergences remain even when two countries enjoy role compatibility. Similarly, even when two countries face an intra-role conflict, cooperation is likely on specific issues. This makes it more challenging to theoretically separate friendly countries from competitors or potential rivals. Due to the thinly established divisions, it remains difficult to pinpoint if the said equations (bilateral or multilateral) fall into the category of 'divergence within role compatibility' or 'convergence despite intra-role conflict'. Considering this conundrum, it is worth addressing this issue in future studies and fine-tuning the concept theoretically and methodologically. Additionally, this work has adopted the conventional methodology of role theory, i.e., content analysis of official speeches. Future studies could develop a more innovative and rigorous methodology to enhance

the quality of correlations between concepts without compromising the conceptual richness of the theory.

Before proceeding, it needs to be realised that the application of role theory in the book has allowed one to identify some deficiencies in the current form of role theory. These weaknesses remain despite this work's contributions to advancing pertinent concepts and formulating a conceptual framework. The identified limitations, however, help segue into new avenues of research. Role theory projects itself as a perfect bridge to resolve the agent-structure divide and a viable middle path between the IR and the FPA. However, to truly achieve this feat, foreign-policy role theorists need to concentrate on further enhancing the theory. One of the strengths of role theory is theoretical eclecticism, which allows greater flexibility to draw from other research traditions and theories (such as the BoP, constructivism, and bureaucratic politics). This helps plug the interpretative gaps and address real-world problems through a detailed multi-disciplinary examination. As in the case of this study, eclecticism helped bridge the theoretical gap between the structure and agent without compromising the explanatory value of either of the two theories—neorealism and constructivism. However, the downside of this practice is that it has not compelled role theorists to produce testable hypotheses or theoretical propositions. Role theory could do well by presenting propositions and hypotheses, which can be tested in future research works and enrich understanding through its application to empirical cases. Testable theoretical propositions could guide the research work in a manner that the pros of eclecticism are utilised and the cons appropriately avoided.

Role theorists also need to focus on methodological novelty and advancing current conceptual blocks further. For example, while role theory helped establish that policymakers deal with role competition due to limited resources and competing priorities and experience inter-role conflict or divergences in their external interactions, it remains short of answering deeper questions. It may be insightful to learn more about how policymakers deal with these challenges and establish priorities at any given point in time. Similarly, it would be rewarding to establish well-defined mechanisms or methods that explain the specific ways through which relevant factors stimulate a change in RCs. Some works have investigated altercasting or socialisation to explain how external actors influence RCs (e.g., Harnisch, Bersick & Gottwald, 2015; Beasley & Kaarbo, 2018). However, they have been limitedly applied to empirical cases of state behaviour.

Further ahead, even as role theory proved valuable to showcase the divisions between the master and auxiliary RCs/self-conceptions, it does not adequately explain the formation process. When new factors emerge, do the master RCs change first or the auxiliary RCs? Based on this work, it can be inferred that the master RCs change before, and the auxiliary RCs evolve incrementally under the umbrella of the master RCs. It is essential to test this premise and

investigate if it holds in all cases or if there are different contexts where the auxiliary RCs evolve before, and their cumulative effect then alters the master RCs? Apart from this, future research could inquire when changes in internal or external factors bring about a change in self-conceptions or role expectations. Researchers and scholars could do well to explore cases when changes in relevant internal or external factors have had no effect on self-conceptions or role prescriptions and for what reasons. These areas deserve greater investigation and, when answered, would further push the boundaries of the current understanding of role theory and its many concepts.

Despite the stipulated limitations of the work, the book ends with optimism that future studies will make headway in advancing the theory and take advantage of the conceptual diversity and richness of role theory to analyse more puzzles of the changing regional and world order. Finally, it is hoped that this book inspires others to take a step away from the conventional theories and explore alternative explanatory variables when analysing empirical developments.

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Appendix A

List of Interviewees (Chronological)

- Professor Shankari Sundararaman, Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Interviewed on December 29, 2015 [Personal Interview].
- Mr. Rajat M. Nag, Former Managing Director General of Asian Development Bank (ADB). Interviewed on January 8, 2016 [Online Interview].
- Senior bureaucrat of the Indian government, New Delhi. Interview held on January 11, 2016. [Name undisclosed upon request.]
- Senior national security official in the Indian government, December 13, 2016, New Delhi [Personal Interview]. Follow-up online interview on June 20, 2019. [Name undisclosed upon request].
- Dr. K. Yhome, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. Interviewed on December 26, 2016 [Personal Interview].
- Commander (Retd.) Abhijit Singh, Senior Fellow and Head, Maritime Policy Initiative Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. New Delhi. Interviewed on December 29, 2016 [Personal Interview].
- Dr. Jagannath P. Panda, Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. Interviewed on December 30, 2016 [Personal Interview].
- Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet Khurana, Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. Interviewed on December 12, 2017 [Personal Interview].
- Admiral (Retd.) Arun Prakash, Former Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy, Goa (India). Interviewed on December 21, 2017 [Personal Interview].
- Ambassador Arvind Gupta, Former Deputy National Security Advisor of India, New Delhi. Interviewed on January 2, 2018 [Personal Interview].
- Professor Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Programme at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. Interviewed on January 4, 2018 [Personal Interview].
- Mr. Saikat Dutta, South Asia Editor, Asia Times. Interviewed on May 20, 2018 [Online Interview].
- High-Ranking Vietnamese diplomat, Interview held on March 16, 2019 [Online Interview]. Name held upon request.
- Commodore (Retd.) Venugopal Vengalil, Former Naval Officer, Indian Navy. Interview held on October 1, 2019. [Online Interview].

Appendix B

Categorisation of Master and Auxiliary Role Conceptions (January 2001–December 2021)

Master Role Conceptions		
Major Power	**Leading Power**	**Global/Great Power**
	2002	
"India and China are, objectively, two major Asian powers with the actual or potential capacity to dominate the Asian landscape."67		"India has emerged today as a key global player".68
	2003	
"India and China are … two major Asian powers with a recognized capacity to play major roles in shaping the future of the continent."69		
	2004	
"This Government … has assiduously promoted the idea that India is a major power in the world."70		
	2005	
"China and India should be two important players in Asia's quest for peace, prosperity and stability".71		
	2006	
		"Our foreign policy must reflect our national aspirations and express our confidence as an emerging global player."[72]
	2007	
		"… would like to be one of the powers contributing to the shape of a global order which emerges and which allows us to pursue our vital interests".[73] "we are once again turning our gaze outwards and seawards, which is the natural direction of view for a nation seeking to re-establish itself not simply as a continental power, but even more so as a 'maritime' power—and, consequently, as one that is of significance upon the global stage".[74]

Master Role Conceptions		
Major Power	**Leading Power**	**Global/Great Power**
	2008	
“Our national aim is to ensure a conducive internal and external environment for unhindered economic progress and socio-political development so as to enable India to assume its rightful role as a major power in the comity of nations.”[75]		
	2010	
“63 years after her "tryst with destiny”, India is now being seen as a major power”.[76]		“We have a keen sense of our potential to be a great power by virtue of our population, our resources and our strategic location”.[77]
	2011	
“As two major Asian powers, there is space for both China and India to play their legitimate role in fostering Asian security”.[78]		“India has a keen sense of our potential to be a great power by virtue of our population, our resources and our strategic location”.[79]
	2013	
		“We have been placed in this remarkable position in the world and that every time you have been placed in a remarkable position like this you can expect a great deal from those who are engaged, associated, dependent, linked with you but you also have tremendous responsibility to give”.[80]
	2015	
“On that occasion, the terminology agreed upon by the two countries [India and China] to describe themselves were as ‘two major powers in the region and the world’”.[81]	“… the Prime Minister urged them to use this unique opportunity to help India position itself in a leading role, rather than just a balancing force, globally.”[82] “Developing narratives is part of a transition towards a leading power”.[83] “The transition in India is an expression of greater self-confidence. Its foreign policy dimension is to aspire to be a leading power, rather than just a balancing power”.[84]	“Consequently, there is also a willingness to shoulder greater global responsibilities.”[85]

Master Role Conceptions		
Major Power	**Leading Power**	**Global/Great Power**
	2019	
		"India is a proactive and constructive contributor to promoting and upholding global peace and security".[86]
	2020	
		"The second aspect of our global engagement has seen India emerge as a responsible and constructive actor on the world stage. India is an active participant in the global conversations on climate change, terrorism, connectivity and maritime security."[87] "As a responsible global power …"[88] "As a rule abiding democracy and positive contributor to the security of the global commons, India aims to bring innovative and inclusive solutions to foster development."[89]

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
2001	
	"Countries of ASEAN and India have a common interest in maintaining peace and stability in the region and beyond".[90] "We value our membership in the ARF, and see it as a way to fashion a pluralistic, cooperative security order that is reflective of the diversity of the Asia Pacific region".[91] "We share a common stake in building a future for our region that is built on the bedrock of peace, development, and economic prosperity".[92]
2002	
	"India's belonging to the Asia Pacific community is a geographical fact and a political reality".[93] "ASEAN and India committed themselves to jointly contribute to the promotion of peace, stability and development in the Asia-Pacific region and the world".[94] "Our political, security and economic interests span in particular the area from the Gulf to South East Asia".[95]
2003	
	"India is an Asian country, the second largest both demographically and geographically".[96] "India's pivotal role in the vision to create a pan Asian economic area extending from East to South Asia".[97] "India proposes to play an active role in promoting security within Asia in collaboration with fellow Asian countries".[98] "India is ready to board the jumbo jet towards greater collective security and enhanced prosperity [in the ASEAN region]".[99] "The fundamentals that are already in place, therefore, put us in a unique position to contribute to peace and prosperity of the region".[100] "India has, therefore, not only an interest but a stake in the stability of Asia".[101] "Being maritime neighbours [with reference to Thailand], we have a common interest in both the economic development of our neighbourhood, as also in the security of the waterways".[102] "We [India and Thailand] are located astride the sea lanes for energy supplies from West Asia to markets in the East. Therefore, we have a common stake in peace, security and stability in this region".[103] "India is Asia and that India will have to play its role in delivering Asia to its destiny. India will also play an important role in Asia's relationship with the rest of the world".[104]

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
	"Given India's size and potential, this engagement imparts stability to India's extended neighbourhood".[105]
2004	
	"As two Asian democracies [referring to India and South Korea] with commitment to human freedom and a mutual interest in peace, stability and prosperity in Asia and the world".[106] "Our [India and South Korea] cooperation also stands to play a positive role in Asia's security environment".[107]
2005	
"In all of Asia, in West Asia, in the Indian Ocean region, and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, India, given its size and economic reach, is an essential partner in any arrangement that wants to successfully promote stability and security".[108]	"The two leaders [of India and Japan] realize and appreciate the importance of the respective roles and responsibilities of their countries in promoting peace, security and prosperity in Asia".[109] "India is a force for stability within Asia".[110] "In all of Asia, in West Asia, in the Indian Ocean region, and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, India, given its size and economic reach, is an essential partner in any arrangement that wants to successfully promote stability and security".[111] "In Asia, India is a source of stability".[112]
2006	
	"I expressed our readiness to share the experience gained in Mitigation of Natural Disasters and provide training for capacity building".[113] "The role we see for ourselves is that of a partner in capacity building and sharing experience in the context of ASEAN".[114]
2007	
"We have a strong stake in the security and stability of these waters, which is linked to energy security, since a very large percentage of Asian oil and gas supplies are shipped through the Indian Ocean".[115] "I am happy to note that there is a greater recognition today of India's stabilising role in the region".[116] "We have individually demonstrated our capacities to contribute to maritime security".[117] "We are also ready to contribute to capacity building of the Littoral States in maritime security".[118] "It would, by now, be obvious that the primary area of Indian maritime interest ranges from the Persian Gulf in the north, to Antarctica in the South, and from the Cape of Good Hope and the East Coast of Africa in the west, to the Straits of Malacca and the archipelagos of Malaysia and Indonesia in the east".[119] "India, with its growing capabilities and confidence, and its history of benign and active international engagement, is ready to contribute its maritime might to ensure such a positive outcome".[120]	"We are also ready to contribute to capacity building of littoral states [of SEA] in the area of maritime security".[121] "As a mature and responsible maritime power, we are contributing actively to capacity building and operational coordination to address threats from non-state actors, disaster relief, support to UN peacekeeping and rescue and extrication missions".[122] "India, with its growing capabilities and confidence, and its history of benign and active international engagement, is ready to contribute its maritime might to ensure such a positive outcome".[123]

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
2008	
	"We remain actively involved in different forums in Asia on disaster relief, maritime security and counter-terrorism".[124]
2010	
"The growth of our naval capabilities enables us also to work out mechanisms of cooperation with other friendly navies to be net providers of security in the region, and also for emergency and disaster management as we saw during the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004".[125] "It is in our interest that we play an active role in the architecture of maritime security based on the twin principles of shared security and shared prosperity".[126] "India is well poised to play a leadership role in this regard".[127] "There is almost universal acceptance of India's credentials and recognition of the vital contribution that we can make for stability and prosperity of the entire region".[128] "India is seen as a net security provider".[129] "A robust Indian naval presence is seen as a necessary contribution to a cooperative regional security order".[130] "As the main resident power in the Indian Ocean region, we have a vital stake in the evolution of a stable, open, inclusive and balanced security and cooperation architecture in the region".[131]	"India and ASEAN have also been engaged in developing a broader regional architecture in the Asia-Pacific region".[132] "We need to work together to evolve a balanced, open and inclusive framework".[133] "In an Asia-centred century, we would naturally wish to ensure a role for India that is commensurate with its size".[134] "India is recognized as an important stakeholder and partner in these [defending Global Commons] processes".[135] "Our ambitious 'Look East' policy is already making India an integral part of the geo-economic landscape of South East and East Asia".[136] "There is growing realization of the importance of preserving the "Global Commons"–Space, Ocean, Air, and Cyber Space. With its size, technological capabilities, and standing as a responsible country, India is recognized as an important stakeholder and partner in these processes".[137]
2011	
"India has favoured consultation and cooperation among all the littoral navies as well as navies of countries which use the seaways to address the multifarious threats from the sea as part of an architecture of maritime security based on the twin principles of shared security and shared prosperity. India is well poised to play a leadership role in this regard."[138] "As a net contributor of security, India's role is widely welcomed".[139] "I believe India has the capacity and the capability to play a unique role in that context, both in the security dimension and in the development dimension of the littoral states off the Indian Ocean".[140] "India is well poised to play a substantive and formative role in this regard [regional architecture]".[141] "We are also prepared to assist countries to conduct EEZ surveillance [reference to the IO]".[142] "In cooperation with the Indian Navy, we are looking at ways of long term engagement with many of these countries in capacity building".[143]	"As a responsible member of the international community, India is ready to contribute constructively to efforts to strengthen Asian security in the 21st century".[145] "India has a vital stake in the evolution of a stable, open, inclusive and balanced security and cooperation architecture in the region".[146] "The Prime Minister and I are of the unanimous view that a strong India-Thailand partnership is a factor of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region".[147] "It is a fact little recognized that India is as much a Southeast Asian nation as a South Asian nation".[148] "The ADMM Plus has identified five areas of cooperation–maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), military medicine, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping operations. India is seen as an important stakeholder in the ADMM Plus activities".[149]

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
"A flexible but proactive maritime doctrine is essential to safeguard and protect our [India's] national interests overseas as a net security provider to several island and littoral states in the Indian Ocean region and beyond".[144]	
2012	
"In the Indian Ocean region, we are assuming greater responsibility for security and stability".[150]	"India is determined […] by contributing actively to the deeper economic integration of the region and construction of a stable and inclusive political and security order for Asia and the Pacific".[151] "As maritime nations, India and ASEAN nations should intensify their engagement for maritime security and safety, for freedom of navigation and for peaceful settlement of maritime disputes in accordance with international law".[152]
2013	
"We [India] have also sought to assume our responsibility for stability in the Indian Ocean Region".[153] "We are [India] well positioned, therefore, to become a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond".[154]	"India is in the centre of Asia, especially if we were to look at the way Asia is placed in relation to the oceans".[155] "India has been part of the EAS dynamics to invigorate the economic recovery, secure the global commons in the region, strengthen cooperation to meet common challenges and anchor an open, inclusive and transparent architecture of regional cooperation in the region".[156] "There is greater intellectual and a greater leadership role that we can provide [with reference to Asia]".[157] "This is the strength of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership as an anchor of stability from the western confines of the Indian Ocean to the shores of the Pacific, from the Straits of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca".[158]
2014	
"India's naval footprint is essentially that of a net security provider even as it is set to expand".[159] "India has been working with coastal states in the Indian Ocean region to help them build capacities to counter piracy and ensure maritime security".[160] "Our two [India and Australia] countries can contribute to a variety of objectives in the Indian Ocean Region, including in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief".[161] "These ships [of the IN] have been deployed to Mauritius with a view to qualitatively enhancing our long standing and multi-faceted cooperation in ensuring peace, stability and maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. The Indian Navy is committed to ensuring the safety and security of these sea-lanes in cooperation with the National Coast Guard of Mauritius".[162]	"Considering that India is strategically located overlooking vital trade arteries, it is a natural corollary that India should play a greater role in maritime security in the region [referring to ASEAN region]".[163] "India has continued interest in ensuring stability and security of the South East Asian region".[164] "Together, and with other countries in the region and beyond [referring to SEA and EA], we seek an open, balanced, inclusive and rule-based regional architecture that fosters regional peace, stability and prosperity".[165] "India is prepared to offer full assistance in capacity building, coordination and response in the region [referring to the ASEAN region]".[166] "Fiji could serve as a hub for stronger Indian engagement with Pacific Islands. […] We will also expand our defence and security cooperation, inclu-

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
	ding assistance in defence training and capacity building".[167]
2015	
"Our vision for the Indian Ocean Region is therefore built on fostering increasing cooperation in our region, use of our capabilities for the benefit of all in our common maritime home and assisting our maritime neighbours and island states in building their maritime security capabilities".[168] "The image of a 'first responder' [referring to India] in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief situations has great value".[169] "And we think that those who are resident in this region have the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean".[170] "Indian Navy has provided direct support and capacity building to island states in Indian Ocean, especially for coastal surveillance and hydrographic surveys".[171] "India seeks to enhance mutual cooperation in our region, to offer our capabilities for the mutual benefit of all in our common oceanic home and assist our neighbours and island states in building their maritime security capabilities".[172] "India will be happy to offer capacity-building programmes to scientists from IORA partners at the Indian National Centre on Ocean Information in Hyderabad".[173] "Given the growing volume of our maritime trade and given that we share a common maritime boundary along the Andaman Sea; we [India & Indonesia] are natural partners in ensuring the development and security of the Indian Ocean and the pacific littoral region".[174]	"In the political-security sphere, I must convey our strong resolve to match the expectations of our friends in the region for India to play a more proactive role. We would also be happy to work […] in collectively addressing the various traditional and non-traditional security challenges in order to ensure peace and stability in Southeast Asia and the greater Asia-Pacific region".[175] "We agreed to work together and with other countries in the region to ensure the freedom of navigation and safety and security of sea lanes of communication".[176] "India's size and role as a key regional and global player, as well as its maritime location at the western gateway to the Asia-Pacific region, points to the enormous untapped potential".[177] "India is an active participant, in the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM+ and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, which are important ASEAN centric initiatives for creating an open and inclusive regional architecture".[178] "Our [India's] goal is to deepen our mutual understanding on maritime challenges and strengthen our collective ability to address them".[179] "India will lend its strength to keep the seas safe, secure and free for the benefit of all".[180] "We will work together in East Asia Summit to promote an inclusive, balanced and open regional architecture and maritime security in the region".[181]
2016	
"The Indian Ocean Region is one of my foremost policy priorities. Our approach is evident in our vision of 'Sagar', which means 'Ocean' and stands for–Security And Growth for All in the Region. We would continue to actively pursue and promote our geo-political, strategic and economic interests on the seas, in particular the Indian Ocean".[182] "Our emphasis on cooperation in Humanitarian and Disaster Response is also similarly an effort aimed at building trust and confidence and creating space for shared security".[183] "By virtue of its location, reflecting ties of kinship and culture, and taking into account its growing commerce, India has a particular obligation in respect to the oceans in the south".[184] "We have also demonstrated willingness and ability to step up to the task of being a provider of security in our immediate and extended neighbourhood as reflected in our new emphasis on HADR".[185]	"India is ready to meet the expectations of our friends in the region and play a more pro-active role in the processes leading to the ASEAN Community".[190] "As maritime neighbours, we [India & Vietnam] have a shared interest in the security of international sea lanes of communication and commerce".[191] "We [India] support the evolution of an inclusive, balanced, transparent and open regional architecture for security and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific".[192] "The Asia-Pacific is the most dynamic region in the world and nurturing a climate of peace and stability in this region is a global priority. This places a responsibility on all of us [India and ASEAN] and on the ARF as a critical platform for security dialogue and cooperation in the region".[193] "The role of a responsible power and a public goods provider involves strengthening of the global order by emphatic espousal, reiteration and abiding by

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
"This makes India a natural maritime country and an important pivot of the Indian Ocean. Securing peace and stability in the Indian Ocean is a matter of high priority for our Government".[186] "We are, therefore, focusing our efforts on developing an architecture that strengthens the culture of cooperation to effectively combat transnational challenges across the Indian Ocean".[187] "Building on its 2004 tsunami relief experience, India today has undertaken a wide range of HADR operations".[188] "And, we are also ready to enhance cooperation in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercises, as well as in capacity building for disaster management personnel".[189]	the global 'rules of the game'. It is in this context that we must interpret India's articulations in favour of freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes in the Indo-Pacific theatre, for example".[194] "… we are looking at an India that will be willing to take these calls in a responsible and responsive manner, including in working with partners in ASEAN to build a new security architecture within Asia".[195] "I would like to conclude by reaffirming our commitment to work closely with all of you towards ensuring peace, prosperity, security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region".[196] "India, geopolitically in the centre, has become the Pivotal Power of Asia".[197] "As two [India and Indonesia] important maritime nations that are also neighbours, we agreed to cooperate to ensure the safety and security of the sea lanes, in disaster response and environmental protection".[198]
2017	
"We were a credible first responder during the earthquake in Nepal, evacuation from Yemen and during humanitarian crises in the Maldives and Fiji".[199] "As India's capacities have grown, we have taken on the role of first responders to HADR situations".[200] "Conscious of our particular responsibility to the safety and security of the Indian Ocean, we have been active in promoting maritime domain awareness, concluding White Shipping Agreements, ensuring coastal surveillance and conducting hydrographic services".[201] "As frontline states of the Indian Ocean, Prime Minister Jugnauth [of Mauritius] and I [PM of India] agree that it is our responsibility to ensure collective maritime security around our coasts and in our EEZs".[202] "India is also working to expand cooperation on Blue Economy and maritime security".[203] "Indian naval ships are deployed in delivery of humanitarian assistance and emergency evacuation as also in patrolling sea-lanes against pirates".[204] "Clearly, it is but natural that India's role as the key pivot in the Indian Ocean region is a given, not only geographically but by virtue of a shared historical and cultural heritage that binds us all across these waters".[205] "India is prepared to bear its share of responsibility in this regard. Our response to security challenges in the Indian Ocean will be based on our national capabilities, complemented by participation in relevant regional platforms".[206]	"We will also continue to work with ASEAN in regional and international fora, to shape the economic and security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region".[215] "On the security front, ASEAN countries also look to working closely with India in securing the trade routes, freedom of navigation in international waters, over flights, threat or use of force to intimidate, reducing piracy along the Malacca Straits, cooperating in addressing traditional and non-traditional security challenges".[216] "PM Najib [of Malaysia] and I [PM of India] are also conscious of our role and responsibility in promoting economic prosperity, freedom of navigation, and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, especially its Oceans".[217] "PM [of Australia] and I [PM of India] recognize that our future is deeply tied to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. We, therefore, agree on the need for a secure and rule based Indo-Pacific".[218] "He [PM of India] has also said that India will provide technical assistance and training for capacity building to Pacific Island Partners to address Climate Change issues".[219] "We would hope that what ASEAN sees looking West is a more confident nation [referring to India] with strong economic prospects, positive demographics, substantial unmet demands, leapfrogging capabilities, one that is active on global issues, shouldering more responsibilities and is a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific".[220] "If Asia is the east, then it is India that is the true middle of the east. All you have to do is look at the

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
"Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) form an important part of our outreach efforts".[207] "… assume larger responsibilities as a net security provider with an integrated approach, reflected in the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision".[208] "As Indian Ocean takes centre-stage in the 21st century, the onus is on us as equal stakeholders to collectively secure and nurture our oceanic space".[209] "India has been working with like-minded countries to preserve the integrity, inviolability and security of maritime domain, much of which are global commons".[210] "India has initiated efforts to help our maritime neighbours set up their network and contribute to the shared development of Maritime Domain Awareness".[211] "India's sense of responsibility will grow with its capabilities and the IOR should be assured that it can count on us".[212] "India's HADR and Search & Rescue efforts in the Indian Ocean have been increasingly in evidence".[213] "we have been the first to respond in times of distress in our immediate as well as extended neighbourhood".[214]	map. Geo-politically, and for many other reasons, India is the pivotal nation of Asia."[221] "… would seek to carry forward the conversation on how India as a stakeholder and a dialogue partner can collaborate with ASEAN in harnessing the opportunities inherent in the MPAC 2025".[222]
2018	
"In our own region, we are finding a renewed interest in collaborative activities in the Indo-Pacific and even in the Bay of Bengal".[223]	"We [India and Indonesia] are two major countries in the Indo-Pacific region."[224] "As a mature and responsible nation, one of India's foreign policy interests, is to evolve a regional architecture based on the twin principles of shared security, and shared prosperity."[225] "Humanitarian and Disaster Relief efforts, Security cooperation, and Freedom of Navigation will be key focus areas for our Maritime cooperation. (ASEAN)".[226] "Indian Armed Forces, especially our Navy, are building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region for peace and security, as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief".[227] "India's interests in the Indo-Pacific are vast and our engagement is deep. Our vision, in one word, is SAGAR which stands for – Security and Growth for All in the Region. We have a comprehensive agenda of regional cooperation with both IORA and ASEAN".[228] "We are ready to strengthen cooperation in areas of HADR, Search and Rescue operations, anti-piracy, counter terrorism, counter proliferation and collaborate on maritime domain awareness".[229] "As Asia regains its global position for the twenty first century to be called "Asia's Century", it goes

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
	without saying that India and ASEAN will play a vital role in ensuring this".[230] "India views the Indo-Pacific as a positive construct of development and connectivity, in which India can play a unique role by virtue of its geographical location and economic gravity. […] we believe in a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific Region, which includes all nations in this geography and others who have a stake in it".[231] "We [India and Vietnam] are both ancient maritime nations and are stake-holders in the commerce, security and stability of the Indo-Pacific Region".[232] "India is doing its part, by itself and in partnership with others […] And, we [India] are important stakeholders in New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank".[233]
2019	
"The willingness to shoulder greater responsibilities including through HADR operation must continue".[234]	"Indo-Pacific region is an inalienable part of our existence. […] will have to work together for ensuring openness, integration and balance in the Indo-Pacific".[235] "We will also endeavour to develop the capacity of other countries in the region, to reach out to them in the times of disasters with humanitarian assistance, and work for shared security, prosperity and a bright future for all. A capable, strong and prosperous India will be a robust pillar of peace, development and security not only in South Asia and Indo-Pacific, but in the entire world".[236] "Indo-Pacific must be perceived as the further extrapolation of the Act East – Look East policy. The transition from the one to the other was itself indicative of India's deepening security stakes in the East".[237] "Conceptually, the East Asia Summit already takes India beyond the Indian Ocean into the Indo-Pacific".[238] "At one level, India must take a contributing approach that partners others to build their capacity and secure their interests. At another it must be consultative in its engagement whether bilateral or regional or even in the respect of the maritime commons".[239]
2020	
"India is emerging at the centre of a network of initiatives. We are fulfilling our role as a net provider of security in the IOR and as a first responder in extending humanitarian assistance in times of natural disasters and maritime environmental incidents".240 "In recent years, India's role in our extended neighbourhood has been that of a 'net security provider'".241	"Where maritime security is concerned, India has emerged as a key player, especially in the Indian Ocean".243 "We are today widely perceived as among the first responders to HADR situations".244 "India, in the midst of the pandemic, went out of its way to be a net provider of security".245 "We decided, in these very difficult circumstances, to continue our role as a responsible member of the international community".246

Auxiliary Role Conceptions	
Indian Ocean Region	**Asia/Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific**
“Net security also means cooperation with our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region on maritime security, including anti-piracy, maritime surveillance, responding to maritime pollution etc”.242	“Our objective remains advancing the security and economic interests of all countries having a legitimate stake in the Indo-Pacific region”.247
2021	
“India is one of the leading maritime security providers in its oceanic neighbourhood”.[248] “We have been the first responder in maritime disasters related to cyclone, tsunami and pollution”.[249] “India's role in the Indian Ocean has been as a Net Security Provider”.[250]	“We have sought to strengthen security and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific by becoming a net security provider – for instance in peacekeeping efforts or anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden”.[251] “India is at the strategic centre of this region”.[252] “We are a part of the greater Indo-Pacific space”.[253] “… as a nation deeply committed to strengthening the EAS as an ASEAN-led organization, India continues to contribute positively to the EAS goals including maritime security cooperation”.[254] “Given its central location in the region, India has been a net provider of security, first responder and a development partner. We work towards enhancing security and ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific – through participation in peacekeeping efforts and anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden”.[255]

Endnotes

1 The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ to denote a geopolitical space was originally introduced by German strategist Karl Haushofer in 1924 in his work titled, *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans* (Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean).
2 Several countries, such as the US, Japan, Australia, France, India, and ASEAN have embraced the term Indo-Pacific officially.
3 Currently, there is no global consensus yet on what regions/countries fall within the ambit of Indo-Pacific. While some countries such as the US, Japan, and Australia consider the maritime stretch between the IO and the Pacific Ocean, India also includes the continental space within (Jaishankar, 2019).
4 Mental maps, as described by Alan Henrikson refer to “an ordered but continually adapting structure of the mind—alternatively conceivable as a process—by reference to which a person acquires, codes, stores, recalls, reorganizes, and applies, in thought or action, information about his or her large-scale geographical environment, in part or in its entirety” (Henrikson, 1980, p. 498).
5 The ‘key maritime passageways’ that serve as commercial trade routes and contribute to the growth of the global economy are termed SLOCs. The SLOCs include ‘narrow passages’ or naval chokepoints (in military terms). See Khalid (2012).
6 White shipping information means the “exchange of relevant advance information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels” (IDSA, 2016, para. 1).
7 Interview with a senior national security official of the Indian government, New Delhi. Interview held on 28 November 2018.
8 It is worth noting that Sebastian Harnisch, in his works, does not use the term ‘Role Conception’ (RC) but simply ‘role’ to denote the interplay of the Ego and the Alter. This study, while drawing heavily from Harnisch’s work, prefers the usage of RC instead of roles.
9 To prevent any confusion, it must be made distinctly clear that the term ‘Alter’ or external actors whenever used in the book, refers to the relevant others or concrete other(s) in the process of a state’s interaction with the external world.
10 Processes that seek to explain the interplay between self-conception and role prescription are a fast-growing research area under role theory. Several studies have carried out research on the specific processes such as role-taking, role-making, and altercasting, through which the external actors shape a country’s RC. Having noted that, examination of the process is beyond the scope of this work.
11 These three processes have been chosen based on their relevance to the study and this is not an exhaustive list.
12 This self-conception has been identified and explained by Zorawar D. Singh (See Z. D. Singh, 2018). To clarify, Singh refers to self-conception as Role Conception in his study. Singh also notes that the term ‘peacemaker’ was first used by Jawaharlal Nehru in September 1946 when Nehru advised the Indian delegation over India’s role in the UN. (*SWJN* cited in Z. D. Singh, 2018, p. 69).

13 It should be clarified that non-alignment as a conception and the NAM are different. The NAM refers to the official forum of 120 countries, which was established in 1961.
14 Zorawar D. Singh makes a similar argument in his work. For details, refer to Z. D. Singh, 2018.
15 For want of clarification, PM Indira Gandhi was not related to Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948).
16 The RC of 'security seeker' is articulated by Zorawar Daulet Singh and covered extensively in his book (see Z. D. Singh, 2018).
17 According to Jaswant Singh (1999, p. 127), former EAM, India's naval expansion in the 80s "established no pattern" and was more of an 'aberration'. Soon after, the Indian Navy began suffering from obsolescence. Eventually, existing ships were being decommissioned and no new ships were commissioned in the Indian Navy for almost a decade after 1988.
18 In the aftermath, in May 1991, the former PM Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by an LTTE suicide bomber.
19 The economic restructuring was headed by PM Rao and his team that implemented the reforms included the future Indian PM, Manmohan Singh.
20 This phase was equally challenging for the ASEAN region due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis and its aftermath.
21 Interview with Ambassador Arvind Gupta, former diplomat and deputy NSA. Interview held on 2 January 2018, New Delhi (India).
22 *Ibid.*
23 The idea of a strategic partnership differs fundamentally from the concept of an alliance. In an alliance, a country or countries provide guarantees of security assistance in case of external aggression. A strategic partnership primarily emanates from shared interests on specific issues and does not entail any security guarantees. This allows an actor greater flexibility to partner with multiple countries, with a view to cooperation on some issues as opposed to the complete spectrum.
24 Interview with Ambassador Arvind Gupta, former diplomat and deputy NSA. Interview held on 2 January 2018 in New Delhi (India).
25 Interview with Professor Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Programme at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. Interview held on 4 January 2018.
26 *Ibid.*
27 In Hindi, the word '*sagar*' means the ocean.
28 Major contracts include the PSC-1 onshore block, won by Jubilant Energy India (in 2012), shallow-water blocks M-17 and M-18 by Reliance Industries (in 2014), blocks M-4 and YEB by Oil India (in 2014).
29 Interview with Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet Khurana, Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. Interview held on 12 December 2017.
30 Interview with Admiral Arun Prakash, former CNS of the Indian Navy in Goa, India. Interview held on 21 December 2017.
31 Online interview with Saikat Dutta, South Asia Editor (Asia Times). Interview held on 20 May 2018.
32 Interview with Admiral Arun Prakash, former CNS of the Indian Navy in Goa, India. Interview held on 21 December 2017.
33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*
35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.*
37 *Ibid.*
38 *Ibid.*
39 Interview with Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet Khurana, Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. Interview held on 12 December 2017.
40 Interview with a senior national security official in the Indian government, New Delhi. Interview held on 28 November 2018.
41 Online interview with Commodore (Retd.) Venugopal Vengalil, Former Naval Officer, Indian Navy on 1 October 2019.
42 *Ibid.*
43 Interview with a senior national security official of the Indian government on 13 December 2016 in New Delhi. Name undisclosed upon request.
44 *Ibid.*
45 Interview with a senior national security official of the Indian government. Interview held on 13 December 2016 in New Delhi. Name undisclosed upon request.
46 Generally, the involved civilian agencies include the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Ordnance Factories (OFs), and Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).
47 This does not mean that the Indian armed forces enjoy no flexibility. The forces are provided with sufficient authority to perform trainings, undertake periodic threat assessments, formulate doctrines and strategy documents, undertake welfare activities, or even embark on decisions that have minimal financial implications for the government.
48 Interview with a bureaucrat of the Indian government. Interview held on 11 January 2016, New Delhi. Name undisclosed upon request.
49 The BRI was borne out of domestic compulsions in China. Beijing needed to outsource its industrial over-capacity abroad, connect its western frontier provinces and the autonomous region's large overseas markets, and boost China's economic development which was slowing down. The BRI was envisaged as a possible solution to all the stipulated needs.
50 The US (i.e., the central hub) entered into alliance partnerships with a number of Asia-Pacific countries (that act as spokes to the hub) such as the Philippines (1951), Thailand (1951), New Zealand and Australia (1951), Japan (1952, updated in 1960), South Korea (1953), and Taiwan (1954).
51 The US was previously also a dominant economic actor in the region. However, in the 2000s, with China's economic rise, Beijing replaced Washington as the favourable economic partner of the regional actors. Despite economic interdependencies between China and the regional countries, there were persistent fears over China's assertive behaviour. As a result, the continued presence of the US is preferred, and the US retains its role as the primary security-provider in the Asia-Pacific.
52 The 123 agreement was a prequel to the Indo-US civil nuclear deal. According to the stipulations, New Delhi decided to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and place its civil facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.
53 The idea of increased proximity with the US was a polarising issue within India. Some voices (strategic analysts and political leaders) still remain extremely critical

of such a proposition, terming it as a “loss of sovereign control” (Karnad, 2016, last section) while others have been vocal about their support for improved Indo-US cooperation (Mohan, 2009).

54 It was only later that Washington realised the inadequacy of focusing solely on the security area under the rebalance strategy. It eventually began paying attention to economic relations by forging the multilateral free trade agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP’s value lay in the hope that the US could offer the Asia-Pacific countries an alternative to China’s model.

55 Interview with a senior national security official of the Indian government. Interview held on 13 December 2016 in New Delhi. Name undisclosed upon request.

56 *Ibid.*

57 India holds 2+2 dialogues with Australia (since 2017), the US (since 2018) and Japan (since 2019).

58 *Ibid.*

59 Online interview with senior national security official of the Indian government. Interview held on 20 June 2019. Name undisclosed upon request.

60 As the only victim of an atomic bombing in 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese society has a strongly entrenched anti-nuclear sentiment.

61 One area where there is greater consensus among the ASEAN countries on India’s role is the economic and trade sector. The ASEAN organisation and most members never fail to express their desire for New Delhi to be a pro-active economic player, with greater connectivity, and economic integration with the region. That the economic and trade areas are non-contentious issues makes it easier for the ASEAN countries to express their role prescription towards India. Notably, it is in the context of economic and trade ties where India’s systemic shortcomings become obvious.

62 Interview with Professor Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Programme at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi on 4 January 2018.

63 Interview with senior national security official of the Indian government. Interview held on 13 December 2016 in New Delhi. Name withheld upon request.

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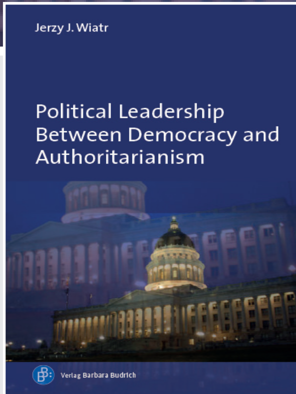

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