

The Stage and Inheritance

The Indian subcontinent is the only subcontinent in the world. That in itself tells us that India possesses a unique geography while also being intrinsically linked to the larger continent, Asia. These two impulses, a pull toward engagement as part of a larger whole and a push to be apart due to a unique geography, have influenced India's history and behavior through the ages and have determined the nature of her engagement with the world. Geography matters because it has consequences for policy, worldviews, and history.

The "big geography" of Eurasia, to which the Indian subcontinent is attached, divides that landmass into a series of roughly parallel ecological zones, determined largely by latitude, ranging from tropical forest in the south to northern tundra. In between these extremes, are temperate woodlands and grasslands, desert-steppe, forest-steppe, the forest, and more open taiga. The zone of mixed grassland and woodland was the ecological niche for settled agriculture to develop in two areas—in southwest Asia, from the Nile valley to the Indus valley, and in southeast Asia including China—where civilizations, states, and empires grew.

Of the two, its geography enabled southwest Asia to communicate easily. Throughout history, from the Nile to the Indus and later the Ganga, exchanges, migrations, and change were the rule with civilizations growing and developing in contact with one another even though they were separate geographically.¹

The topography of the Indian subcontinent is open on three sides: the west, south, and east and is blocked off to the north by the Himalayan range. It is through the Makran coast that human beings first came to the subcontinent after it had been wiped clean of life as it traveled over the Reunion volcanoes on its 6,500-kilometer journey to collide with the Eurasian plate, thus forming the Himalayas, which are still rising at about 5 millimeters every year. When early humans migrated into the subcontinent, the Makran coast was part of a

grassland or scrubland corridor that stretched across Asia. By the time Alexander retreated along the same corridor in 321 BCE, it was already a dry, inhospitable desert to which he lost many men.

The Indian subcontinent, bounded by the world's highest mountains and the Indian Ocean, was given a unity by geographical features within which cultural, political, and economic processes of integration could occur. Successive waves of migrants, immigrants, and invaders were assimilated and absorbed into the subcontinental mix, until the English chose to be indigestible. For most of history, until technology gave us the means, geography represented unalterable facts that humans had to work around in war and peace. Today, technology has given us the means to overcome the tyranny of distance, to cross mountains like the Himalayas, and to even fight wars in them.

The Indian subcontinent's location made it both the pivot of the Indian Ocean world and one of the crossroads of Asia. Writing in 1922, Halford Mackinder remarked, "In all the British empire there is but one land frontier on which war-like preparation must ever be ready. It is the north-west frontier of India."² He then described the physical geography of the single plateau of Persia, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan as not as lofty as Tibet, but still, he remarked, one of the great natural features of Asia, bounded by escarpment. Near Kabul is the dividing watershed between drainage going west (the Helmand flowing to Iran), north (the Amu Darya), and south (the Kabul River flowing into the Indus). The towering Hindu Kush separates central Asia from the Indus valley and is crossed by a few passes. As he noted, there is no obvious border between Persia and Afghanistan, nor between Iran and Baluchistan. As a result, the histories of India, Afghanistan, and Persia have long been intertwined.³

Without obvious borders in the northwest, a long search by the Raj (India under the British yoke) for a secure northwestern frontier produced a multilayered result: a boundary between Russia and Afghanistan; a buffer or client state of the Raj in Afghanistan and the North West Frontier Province; and a border province of British India without the laws or administration of other Indian provinces. On the other open land frontier of the northeast as well, the Raj created, in fits and starts, a multilayered frontier: occupying Burma in the late nineteenth century and ruling it from Calcutta until 1936; a frontier zone of British India up to the Himalayas without Indian laws and administrative structures; and a boundary with Tibet as a *de facto* buffer between India and a weak China.

In the Indian Ocean and its littoral, the Indian subcontinent's pivotal role was established early in history by the predictable cyclic weather pattern dominated by the monsoon winds. Between April to August low pressure over the

Himalayas draws in air from the south, creating southeast trade winds that, crossing the equator and picking up moisture, become the southwest monsoon. Between December and March, in the second half of the year, high pressure over central Asia gives rise to the northeast monsoon as the winds blow south to the equator.

Thanks to this regular pattern of monsoon winds, the Indian Ocean did not have to wait for the age of steam in the eighteenth century for deep water navigation and sailing. As early as 57 CE. "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea," a handbook for pilots, told navigators when and where to catch the winds to sail between Red Sea ports and India. It credited Hippalus as "the pilot who first discovered how to lay his course straight across the ocean," but this must have been preceded by centuries of experience as shown by the Indus valley civilization's docks at Lothal and the evidence of traded goods found in Indus valley sites and in Mesopotamia going back to the third millennium BCE.

The pattern of revolving winds to India's east and west made the Malabar and Coromandel coasts a commercial crossroads where goods from Egypt, the Levant, and Persia were exchanged for those from India, southeast Asia, and China. The Straits of Malacca are the junction of the southwest and the northwest monsoon winds. The Chinese called Malacca "where the winds end." A revolving wind pattern allowed ships sailing southwest from China through the South China Sea and southeast from India to meet in the straits and on the Malay peninsula where they exchanged goods. In each case, they would sail back when the winds reversed (in January-February and April-May). The Indonesians traded with India by 500 BCE, China by 400 BCE, and Egypt and Mesopotamia as early as 2600 BCE.

The subcontinent was thus both the pivot of the Indian Ocean world and also a self-contained geopolitical unit and could choose its engagement with the rest of the world. Not all routes across the Indian Ocean had to pass through India, unlike, say, the Mediterranean, where routes all passed through the Levant. When the Melanesian ancestors of today's Indonesians sailed right across the Indian Ocean in the sixth to ninth century CE to become the first humans to settle and colonize Madagascar, they did not have to touch India. By that time sailing long distances in the Indian Ocean was normal.

Nehru's summary of the effects of geography was that "we are geographically so situated that we are not drawn into controversies with that passionate fury that some other countries are. This is not due to our goodness or badness, but it is a matter of geography."⁴ For him, India "is the natural centre and focal point of the many forces at work in Asia. Geography is the compelling factor,

and geographically she is so situated as to be the meeting point of Western and Northern and Eastern and South-East Asia. Because of this, the history of India is a long history of her relations with the other countries of Asia.”⁵



The other long-term driver of India’s behavior in the world has been its demography.

India has always supported a relatively large population on a limited arable landmass. Today it occupies 2.41 percent of the world’s land area but supports over 18 percent of the world’s population. At the 2001 census, 72.2 percent of the population lived in about 638,000 villages, and the remaining 27.8 lived in more than 5,100 towns and more than 380 urban concentrations. More than half the population is under 25 years of age, which adds over 11 million people to the job market every year.

Historically three waves of urbanization—during the Indus valley civilization, 2600–1500 BCE, from the sixth century BCE to the second century CE, and during the Mughal period—were both a consequence and a cause of periods of rapid population growth. The subcontinent’s population grew steadily from the stone age in 10,000 BCE until the Mauryan empire in the second century BCE, before slowing in the classical era up to 500 CE, and then staying generally stagnant up to about 1000 CE. Population growth resumed during the Delhi Sultanate from 1000 to 1500 CE. The Mughal empire, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, saw higher population growth rates than any previous period in Indian history. Agrarian reforms, intensified agricultural production, and proto-industrialization established India as the most important global source of manufactured goods. Some 15 percent of the population lived in urban centers, higher than the percentage of the urban population in nineteenth-century British India, much higher than other societies except China, and a level that Europe only reached in the nineteenth century.⁶

Among the enduring practical consequences of this demography, of a large population on a limited landmass, was for India to become one of the first areas in the world to undergo proto-industrialization. It was also the largest military manpower market in the world for the greater part of history and one of the world’s significant sources of advanced weapons. While it depended on central Asia for the horses that provided military mobility, it was a major source of military manpower in its periphery. For instance, India provided the skilled manpower and elephants that constituted half of Mahmud of Ghazni’s troops when he conquered Samarkand and Bokhara in the thirteenth century.

The population of India under the Raj, including areas that are now Pakistan and Bangladesh, grew sporadically but steadily from approximately 239 million to 389 million between 1871 and 1941. In the 1920s India's population was around 275 million. Only 0.6 percent of the population was enrolled in secondary education and 0.03 percent in universities. Primary education was even worse with less than 4 percent of the population in any form of instruction. The literacy rate was about 10 percent and education formed tiny islands of privilege in a sea of ignorance. Seventy percent of the population were dependent on agriculture and 90 percent lived in villages.

The British altered the geography of India in many ways, through deindustrialization, by building railways, by making the economy a colonial appendage to their own, and by adding new port cities to the periphery of the subcontinent. The bulk of India's population is now concentrated along the coasts and in the Gangetic valley.



Another abiding influence has been India's resource endowment and the economy that it has shaped. Resources around the world are very unevenly distributed and, along with climate change and demography, set up the pervading rhythms of life. While India is a fertile and rich land agriculturally, throughout history it has needed resources from abroad. The country is people rich but resource poor. Today, the country is resource poor in energy and nonferrous metals. Over 80 percent of its imports are maintenance imports—of nonferrous metals, of fertilizer, of crude oil, of even lentils for a basic dish, dal, and we have no choice but to buy from the world.

Because of its resource endowment India has always been a trading nation. Throughout history India has been most successful and prosperous when it was most connected to the rest of the world. Buddhism spread to the rest of Asia along trade routes between India and west, central, and east Asia, and it was initially a religion of the trading classes, with the guilds and *sangha* (or monks) working hand in hand. When India exported its ideology, as was done with Buddhism and Hinduism, or military power in the Indian Ocean region (becoming what would now be called a net provider of knowledge and security), it was also promoting its own prosperity. It was these links abroad that made India one of the most prosperous and advanced societies in the world. When the country stopped doing so, from the eighteenth century onward, and closed its mind as well, it entered a long and precipitate decline.



The postmodernists would like us to believe that Indian history is what we make it or are the narratives that we choose to tell ourselves and believe. I beg to differ. History is like a map, an imperfect reflection of a larger objective reality that, over time and with improvements in the historian's art, becomes clearer and more representative of an objective reality that did exist and certainly seemed to exist to earlier generations in history. That map is important to us in looking at India's foreign and security policies because we choose, decide, and act on the basis of the map of our own experience, or the history, that we carry in our heads. Perception matters. And when perception does not match objective reality, policy errs or fails.

The problem is that several generations in India have been taught a version of history that ignores that India has for much of its past been well connected to the world and its prosperity and security have waxed and waned in direct proportion to that link. That may be because the regions that undertook these contacts with the rest of the world, what historians call coherent core areas, that is, areas characterized by stable, long-term political and cultural institutions, such as Bengal and Gujarat and the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, have been ignored or downplayed in these historical narratives in favor of the relatively insular Indo-Gangetic plain and the region around Delhi, partly because a version of Indian history written by those loyal to the British empire dominated the field. It is only in the last few years that younger scholars have begun to study these less recognized regions seriously.

The simplistic history written by historians loyal to the British empire legitimized British rule by making Indian history a continuous sequence of alien empires and conquerors. This saga of empires was periodized by religion, and caste was emphasized, disregarding the fact that the ruling elite was always of mixed religious persuasion and origins, and that assimilation and social mobility were both possible and practiced.

It amazes me that some Indians—despite having been shown alternative and more cogent lines of enquiry—persist in this religious characterization and accept the simplified history foisted on us. Certain historians and writers in India still contribute to the misrepresentation of India in history as an autonomous world apart, driven by religion and its own logic, and different from the rest of the world. One has only to look at the practice and the linkages with the world of the Mauryas, Kushanas, Guptas, Delhi Sultanate, and Moghuls to see how misleading this representation is. And these entities were carrying on a

tradition of engagement stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the Middle East, the Roman empire and the Mediterranean Sea, central Asia, China, and southeast Asia inherited from the Indus valley civilization in the third and second millennium BCE. India was not “a world apart,” but a complex civilization involved in myriad exchanges—of goods, ideas, and peoples—with the surrounding world.⁷

But this is only one part of India’s true geopolitical inheritance. Kalidasa described the ideal rulers of the Raghukula as *asamudra kshitiesanam*, or those whose territories extended to the sea shore. The Satavahanas used the title *Trisamudrapati*, or Lords of the Three Seas. Including the history of the other regions in our consideration gives us a very different historical legacy that forms an increasingly important element of our strategic culture and driver of our policy choices. If you see Indian history as Delhi-centered, you will make the mistake that many of us make, of believing, as K. M. Panikkar said, that “India has, throughout history, had trouble arousing much interest in the world beyond its borders,” which he contrasted to British attentiveness to developments around the Raj.⁸ The coastal tradition in India, on the other hand, has seen outward projections of power, influence, and culture throughout its history.

Once you include southern and western India and Bengal and Orissa, the strength of India’s links with the rest of the world, going back to 2600 BCE, become clear. Ptolemy attests to this in the second century CE, while Pliny in mid-first century CE grumbles about gold and silver draining away to India from the Roman empire for luxury goods, a problem that the British also had in the early days of trading with India, until they discovered the uses of opium. The reach and extent of the soft and hard power of non-Gangetic regions of India in both mainland and archipelagic southeast Asia are visible to this day in the great ruins of Angkor Wat and Borobudur, on the walls of the Vaikuntha Perumal temple in Kanchipuram and in Hampi, and in the living culture of our countries. The Cholas’ activist external policies and willing militarism enabled them to last from the third century BCE to the thirteenth century CE, longer than any dynasty in the Gangetic valley. Their example was actively followed by the Pandyan (sixth century BCE to twelfth century CE) and Pallava (third to ninth century CE) dynasties. The same is also true of the reach and influence of some Gangetic or Indus valley-based political entities like the Mauryas or Kushanas as the spread of Buddhism overland to the Pacific and the Mediterranean attests. Vijayanagara flourished and grew prosperous on its trade with central, west, and southeast Asia. The Mughals, for their part, played an active role in central Asian politics, too. This is a strong, continuous, and abiding

legacy of engagement beyond the subcontinent. As long as the Indian Ocean was an open, competitive space, peninsular India was relatively secure. The Mughals punished the Portuguese for piracy by limiting their activity on land, advantaging their competitors, the English, French, Dutch, and Danes. When Britain managed a relative monopoly on trade in the Indian Ocean following the Carnatic Wars with the French, it became possible for Britain to translate maritime control into predominance on land.



Until almost 1800, little differentiated the development of western Europe from India or eastern Europe or China, or, to be more precise, portions of each of these regions from one another. The areas in India where living standards were similar to those in advanced parts of China and western Europe and where proto-industrialization had taken place were precisely those most connected to the world mentioned earlier—Bengal, Gujarat, the Malabar, and Coromandel coasts. It was only later that the great divergence, as it is now called, took place with western Europe's economic and technical advancement creating a Europe-centered world. As Pomeranz says, "We cannot understand pre-1800 global conjunctures in terms of a Europe-centered world system; we have, instead, a polycentric world with no dominant centre."⁹

Angus Maddison's estimates of GDP bear this out and show how late the great divergence actually took place (see table 1-1).¹⁰ For our purposes, these figures are interesting, not because they show what the British empire did to a once prosperous and advanced society in Asia, nor to create a narrative of historical humiliation to justify present-day bad behavior as today's Chinese regime does. Instead, they show the existence of a polycentric world through most of history and how unusual were the bipolar, then unipolar, and now the confused world orders that Indians have operated in since independence in 1947.

TABLE 1-1. *Distribution of Population and Income in World Economy, 1000–1820 (Percent)*

<i>Period</i>	<i>World population</i>			<i>World GDP</i>		
	<i>1000</i>	<i>1700</i>	<i>1820</i>	<i>1000</i>	<i>1700</i>	<i>1820</i>
Asia (total)	65.5	62.1	65.2	68.2	57.7	56.5
China	22.1	22.9	36.6	22.7	22.3	33.0
India	28.1	27.3	20.1	27.8	24.5	16.1
Western Europe	9.6	13.5	12.8	9.0	21.8	22.9

Source: Deepak Nayar, *Catch Up: Developing Countries in the World Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 13.

The data also show that the Indian Ocean region was the center of world affairs and of the global economy for centuries. It remained so after Vasco da Gama reached India in 1498, even as the New World made the Mediterranean a backwater and the Atlantic became more important. In 1667 the Dutch considered it a great victory when they forced the English to hand over the tiny nutmeg-growing island of Run in the East Indies for a much larger island on North America's eastern seaboard, Manhattan.¹¹ By the nineteenth century this position was reversed. The Atlantic was the new center of the global economy and world affairs. In the second half of the twentieth century the center of gravity shifted again to the Pacific rim, with the growing importance of the economies of the U.S. state of California, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and ultimately China. The Indian Ocean was mainly a transit route for shipping passing through to other places, a spectator to history. Today, with the rise of India, and the growing importance of Indian Ocean rim economies like Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, Iran, and others, the Indian Ocean could return to its earlier preeminence if it were to manage its demography, natural resource endowments, and politics, while also continuing its present economic course.

For most of its history, the world system, when one could speak of one, was essentially made up of parallel multiverses trading and exchanging people, goods, and ideas, but disconnected in terms of security and internal order.¹² Before the nineteenth century, technology and geography did not permit involvement with each other's polity or security on a sustained basis, except for short, exceptional periods of war. In Asia, before the sixteenth century, these multiverses were centered on Egypt and Persia in the west, India in the Indian Ocean region, the maritime empires of Srivijaya and its successors in southeast Asia, and on China in northeast Asia. The Khmer and other empires on the southeast Asian mainland coexisted with and traded with the other centers in uneasy and unstable relationships. This, to my mind, was the historical norm in Asian geopolitics and is one possible future that we might return to after the aberrations of the last two centuries.



For fifteenth century Europeans, starting with the Iberians and later other European powers, sea power was a way to get around the great overwhelming land power of Islam in the Middle East and to break out of the "prison of the Mediterranean." After Vasco da Gama's first landing at Calicut in 1498, maritime power became a 400-year European monopoly, allowing European hegemony over the land masses of continental Asia. Only in the mid-twentieth century did

that monopoly weaken with Japan's rise, the growth of nationalism in Asia—particularly in India and China—and Europe's own weakness after its fratricidal world wars, following which Europe failed to reconquer and hold Asia. That failure is also an example of the limitations of sea power. Hilaire Belloc wrote: "Dependence on sea power in military affairs is a lure leading to ultimate disappointment. In the final and decisive main duels of history, the party which begins with the high sea power is defeated by the land power; whether that sea power be called Carthage or Athens or the Phoenician fleet of the Great King, it loses in the long run and land power wins." But this might be too one-sided a judgment, because the record is mixed in Asia. Japan's naval power was defeated in World War II, only because of the superior naval force of the United States, and it was not overcome by land powers China and Russia. On land, Japan was outfought by the Indian Army of a maritime British empire.

Today, Asia sees a land power, China, trying for the first time in its history to become a maritime power, increasingly confronting the world's greatest maritime power, the United States. It is far from clear who will prevail and whether China will be able to make that transition. Historical analogy and experience suggest that the different geographies of Asia's seas will produce different results, whether it is the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, or the western Pacific. The Indian Ocean has historically been an open area where attempts to dominate the trade or build monopolies have always failed, such as when Admiral Zheng He tried to monopolize the trade in porcelain and pepper during the Ming dynasty in the fifteenth century.



The classical geopoliticians were children of their age and looked at Asian geopolitics through a late nineteenth-century European or British lens, concentrating on the European hegemony that followed the breakup or decline of the classical Asian empires, namely, the Mughals in India, the Ming and early Qing in China, the Ottomans in Turkey, and the Safavids in Iran.

British geographer Halford Mackinder attempted to provide a theoretical explanation for events and relationships through his theory of what he called "the heartland" of Eurasia in a 1904 paper, "The Geographical Pivot of History." Here he detailed his version of the histories of the peripheries of the Eurasian landmass, Europe, and China in response to the pressure of successive waves of Asiatic nomads—Huns, Avars, Bulgarians, Cumans, Magyars, Mongols, Kalmuks, and others. He described the heartland of Eurasia as a citadel, radiating influence but not subject to invasion itself, because water transport

along the periphery remained much easier than land transport until the coming of the railways. Physical geography meant that the horse ruled the steppe, the Pivot areas, denying the peripheral world the use of its waterborne transport except in the Outer Crescent of the maritime states and the oceans around Eurasia.¹³ Later writers revised and added to Mackinder's vision in terms of trade and culture. But the basic Mackinder view of the world informed British, American, and both Czarist and Soviet foreign policy for years, and, as Robert Kaplan points out, is still influential in the West.¹⁴

In this view, the Indian subcontinent is unique and distinctive. Cohen classifies it as an independent geopolitical region, not contained within either of the geostrategic regions.¹⁵ It is big enough to be a subcontinent in its own right, guarded from Eurasian power by the Himalayas, from the Middle East by the Hindu Kush and other mountains, and from Myanmar and Indochina by lower but heavily forested mountains. If united, the subcontinent has clear lines of defense, and it has the options of self-sufficiency or access to the trade-dependent maritime world. But if divided, scenarios change fundamentally. When the British left India they bequeathed a Joint Defense Council to India and Pakistan that did not survive the war in Kashmir. When divided, subcontinental powers have sought outside balancers and patrons, and the alignments between India and Pakistan and the three outside powers most involved in subcontinental affairs—Russia, China, and the United States—often reflect a continuation of Mackinder's imperatives. The early 1950s were a period of many open opportunities and few binding commitments, but Pakistan, seeking weapons and support from the United States, as well as membership in CENTO and SEATO, took advantage of the U.S. goal to complete the rimland containment of the Eurasian heartland controlled by the Soviet Union.



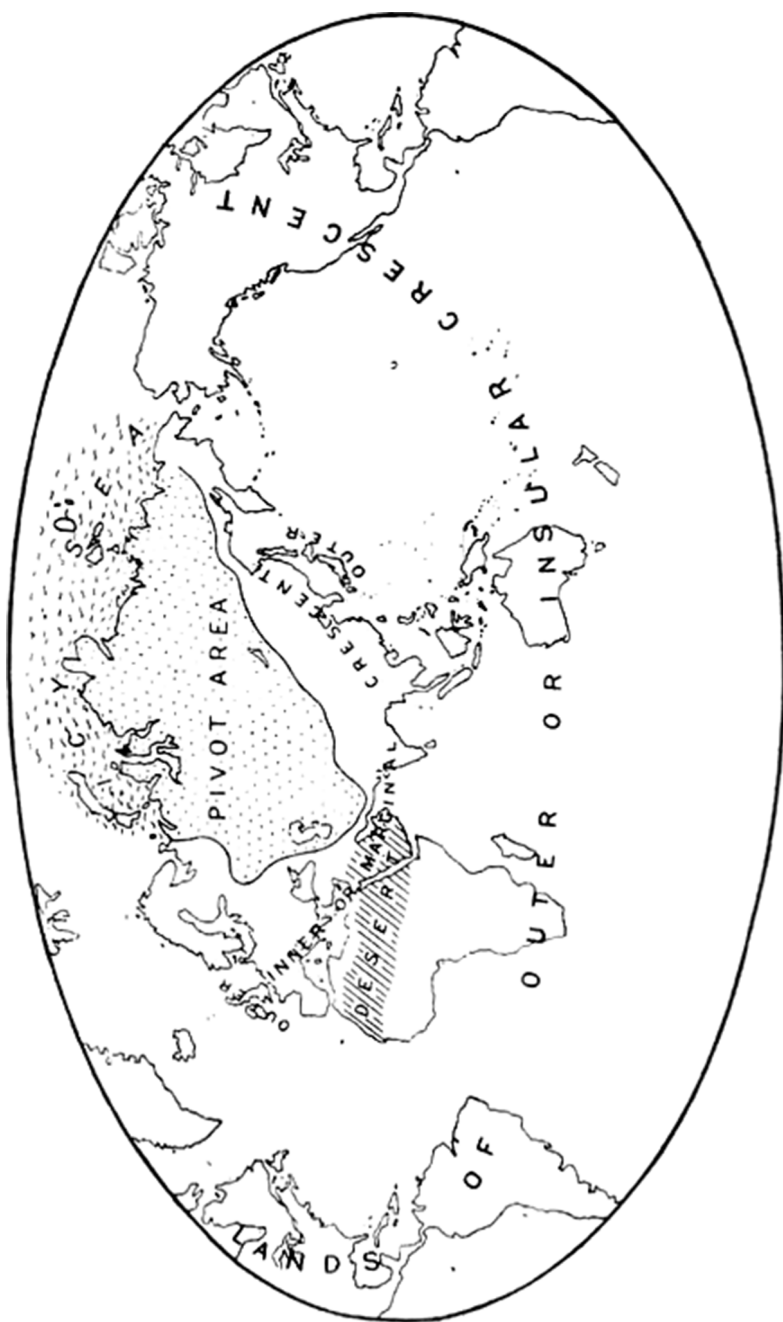
The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British Raj in India saw a bogey in Russia, first imperial then revolutionary, threatening the northwest of India, and repeatedly intervened in Afghanistan to preempt that fear from becoming reality. Despite policy based on false premises, and suffering repeated tactical setbacks in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the British in India did succeed in keeping external powers at bay and away from India itself. British forces also countered a Japanese threat in the northeast when Japan took Burma and sought to enter India in World War II.

The phrase the "Great Game" was reputedly coined by British officer Arthur Connolly around 1840, and popularized by Rudyard Kipling. And it

led to the British "Forward School" approach to military conquest or annexation of land to ensure security. It described the nineteenth-century contest between Great Britain and Russia for mastery in continental Asia or Eurasia and inflated the concern about a Russian invasion of India. Three generations of Britons believed that the Russian empire, which had been expanding for four centuries at a rate of 20,000 square miles a year, was poised to invade and seize India from Britain. British Foreign Secretary Palmerston argued in 1840 that since the Russian and the British armies were bound to meet one day, it was best to ensure that the meeting took place as far as possible from India, instead of "staying at home to receive the visit." This logic led to a demand for British garrisons in Afghanistan. The Forward School saw "masterly inactivity" as encouraging Russian invasion and Indian rebellion. The 1839 British invasion of Afghanistan led to the annihilation of the occupying British forces and the death of British proxies. But by 1878 Britain was ready to try again. Again, military disaster resulted but its political fruits were averted by diplomatic skill and flexibility. This time the result was a buffer state run by a strong and subsidized ruler in Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman, friendly to the British and a claimant to the throne who had also been backed by the Russians.

In 1893 Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary to the government of India, 1885–1894, negotiated a unique and peculiar agreement with Afghanistan that gave India a double border. The "Durand Line" (which Pakistan today regards as its international border with Afghanistan) ran through tribal areas, eliminating the no-man's-land and dividing it into spheres of influence loosely attached to Kabul and Lahore. But behind it to the east, resting for the most part on the Indus, lay the administrative border. Between the two lines tribes lived under British protection but not as British subjects; they came under the supervision of political agents and not the direct rule of deputy commissioners; their crimes were dealt with under tribal and Islamic law, not the British-Indian Code of Criminal Procedure.

In 1900 Lord Curzon, viceroy of India, who had long proclaimed the Russian threat, traveled to the northwestern region and revised what he considered the empire's deeply flawed frontier policy. He withdrew regular troops from advanced positions on the Khyber Pass and concentrated them in the rear, instead employing tribal forces recruited by British officers, such as the Khyber Rifles and Khurram Militia, to police the tribal country. In his own words, Curzon's way of managing the Pathan tribesman was "to pay him and humor him when he behaves, but to lay him out flat when he does not." He also detached Punjab's frontier districts and united them to the transborder tracts between the Indus



and Durand Line creating the North-West Frontier Province in 1901. Curzon had created a frontier that John Masters described as “a betwixt and between place, part India, part central Asia.”

The Victorian British view of India’s role in Asia was of “sub-imperial” diplomacy, or what some call the “empire of the Raj.” Mortimer Durand imagined India’s role in Asia in his 1885 “Memorandum on the External Relations of the Government of India.” He proposed that the government of India ought to control England’s relations with “all the purely Asian continental powers” from Persia and Siam to China and Korea. Although this grand vision was never implemented or accepted in London, bureaucrats in Simla, summer capital of British India, exercised considerable authority over much of the Middle East, appointing residents at Gulf and Persian courts, and through the agency of the Bombay Presidency at the Aden and Zanzibar outposts. Relations with Afghanistan and central Asia too, as part of the Great Game, fell under the control of the Indian Foreign Department. Some of India’s neighbors suspect that such thinking is still not entirely dead in New Delhi, 150 years later.

From 1875 on, the British empire grew rapidly both in Africa and in south-east Asia. In that expansion from northern Nigeria to Fiji, British principals looked to India and Indian models and used the Indian Army. The use of the Indian Army to extend and secure Britain’s empire “east of Suez” was not a new phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. The East India Company had deployed Indian troops in Manila, Sumatra, Malacca, Mauritius, the Persian Gulf, and Aden from its very first conquests. Company troops participated in both opium wars with China, the 1855 Persian war, and successive campaigns in Burma. With the abolition of the East India Company in 1858, and the subsequent reorganization of the Indian Army, deployment abroad became a regular feature. (Unlike the deployment of British troops, it required no parliamentary approval in London.) India was, of course, a subordinate partner in the imperial enterprise, but the construction of the arc of power extending throughout the Indian Ocean rim from Africa to eastern Asia centered on India was made possible by the Indian Army. This had its consequences: those living in most other British colonies in southeast Asia, west Asia, and Africa viewed Indians, and the Indian Army particularly, as subordinate colonizers or instruments of their imperial masters, thus complicating independent India’s foreign policy task. At the same time, until World War I the British ensured that Indian troops were never used against whites, lest they realize that they could defeat the British and rule themselves. The Boer war even saw Indian cavalry horses used without their Indian riders, in order to keep it a “white man’s war”—in what is proudly

described in Jodhpur as “the only time the Jodhpur Lancers were unhorsed.” At the same time, at the peak of the Boxer expedition in 1900–1902, 15,000 Indian troops were in action in China. After World War I Britain was unable to sustain such commitments. By 1920 colonial Indian contingents had ceased to exist outside Hong Kong and the Chinese treaty ports. But the Indian police presence abroad remained. At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Indians still formed some 35 percent of the Hong Kong police. With Indian independence, a process began to end all recruitment of Indians for colonial police service by the 1960s. As Metcalf says: “Everywhere in the empire, Indians were viewed with suspicion and disdained as rivals and competitors—by whites in south and east Africa, blacks throughout Africa, Arabs in Iraq, and Malays in south-east Asia.”¹⁶



The later decades of the nineteenth century leading up to World War I saw the emergence of a truly global economy. The early modern era, with the extension of Portuguese and later British power into the Indian Ocean and subsequently the South China Sea marked the origins of this wave of globalization. That was an era of proto-globalization, when an integrated Eurasian economy was created but trade was still limited, for the most part, to luxury goods—spices, tea, silk, and handwoven textiles—and limited by the high cost of carriage in sailing ships traveling the long way around the Cape of Good Hope. It is estimated that trade with Europe grew steadily by some 1.1 percent a year over three centuries, 1300–1800, with an annual 50,000 tons of goods shipped to Europe by 1800. Europe’s trade with Asia was dwarfed by the Atlantic trade, which grew at twice the rate of the Asian. Mature globalization was a product of the nineteenth century, pushed by technical innovation, the telegraph, railways, steamships, undersea cables, and the Industrial Revolution. By the end of the nineteenth century the “modern” global economy encompassed the entire world, with capital and goods flows creating the first truly globalized economy. The high point of that process of globalization coincided with the fullest development of the India-centered subimperial system.¹⁷

That era of truly global integration came to an end after the First World War and arrived hand in hand with the decline and ultimate collapse of the India-centered Indian Ocean British imperial system.¹⁸ Indians too lost faith in the British empire, from Ranade to Gandhi to Gokhale, and moderates in the Indian freedom struggle were disenchanted, eclipsed, or discredited. British favoritism to the white Dominions (Canada, Australia, and South Africa),

discrimination against Indians in white settler dominated states, and the treatment of Indian indentured labor in British sugar colonies outraged Indian sentiment. Over roughly eighty years, from 1840 to 1920, a total of just over 1.3 million Indians went overseas as indentured laborers. A beleaguered Britain reverted to the narrower imperialism of race, which revealed for all to see the racial hierarchies and institutionalized violence that sustained colonialism.

Until 1914 passports did not exist as a confirmation of citizenship, and where similar documents were produced, their use was often not enforced. Within the British empire, restrictive immigration policies were first enunciated by the British colony of Natal in South Africa in the mid-1880s, and these in turn inspired similar restrictions in Australia and Canada after 1900. In India a reluctant Raj government implemented a passport officially certifying that its holder was "Indian" by the 1920s. It might get a reputable holder temporary entry into Australia, but there was no longer the concept of an "imperial citizen." World War I brought increased surveillance of travelers and the enforcement of passport regulations in Europe as well as in India. Codified in the Indian Passports Act of 1920, the restrictions were justified in the name of keeping out "mischievous persons," Bolsheviks, and revolutionary conspirators.

With the Depression and protectionism, deglobalization gathered pace after the war. In 1931 Britain formally abandoned the gold standard and, with it, free trade. India was allowed to raise its own tariff barriers, first on steel in 1920, and then in the 1930s on cotton textiles. With India's struggle for freedom and subsequent concentration on its own development, India was cut loose from the "global" order during the Cold War, much of it at India's insistence. It was only at the beginning of the 2000s, and after, that levels of international trade and investment as a proportion of economic output for India once again reached those of a hundred years before.

The British made some gestures toward giving India's foreign relations something of an Indian face after World War I but still controlled completely by Britain. At the Versailles peace conference in 1919 India was represented, effectively giving Britain a second seat in the form of the submissive and exotic figure of Maharajah of Bikaner. This led to India's role as a founder member of both the League of Nations and the United Nations after World War II. An agent of the government of India had been sent to South Africa in the 1920s, and during the Second World War the government of India sent representatives to Chungking, Washington, and Xinjiang.

World War II changed everything for Britain in Asia. The fall of Singapore and Burma to Japan in 1942 was the final blow. Empire had collapsed abjectly,

and even Indians who had served and prospered under it had no choice but to seek their own destiny. This was a final parting of the ways, exemplified by Indian soldiers who chose to join the Indian National Army to fight with Japan against Britain.

Although the economic basis for India at the center of an imperial Indian Ocean system no longer existed after the 1920s and the Great Depression, British strategic thought and planning did not make that transition until much later. Late British strategy in India was perhaps best exemplified by the work and writings of Olaf Caroe, a true successor to Lord Curzon. Caroe was foreign secretary to the Indian government during World War II and a lifelong practitioner of the Great Game. The concept of “buffer states” from the 1880s onward, a British-Indian coinage, sought to interpose a protected state between the area actually administered and the possessions of adversarial neighbors, Russia and China, who were to be kept at arm’s length. Curzon called this outer periphery a “glacis,” literally a gentle slope. “We do not want to occupy it but we cannot see it occupied by our foes,” Curzon said. This was not a neutral space but one that excluded all outside influences in its foreign relations. Britain built a series of buffers along the landward periphery of the Indian subcontinent, a system that the Raj called “the ring fence.” As Caroe put it, this stretched from the Persian Gulf to Burma in “a double line of inner and outer entrenchments.” The inner ring included Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. The outer ring consisted of countries and territories that Britain nominally recognized as independent or at least autonomous—Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and Siam—which it sought to keep free of outside influence and hostile powers. India was, as Caroe said, “a kernel within an outer shell and an inner husk.” Today’s flash points and headlines continue to light up those same places in an arc from the Persian Gulf to Persia to Afghanistan, to Kashmir to Nepal to Burma. For Curzon, Caroe, and other British strategists, India commanded the strategic center, and the Asian balance hinged on India’s power and the overall stability of the subcontinent.

Caroe formed a Viceroy’s Study Group during the war to devise a strategy for the time when India would become independent. He saw control of the “Indian Ocean theatre” as critical to check Russia’s piecemeal absorption of more than half the colossal “Central Land Mass theatre,” enabling Britain to link the Pacific and European theatres. Control of the Cape of Good Hope, Egypt, and Malacca secured what Edwardian Admiral Fisher had called “the keys.” But these keys did not lock all doors. Military power based on India was the only sure way to seal out the most dangerous re-entrants in Afghanistan and Persia.¹⁹ The ultimate goal for British officials like Caroe in the 1940s was to

ensure that the subcontinent remained a secure base of power for Britain in the wider Asian balance after India's independence. For them the Great Game did not end with British rule in August 1947, and they did not expect it to. They intuited that the imperatives of Asian defense reflected the permanence of geography versus the vicissitudes of empire and ideology. The landscape would endure. As Soviet, and increasingly Chinese, power consolidated in the Asian heartland, they expected that India would remain pivotal to the maintenance of global balance between land and sea power. India had historically formed and would continue to be a "central bastion" of world power well beyond the end of British rule, Caroe wrote.



What also matters for our purposes is the Indian elite's sense of self and view of their place in the world, as broadly formed in the early twentieth century in the course of a national movement seeking independence from Great Britain. It was an awareness born of 5,000 years of history, of India's geographic advantages and demographic weight, and of its civilizational contributions that helped to shape the thinking of the leaders of the freedom movement when they turned their minds to foreign policy. Or perhaps I should use the singular and say "leader," because to a great extent it was Jawaharlal Nehru and his ideas that formed the core of Indian foreign and security policy thinking during his lifetime. And his ideas played that role until the late 1980s, for more than twenty years after his death, and still influence thinking today. Others in the national movement, however, also thought deeply on these questions and not always in line with Nehru.

Nehru's thinking was a mixture of realism and idealism, although he would describe himself as a realist with a longer strategy than that of the tactical geopoliticians. His understanding of India's civilizational greatness and of the importance of the subcontinent as a geopolitical unit led him to continue several British Indian policies. After independence in 1948, the treaties India signed with Bhutan in 1949 and Afghanistan in 1950 were very similar to earlier ones signed by these countries with British India. He was also willing to intervene in affairs in the subcontinent, as in Nepal in 1950, to an extent that he was not willing to consider outside it. But by far the greater influence in his thinking was the nationalist and anti-imperialist strand. Hence his early pan-Asianism and his attempt to manage India's "civilizational sphere of influence."²⁰

Nehru was deeply influenced by the conviction, not unreasonable in mid-century, that power politics in the name of realism and geopolitics had led the

world to two world wars and disaster, and that there had to be another basis for international politics. He makes his arguments in detail in his book, *The Discovery of India*, where he sees geopolitics and power politics as handmaidens of fascism, national socialism, and imperialism.²¹ Writing in jail during the final stages of the Second World War in 1944–1945, Nehru saw geopolitics and realism as continuations of the power politics and practices that had caused the disasters of the two world wars. He saw geopolitics as “the anchor of the realist,” and “its jargon of ‘heartland’ and ‘rimland’” as a “partial truth [which] is sometimes more dangerous than a falsehood” and as “the old policy of expansion and empire and the balance of power which inevitably leads to conflict and war.” He believed, “Civilization is no longer confined to the oceanic fringes and tends to become universal in its scope and content.” He felt that “Mr. Walter Lippman’s vision of a three or four orbits encompassing the globe—the Atlantic community, the Russian, the Chinese, and later the Hindu-Muslim in South Asia—is a continuation of power politics on a vaster scale, and it is difficult to understand how one can see any world peace or cooperation emerging out of it.”²² But Nehru was practical enough to say on the same page, “Realism of course there must be, for no nation can base its domestic or foreign policy on mere goodwill and flights of the imagination. But it is a curious realism that sticks to the empty shell of the past and ignores or refuses to understand the hard facts of the present”—meaning the desires of the colonized and the destructive power of modern war. These beliefs were reinforced by the use of U.S. atom bombs to end the war with Japan. Nehru therefore saw building an area of peace, as he called it, in Asia as the only truly practical and realistic goal if mankind was to avoid annihilation.

Nehru’s anti-imperialist and socialist inclinations were evident as early as 1927 when he attended a Brussels conference of oppressed peoples organized by the leftist League Against Imperialism, of which Nehru was elected an Executive Council member. In Brussels, Nehru was convinced that independence from Britain had to be a multinational effort by all the oppressed and colonized throughout Asia and the world. He then visited the Soviet Union in the 1930s. He was not swept off his feet by what he saw there, or by the propaganda, but recognized an alternative to the economic and political system that had enslaved India. He was therefore willing to grant the Soviets equal or greater validity and to work with them. This also accorded with his instinctive faith in socialist solutions to India’s abject socioeconomic condition. Nehru broke with his colleague and sometime rival in the Congress Party, Subhash Chandra Bose, in the late 1930s on the question of working with the fascist regimes in Europe. He refused

to meet Benito Mussolini while in Italy in the 1930s and visited Spain along with V. K. Krishna Menon to support the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. Nehru organized support and a medical mission to China, when China was fighting the Japanese invasion in 1938. Bose, as president of the Congress, was not in favor of steps hostile to Japan and Germany but chose to allow the medical mission to China to proceed while he did not associate with it in any way.

When World War II broke out and it came to choosing sides, Nehru and the Congress made it clear that India's place was with the democracies but that it could only fight as a free country. In this Nehru and Gandhi differed from Bose, who, on the principle that "my enemy's enemy is my friend," wanted to work with and fight alongside the Axis to win freedom for India. Indeed, this was the significant ideological cleavage in the Congress, before, during, and after the war. When the British viceroy declared India a belligerent within hours of Britain's declaration of war on Germany without consulting either the Central Assembly or the easily identifiable leaders of Indian opinion, the Congress leadership was divided. Many sympathized with Bose's anti-British stand, which called the war imperialist. Moderates, led by C. Rajagopalachari, were for Congress giving "whole-hearted support to Britain in the fight against gangsterism personified."²³ That was also the stand of the Hindu right, which worked with the Raj through the war. Nehru was between the two extremes, saying that "Indians will not participate [in the war] as slaves."²⁴ Ultimately, Congress under Nehru and Gandhi's influence made it clear that they stood against the fascists, but were not willing to stand with Britain unless India was promised freedom at the end of the war—a promise that Churchill was unwilling to make even in the desperate straits that Britain was reduced to in 1940–1941. Nehru made his ideological position clear, stressing that India could not support a war in the name of democracy and freedom when this was denied to India by Britain. He managed to do so with a remarkable absence of personal rancor against the British, despite his extended imprisonment during the war. He showed equal equanimity in his attitude toward those Indians who differed from him politically. When it came to the trials for treason after the war of Bose's Indian National Army followers, Nehru chose to defend his political opponents himself and later accommodated many leaders in the Indian National Army in the new Indian Foreign Service and in politics, but not in the armed forces.

Writing in Allahabad jail in 1944 Nehru foresaw that "an entirely new situation would arise after the war, with two dominating world powers—the USA and the USSR—and the rest a good distance behind them unless they form some kind of a bloc."



Nehru's belief in the rise of Asia and pan-Asian unity was not unique or an unreasonable reaction to what Asia had experienced under European hegemony.

If there ever was a moment when minds all across Asia were electrified, when Asia began to believe that it might have a future other than one under Western subjugation, and when the rise of Asia began, it was during two days in May 1905 when Admiral Togo Heihachiro's Japanese ships annihilated the Imperial Russian navy in the Tsushima Strait. A non-European country, and an Asian one at that, had vanquished a European power at sea. From Egypt to China Asians celebrated. A sixteen-year-old schoolboy then, Nehru heard the news on a train to his British school, Harrow, and was elated and "in high good humor," as he put it. Returning to China later that year, Sun Yat-sen was congratulated by Arab port workers at the Suez Canal who thought he was Japanese. In Damascus a young Ottoman soldier, Mustafa Kemal, was thrilled and felt vindicated. As Pankaj Mishra said, "They all drew the same lesson from Japan's victory: white men, conquerors of the world, were no longer invincible. A hundred fantasies—of national freedom, racial dignity, or simple vengefulness—now bloomed in hearts and minds that had sullenly endured European authority over their lands."²⁵

If Japan's rise kindled hope, the carnage of the world wars extinguished any lingering respect for Western superiority in Asian minds. In its place rose pan-Asianist sentiment, the belief that Asian fates were linked and that Asians would take charge of their own destinies together in a way that Japan had shown was possible. Pan-Asianism was part of the reaction to imperialism and colonialism and to the impact of the West on Asian societies. Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, developed serious differences with Gandhi over what he saw as the xenophobic side of the anti-colonial movement and nationalism in India and elsewhere. Pan-Asianism seemed to offer Tagore, Liang Qichao, Okakura Kakuzo, and others across Asia self-respect and an answer to the humiliation and racism inflicted on what the West considered to be backward societies. They sought to establish a cultural basis in Asian spiritualism and ideals, contrasted with Western power and materialism, and stressed the old maritime and Silk Road links, arts, and a shared legacy of Buddhism in India, China, and Japan.

By the mid-1930s, however, pan-Asianists in Japan who were also ultranationalists were dreaming of an Asia revitalized and dominated by Japan. Okawa Shumei, for instance, outlined a Japanese version of the Monroe Doctrine for

Asia. (In 1946 he would be indicted as the chief ideologist of Japanese expansionism by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal.) After the 1931 invasion of Manchuria, Tagore and Chinese victims of Japanese aggression broke with the pro-Japan freedom movement across Asia. The movement split between those who saw pan-Asianism as part of a larger, humanist return to a mythical Asian peace, such as Nehru and Tagore on the one hand, and Japan-sponsored Asian freedom fighters on the other hand, who saw military power as offering them the way forward. By 1940, sitting in a British prison in India, Nehru would say, "My own picture of the future is a federation which includes China and India, Burma and Ceylon, Afghanistan and possibly other countries."²⁶

In a little more than ninety days beginning on December 8, 1941, Japan's military offensive through Asia dispossessed the United Kingdom, United States, Netherlands, and France and took the Philippines, Singapore, Malaya, Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, much of China, Indochina, and Burma. "There are few examples in history of such dramatic humiliation of established powers."²⁷ In each Asian country nationalists were faced with a choice of whether to work with the Japanese, who promised liberation from the old colonial masters, or whether to oppose them as new masters. In April 1943 the "liberation of Asia" became Japan's official war objective. Despite the undoubted brutality that accompanied Japanese occupation, occupying forces set up friendly regimes across almost all of occupied Asia and actively boosted nationalist movements in Burma and Indonesia and galvanized anti-Western feeling. Aung San in Burma, Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob in Malaya, and Sukarno in Java, like Bose of India, all received encouragement and were actively boosted by Colonel Suzuki Keiji, often called Japan's Lawrence of Arabia. The first generation of postcolonial leaders had been trained and tasted power thanks to Japan. Ba Maw, the Burmese leader, said he felt the "call of Asiatic blood," and, "We were Asians rediscovering Asia."²⁸

The strength and effect of pan-Asian sentiment should not be underestimated just because its unchallenged life was short and it was quenched in China by Japanese behavior in the 1930s. For one thing, nationalist leaders supported by Japan, all believers all in one form or another of pan-Asianism, made a return to prewar empire impossible, from Vietnam through Indonesia to Burma and India. The speed of decolonization in Asia was spectacular. Britain departed from a partitioned subcontinent in August 1947, Burma became free in 1948, Indonesians threw out the Dutch in 1949. Malaya and Singapore were plunged into postwar chaos that lasted years, but the British departure was clearly inevitable and never in doubt. Where empire tried to hold on to its privileges, as in

Iran with the Anglo-American coup against Mosaddegh in 1953, the seeds of future foment lay in wait.

Besides, it was these pan-Asianists—Aung San, Sukarno, and others—who led the new Asian states that emerged from decolonization and produced the new rulers of Asia. There was a direct line from the 1943 Greater East Asian Congress in Tokyo to the 1955 Bandung Conference of the Afro-Asian states. The Asia for the Asians sentiment of those conferences still resonates today, for instance, with China's Xi Jinping tapping into an idea with deep and abiding roots.



The significant strands in Nehru's thinking—anti-imperialism, subcontinental leadership, cultural and political pan-Asianism—can be traced back to Nehru's experiences before independence. What underlay them all was his conviction that "India is not a poor country. She is abundantly supplied with everything that makes a country rich, and yet her people are very poor. She has a noble heritage of culture-forms and her culture-potential is very great; but many new developments and the accessories of culture are lacking." He was prescient in saying in 1946 that "only two factors may come in the way: international developments and external pressure on India, and lack of a common objective within the country. Unfortunately, it is the latter alone that will count. If India is split up into two or more parts and can no longer function as a political and economic unit, her progress will be seriously affected. There will be the direct weakening effect, but much worse will be the inner psychological conflict between those who wish to reunite her and those who oppose this."²⁹

If the ideological basis of the new India's foreign policy was nationalist, anti-colonial, and pan-Asianist, the foreign policy and security instruments that the republic inherited were the creation of the Raj, were limited in nature, and brought along a set of attitudes and habits, too. The Foreign and Political department, which became the Ministry of External Affairs, the Indian Army, and the government of India missions and posts abroad, as well as seats in the United Nations and International Labor Organization, were all legacies of British India. They were also the least "Indianized" of the Raj's instruments. That did not prevent Nehru from remaking and repurposing them. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel did the same for the state's internal instruments. It is interesting to consider which of them was more successful in making the apparatus inherited from the Raj fit for the new democratic republic's purpose. Nehru had a cleaner slate to work with in foreign affairs.

His instruments, such as the Indian Army and the Indian Foreign Service, have shown an ability to adapt and evolve with India's needs. Patel was probably dealing with more intractable internal structures left by the Raj, such as the police and the civil services, all of which today require drastic overhauling. Nehru was pragmatic enough from the start to turn and use these instruments for his own purposes. For instance, when the process of integrating the princely states was about to begin and some rulers were toying with the idea of independence, Nehru said in July 1946 that no princely state could prevail militarily against the army of independent India, implicitly threatening them with an imperial instrument for a national purpose.

While the British like to be remembered for their contributions to India of administration—civil service, the army, posts, telegraphs, banking systems, irrigation schemes, and, most of all, the railways—it was a state run for Britain, by Britons who, unlike all previous invaders, never made their home in India, never assimilated, and were never committed to India's interests before Britain's imperial interests. The British Raj, however, was an Indian state in that most of its personnel were Indian. Only 4,000 British officers were stationed with the civil service, the police, the railways, and in forestry in the 1930s. Perhaps a maximum of 30,000 civilian Britons in India worked as traders, tea planters, bankers, and so on. Units of the British Army in India peaked at 70,000. As against this, the British Indian Army composed of Indian soldiers with British and Indian officers raised voluntarily had 1.3 million men serve in World War I and 2.5 million in World War II. Given the fragility of their hold, the British obsessed about staying in power, particularly after 1857, and the imperial state failed to do what it might have in education, public health, and industry. This made them more determined than ever to keep the higher functions of the state—war, diplomacy, and intelligence—in British hands, and these were the last portions of the Raj to be “Indianized.”

During the Raj, India enabled Britain to overcome its limited size, small population, and lack of natural resources to hold on to its global empire. The Indian Army was used by the empire from Africa (Natal, Somaliland, Uganda, Rhodesia, Sudan, Mauritius, Egypt) to the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Aden) to Asia (China, repeatedly, Tibet, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong). For Curzon and British followers of Mahan and Mackinder, control of the sea was critical. They believed that their security in India would be materially affected by an adverse change in political control of the Persian Gulf, that they had to ensure the safety of “the great sea route, commercial and military, to India and the Further East.” British policies in Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet,

China, Burma, and the Middle East were all influenced by the security and geopolitical advantages of the base in India. Churchill recognized that without India, the British empire would not survive and Britain would no longer be a global player. "The loss of India would be final and fatal" for Britain and "reduce us to the scale of a minor power," he said on January 30, 1931. A significant factor in the British decision to leave India was a concern about the loyalty of the Indian Army after World War II and the Royal Indian Navy mutiny of February 1946, which spread from Bombay to Karachi, Cochin, and Calcutta. The mutiny was joined by elements of the Royal Indian Air Force and police and had to be suppressed by force by British troops and Royal Navy warships. There was also some unrest in Indian Army garrisons in Poona and Madras.

Nehru took a very different view. He was deeply opposed to what he saw as imperial adventures that Britain had dragged India into and was against the use of Indian soldiers as cannon fodder in Britain's fights, as in the First World War. In this he differed from K. M. Panikkar, and senior Congress politicians like C. Rajagopalachari and T. T. Krishnamachari, who saw independent India playing the same role as it had under the Raj, but now for India alone, as a security provider in southeast Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere, and were willing to rely on and work with British maritime power, which India lacked. They also saw India as a key economic power in an extended neighborhood. In 1948 Panikkar argued for a regional organization with a defense council from Iraq and Iran to Australia, including Indochina, Thailand, and all the other countries in between, centered on India and involving Britain as well. In this he was supported by C. Rajagopalachari. This was a very different view from what finally prevailed in independent India, as we shall see.

The imperial uses and origin of the Indian Army had left a layer of mistrust of that body in independent India's first generation of political leaders. They had seen the army used against themselves in internal security duties. For a short while after World War II it was Bose's Indian National Army that was the national army of India in the popular mind. But the role of the armed forces in handling the communal violence that accompanied Partition and, more significantly, the army's response to Pakistani raiders and then regular armed forces invading Jammu and Kashmir in 1947–1948 helped to make it the national army of India in the popular imagination and to smooth its relationship with the political leadership, most of whom had no experience or familiarity with the military. Today, after years of an apolitical army that has stayed away from politics, unlike its siblings in the neighborhood, the concerns of those days about civil-military relations are hard to credit.



This broad-brush look at India's past suggests that though India is unique in several respects, and has been so for much of her history, the country has also been connected to the world and its fate, and prosperity has depended on that connection. The nature of India's engagement with the world is a logical result of its geography, resource endowment, demography, and history. No other country in the world has the same combination of size, location, present-day backwardness with some effective power, and voice as India. It is therefore not surprising that India has had to walk a lonely path for much of its independent existence as a modern state since 1947, but, where possible, chose to do it with other partners, among the nonaligned and the major powers. Indian exceptionalism has some basis in geography, history, and condition, but remains an incomplete and unsatisfactory frame to understand India's behavior. No other country shares India's interests to such an extent that an alliance is natural or inevitable. At the same time India's interests and weaknesses make partnership and cooperation abroad essential and inevitable. It is through the search for congruence of interest and partnerships short of alliance that India has sought to engage the world.

Not surprisingly, in order to further its unique set of interests, every Indian government since 1947 has chosen to pursue strategic autonomy, by one name or another—whether one calls it nonalignment or genuine nonalignment or a multidirectional foreign policy, or anything else. There has also naturally been an internal focus on remaking the institutions of governance and creating instruments of state to concentrate on the primary task of transforming India into a strong, prosperous modern country where every Indian can achieve his or her potential.

In 1947 the new state's inheritance was a complex one of some instruments and attitudes that the new leadership sought consciously to reject or change; of limited capacity to drive foreign and security policy; of an Asia that was clearly evolving but in an uncertain direction; and of overwhelming domestic priorities for the new state of India. At the same time, India's independence in 1947 and China's revolution in 1949 radically altered the basis of Asia's relationship with the world, dealings among the countries of Asia, and also India's role and policies. The rest of this book is about that change, and its evolution over seven decades, a story of incredible and improbable events that have led us to where we are.