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► **To cite this version:**

Brigitte Vassort-Rousset. The winds of change in interregional representations, shifts, and balances of power: the US, India, and the Indo-Pacific area. *Paix et sécurité européenne et internationale*, 2017, 6. hal-01815754

**HAL Id: hal-01815754**

**<https://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-01815754>**

Submitted on 31 May 2021

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The winds of change in interregional representations, shifts, and balances of power : the US, India, and the Indo-Pacific area

Brigitte VASSORT-ROUSSET

Professeur de Science politique, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 -

Cet essai examine les interactions de l'Inde avec la zone indo-pacifique, la Chine en particulier, dans le cadre de la puissance globale des Etats-Unis, comme illustration du nouvel interrégionalisme politique hybride. Le pivot américain vers l'Inde s'est mué en solide relation bilatérale fondée sur la compréhension mutuelle et les intérêts réciproques stratégiques et commerciaux. En outre, il a développé des engagements multilatéraux éco-stratégiques spécifiques, et renforcé la politique indienne d'Action à l'es.

This essay examines India's interactions with the Indo-Pacific area, China in particular, in the framework of global US power, as an illustration of new political hybrid inter regionalism. The US pivot to India has grown to a solid bilateral relationship based on mutual understanding, and strategic and commercial reciprocal interests. Furthermore, it has fostered specific multilateral eco-strategic commitments, and an enhanced Act East policy

Inde, Etats-Unis, zone indo-pacifique, relation bilatérale, régionalisme politique hybride, intérêts réciproques stratégiques et commerciaux, engagements multilatéraux

India, United States, Indo-Pacific Area, bilateral relationship , political hybrid regionalism, strategic and commercial reciprocal interests, multilateral commitments

## I.Introduction

In his book « A world of regions : Asia and Europe in the American imperium » (Cornell University Press, 2005), 12 years after his seminal article «A world of regions : America, Europe and East Asia »<sup>1</sup>, Peter Katzenstein<sup>2</sup> observed a new political regionalism, critical to contemporary international relations, emerging from the dramatic shift in world politics in the aftermath of the Cold War, and unlikely to be fully integrated into one normative, homogeneous global order.

He argued along several lines. First of all, this was in sharp contrast to either a focus on the allegedly stubborn persistence of the nation-state, or one on the all-pervasive march of globalization. In his studies of technology and foreign investment, domestic and international security, and cultural diplomacy and popular culture, he examined the changing regional dynamics of Europe and Asia, linked to the United States through Germany and Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter KATZENSTEIN, « A world of regions : America, Europe and East Asia », *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Fall 1993, vol. 1/1, Maurer School of Law : Indiana University, Article 4, available at <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol1/iss1/4>

<sup>2</sup> Peter Joachim Katzenstein, Walter S. Carpenter, Jr. Professor of International Studies at Cornell University, has specialized in Asian (particularly Japanese) as well as European (particularly German) roles and norms in international relations. His main concentration lies in the study of culture, religion, identity, and regionalism in the interstate system, for which he is known as a proponent of constructivist thinking. He is often associated with the school of neoliberal institutionalism through his joint projects with Robert Keohane. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Secondly, he contended these regions were closely interacting with an American imperium combining territorial and non-territorial powers; he argued that globalization and internationalization create porous regions, historically distinctive yet open to transnational influences and embedded in the American imperium, and that such regions may be central to the provision of solutions to the contradictions between states and markets, security and insecurity, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism. He held these regions as critical elements in the dynamics of contemporary world politics, and as framed by specific regional institutions influenced by domestic and cultural arrangements.

Thirdly, Katzenstein's insights already meant that an important legacy of the informal American empire was gradually receding in world politics, as other states embodied different norms and were endowed with different capacities. In other words, the spread of legal norms has been politically contested; European integration has been driven by a legal revolution, but the Asian processes of regionalism have not. Hence, « global politics is nowadays polycentric in structure, and plural in substance ».<sup>3</sup>

In this respect, the decline of the American global hegemony should not necessarily lead to instability, according to UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance Amitav Acharya, in "The End of American World Order" (2014).<sup>4</sup> The emerging alternative to U.S. hegemony is a "multiplex" world, he says, using his own term for the complex global system. "It might be debated whether the power of the United States itself is declining or not," says Acharya, "but the U.S.-led liberal hegemonic order that has shaped the world's history for the last 50 years, however, has undoubtedly come to an end. The shift of power has begun – the question is what our world will look like in the future."

Transnational terrorism is only one of the challenges that the liberal hegemony could not react to in a competent way, he says. The view held by many Western scholars that by rearranging itself, the present hegemony may retain its power, is false, he adds. In his view, the world has changed too much in the past decades for a system that was based on the realities of the 1950s. "This world, the complex global world, has never existed before. The institutions through which the United States could exert authority – NATO, IMF and so on – were created in a different time, and while reforms were promised many times to share authority and power, they only come slowly," Acharya adds. He also contests the view that emerging powers such as China, India or Russia will uphold the system of liberal hegemony because they have benefited from it so far. They don't feel as sentimental about liberalism as those in the West, and their system of capitalism is vastly different - only take China's state capitalism as an example.

Defining it rather as a metaphor than a theory, Acharya introduces the concept of the "multiplex world order" as an alternative to the frequent terms "bipolar" and "multipolar," which he regards as inadequate. Drawing comparisons from the world of cinema, he states that in this world it is possible for different systems to coexist, just as several different movies can be screened in a multiplex theater. In this new world order, it is no longer only great powers that count. Lesser powers, regional powers, international and transnational organizations and corporations will all have a more important role to play. According to Acharya, one of the key characteristics of the multiplex world is an unprecedented global interdependence, which manifests itself in the financial sector and in production networks, not primarily in trade. He also mentions regionalism as a defining trend that is exempt from the universalistic U.S.-led system of hegemony, and argues that regionalism in the multiplex world order is much more open to cooperation than the blocs formed in nineteenth-century Europe. He mentions the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as one example of regional cooperation that has shown gradual development in efficiency and recognition by other powers.

Further comparative research has been conducted on the socio-economic, intellectual, and security-related dimensions of regionalisms since the turn of the twentieth century, stressing

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<sup>3</sup> A « polycentric » world refers to the principle of a global organization around several political, social, and financial regional centres/hubs, while in a « multipolar » world, more than two nation-states have nearly equal amounts of military, cultural, and economic influence.

<sup>4</sup> Amitav ACHARYA, « Comparative regionalism : a field whose time has come », *The International Spectator*, March 2012, 47/1, 3-15 ; and *The End of American World Order*, Cambridge : Polity, 2014. The Indian-born Canadian Professor has taught I.R. at the School of International Service of the American University in Washington, D.C.

the spread of cross-border regionalization processes at the expense of region-building (inspired by European integration), the interplay between territory, space, and trans-state networks, and the intrinsic ambivalence of global frontier narratives. The regionalism/regionalization dyad has been substituted to the previous focus on integration/cooperation : « regionalism refers to cognitive and/or state-centric projects, while regionalization points to processes and/or de facto outcomes »<sup>5</sup>.

Regionalism may be defined « as the ideas or ideologies, programmes, policies, and goals that seek to transform an identified social space into a regional project. Since regionalism postulates the implementation of a programme and the definition of a strategy, it is often associated with institution-building and the conclusion of formal agreements. » Yet, « regionalism also refers, under the influence of the constructivist literature, to cognitive and ideational projects associated with the ‘invention’ of regions and construction of identities, and delineation of mental maps ». <sup>6</sup> Besides, while it can account for interstate processes of sovereignty-pooling, it also applies to groupings seeking sovereignty-enhancement. (The dynamics of regionalization, on its part, can be associated with the study of undirected economic and social interactions between non-state actors, whether individuals, companies or NGOs).

In addition, recent scholarship has characterized with renewed views both regionalism (past the « Europe first » and the « beyond Europe » focus, into the so-called « post-revisionist perspective ») and interregionalism (Eurocentric, then polycentric, later multiplex). Telo has loosely defined hybrid interregionalism as « institutionalized multidimensional cooperation between at least one regional grouping, and either a region or a large country belonging to a different continent ».

As an illustration, this essay examines India’s interactions with Asia within the framework of global US power, in a pragmatic way yet within the overarching theme of regionalism, and as an illustration of the impact of new political interregionalism.

## II. The US’ tilt towards India: from a fissured partnership to a solid bilateral relationship based on mutual understanding, and commercial and strategic regional interests

The US policy towards India has not been predictable: in January 2014, India and the US were locked in a bitter diplomatic quarrel. Less than a year on, the reset button had been pressed and “areas of contention turned into areas of collaboration”, partly because of the Indian government’s sharper strategic focus on the US under the incumbent Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi: the first summit between PM Modi and President Obama took place in late September 2014, and US President Barack Obama was the chief guest of India’s 65<sup>th</sup> Republic Day parade. The warm ties cultivated by the Heads of governments in charge of both countries cannot be underestimated in making the foundations of the India-US relationship stronger.

Back in July 2011 already, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Minister of External Affairs Krishna had acknowledged their two countries’ shared interests in promoting stability and prosperity across Asia, and as the world’s two largest democracies in upholding the rules that frame relations between states, and in ensuring that the model for 21<sup>st</sup> century Asia is one of open economies, open governments, and open societies. Their priorities were four-fold:

- *engaging East*: in order to deepen cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, including in multilateral fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+); to support a balanced and inclusive regional architecture, and look forward to holding the new Trilateral dialogue between Japan, India, and the United States, a valuable forum to discuss issues of mutual interest, e.g. managing counter-piracy and natural disasters, or fostering trade and commerce;

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<sup>5</sup> Björn HETTNE, « The new regionalism : a prologue » in HETTNE, Björn, Inotai, Andras and SUNKEL, Osvaldo, eds., *Globalism and the New Regionalism*. Vol. 1, Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, xv-xxix.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel BACH, *Regionalism in Africa*, London and New York : Routledge, 2015, 5-6.

- advancing *stability, peace, and prosperity in Afghanistan* via a joint pledge to intensify consultation, cooperation and coordination there, with \$2 billion in development efforts from India, towards an Afghan-led settlement backed by regional partners;
- *a shared vision for regional integration, based on democratic peace and market economy*: both countries acknowledged the crucial role of economic integration in South and Central Asia in furthering long-term peace, stability, and prosperity, as well as free flows of goods, ideas, and people along a modern day “Silk Road”;
- *sharing global perspectives*: the United States and India held inaugural consultations on West Asia and Central Asia, as well as the third round of the Asia-Pacific Dialogue, in order to enhance their global strategic partnership on issues facing both countries, and to make progress in implementing trilateral food security initiatives in Africa.

Yet in reality, the shift in Washington’s policy towards New Delhi had to do with the new American focus on the Asia-Pacific and West Asia. For the US views India as a regional net security provider for at least three reasons. First, it considers India as a responsible emerging power committed to established international norms and laws; and it also considers India’s democracy and political set-up as a model for the subcontinent, and an added value to the role of democracy in world affairs, in addition to being an economic powerhouse. Second, Washington likes to envisage New Delhi as a potential ally for positive engagement with Beijing, with a mandate to keep the sea lines of communications (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean free and safe for international trade and navigation, given that political turbulence in the South China Sea has raised uncertainties over freedom of navigation <sup>7</sup>. And third, the menace created by ISIS in the West Asian Region must be tackled. These American expectations could materialize as the Modi government’s foreign policy goals signaled a will to develop cordial and constructive ties with all major powers of the world <sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> With a nearly two-digit growth, a booming trade, an ever-increasing military budget, possession of a credible nuclear force, an ambitious Navy, and asserted diplomatic objectives on regional and international levels, the emergence of China has both fascinated and raised many questions around the world, especially in a new era of geopolitical competition between the US and China. This US-China rivalry will shape international relations ; it is based on a new balance of power in the Pacific and Indian Oceans due to the growth of China’s economy and industry, and its military power and naval development, to a shift from an exclusively hard power rivalry to soft power and ideological competition (City upon the Hill vs. Confucius Institutes), and to long-standing exceptionalism in both countries (freedom from external constraints, messianism, surrounding hostile world), yet vulnerable (pollution, financial crisis, deforestation, human rights violations).

By weakening American presence in the Pacific, China would like to put an end to America’s Asian alliances (South Korea, the Philippines, and even Japan). The enhancement of the Chinese Navy is congruent with its One Belt One Road strategy, and aims at reshaping the balance of power in Asia : in 2006, Hu Jintao had termed the development of China’s naval power « a great task », and Admiral Wu Shengli said « it is the great revitalization of the Chinese nation », in a maritime geopolitical approach similar to Admiral Alfred Mahan’s insight that naval power guarantees winning battles and achieving national grandeur, and commercial power as well.

The dispute remains unsolved as Beijing continues to claim the South China series of islands as part of its historical heritage, vs. Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. China is definitely trying to roll back foreign military presence in this area ; one major reason is linked to the PRC’s focus on Taiwan. The ongoing geopolitical contest in the Western Pacific, as a central issue in the 21st century, will be a crucial test for how the US and China manage their rivalry.

Nevertheless, Xi Jinping and Barack Obama’s meeting at the G20 Summit in Hangzhou early September 2016, illustrated the three coexisting dimensions of the Sino-American relationship : enhanced pragmatic cooperations (e.g. ratification of the COP21 Agreement), yet concrete divergences (on Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, and religion ; on trade issues, cybersecurity, the South and East China Seas), and the inevitably growing strategic competition between an established power and an emerging one. Cf. JIA Xiudong, « La rencontre Xi Jinping-Barack Obama pour renforcer la relation sino-américaine », *La Chine au présent*, 10/2016, 14-5.

<sup>8</sup> Significantly, PM Modi’s first meeting with President Obama took place after his summit meetings with leaders of the two most powerful Asian countries, i.e. Japanese PM Shinzo Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping ; Modi had also met Russian President Putin during the BRICS summit in Brazil. Moreover, Japan’s

Such was the background for the January 2015 signing of the US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region: the document explicitly mentioned safeguarding regional maritime security, i.e. a vital US national security interest in the Asia-Pacific<sup>9</sup>. India reciprocated this gesture of the US with a combination of enthusiasm and principled reluctance, as its perspective is different, and dual. Actually, India's approach has been to recognize the importance placed on it as a major player in maintaining peace and security in the region, and has maintained that it would focus on bilateral relations, thus deriving maximum benefit out of the partnership. But it has also sidelined any pressure to behave as a traditional US military ally, and refrained from posturing against China in any dispute.

Regarding principles of international involvement, Indian foreign policy has remained guided by non-interference, non-alignment, and non-aggression. In post-Cold War Asia, becoming a "linchpin" of an entity is a good strategy provided the objective and terms of becoming a "linchpin" fits India's economic, political, and strategic interests and considerations. However, Modi's policy towards the US carries a sharp strategic focus, as his government needs a strong strategic partnership to bolster its military capabilities in the face of rising security threats posed by state and non-state actors: i.e. border disputes with China and Pakistan combined with asymmetric security threats posed by Jihadist terrorism, or the expansion of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in the subcontinent, among others, fuel much of New Delhi's logic in seeking a stronger partnership with the superpower, as illustrated by the India-US defense deals.

The deals have met India's security needs guided by the country's national interests, hence an era of strong India-US bilateral ties under the Obama Administrations. However, if India wishes not to abandon its policy of maintaining "strategic autonomy", it must resist US pressure to take concrete stands in disputes involving US interests in Asia when partnering with the US.

In addition, the two compelling rationales behind Modi's visit to the US were first of all wooing investors to India, and then providing momentum to bilateral defense cooperation, on a standstill for some time, in order to design a cooperative framework to expand collaboration in trade, investment, and technology.

The resilience and expansion of the Islamic State's influence, the resurgence of the Taliban threat in Afghanistan, instability in nuclear-armed Pakistan, and China's apparently unstoppable assertiveness provided a significant rationale for a quick second Indo-US summit.

In 2016, the US policy vis-à-vis South Asia was dominated by its regional security interests as well as the value of the Indian market for US companies, as the US-India

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commitment of US\$35 billion and China's of US\$20 billion foreign investment in India, had encouraged Modi to draw a substantial amount of more than US \$40 billion potential FDI from the CEOs of many top American companies.

<sup>9</sup> See US-India Joint Statement, « Shared effort ; progress for all », White House, Office of the Press Secretary, January 25, 2015. This marked the end of US exports restrictions for India's defense and space industries, and constituted a breakthrough on a pact allowing US companies to supply India with civilian nuclear technology, with a deal to limit the legal liability of US suppliers in the event of a nuclear power plant catastrophe (after the 2005 Civil nuclear Agreement had demonstrated new trust and economic opportunities). The deal was struck to share defense technology and improve dialogue in the future, with a security hotline between Obama and Modi. The next Joint Statement of the White House (Office of the Press Secretary) on June 7, 2016, « The United States and India : enduring global partners in the 21st century », stressed the relevance of both countries' two-way defense engagement, and their important role in promoting peace, prosperity, stability, and security in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, as well as the opportunities offered by India's Act East Policy, and by the US rebalance to Asia, on maritime security, counter-terrorism, clean energy, and global issues and regional consultations.

relationship was also guided by the mutual understanding towards gaining economic benefits from the two-way trade between the two large economies<sup>10</sup>.

With Donald Trump in the American Presidential office, it is unclear whether India-US relations will remain stable and work on sorting out major constraints in the bilateral link, such as nuclear liability, intellectual property rights, and so on. As evidenced during sessions of the US-India East Asia Consultations, views are exchanged on a variety of issues including maritime security, combating nuclear proliferation, and expanding regional trade opportunities in the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor and beyond.

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, it would be expected that a more intense New Delhi-Washington cooperation than before would be needed to preserve and secure the shared long-term commitment to help build a stable and governable Afghanistan. Pakistan's significance in the American policy formulation on the region remained, however troubled, in the Obama administration; but the US could not strike with Islamabad a deal similar to the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal with Delhi in 2005. It will not sell the Pakistani Air Force the latest variant of the jet it has operated for 33 years, as India is acquiring the Lockheed Martin F-16 fighter jet.

According to the latest US-India data that measure arms deliveries rather than orders and sales contracts, as confirmed by the Indian Defense Minister Arun Jaitley's address to the Indian Parliament<sup>11</sup>, the US has overtaken Russia as the largest arms supplier to India since 2013, followed by France and Israel. The emergence of the USA as a major supplier to India is a recent development.

Until 2014, most of India's contracted arms purchases had been from Russia, partly because it needed to replace or upgrade equipment bought from its former ally the Soviet Union. But with defense imports from the US of \$1.9bn in 2014 (and up to \$5.9bn spent on buying defense equipment from the West in 2012-14 vs. \$4.1bn from Russia, in second place<sup>12</sup>), India knocked out Saudi Arabia out of the top spot among buyers (as of 2013, according to HIS Jane's) with purchases that included Boeing's C-17A Heavylift strategic transport aircraft, the C130J Super Hercules aircraft, Harpoon anti-submarine missiles, and P-81 Maritime Patrol aircraft. (According to SIPRI, India had overtaken China to become the biggest arms importer in 2010). Meanwhile, Russian defense industries sold the most products to China (\$2.3bn), followed by India with \$1.7bn.

Hence, arms trade patterns have fundamentally changed for the dominant players: India is buying a lot of high-end equipment to address the capability gap with the Chinese armed forces. This strategy of India (to obtain more advanced technologies and diversify its imports) is looking increasingly towards the West, expanding cooperation with Israel, the US, and the EU (despite a number of projects with Russia such as the development of the BrahMos and the creation of a fifth-generation fighter FGFA). In addition, cooperation with India is hard to reconcile with the development of Russia's relations with China. This reverse trend has been facilitated by the opening up under Modi of the defense sector to 49 percent foreign direct investment. (In his August 2014 visit to India at a time when India was set to close in on a \$2.5bn deal with the US for 22 Apache attack helicopters and 15 Chinook choppers, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel even discussed co-production of arms such as the Javelin anti-tank guided missiles, MH-60 Romeo multi-role helicopters, spy drones, mine-scattering systems, and 127mm warship guns. Increasing interest in India's defense sector was reflected by Hagel's unprecedented offer of technology transfer and joint production of the Javelin missile).

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<sup>10</sup> Including the objective to deepen economic cooperation by raising Indo-US trade five-fold to \$500 billion, and setting up a joint programme to boost business development, investment, and technology.

<sup>11</sup> Sam LaGrone, « US edge out Russia to become India's largest military equipment vendor », *US Naval Institute News*, August 14, 2014. See also Gill Plimmer and Victor Mallet, « India becomes biggest foreign buyer of US weapons » February 24, 2014 (quoting IHS Jane's). See also *India Spend*, January 27, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *India Spend*, January 27, 2015.

Indo-US relations are largely poised on trade in defense, comprising mainly of imports from India; however, towards the end of the previous Indian government's tenure, trade in defense had been stalled due to budgetary concerns and the impending elections. The Modi government has cleared pending defense projects in India worth about US\$14 billion, as a big step forward in trade with other countries, and been rational in its defense cooperation with the US: it initially turned away, because of the price increase and despite lobbying, the procurement of 145 M777 ultra-light Howitzers to deploy in mountainous terrain, and focused on jointly developing and producing military hardware, rather than going for the Raytheon/Lockheed Martin designed Javelin anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) and more Apache attack helicopters; it also chose Spike missiles from Israel. Yet, India and the US eventually signed a deal for these Howitzers (to be deployed near the borders with China) on December 1, 2016<sup>13</sup>.

The potential to take the bilateral relationship forward on defense articles that would work for both countries' security interests, has been facilitated by the Modi government's market-oriented reforms, including an increasingly liberal foreign investment regime in many sectors, as illustrated by the resolution revising an increase in FDI in the Indian defense sector, thus significantly raising expectations in US investments and sales, and an increase by 10 per cent in the Indian defense budgetary allocation.

E.g., after 10 years of negotiations, on August 29, 2016, India and the US signed a key military logistics agreement to facilitate joint operations and to use each other's land, air, and naval bases for repair and resupply, taking a step forward toward reinforcing ties as they seek to counter an aggressive China<sup>14</sup>. But US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar made it clear after this milestone agreement that its logistics component did not allow the basing of troops in India<sup>15</sup>. Both leaders, without naming China, mentioned the importance of the free flow of trade to both countries, and a shared interest in freedom of navigation and overflight, and unimpeded commerce as part of rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

In overall bilateral economic relations, the United States is one of India's largest trade and investment partners<sup>16</sup>. US-India bilateral trade in goods and services, and the stock of Indian FDI in the US have increased over the last decade, supporting thousands of US jobs. Bilateral trade between the two countries is up since the US-India Strategic Dialogue was launched in 2009, and was expanded in January 2015 to become the US-India Strategic and Commercial Dialogue<sup>17</sup>, thus providing opportunities to strengthen collaboration in areas like energy<sup>18</sup>,

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<sup>13</sup> *India News*, Press Trust of India, December 12, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> US Department of Defense, « US-India Joint Statement on the visit of Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar to the United States », *Press Operations Release* n° NR :306-16, August 29, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> *New Delhi Television Limited* (a rather unbiased and comprehensive Hindi news channel), August 30, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> US exports to India include diamonds and gold, aircraft, machinery, and optical and medical instruments ; US imports include diamonds, pharmaceutical products, oil, agricultural products, organic chemicals, and textile articles. US direct investment in India is led by the professional, scientific, technical services, manufacturing, finance/insurance, and information sectors. Indian direct investment in the US is primarily concentrated in the professional, scientific, and technical services, and banking sectors. US Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, *Fact Sheet*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> On September 21-22, 2015, the State Department hosted the inaugural meeting, when Secretary Kerry and Commerce Secretary Pritzke were joined by their respective Indian co-chairs, along with members of both delegations. Shared priorities include strengthening partnership to meet such challenges as climate change and regional security, as well as deeper economic and commercial ties between the two countries.

<sup>18</sup> On energy cooperation, the US and India are working collaboratively in bilateral and multilateral fora on ensuring mutual energy security, combating global climate change, and supporting the development of low-carbon economies for more job opportunities in both countries. The two countries consult regularly on oil and gas markets, and expand sustainable energy access through US exports of clean energy technology. Initiatives in that regard by the previous Singh government had already led to creating the US-India Energy Dialogue, US-India Climate Change Dialogue, the US-India Civil Nuclear Energy, the Oil and Gas Working Group, and the New



climate change, trade, education, and counterterrorism (including a common agenda of important aspects of homeland security for top level national security advisers' meetings).

Clearly, with regard to partnership with the US, the initial strategic dimensions of the bilateral relationship have moved from its political and strategic attributes to taking on an economic-strategic scope. This is a challenge to India more than to the US, because of India's effort to maintain intact its "strategic autonomy" and non-alignment, and to keep separate the strategic from the economic, particularly in relation to China. However, it undoubtedly stresses increasing convergence in US-Indian strategic perspectives, and reciprocal investment in each other's security and prosperity. Claiming to be rooted in shared values of freedom, democracy, universal human rights, tolerance and pluralism, equal opportunities for all citizens, and rule of law, both countries' official dialogue on this priority partnership is pledged to bolster economic growth and sustainable development, to promote peace and security at home and around the world, to strengthen inclusive, democratic governance and respect for universal human rights, and provide global leadership on issues of shared interest. The US and India are resolved to look at each other as priority partners in the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region.

### III. The specificities of India's cooperation with the US: an increase in regional stakes and multilateral economic-strategic commitments, and an Act East policy within tacit bilateral Indo-US understanding

Although India has categorically stated that its strategic deterrence is not directed against any particular country, this does not govern its maritime policy, as India has built its own deterrence vis-à-vis increasing Chinese presence in the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean, and possible maritime aggression. The development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Command (ANC) as a strategic outpost is part of this strategy of cooperating with the US in the maritime domain. Corroborating these expectations in the Indo-Pacific strategic area, US Admiral Jonathan Greenert said that the US would like to extend this cooperation to India's participation in exercises in the Western Pacific region, where China is becoming more assertive.

The pragmatic and result-oriented Modi government, with its clear focus on its immediate neighbourhood, has also shown interest in two specific economic-strategic imperatives propounded by the Obama Administration, namely the New Silk Road and the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor, which comes to placing a strategic bet on regional economic connectivity.

Through its Silk Road Strategy Act in 1999, the United States intended to launch the concept of a New Silk Road that made Afghanistan a transcontinental trade and transit hub by linking it with the West and the Far East. The Obama Administration counted on constant Indian presence in Afghanistan even after the American withdrawal, as a linchpin for the US to implement the New Silk Road endeavor. India for its part has shown strong interest in maintaining its presence to support developmental work in Afghanistan; yet the prospect of building a safe, secure, and operational transcontinental route crossing Afghanistan is still remote.

Protection of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) has been treated as a priority area of cooperation, especially due to the rise of sea piracy and international terrorism; it could become a priority for the Modi government to counterbalance these maritime concerns, by a two-pronged approach, economic and strategic. The Indian government could match global

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Joint Working Group on Sustainable Growth. They will likely remain in focus. Cf. Vivek MISHRA, « Indo-US relations : after Narendra Modi's visit », Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, *Issue brief*, 20.

expectations and buttress its geopolitical edge by taking a lead economic role with greater trade engagement with the countries of the region, along with a vanguard maritime security role for protecting trade within this area. As a matter of fact, taking forward the promise of the previous government, the Modi government cleared a \$100 million line of credit to Vietnam for four patrol boats, a strategic investment for trade and security.

In parallel, Japan's commitment to double its current investment in India to \$35 bn over the next five years, along with substantial Chinese investment, is a win-win situation for India. Besides, Modi's early tour of Myanmar, Australia, and Fiji showed that his administration has taken the Act East policy seriously, and understood that small countries are also crucial. The US remaining nevertheless a resident power in the Asia Pacific, India's cooperation with its Eastern and extended neighbors also requires tacit understanding with the US.

Many American and Indian interests converge on the Indo-Pacific corridor: both have enormous trade passing through the area, and are keen on achieving a rule-based maritime order and safe sea-lanes for trade, for which increased participation by the Indian Navy is required. The Indian Navy would work with the US Pacific Command fleet in maritime patrol, search, rescue and surveillance in the Indo-Pacific corridor, using the reconnaissance aircraft P-81 Poseidon imported by India from the US, and support facilities from US bases in Guam and Diego Garcia in such joint operations. The US has pressed for a "code of conduct" in the South China Sea against the Chinese push for their version of law and history; given the ongoing South China Sea problems between China and its neighbors, India along with the US may push for a universal "code of conduct" for the Indo-Pacific area and the larger Pacific Ocean.

What are the trend lines in the Indian Ocean?<sup>19</sup> The region witnesses cooperation, and inclusiveness but also competition among the littoral states, which is why prediction is risky on geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic trends. In the geopolitical domain, the region remains peaceful and pan-Indian Ocean multilateral organizations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) (convening the regional navies) address a number of common security issues confronting it.

The presence of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean, and the Chinese Maritime Silk Road initiative (with its growing popularity among a number of smaller states like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives) created unease in New Delhi, though predicted, and have led the Indian Navy to beef up its capabilities to respond to China's ventures there to consolidate its strategy of naval access and basing in support of the PLA Navy's future operations.<sup>20</sup>

One of the important positive developments in the Indian Ocean is the near total suppression of piracy in the Gulf of Aden/Somali Coast area, after eight years of activities by the naval forces of nearly two dozen countries including several UN Security Council resolutions. Which has not prevented the upsurge of illegal activities at sea such as drug smuggling. And the rise of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent has raised a threat whether Pakistan will become a haven for maritime terrorism.

The geoeconomic environment in the Indian Ocean has led to the emerging "Blue Economy" concept led by Seychelles and Mauritius, with the leaders of Indian Ocean littoral countries committed to the sustainable development of marine resources to enhance food and energy security. And the loss of two flights in the Indian Ocean and the Java Sea were reminders of the need to continue developing robust search and rescue (SAR) mechanisms in the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>19</sup> See Vijay SAKHUJA, « IPCS Forecast : the Indian Ocean in 2015 », IPCS, *US and South Asia Articles*, January 6, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Yves-Heng LIM, *China's naval power. An offensive realist approach*, Farnham : Ashgate, 2014, 217 p.

The US continues to act as the strategic anchor and security provider in the Indian Ocean, and its role is welcomed by the regional countries “to correct security imbalances, challenge the hegemony of any dominant power, and ensure regional stability”.<sup>21</sup>

It should be mentioned that the UK decision to permanently position several power projection platforms in the Persian Gulf prompted New Delhi to recall the idea of an Indian Ocean “Zone of peace”, and the withdrawal of extra regional naval powers from the Indian Ocean. This is because India’s security approach to the Indian Ocean has been dichotomous, opposing extra-regional military presence and yet depending on US naval power to underwrite regional security.<sup>22</sup> In the wake of the global financial crisis and the US pivot to the Pacific, American interest in the Indian Ocean has waned; with the shale revolution, the US has lost interest in the Middle-East and in securing the flow of energy from the Persian Gulf; the US naval retrenchment from the region has meant a reduced ability to confront larger threats to peace and security in South and West Asia. Thus, many other states are rushing to fill the vacuum, e.g. the UK’s announcement that it would revive its maritime presence in Manama, Bahrain. But in the event that a Zone of Peace is declared (presumably followed by Pakistan’s renewed proposal for a denuclearized Indian Ocean), India will stand to lose the most because its proposal will be seen as a “backdoor” maneuver to limit the Chinese presence, and an effective abdication of leadership and responsibility in the Indian Ocean Region.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of renewing the 2007 informal strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, i.e. the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (modeled on the Democratic Peace concept to establish an Asian Arc of Democracy of all the countries around China), is recent. The diplomatic dialogue was from the beginning paralleled by joint military exercises, widely viewed as a response to increased Chinese economic power and military modernization, and geared towards contingency in the Taiwan Strait, but also towards force projection capabilities. The Chinese government has responded by issuing formal diplomatic protests to its members, and more recently calls for cooperation towards peaceful relations.

The QSD had ceased after the withdrawal of Australia during PM Kevin Rudd’s tenure (2008), reflecting the ambivalence in Australian policy over the growing tension between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific, or over regional escalations in conflict, China being Australia’s main economic partner but not its principal strategic partner. Following Rudd’s replacement by Julia Gillard in 2010, enhanced US military cooperation with Australia was resumed. In September 2015, Australia’s Defense Minister Kevin Andrews told an audience he and his government would be keen to join in the permanent expansion of the Malabar Exercises when invited by India, and would hold the first ever Indo-Australian

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<sup>21</sup> Active US-Indian military cooperation expanded in 1991 following the economic liberalization of India, when American Lt. General Claude C. Kicklighter, then Commander of the US Army Pacific, proposed army-to-army cooperation, which further grew in the mid-1990s under an Indian center-right coalition. In 2001, India offered the United States military facilities within its territory for offensive operations in Afghanistan. In 2001, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his Indian counterpart Mukherjee signed a « New Framework for India-US defense » under the Indian United Progressive Alliance government, increasing cooperation in military relations, defense industry, and technology sharing ; and they established a « Framework on maritime security cooperation ». India and the US conducted dozens of joint military exercises in the ensuing years, before the development of the Quadrilateral Dialogue.

<sup>22</sup> The Indian Ocean Zone of Peace (IOZOP) was proposed originally in 1971 by Sri Lanka, not so much about peace and tranquility in the Indian Ocean Region, as a way to circumscribe the presence of Western powers in the region, and a perceived uneasiness about growing Indian naval power in the aftermath of the war with Pakistan. It resurfaced early 2015 after the docking of a Chinese submarine in Colombo, with proponents of the proposal believing that in the absence of military strength to counter the growing Chinese presence in the region, India should use the multilateral route to create a consensus for preventing the military activity of external powers in the region.

<sup>23</sup> See Abhijit SINGH, « The Indian Ocean Zone of Peace : reality vs. illusion », *The Diplomat*, January 7, 2015.

bilateral naval exercises in October 2015, before expanding the range of exercises to the air force and to the army.<sup>24</sup>

In brief, these are some of the main reasons why President Obama called the relationship with India one of the defining partnerships of the twenty-first century, vital to US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific and across the globe. There are additional institutional and ideational factors. The two countries share membership in numerous international organizations.<sup>25</sup> And when Presidents Bush and Obama visited India, they underscored the increasing importance of the bilateral relationship as rooted in common values including the rule of law, respect for diversity, and democratic government. Both countries also have a joint interest in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity via the free flow of global trade through the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean, investment, and connectivity.

The US has backed India's critical role as a leader in preserving regional stability. Security ties have been reflected in growing bilateral defense and counterterrorism cooperation. The two countries are developing their defense partnership through military sales and joint research, co-production and co-development efforts.

The strength of people-to-people linkages has added to the Indo-American relationship, with increased cooperation of state and local officials to enhance engagement in education, and state to state as well as city to city engagements to create new partnerships in business and the private sector.

There is no decline of the United States; but its international partners have gained on economic, financial, and military clout, and thus autonomy from American influence.

India's Janus-faced policy is obvious when we compare elements of its traditional third-worldist posture in the WTO against its pragmatic bilateralism on nuclear weapons, siding with the American camp on non-proliferation after 2006, away from its former adherence to non-alignment.

This dual policy takes shape with two apparently opposite negotiating positions, one with the Ministry of Commerce representing India as the "voice of the voiceless", and the other with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs standing as the forward-looking and powerful strategist. They do not easily add up; they are partly a function of bureaucratic politics within India, rooted in an old anti-colonial view that resents Western powers. In addition, each face of India's rising power must be located within the specific international regime context of negotiation, where it has developed its long-established capacity for building and leading coalitions (combining issue-based and bloc-type ones) with developing countries, standing up to the developed world, and retaining at least some of its old ideals of global justice and fairness (effective participation in the negotiation processes, use of the dispute settlement mechanism, and proven ability to block the negotiations until certain demands are met). Hybrid coalitions are elaborated, distributive strategy is implemented, and appropriate goal framing of the issue is constructed.

Rather than act consistently as a status quo or revisionist power, a challenger of the system or a conformer, India acts differently across international regimes. Its real power now will stem from the use of an integrative strategy to achieve outcomes that go in its favor.

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<sup>24</sup> Prashanth PARAMESWARAN, « Australia wants to join India, US and Japan in naval exercises... », *The Diplomat*, September 5, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Including the United Nations, G-20, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization... The US supports a reformed UN Security Council that includes India as permanent member. India is an ASEAN partner, and an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development partner also, under its Enhanced Engagement programme, as well as an observer to the Organization of American States. In addition, India is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, of which the United States is a dialogue partner.

What about the US and China in this strategic triangle?

The US as a “missionary” power has been filled with the righteous belief that it must guide the world to liberty and democracy. Conversely, China as an anti-missionary power has been convinced by its own bitterest experience of foreign domination, that non-intervention into the affairs of other states is a necessary form of respect and an illustration of moral rectitude (a posture which stands out against the West’s perception of Chinese bullying and ruthless mercantilism).

The US is an idea as well as a nation, and Americans are hard-wired to the notion of their country as a beacon to humanity. Chinese exceptionalism is no less powerful, yet holds up China as a uniquely non-expansionist power over millenia of history, bringing harmony in a Confucian expression of its benevolence. That is, China standing in contrast to the predatory West... By resurrecting Confucius and launching Confucius Institutes all over the world, the Chinese Communist Party with its mantra of “peaceful rise”, has fashioned an effective tradition-based pillar of its ideology through the integration of “Middle Kingdom thought” as exceptionalism, while it no longer has much socialism to cling to. Hence the widespread political motto of “historical China as a shining civilization, in the center of All-under-Heaven, radiating a splendid and peace-loving culture based not on power but on relations and mutual recognition”.

The “strategic pivot” or rebalancing launched in 2009 by the Obama government, was based on the recognition that a disproportionate share of political tensions and economic flows in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would take place in the Asia-Pacific region. The actual key to this strategic reorientation was the need to cultivate a stable and predictable political, economic, and security environment spanning the Indian Ocean to the West Pacific. The untold central dynamic was to build an entente to contain and balance the rise of China. With a strong military component of the pivot, derived from the increased collective concern about China’s military modernization and its larger revisionist goals. However, the unfinished business of Afghanistan and Iraq has distracted from the strategic priority of the Asia-Pacific, according to the worried Indians, and explained China’s haste to develop military infrastructure and artificial islands in the South and East China Seas, operationalize “Access Denial” strategies, declare control on sea lanes of communication and Air Defense Identification Zones, and reject with intransigence the Hague International Permanent Court of Arbitration’s July 2016 award on the South China Sea. Though China is now India’s largest trading partner, difficulties in finding common ground at the political and strategic levels are being felt.

Although the strategic partnership between India and the US has moved upward, there exist critical challenges as the world’s balance of power has entered a phase of transition wherein both countries need to sort out key issues for this new and ongoing project. As seen from India, the US has been unable to tackle Pakistan-backed terrorist activities, and finds it difficult to restrain Chinese expansionist policies in the Asia Pacific; China is a bigger economic partner, and Pakistan a non-NATO ally; Russia and China have begun to collaborate in impeding US policies in the Asian and Eurasian region (e.g. Russian military exercises with Pakistan).

How India and the US redefine, reshape, and materialize their strategic partnership is the real test in the midst of a relative decline in the American ability to preserve the global order, and Russo-Chinese collaboration to expedite that American decline. Donald Trump’s decisive dismissal of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, signed in February 2016 in New Zealand, and considered to be an important component of the US pivot to Asia, bespeaks a global turn inward: as the US has withdrawn from regional initiatives, and while it is imperative that India shed its defensive stance in preferential trade agreements, China is offering up alternatives. Most of Asia now counts China as its largest trading partner, and some of the countries drifting toward China are doing so as much out of personal politics as economic necessity (Philippines, Malaysia...). As America is retreating from the region, it is unclear how much Beijing wants to play superpower, because it is expensive and exhausting, and Chinese foreign policy has been more about pursuing its perceived national interests than presenting a workable alternative to the current global order.

## IV. Conclusion

In this context, the strategic partnership project between India and the US which began when Bill Clinton visited India in March 2000, has gone through varying pace and intensity, but overall matured to an extent where hardly anyone raised serious opposition to the Logistics Exchange memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). India has become the largest “open” defense market in the world, with its Ministry of Defense looking abroad to modernize its forces. Recently, India pushed to cement military collaboration in the final months of the Obama Administration<sup>26</sup>. For the Republican Presidential candidate’s “America First” foreign policy statements had quickly raised questions in India and other Asian nations about a US pull-back from Asia, and sent contradictory messages to India; his unpredictability has appeared worrisome.

The attempt by the still prominent United States and such “secondary” powers as India and China to develop codified, formal bilateral partnerships and trilateral ties that seek to neither antagonize nor fully embrace each other, is both a challenge to peace and an opportunity for cooperation, when seeking balancing without alliances. It also brings to the fore the leadership potential and legitimacy of the emerging powers<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *New Delhi Television Limited*, October 6, 2016. Hence the help the US has given India in developing its biggest aircraft carrier : Washington has offered flight launched technology that is being inducted into its own carriers to fly heavier planes off the deck, which could allow the Indian Navy to leapfrog a generation of technology ; India is the only non-treaty ally with such an arrangement on exchanging confidential information.

Washington has offered field-tested, battle-proven aircraft (Apache, Chinook, C-130 Hercules, C-17 Globemaster), and top-end new platforms (such as the Boeing-81 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft) that fit local requirements and that the cash-rich Indian armed forces can afford to purchase. See James HARDY, « India’s rising military might : « made in the USA » ? », *The National Interest*, Sept. 11, 2014.

Another indicator of deepening ties with the United States, with India as a counterweight in the region, occurred when Delhi asked Washington for the Predator series of unmanned planes built by privately-owned General Atomics, as a government-to-government discussion. Predator surveillance drones would be a possible first step towards acquiring the armed version of the aircraft (100 of them ?), and would allow to gather intelligence and boost its firepower along the landborders of Pakistan and China, and to keep a closer eye on the Indian Ocean. Although India joined the Missile Technology Control Regime group of 34 nations on June 7, 2016, the US Congress before any transfer of lethal Predators, is likely to treat the export of armed drones to India with much more caution than it does to NATO allies, for fear of expanding its perceived options for striking Pakistan. Cf. *World News*, April 11, 2016 ; hence, clearance remains more intimately bound up with geopolitics than the specifics of export control.

<sup>27</sup> See Vidya NADKARNI, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia. Balancing without Alliances*, Routledge, 2010, 255 p. ; and Amitav ACHARYA, *Rethinking power, institutions, and ideas in world politics. Whose IR ?*, Routledge, 2014, 264 p.