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ABSTRACT: To buttress stability in the Indo-Pacific, the United States must understand how India sees the region and the world. The theories and ideas of Kautilya, a leading but little-studied Indian philosopher, provide significant insight into Indian perspectives on strategic partnerships and silent war. India has lived out Kautilyan perspectives in its recent foreign policy; therefore, a US understanding of the Indian perspective could advance the national security interests of both countries, clarify recent Indian security responses around the world, and provide a basis for the mutually beneficial pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Kautilya, Quad, US-India partnership, realism

China's rapid and aggressive expansion has led India to increase its security cooperation efforts with Australia, Japan, and the United States, a grouping of likeminded states known as the Quad.¹ One sign of the Quad's growing influence was the first in-person meeting of its four leaders in September 2021; they met again in May 2022.² The Quad is a powerful diplomatic tool for addressing shared concerns in the Indo-Pacific, and the same grouping of states also has a history of combined military exercises. The United States recognized the importance of the Quad in the *2017 US National Security Strategy*, and the *2021 Interim National*

1. Stephen F. Burgess and Janet Beilstein, "Multilateral Defense Cooperation in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region: Tentative Steps toward a Regional NATO?," *Contemporary Security Policy* 39, no. 2 (2018): 273; Oliver Stuenkel, "India's National Interests and Diplomatic Activism: Towards Global Leadership?," LSE IDEAS, IDEAS Report (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, May 2012), 36, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/43446/1/India_India%27s%20national%20interests%20and%20diplomatic%20activism%28lsero%29.pdf; and Mark Beeson and Troy Lee-Brown, "The Future of Asian Regionalism: Not What It Used to Be?," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 198.

2. "Media Center: Joint Statement from Quad Leaders," Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India (website), September 24, 2021, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34318/Joint_Statement_from_Quad_Leaders; "Briefing Room: Joint Statement from Quad Leaders," White House (website), September 24, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders/>; "Media Center: Quad Joint Leaders' Statement," Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India (website), May 24, 2022, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35357/Quad_Joint_Leaders_Statement; and "Briefing Room: Quad Joint Leaders' Statement," White House (website), May 24, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>.

Security Strategic Guidance further reinforces the importance of strengthening the US-Indian relationship.³

Stability in the Indo-Pacific will define American security interests for the foreseeable future. An understanding of how India's national interests and regional perspectives inform its foreign policy points to the confluence of Indo-American national security interests. This alignment offers unique opportunities for both countries and sets the stage in favor of Indo-American interests for decades to come. If the United States is to secure a free and open Indo-Pacific, it must gain the complete partnership of India. To do so, US leadership must understand how India sees itself, the region, and its place in the world. A review of India's strategic partnership agreements with Afghanistan, its Maritime Security Strategy, and the revitalization of the Quad can draw out contemporary examples of Indian decision making and improve the United States' understanding of Indian foreign policy.⁴

The writings of Kautilya, a leading Indian philosopher, best explain India's pursuit of its national security interests. This Indian statesman and political adviser emerged around 300 BCE and provided a realist outlook on geopolitics through the *Artha-shastra*, his foundational work.⁵ The treatise outlined a classical vision of political wisdom and guided the creation of the Mauryan Empire. Importantly, Kautilyan theory provides a culturally and historically informed construct for assessing Indian behavior. Kautilyan logic continues to influence Indian strategic thought and is manifest in India's national security interests and assessment of regional and international relations.

3. Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America: December 2017* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 46, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; and Joseph R. Biden Jr., *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance: March 2021* (Washington, DC: White House, 2021), 10, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

4. Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy – 2015*, October 2015, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-maritime-security-strategy-2015>.

5. Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans. L. N. Rangarajan (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 1992); Roger Boesche, *The First Great Political Realist: Kautilya and His Arthashastra* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 8; and Roger Boesche, "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India," *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (2003): 16.

Indian Interests and Perspectives

While India is not often recognized as a great power, there is a compelling argument that it has arrived, and India certainly sees itself as a foundational world civilization and a great power.⁶ In sheer mass, India is a cornerstone of Asia, with 1.3 billion people, the world's sixth-largest economy with a gross domestic product of \$2.66 trillion, and the world's second-largest army.⁷ Additionally, India is home to great schools of thought and an enduring cultural legacy. A key player in South Asia, India possesses clear extra-regional economic and security interests and the resources and will to pursue them.⁸

Evaluating Indian national security interests is not as straightforward as it is for Western powers. Unlike the United States, the United Kingdom, or France, India has not published a national security strategy. India's regional approach and foreign policy, however, reflect its decision to act like a great power in pursuing national security interests and reveal the nature of these interests.⁹ The country's economic expansion and military aid to Afghanistan, paired with a convergence of strategic interests with the United States, point to interests and influence that extend beyond the region.¹⁰ India is recognized within the international system as a force to be considered.¹¹

Through Indian Eyes: National Security Interests

Although India has long presented itself as a nonaligned state, its emergence as a great power has driven it toward a more active role in the international system. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's shift in Indian foreign policy reveals three core national interests. The first is a desire to sustain the international system, which helped give rise to Indian power and influence and allows India to address internal economic and societal development

6. Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 46; and Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Is India a Great Power? Understanding Great Power Status in Contemporary International Relations," *Asian Security* 11, no. 1 (2015): 1, 23.

7. "GDP-India," World Bank: Data (website), n.d., accessed October 22, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=IN>; "India: Military and Security," Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook (website), updated September 1, 2022, accessed January 7, 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/india/#military-and-security>.

8. Pardesi, "Is India a Great Power?," 1, 23.

9. Rory Medcalf, "Imagining an Indian National Security Strategy: The Sum of Its Parts," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 5 (2017): 517.

10. Vinay Kaura, "Grading India's Neighborhood Diplomacy," *Diplomat* (website), January 1, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/grading-indias-neighborhood-diplomacy/>.

11. Pardesi, "Is India a Great Power?" 1, 23; and Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 46.

through cultivating foreign investment, implementing infrastructure projects, and securing the energy resources necessary for growth.¹²

A second national interest is to deter Pakistan without escalating armed conflict between these two nuclear states beyond the conventional threshold.¹³ This objective requires India to manage its relationships with Pakistan and China, two actors whose fates are increasingly linked. A decline in US-Pakistani relations, coupled with China's One Belt One Road and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor initiatives, have deepened Sino-Pakistani relations.

A third national interest is maintaining Indian hegemony in its traditional sphere of influence. Chinese encroachment into the Indian Ocean region is a complex issue marred by a history of mutual mistrust.¹⁴ China's outreach to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar improves Chinese access to ports in the Indian Ocean and positions it to compete in India's traditional sphere of influence. India perceives China's attempts to expand its foothold in Southeast Asia as slow encirclement by an adversary and therefore approaches the situation as a zero-sum game of influence and access, which will either be won by China or by India.¹⁵

The Indian Neighborhood: Kautilya's Mandala Assessment

India seeks to maintain hegemony in its traditional sphere of influence. Kautilya described this area as emanating from the Indian subcontinent west to Persia, north to Bactria (modern-day Afghanistan), and east to Bengal.¹⁶ Today this region is roughly composed of the eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.¹⁷ India dominates this area, possessing over 80 percent of the association's landmass, population, and gross domestic product.¹⁸

Assessing India's regional neighborhood through the lens of Kautilya's Mandala theory can help the United States understand Indian actions and intentions. Kautilya's tool for assessing geopolitics assumed bordering

12. Medcalf, "Indian National Security Strategy," 520.

13. Medcalf, "Indian National Security Strategy," 520.

14. Medcalf, "Indian National Security Strategy," 520.

15. Kaura, "Grading India's Neighborhood"; and Stephen Burgess, "The U.S. Pivot to Asia and Renewal of the U.S.–India Strategic Partnership," *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 4 (2015): 369.

16. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, xiv, 28, 507.

17. Breffni O'Rourke, "South Asia: Afghanistan Joins World's Largest Regional Grouping," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (website), April 3, 2007, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1075660.html>.

18. Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, "India's Foreign Policy in the Neighbourhood," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 9, no. 2 (2014): 144.

kingdoms were inherently hostile and those nations immediately beyond, or opposite a neighboring state, were potential allies.¹⁹ Although Kautilya used this model to describe smaller, warring kingdoms and not modern nation-states, the model offers insight into the current Indian perspective.²⁰

Applying the Mandala theory clarifies Indian relationships in South Asia through a country's position relative to India. The model places Pakistan and India at odds as bordering states and makes Afghanistan a potential Indian ally. As other states within India's traditional sphere of influence, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka are seen as potential adversaries that may also be threatened by a shared enemy and bordering state—China.²¹ At the strategic level, the Mandala theory adds China as a potential adversary and Iran as a potential ally.²² China has reaffirmed its patron-client relationship with Pakistan and advanced port projects across the Indian Ocean region with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Djibouti. Thus, Mandala theory reflects the current state of relations within the traditional Indian sphere of influence and at the strategic level.

Attributes of Indian Statecraft

Viewed through the Mandala theory, two attributes of India's statecraft emerge as vectors for understanding its approach to national security—strategic partnership and silent war. Strategic partnership agreements (SPAs) are policy positions consistent with Kautilyan thought regarding a preference for alignment over alliances.²³ Kautilya's concept of silent war encourages nations to weaken and harass adversaries through means below the threshold of overt hostilities.²⁴ India uses strategic partnerships to exert influence through foreign policy with friendly states and uses silent war, which emphasizes competition over conflict, to pursue its interests vis-à-vis Pakistan and China.

Strategic Partnerships: Kautilyan Alignment

Strategic partnership agreements began as a Soviet approach to bilateral relations during the Cold War. The Soviets pursued bilateral agreements to establish patron-client relationships, avoid the constraints of multistate

19. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, xiv, 506–7; and Boesche, “Kautilya's *Arthashastra*,” 18.

20. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, xiv, 507; and Boesche, “Kautilya's *Arthashastra*,” 18.

21. Raju G. C. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 16; and Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 521–22.

22. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, 16.

23. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 103, 511, 544, 566, 571, 576; and Boesche, “Kautilya's *Arthashastra*,” 17, 21.

24. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 513, 533; and Boesche, “Kautilya's *Arthashastra*,” 22, 23.

alliances, and operate outside the construct of the international system.²⁵ India's preference for these behaviors is evident in its historical policy of nonalignment and is supported by Kautilyan thought on joint undertakings, which describes the importance of cooperation with other states for access to resources, trade routes, and military basing.²⁶ India sees strategic partnerships from a Kautilyan perspective: it avoids entangling alliances while providing a means to pursue its national interests through "access to markets, finance, technology, arms, intelligence, and other commodities that it does not possess."²⁷ India has increased the use of SPAs, signing at least 28 agreements since 1998 with countries as varied as the United States, China, and Afghanistan.²⁸ Raju G. C. Thomas identifies these maneuvers as alignment strategies and argues they have served India as well as or better than alliances that could compel India to act militarily.²⁹

India's agreements with Afghanistan demonstrate New Delhi's preference for alignment over alliance in its statecraft. India signed the original Treaty of Friendship with Afghanistan in 1950, one year after the conclusion of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947 and three years after partition. The agreement accorded each state the right to establish embassies and conduct diplomatic activities, manage trade, emphasize cultural exchanges, and assist each other in industrial and agricultural development.³⁰ The agreement displayed India's Kautilyan grasp of influence and focused on applying diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power. Notably, the agreement lacked any mention of military cooperation: it was a policy of alignment, not an alliance. The 1950 Treaty of Friendship was interrupted by Afghanistan's 1978 Saur Revolution and subsequent civil war. In Kautilyan fashion, when the nonbinding agreement no longer suited India's interests, New Delhi abandoned it.

Over 60 years later, the two nations signed the Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in October 2011.³¹ This agreement referenced the democratic nature of the two states, a desire to see the entire region prosper, and a shared adherence to international law and the United Nations (UN) Charter.

25. Ian Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi," *Round Table* 105, no. 3 (2016): 277.

26. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 582–85.

27. Hall, "Multialignment," 282.

28. Hall, "Multialignment," 277–78.

29. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, 16–17.

30. "Media Center: Treaty of Friendship between the Government of India and the Royal Government of Afghanistan," Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India (website), January 4, 1950, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6584/Treaty+of+Friendship>.

31. "Media Center: Text of Agreement on Strategic Partnership Between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India (website), October 4, 2011, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5383/>.

Diplomatically, it required Afghanistan to support India's pursuit of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The SPA also outlined a robust agenda of social, cultural, academic, and intellectual exchanges to bolster historical and cultural links between the two states.³² Trade and economic cooperation focused on regional interaction with other countries, envisioning Afghanistan "as a trade, transportation and energy hub connecting Central and South Asia."³³ Additionally, it allowed India to "assist, as mutually determined, in the training, equipping and capacity building programmes for Afghan National Security Forces."³⁴ In a foreign policy shift, this SPA changed India's long-held stance of noninvolvement in the Afghan conflict.

The Indo-Afghan SPA embraced all three of India's national security interests: sustaining the international system, deterring Pakistan, and containing Chinese expansion. The SPA expanded India's regional influence by connecting it to a democratizing Afghanistan and secured one more vote in India's pursuit of a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a position India believes commensurate with its role in the international system. Furthermore, it indicated India's policy of alignment is not limited to benign approaches, as demonstrated by the introduction of lethal aid. India's outreach to Afghanistan, coupled with its Chabahar Port initiative in Iran, showed a determination to open Central Asian markets to India's economy and ensure its energy security, directly supporting India's national security objectives of deterring Pakistan and countering Chinese expansionism by maintaining its regional hegemony. It also demonstrates India's conceptual alignment with Afghanistan and its posturing to thwart its nuclear armed neighbors, Pakistan and China, by seeking first-mover economic and security advantages.

Kautilyan Silent War

Kautilya was a classical realist, given his assertion that states must seek or suffer conquest.³⁵ India sees itself in realist terms relative to Pakistan and China while acknowledging the modern constraints placed on nation-state behavior. Following the founding of the United Nations, state sovereignty became closely guarded and wars of aggression became unlawful.³⁶ India's ability to counter Pakistan and China is complicated by the

32. Ministry of External Affairs, "Text of Agreement."

33. Ministry of External Affairs, "Text of Agreement."

34. Ministry of External Affairs, "Text of Agreement."

35. Boesche, *First Great Political Realist*, 78.

36. *United Nations Charter*, United Nations (website), n.d., accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>; and 3314 (XXIX). Definition of Aggression, Resolutions Adopted on the Reports of the Sixth Committee, United Nations (1974), 143, [https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/3314\(XXIX\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/3314(XXIX)).

stabilizing effects of nuclear weapons, which drive states to avoid conflict. Although Kautilya did not have to consider the constraints of an international system and nuclear weapons, the *Artha-shastra* provides applicable guidance. Kautilya believed kings would face two types of rivals: weak ones to be exterminated (conquered) and strong ones requiring a long-term approach of steady harassment and weakening.³⁷ Facing nuclear-armed and belligerent neighbors, which India views as strong states, Kautilyan thought steers India away from direct confrontation and toward a strategy of harassment and weakening through the application of soft and nonmilitary instruments of power.

Pakistan remains a nuclear-armed garrison state which oscillates in and out of pseudo-democratic status and runs the gamut of state behavior from supporting terrorism to nuclear brinkmanship.³⁸ Kautilyan success in a modern context is the avoidance of large-scale conventional conflict with Pakistan and the denial of Afghanistan as strategic depth to the Pakistani military. India's persistent diplomatic, economic, and cultural support for the government of Afghanistan demonstrated a foreign policy informed by Kautilyan logic, specifically the support of "the [vulnerable] enemy-in-the-rear of a strong king."³⁹ India saw opportunity in Afghanistan and became the fifth-largest direct donor of economic support, pledging over \$3 billion.⁴⁰ India also gradually increased support for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.

The impact of Afghanistan's deepening relationship with India on the Pakistani psyche should not be underestimated, nor should India's aggressive response to Pakistani-sponsored terrorist attacks on Indian military targets launched into Pakistan.⁴¹ Afghanistan's refusal to accept Pakistani military aid provided India an opportunity to support a Mandalan ally while harassing a Mandalan foe. Within months of signing the SPA, India outlined a program to train over 25,000 Afghan officers and soldiers.⁴² By 2014,

37. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, xiv, 514–15, 520, 530; and Boesche, "Kautilya's *Arthashastra*," 20–21.

38. Thomas Bruneau et al., "Civil-Military Relations in Muslim Countries. The Cases of Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey," *Journal of Defense Resources Management* 4, no. 2 (2013): 5–36, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/37500/01_bruneau_mayfield_mccaskey_weece_matei.pdf.

39. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 523.

40. Alyssa Ayres, "How India Can Help in Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations Asia *Unbound* (blog), April 14, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-india-can-help-afghanistan>; and "Media Center: Q.NO.282. Indian Aid to Afghanistan," Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India, February 25, 2015, <http://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/24811/qno282+indian+aid+to+afghanistan>; and "Media Center: Q.NO.506. Indian Investments in Afghanistan," Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India, February 4, 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/34803/question+no506+indian+investments+in+afghanistan>.

41. "Special Report: Hissing Cousins – Why India and Pakistan Hate Each Other," *Economist* (website), July 22, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2017/07/24/why-india-and-pakistan-hate-each-other>.

42. Nitin Gokhale, "India Boosts Afghan Military Role," *Diplomat* (website), December 7, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2011/12/india-boosts-afghan-military-role/>.

the program evolved beyond commissioning and initial-entry programs to the training of Afghan commandos.⁴³ Indian support expanded to nonlethal aid with the delivery of three light utility helicopters in 2015.⁴⁴ A significant shift in Indian policy came in 2016 with the delivery of four Mi-35 attack helicopters to the Afghan Air Force, India's first foray into lethal aid.⁴⁵ India's delivery of lethal aid, widely considered by Afghans a positive development was quietly acknowledged by the US-led Resolute Support Mission in Kabul. Both actions carry the hallmarks of Kautilya's concept of silent war, competing with adversaries indirectly through actions that harass and weaken their position militarily.⁴⁶

From an Indian perspective, a stable and Indian-friendly Afghanistan would have required Pakistan to rethink its concept of strategic depth and its continued indifference to, if not overt support for, violent-extremist organizations within its borders. Despite the Taliban's return to power following the US withdrawal, the Afghan-Pakistani relationship remains uncertain. Without an American-led military structure in Afghanistan for violent-extremist organizations to oppose, Pakistan may be forced either to address its policy of supporting these proxies or to allow itself to be threatened by them. Either outcome suits India's interests.

Opportunity in the Indo-Pacific

While Afghanistan provided India an opportunity to harass and weaken Pakistan, China presents a larger and more capable problem. Relative to China, India is at a military and economic disadvantage—the “weak king,” in Kautilyan parlance—which limits its means to manage Chinese encroachment.⁴⁷ Historically, India has firmly maintained its status as a nonaligned state, partly to avoid provoking China militarily. This concept is central to India's foreign policy as New Delhi seeks to delay conflict with China and build capability, congruent with Kautilyan thought on a state's fluctuating power over time.⁴⁸ India's efforts to harass and weaken Pakistan were land centric. Future strategic competition with China will take

43. Sanjeev Miglani, “India Begins Training Afghan Commandos as Ties Deepen Ahead of 2014,” Reuters (website), December 20, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-afghanistan/india-begins-training-afghan-commandos-as-ties-deepen-ahead-of-2014-idINDEE9BJ05E20131220>.

44. “Media Statement by Prime Minister during the Visit of President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to India (April 28, 2015),” Ministry of External Affairs/Government of India (website), April 28, 2015, <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25136>.

45. Franz-Stefan Gady, “India Delivers 4th Combat Helicopter to Afghanistan,” *Diplomat* (website), December 1, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/india-delivers-4th-combat-helicopter-to-afghanistan/>.

46. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 505, 513, 533, 630.

47. Burgess, “U.S. Pivot to Asia,” 369–70; and Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 622–23.

48. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 507–9; and Burgess, “U.S. Pivot to Asia,” 372.

place where India's economic, energy, and national security must be ensured and where the geography and international law enable competition: at sea.⁴⁹

As India's power grows, its idealistic approach of nonalignment has yielded to expanding national security interests. Since independence, India has modified its foreign policy, moving through periods of nonalignment, strategic autonomy, "multi-alignment," and now into an approach known as "neo-Curzonian" foreign policy.⁵⁰ This new Indian policy represents increased cooperation with Australia, Japan, and the United States.⁵¹ India's clear-eyed emphasis on revitalizing its economy while deepening its regional security ties reflects this new reality.⁵² Current US policy for the Indo-Pacific aligns with Indian interests, a point made clear in Secretary of State Antony Blinken's December 2021 speech on a free and open Indo-Pacific and reinforced in his May 2022 speech on the United States' approach to the People's Republic of China.⁵³ The convergence of American and Indian national security interests in containing Chinese encroachment and complementary long-term regional policies creates the opportunity to secure Indian partnership.

The Quad: Kautilyan Alignment and Silent War

Persuading India into a full security partnership with the United States will not be easy, and may not be necessary. India's use of bilateral SPAs is consistent with Kautilyan foreign policy concepts and congruent with the alignment of like-minded states. Therefore, it is unsurprising the Quad rests at the center of India's foreign policy under Modi.

Born in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Quad rose and foundered as it drifted toward a security-focused organization.⁵⁴ Revitalized in 2017, the Quad focused on a clear nonsecurity mandate: diplomatic, information, and economic alignment. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's minister for external affairs, hailed the Quad's revitalization as a major diplomatic accomplishment of Modi's administration, adding,

49. Navy, *Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 5.

50. Hall, "Multialignment," 271, 273, 275, 282; and C. Raja Mohan, "The Return of the Raj," *American Interest Online* 5, no. 5 (2010), <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2010/05/01/the-return-of-the-raj/>.

51. Medcalf, "Indian National Security Strategy," 517–18.

52. C. Raja Mohan and Parag Khanna, "Getting India Right: Mutual Interests and Democratic Affinity," Hoover Institution (website), February 1, 2006, <https://www.hoover.org/research/getting-india-right>.

53. Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 46; Antony J. Blinken, "Speech: A Free and Open Indo-Pacific," US Department of State (website), December 14, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>; and Antony J. Blinken, "Speech: The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of China," US Department of State (website), May 26, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

54. Associated Press, "What's the 4-Nation Quad, and Where Did It Come From?" *Economic Times* (website), May 24, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/whats-the-4-nation-quad-and-where-did-it-come-from/articleshow/91772674.cms>.

“it is also a statement of [India’s] growing interests beyond the Indian Ocean.”⁵⁵ Jaishankar describes India as “overcoming the hesitations of history” and the Quad as developing relationships that align with India’s national interests and vision “of shaping the region and the world.”⁵⁶

The Quad leaders did not meet in person until September 2021. When they reconvened in May 2022, they delivered a true development: the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness.⁵⁷ This partnership enables Quad members to share information and deliver real-time maritime data to existing information-sharing centers in India, Singapore, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.⁵⁸ Maritime Domain Awareness, is a dual-use capability that allows nations to access shared data to combat illegal fishing, piracy, and dark shipping. Additionally, it allows the Quad to monitor the hallmarks of Chinese encroachment—incursions into economic exclusion zones and the persistent violation of maritime boundaries. The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness deftly addressed economic and sovereignty issues without naming China as an adversary or labeling the Quad as a security organization.

The Quad and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness demonstrate the Kautilyan influence of alignment and silent warfare on Indian foreign policy. The Indian Maritime Security Strategy identifies Maritime Domain Awareness as a task that supports responding to nontraditional threats at sea, ensuring freedom of navigation, upholding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, deterring adversaries, and managing conflict.⁵⁹ India’s strategy points directly to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, leveraging the international system and courts that would subsequently rule in favor of the Philippines and against Chinese claims in the South China Sea.⁶⁰ India draws strength and authority from the international system. India’s Maritime Security Strategy and the contemporary foreign policy focus on the Quad demonstrate support

55. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, “Opinion: Quad Validates PM’s India-First Approach, Writes S Jaishankar” *Hindustan Times* (website), May 25, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/quad-validates-pm-s-india-first-approach-101653498815738.html>.

56. Jaishankar, “PM’s India-First Approach.”

57. “Media Center: Joint Statement from Quad Leaders”; “Briefing Room: Joint Statement from Quad Leaders”; “Media Center: Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement”; and “Briefing Room: Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement.”

58. “Media Center: Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement”; “Briefing Room: Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement”; and “Briefing Room FACT SHEET: Quad Leaders’ Tokyo Summit 2022,” May 23, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-tokyo-summit-2022/>.

59. Navy, *Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 6–7, 50, 64.

60. In the Matter of the South China Sea Arbitration, Permanent Court of Arbitration, case no. 2013-19 (Permanent Court of Arbitration, Hague 2016), <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>.

for Indian national interests of sustaining the international system and maintaining regional hegemony.

Mandalan Motives

Approaching India requires deft regional realism and careful international diplomacy. India's desire for strategic autonomy, paired with its assessment of the region and national security objectives, has resulted in some alignments that give the United States pause. Specifically, US leadership questions India's economic alignment with Iran, its dependency on Russia for defense-related articles, its participation in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and its problematic voting record in the UN.

The US-Iranian relationship impacts India's ability to advance its national security objectives, specifically the maintenance of the regional hegemony and management of Chinese encroachment. The withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action resulted in the collapse of Indian oil imports—Iran's second largest market—and a boon for China, which became the near-exclusive export destination for Iranian oil.⁶¹ The collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action also highlighted the Chinese-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2016, which called for Chinese-Iranian cooperation on issues ranging from defense and security to energy, ports, and other infrastructure projects.⁶² These outcomes did not advance American interests and jeopardized Indian economic and national security interests while bolstering Chinese influence and access in Iran.

Indian dependence on Russian defense articles is another point of potential contention. From 2018 to 2021, India was the world's largest importer of defense items, and from 2012 to 2016, over 68 percent of India's defense imports came from Russia.⁶³ The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted India's dependency, which runs counter to India's pursuit of strategic autonomy. Similarly, India would see dependence on the

61. Nidhi Verma and Julia Payne, "Indian, European Refiners Get Ready to Buy Iranian Oil," Reuters (website), May 19, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indian-refiners-set-curb-spot-buying-make-room-iranian-oil-2021-05-19/>.

62. Hassan Rouhani, "Full Text of Joint Statement on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between I.R. Iran, P.R. China," January 23, 2016, <https://www.president.ir/EN/91435>; and Reuters Staff, "Iran and China Sign 25-Year Cooperation Agreement," Reuters (website), March 27, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-china/iran-and-china-sign-25-year-cooperation-agreement-idUSKBN2BJ0AD>.

63. "TIV of Arms Imports to the Top 50 Largest Importers, 2018-2021," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (website), accessed July 10, 2022, <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/toplist.php>; and Kate Blanchfield, Pieter D. Wezeman, and Siemon T. Wezeman, "The State of Major Arms Transfers in 8 Graphics," *SIPRI WritePeace* (blog), February 22, 2017, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2017/state-major-arms-transfers-8-graphics>.

United States, whose weapons sales come with many more restrictions and caveats, as equally disadvantageous.

India's membership in BRICS, a grouping of five major emerging economies, indicates some economic alignment with China and Russia. More importantly, from an Indian perspective, membership bolsters India's international status, provides economic access to the global south, and balances its increasing connectedness to the West—all three of which serve to advance India's desire for strategic autonomy.⁶⁴ In the United Nations, India abstained on 2022 votes condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine and its removal from the Human Rights Commission.⁶⁵ These abstentions must be considered in the context of India's desire to obtain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, a foreign policy objective only achievable through a reformation of the UNSC, with China and Russia's consent. By not voting with the West on Ukraine, India avoided antagonizing China and protected access to logistical support for its inventory of Russian military equipment.

Conclusion

Kautilyan logic drives India to avoid alliances and seek alignment with countries that can advance its interests. Through an understanding of India's perspective and Kautilya's influence on Indian foreign policy and strategy, the United States can take several actions to gain Indian partnership and address US national security interests of managing a rising China.

The United States must take a more deliberate approach to its diplomatic relationship with India than with other Asian actors. A permanent seat on the UNSC is high on India's priority list, and the United States has supported this objective. Revisiting this issue formally in the UN would bolster India's stature on the global stage. Importantly, it would send a clear message to China and Pakistan regarding democratic values in the furtherance of the international system. Additionally, it would provide India equal footing with China on the UNSC, a position that could bolster US efforts to steer China toward peaceful growth. Sustaining the rules-based

64. Michael Kugelman, "India Plays BRICS to Its Interests," *Foreign Policy* (website), June 23, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/23/brics-summit-india-russia-china-quad/>.

65. "UN News: Russia Blocks Security Council Action on Ukraine," United Nations (website), February 26, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112802>; and "UN News: UN General Assembly Votes to Suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council," United Nations (website), April 7, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115782>.

international system is a clear area of Kautilyan alignment for India and the United States and would further balance the influence of China and Russia.

The United States must resist the urge to militarize the Quad lest it lose the Indo-Pacific's most powerful diplomatic tool of the twenty-first century. The Quad states' diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of national power are aligned. Every deliverable the Quad produces advances the sustainment of the international system and pushes back on Chinese encroachment—two of India's identified vital national interests in complete alignment with those of the United States. The United States must recognize that while India did not vote in support of the US position in the United Nations, India's abstentions were made to manage the timing and conditions for what the Indians believe is the coming Sino-Indian conflict. Finally, the United States should continue to encourage Indian defense relationships with like-minded states and support Indian decisions to move away from Russian equipment, even if these actions do not result in American sales.

Policies of nonalignment and strategic independence saw India through multiple conflicts with Pakistan and China, but today these adversaries are effectively aligned nuclear powers, and their management requires a different approach.⁶⁶ The operationalization of India's foreign policy through the Quad demonstrates India's recognition of the changing environment.⁶⁷

The United States must break its reactive approach to South Asian policy and proactively pursue opportunities in the region.⁶⁸ Securing India's partnership is a logical next step for the United States in pursuing a free and open Indo-Pacific. A strong and US-aligned India will bolster the rules-based international order, encourage Pakistani compliance with international norms, and steer China toward a path of peaceful prosperity by changing the calculus of confrontation.

66. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, 21.

67. Gurmeet Kanwal, "Next Steps in the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership: Defense Cooperation Must Be Taken to a Higher Trajectory," Center for Strategic and International Studies (website), October 8, 2015, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/next-steps-us-india-strategic-partnership-defense-cooperation-must-be-taken-higher>.

68. Burgess and Beilstein, "Multilateral Defense Cooperation," 4.

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