

Must India's Foreign Affairs Strategy Change?

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Must India's Foreign Affairs Strategy Change?

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Dr. Justin Vaïsse, Director General, Paris Peace Forum, and former Director, Policy Planning Staff, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France

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Read Amb. Shivshankar Menon's paper here:

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/indias-foreign-affairs-strategy/>

Watch the event video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtNQH17Nzic>

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PROCEEDINGS

Constantino Xavier: Good. I think we are live now, both here on Zoom and on [YouTube](#). Welcome to all. Good afternoon from Delhi. Greetings to all joining us here around the world, hopefully safe and healthy in these distressing times. My name is Constantino Xavier. I'm a Fellow in Foreign Policy and Security Studies here at Brookings India in Delhi. And it's my great pleasure, today, to welcome you to this webinar hosted by Brookings India.

Must India's Foreign Affairs Strategy Change? This is really the central question we will examine today, over the next hour and a half, with a really fantastic panel of distinguished speakers from across five time zones; all the way from Washington DC on the United States' east coast, all the way up to Canberra in Australia. Our focus today will be on the really excellent [paper](#) recently published at Brookings India by Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, India's former National Security Adviser, our distinguished Fellow at Brookings India. The paper is titled, '*India's Foreign Affairs Strategy*'. And if you haven't yet, I invite you all to read it, it's on our website www.Brookings.in

I'll introduce Ambassador Menon and our four other panelists in a minute but allow me to briefly explain what we had in mind as we planned this webinar today and especially why we shaped the title of this webinar as a question – 'Must India's Foreign Affairs Strategy Change?' Whether you think he's been successful or not, I think we all surely agree that Prime Minister Modi has set unprecedentedly high expectations about India's position in the world since he came to power in 2014. In the last six years, Prime Minister Modi visited 104 countries, traveling abroad twice as much as his predecessor. He spoke of India as a leading power, also as a 'Vishwa Guru' a Sanskrit phrase for world teacher. And I would say that in his many outreach engagements and speeches, he promised the world to the world. Today, beyond just these recent Modi years, I think we can also recognize that India has been rising progressively from the 2000s onwards, in line with the country's growing economic power, its democratic governance and its developmental model.

Ambassador Menon's paper discusses all this and helps us to take a step back from the daily noise, taking a deeper look at the past, present and future, and the many lines of change and continuity in India's foreign policy. In the paper, he offers us what I would call a truly grand strategic picture of India's external objectives and also, the economic, military and political instruments that India requires to achieve these objectives. We've not had, I think, a grand strategic debate in India for some years now. In fact, I would say that, at least, the last such debate we saw dates back to 2012, when the Centre for Policy Research, our fellow think-tank here in Delhi, launched the report titled '[Non-Alignment 2.0](#)'.

If you look back at the report webpage today, it still lists more than 35 articles and essays in response reflecting a vibrant variety of perspectives, including from, for example, Sitaram Yechury and Swapan Dasgupta, two distinguished communist and conservative, respectively, members of parliament. Ambassador Menon's paper helps us to reignite this debate, probably when it is most needed as India faces external turbulence and uncertainty. A couple of years ago, we used to speak about disruption often as an opportunity, even with a positive dimension relating, for example, to technology. But with the COVID pandemic, I would risk saying that we are now facing prospects of a global disorder and its many negative effects also.

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Today, rather than an Indian discussion with Indian experts only, on whether and how India must or should change its foreign policy, we thought this would be a good moment to understand how other countries are looking at India. We want to focus really on the international external perspectives on whether and how India should or should not change its foreign policy strategy to navigate this disruption or disorder. Has India been able to cater to the rising expectations worldwide? Is it on the right track? What can it do more or differently? To address these questions and help us all out here in Delhi to get a better sense of these different expectations, Ambassador Menon and I are lucky to be joined by four distinguished experts from the United States, France, Indonesia and Australia, all key strategic partners of India.

So, allow me to briefly introduce each of them before we proceed to the discussion. Ladies first; over to you Alyssa in Washington. From very early morning Washington DC, we're joined by Dr. Alyssa Ayres. She's a Senior Fellow for India Pakistan and South Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations. She came to CFR after serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia from 2010 to 2013. Dr. Ayres recently published her book on India's rise on the world stage titled, [‘Our Time Has Come: How India is Making its Place in the World’](#). At CFR, her work focuses on India's role in the world and on US relations with South Asia. During her tenure at the State Department in the Barack Obama administration, Dr. Ayres covered all issues across Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and provided policy direction for four US embassies and four consulates in this region.

From lunchtime Paris, we are joined by Dr. Justin Vaisse, who is a Founder and Director General of the Paris Peace Forum. Previously, he was Director of Policy Planning at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2013 to 2019. He served as Director of Research for the Centre on the United States in Europe, and a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. A historian specialized in international relations and American foreign policy, Dr. Vaisse has written and co-authored numerous books on the United States, and has held teaching positions at Harvard University, the Paris School of International Affairs at Sciences Po, and Johns Hopkins University.

From late-afternoon Jakarta in Southeast Asia, we are joined by Dr. Dino Patti Djalal, who is former Deputy Foreign Minister of Indonesia. Dr. Djalal joined Indonesia's Department of Foreign Affairs in 1987 with postings in London, Dili, Timor-Leste and Washington DC. From 2010 to 2013, he served as Indonesia's Ambassador to the United States, elevating bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Partnership. In 2004, Dr. Djalal was appointed a Special Staff of President Yudhoyono for international Affairs. In this capacity, he served as Presidential Spokesperson, Foreign Policy Adviser to the President, and Speechwriter until 2010, making him the longest-serving presidential spokesperson in Indonesia's modern history. He also founded the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI) in 2015, and he heads the Indonesian side of the India Indonesia Eminent Persons Group.

From late-evening Canberra, we are joined by Professor Rory Medcalf, who is the Head of the National Security College at the Australian National University since 2015. He has three decades of experience across Diplomacy, Intelligence, Analysis, think-tanks, Academia and Journalism, including as Founding Director of the international Security Program at the Lowy Institute from 2007 to 2015. In government, Professor Medcalf worked as a Senior Strategic Analyst with the Office of National Intelligence. He also served as an Australian diplomat, which included a posting here in New Delhi, and secondment to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, truce monitoring after the civil conflict in Bougainville, and policy development on Asian security institutions. His

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new book, just come out fresh off the press, is titled, '[Contest for The Indo-Pacific](#)' recently published, providing a refreshing and broad account of the Indo-Pacific and tensions existing in the region, as he weaves together history, geopolitics, cartography, military strategy and economics.

So, welcome to all. And let me finally introduce from abroad, and just here across the street in Delhi, let me finally introduce from blazing afternoon Delhi, Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, who is a distinguished Fellow at Brookings India, and Chairman of the advisory board of the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. Ambassador Menon's long career in public service spans diplomacy, national security, atomic energy, disarmament policy and India's relations with its neighbours and major global powers. Previously, Ambassador Menon served as National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India between 2010 and 2014, and as Foreign Secretary of India between 2006 and 2009. He was Ambassador and High Commissioner of India to Israel, Sri Lanka, China and Pakistan. Ambassador Menon is most recently the author of '[Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy](#)' and the upcoming book, '[India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past-Present](#)'.

Good. Introductions done, and I think welcoming all once again. Ambassador Menon, if we could start with you, because what really brings us here is your paper. And if I can just highlight the slightly scary terms you used to describe the world, you call it, "dangerous, fragmenting, unpredictable, in which India's adversaries are becoming increasingly powerful". Now, you wrote this in 2019, pre-crisis, so I wonder to what extent things are looking, even worse now for India.

Shivshankar Menon: Thank you, Tino, and thank you to all my fellow panelists for agreeing to discuss this paper on India's foreign policy strategy, and I'm waiting to hear what they have to say about it. I won't repeat what's in the paper because I hope, and I would encourage everyone to read it, but what I'll try and do is to answer the question that you've posed to us here: must India's foreign policy strategy change? And my answer to that is, yes. I thought so pre-pandemic, when I wrote this paper, and I still think so. In fact, this is even more necessary today, post the COVID pandemic.

The paper, as you said, was written in February 2019 and I chose not to change it. Partly, because the main trends which I thought we needed to react to and therefore to change our policies, are not just present but, if anything, have now been accelerated by the pandemic. And what do I mean by that? I mean de-globalization or the retreat from globalization, fragmentation of the globalized economy into regional trading blocs – NAFTA by any other name in North America, the European Union, RCEP in the Asia-Pacific – and this complex economic slowdown that we faced ever since the 2008 economic crisis.

Secondly, the rise of the new authoritarians and what is, I think, wrongly called "populist politics" because it's really become local, ultra-nationalist, emotional politics. Because governments have been less and less able to deliver the kind of economic progress and change that is expected from them, they compensate actually by promising more and more, and by basing their appeal on the emotional, nationalist and the other criteria.

Thirdly, of course, the fundamental shifts in the balance of power, particularly in the economic balance of power: the rise of China and the consequent pushback by the U.S., resulting in a much more contentious US-China relationship, which is getting increasingly so post-Covid; and the shift in the centre of geopolitical gravity to the Asia-Pacific, where the flash points and hot spots are live again. And lastly, the fact that we are between orders. I mean, we went from a bipolar cold war, to a unipolar moment when the U.S. was the sole superpower. She's still the sole global

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superpower but other countries have advanced. And today, the world, my summary, is economically multipolar, it is militarily still unipolar in a global sense, and politically, it is completely uncertain.

It seems to me that in such a changed situation, for a country like India to keep doing what it did in the 90's or the noughts of this century, and to expect the same results or better results, would really be silly. And now that we are in a post pandemic world, in fact, each of these trends has actually been accelerated so far. Some of these could change, of course, but at least so far, it seems to me that what we see is really quite worrying. Whether it is the trend towards a much more fragmented global economy, whether it's a centralization of power in the hands of the new authoritarian leaders, I mean all of these I think have been accelerated. In fact, of course, there are new elements and the longer the pandemic lasts, the more likely that the newer elements will predominate.

But what we've seen so far doesn't inspire very much confidence. Governments are fighting, or, political leaderships are fighting for their survival; for their political futures, for legitimacy. Some have elections coming, others I think have to justify what they're doing. And I don't think they really know whether what they're doing is right, where it's going to end up, whether it will work, so they're blaming each other, they're turning to centralization. Every single major power is diminished by the pandemic and its effects; in reputation, in power and in its prospects, particularly in their economic prospects. Because we all depend on the world economy, and the world economy's prospects are not good right now.

Many of the assumptions that were made earlier, very confidently I think, not necessarily wrongly, about power transitions and so on, I think can now be questioned, including those about the rise of various emerging countries. I think all these assumptions today are in question and the longer the pandemic lasts, the greater these questions. We were already between orders, as I said, and we're likely to be so for longer, with all the debilitating effects that brings for peace, for prosperity.

The overall effect is that there is even less room for diplomacy than there was before the pandemic. And I don't mean just wolf-warrior diplomacy but for all these ultra-nationalist authoritarians, there is very little scope actually for compromises and for the give-and-take that diplomacy requires. And this is why we have the effective end of multilateralism. If you look at the difference between the way the G20 responded to the 2008 financial crisis in April 2009, and the way it has responded now to the pandemic, this is the difference between night and day.

So, my summary is, I think some of you may have heard me say this before, is that we're in for a poorer, meaner and smaller world. Poorer because the economic prospects are dim, even for large economies which have domestic demand. Meaner because we can see the selfish turning inward and the failure of multilateralism. And smaller because the fragmentation of politics and economics has accelerated.

So, how has India done so far responding to this, to the immediate crisis? What we've had so far is a good beginning, considering the level of uncertainty that we're facing. We've heard the government of India speak of self-reliance, which is good. It's good to see us channelling our inner Nehru, but we have to explain how we're going to square that with India's need to engage with the world, for about half our GDP is today the external sector. And the signs are not good. If you look at the last four years, we've raised customs duties, and we walked out of the RCEP

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negotiations. India needs to be engaged with the world economy. 80% of our imports are maintenance imports, essentials like energy, fertilizer, things that we cannot do without.

Secondly, the Quad tried an expanded meeting, which is good because frankly, without expanding it, the Quad is three islands and a peninsula with a huge hole in the middle. And a Quad makes no sense if we're talking about the Indo-Pacific – How can we talk of the Indo-Pacific without ASEAN, without Indonesia, without the other littorals participating in managing the issues of the Indo-Pacific? We've also seen a small revival of SAARC. Again, this is good but needs to be taken forward in concrete terms to real cooperation, with or without Pakistan.

And as for overall positioning, my own conclusion both before COVID and especially now, given what we're seeing between China and the US, is that the ideal position for India is to be closer to both China and the US than they are to each other. And that shouldn't be difficult given the way their relations are going, but that's the ideal position. Can it be done? I don't know, that's a much harder thing to do on practice than theory. Maybe I'll stop there. I've gone on long enough to, I think, provoke my fellow panelists.

Constantino Xavier: Ambassador Menon, just one follow-up question for myself which came in. I assume you agree that not everything must change, right?

Shivshankar Menon: No, not at all, not at all.

Constantino Xavier: Where's India on the right track in what you would say and where has-

Shivshankar Menon: I've said we made some good beginnings but we do need to do much more in the neighbourhood. I naturally concentrate on what needs to change. Many of these things have deeper roots in earlier policy, whether it's the economic integration of the subcontinent, or whether it's 'Look East'. But you can't have a political and military Look East which is not backed by an economic Look East, if it doesn't have trade and economic legs. And that's the kind of adjustment. So, what I'm saying is not that throw all your old policies out and do completely new ones. No, not at all. Because India's geography, history, needs, resource endowment, etc. don't change, and these are still the same. So, it seems to me that we need to adjust to the changing circumstances that we have around us. That, I think, is where we are today.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Ambassador Menon. Let's move to Washington, Alyssa, if I may come to you. What's your perspective from DC these days? I think we had a bit of an exchange of notes, where you seemed a bit disappointed in what's happening on the US-India relationship, but feel free to share any points on Ambassador Menon's paper.

Alyssa Ayres: Sure. First, thank you for convening all of us. This is the first time that I've been in a global webinar with five different time zones and great thinkers represented across the world. So, thanks to Brookings India for organizing this. I want to follow up on the idea that what we're seeing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is an intensification of trends that were already at play prior to that. And to me, the most important element here in Ambassador Menon's paper and that has become just all the more vital, is the economic growth issue. I think if economic growth was the basis for India's claim to rise, and for the ability to meet the domestic development requirements for such a large population, to give India that heft on the world stage and be able to deliver quality of life for 1.35 billion citizens, people around the world are now facing serious recession times and this is clearly the case in India. We don't know how long it's going to last but it raises vital questions about how to bridge the months during which this severe economic pain

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is being felt, and what role international economic policy can play to spurring the economy, to get it back on track.

And here, I think we continue to see, within India, many of the same debates that have been circulating for decades: how open to be? How closed to be? People aren't using the language of being closed, but we've seen, again as Ambassador Menon mentioned, seen tariffs go up in successive budgets over the course of the past three years, I guess it's been. It's not clear that that is really an approach that is based on an idea of better integrating India with global economic flows and really, making India become a workshop of the world. That is a stated goal. It's a stated goal of the Modi government. It was a stated goal, actually, of the UPA's two terms through the National Manufacturing Policy. But it is not at all clear to me that domestic economic policy decisions are aligned with that broader international economic policy goal.

So, I just wanted to flag that as I think perhaps the most important foundational concern for the idea of India as a global power, and how India can really realize the heft that it already possesses to become much more of a shaper of flows and ideas on the world stage. Should I stop there, or should I raise one other issue that I wanted to bring up?

Constantino Xavier: Please go on, yes.

Alyssa Ayres: One of the things that I found most intriguing about the foreign policy paper were the references in several places to increased urbanization. I'm interested in this, in large part because this is the subject of my book project that I'm working on now. But what we are seeing happening in India, as India looks ahead over its next three decades, is indeed this deepening urbanization, and that is going to change the way India engages with the rest of the world as it already has in some capacities, because of the need to grow infrastructure in new and different ways; account for needing greater resilience in coastal and other cities. Thinking about housing shortages, the migrant labour crisis has really raised this to attention. And if we look at the way that global cities throughout the world are the showcases for their countries, I think this puts this issue of urbanization in an even more prominent light for India.

But Ambassador Menon, one of the things that was most intriguing to me about the way you frame some of the urbanization challenges in the paper, is that that a deepening urbanization, if I read you correctly, suggests challenges to social cohesion. And I also wanted to add that there's also another way to think about urbanization, and that is particularly, in light of deep joint family traditions or village life where everyone knows everybody, where there are very stratified social orders, where there are problems of gender discrimination that are well known and well documented, in many ways the kind of life that urbanization offers to people can be liberating. It can give people the opportunity to earn their own income, live on their own or live with friends or their chosen family. It can break down caste barriers that, in some parts of the country, are debilitating. It can provide people the opportunity to transcend religious divides. So, I just wanted to suggest that there is actually something quite liberating about urbanization in addition to the cohesion issues that, of course, are there in the backdrop.

Constantino Xavier: and very briefly, Alyssa, I mean sitting in DC, you've been looking at this US-India relationship over a long, long time, and to what extent do you see more of change or continuity in the last few years under Prime Minister Modi? This is an eternal debate, I know, but where do you stand on that, and particularly on the US-India relationship?

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Alyssa Ayres: I think what the Modi role in foreign policy has done is to elevate the idea of India as a leading power and become much more vocal about the way India should be shaping its goals, ambitions, desires, and engaging with countries around the world to do that. Many of the policy approaches are actually quite continuous with earlier approaches. On the US-India front, I will say that I do think there's been a shift with the Trump administration. There's been a narrowing of the US-India relationship to defence and security issues, that aspect of the relationship has proceeded quite well, and kudos to the policy managers who are ensuring that it does continue to grow.

But we are seeing, in my view, a weakening of some of the other elements of the relationship. The trade relationship has always been tough, nobody will deny that, but we're not making a lot of progress on any of these long-standing thorny issues and I think that the Trump administration's approach to applying tariffs all over the place has actually exacerbated this problem that we faced in trying to find some sort of meeting ground with India. We are now farther away on any idea of an economic meeting ground than I think we probably were 10 years ago. I mean, 10 years ago we were still talking about the prospect of a bilateral investment treaty. Now, we are so far away I don't even see how people would sit at the same table to talk about such a thing, let alone a free trade agreement, which keeps popping up as some kind of meme that would be a next step. But I mean, we can't even complete a minimal package that would deal with esoteric issues like dairy market access, or medical devices, or these sorts of things. So, I do worry quite a bit about the economic side of the relationship because it's through deepening economic ties that you continue to grow constituencies in countries to further and deepen relationships, and so I do worry about that.

The other thing I would just note that I worry about is a kind of diminished focus on some of the people-to-people, the democratic issues, the importance of liberal democracy issues, the importance of higher education cooperation, the importance of engaging on women, there's a whole array of issues that span the whole depth of this important relationship. And I just worry that they're not as high of a priority for the Trump administration and naturally, have fallen down in priority in the bilateral relationship. That would be one of my biggest worries there. The last point I would add is not specific to the US-India relationship but I do worry quite a bit these days that the American foreign policy focus is not so great at, let's say, juggling multiple nuanced issues. And I think we are now entering a moment where, all of a sudden, everybody's focused on China and the challenges of China both economically and its use of its influence around the world. Now, with the Coronavirus, its responsibility for it. And I think that makes it very hard to try to find space in the foreign policy discussions that go on, either governmental or non-governmental, to really talk about the importance of a partnership between two democracies that lacks a kind of urgency derived from, let's say, war or other conflict. And that also frankly lacks the structures that are inherent to long-standing alliance relationships. We've made great progress on that front in the last 20 years but the relationship that Washington has with New Delhi is not the same as the relationship Washington has with London, or with Canberra, or even with Paris, although we do disagree at times with France on approaches.

So, I do I worry about the fact that it's pretty hard to get India on the radar screen. It's always been a little hard to get India on the radar screen, but I think that dynamic has been exacerbated now that there's almost like a honing to very narrow issues on the foreign policy agenda.

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Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Alyssa. Let's move over to Paris. Dr. Vaisse from Europe, how do you look at India? How do you look at Ambassador Menon's paper?

Justin Vaisse: Thank you, Constantino, and it's really good to be back at Brookings, even though it's in India and even though, I'm in my living room in Paris, but of course, I feel back at home. Thank you, Ambassador Menon for a great paper. I think I will leave the security aspects to Rory, most probably, including because he and I, along with Michael Fullilove and other French and Australian colleagues have been working on this as early as 2013/2014 when it really started. And then when we did, along with Indian colleagues, the start of the trilateral dialogue between Australia, France and India, that has been continuing and which is something really important in the framework of the Indo-Pacific strategy that we largely share. So, I will leave that to Rory because he's more of an expert than I am. On this, I will perhaps focus on the question of multilateralism and the question of soft power, and would like to challenge Ambassador Menon's excellent brief a bit on these things. I have basically two messages: one is about multilateralism – self-reliance is not enough; and the second one is about soft power – soft power matters. And so, let me just elaborate a bit on this and try to push Ambassador Menon a bit further.

There are things that sovereignty and strategic autonomy, however important they are, cannot achieve, including for the very goals that you put forward in the paper; developing India, making sure that India gets out of poverty and provides for all of its citizens. Let me give a brief illustration through the COVID-19 crisis. We can emphasize all we want about sovereignty and self-reliance and strategic autonomy, etc. but that won't solve the question of finding and more importantly, distributing the vaccine to all countries. And we know that no country will be safe until all countries are safe from this new coronavirus and so, we really need to work together. There's not really an alternative to that. A good example was given by the EU and France and a number of other countries but also, with non-state actors like the Gates Foundation, the Wellcome Trust, or these sort of- we sometimes call them plurilateral or polylateral actors, like Gavi, or SIPPY that associate states with WHO, with private companies, with large philanthropic foundations. And these are the kinds of things we need because we know we will get out of this crisis, we will get out of it faster and in a better shape for the international system, if we cooperate. That's one example.

Another example is unilateralism won't help much in supporting fragile states in South Asia, or in Africa in particular, in restoring disruption in food supplies that are looming, etc. And it's the same as with health; that is, no country will get back to real and non-lasting prosperity until major economies and all economies across the globe are stabilized, and international trade routes are reopened. And so, since we have basically the two largest superpowers, China and the U.S., that are largely missing in action in terms of leadership, in terms of what they provide for multilateral energies that we so thoroughly need, what should be India but also the EU and a couple of other, I would say mid-sized powers, like Australia, like Indonesia and others, how should they behave?

And so, if I look in Ambassador Menon's paper, I find sort of a tension between these two conflicting goals; self-reliant sovereignty on the one hand and a participation into creating public goods on the other hand. For example, if I quote, you mentioned what sort of engagement India seeks, “it excludes ideas such as exporting democracy” – fair enough – “protecting the ideological frontiers” of India – okay – “creating global public goods”. So, here I sort of cringe a bit more. In a different page, you mention something about strategic autonomy and you say, “in practice, it has meant keeping decision-making power with itself, avoiding alliances and building India's capabilities, while working with others when it was India's interest to do so”. So, I understand the

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point about alliance; it's about hard security, etc. but it still sorts of pushes India more towards unilateralism than multilateralism.

On the other hand, in your paper, there are sentences like, "India's well-being is affected much more by global factors than is reflected in India's thinking". Or another one, "India's definition of security has grown to include several non-traditional aspects, most of which are now included in human security. Consequently, India cannot think of securing itself without considering energy security, food security and other issues that can derail India's quest to transform India, such as climate change and cyber security".

So, my point here is that there's a bit of work, I think, to do to reconcile these two things, or perhaps to move the cursor a bit more towards the direction of multilateralism, not for the sake of it. We Europeans don't like multilateralism because it's nice and because it's a Kantian view of the world. We like it because it works. And I would go a bit further, when I was mentioning India, Australia, Indonesia, and the EU. If you look at the 15 largest powers in terms of GDP, out of these 15, basically three of them are quite ambivalent about multilateralism. The first two are the US and China, and I would add Russia to that. For the others, frankly, they are all countries that like multilateralism because it works and because it's necessary for shaping their environment. They care about climate change. They care about open trade, or a reasonably open trade and more generally, about collective action and the necessity of coordinating. And that was the idea behind the creation of the Alliance for Multilateralism, to which Minister Jaishankar has been taking part in and it was good, it was important. But I would say, sitting from here and reading your text, I would encourage or push India a bit more in this direction, let me give you just a couple of examples. In terms of not as really providing global public goods by itself, but at least taking part and perhaps, innovating in this.

The Solar Alliance, for example, which was created along with France and others in 2015, the year of COP21 is a good example of that. Maybe there's not been enough of a follow-through or of a follow-up to the Solar Alliance. Maybe it could have been even larger. It was meant to provide technologies and resources for countries that are closer to the Sun than we are in the north, in order to make more of their energy out of solar power rather than coal and other fossil fuels. That was really good and that was a model of what should be done, maybe there could have been more. Other examples include cyberspace, for example. So, at the Paris Peace Forum two years ago, we launched the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace, which because the UN right now is unable to move fast on these issues, at least provides some norms, etc., it is signed by more than 75 governments and more than 600 companies around the world that apply to themselves the principles that are included in the very scope. India has not signed and that's something that we note with regret and sorrow because India is so important and could really make a difference in signing and giving its weight to this.

Other examples include trade, outer space. Developing India, providing foreign citizens will require also being a space power, an outer space power and India is taking that route, and as it should. But I think it should sort of put its efforts in in trying to do more, because this outer space is under-governed, under-regulated and it's in India's national interest to make it a better governed space in order to take all the advantages that it can from space. The anti-satellite weapon test of last year, for example, which created debris, it was a bit disappointing, to be honest, because China had done that 10 years ago and India could have done it better, in a sense. So, I'll stop here because I've been too long already. But my bottom line, my message related to the excellent paper that you

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gave would be, let's not confuse strategic autonomy and attention to sovereignty with introversion and either unilateralism or reserve vis-a-vis multilateral initiatives, which are really critical to provide not only for world peace but also for the well-being of Indian citizens. I'll stop here.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Justin. I think it was a really interesting perspective on multilateralism, India's role in that and also, what many ways is a softer multilateralism, which is emerging, a more flexible one. Let's move to Jakarta, Dr. Djalal, if you're hearing me. If you'd like to come in now- can you hear us?

Dino Patti Djalal: Yes, I'm here. Okay. Well, thank you. First, I want to say congratulations to Amb. Menon, it was a very good paper, excellent analysis, I loved it. And I think it's a paper that should be read by all foreign policy thinkers that are seriously thinking about a grand strategy for their country. And I think your paper may even be the first draft of Indian foreign policy white paper, so congratulations, I really like reading it. I have a couple of points that I want to mention. First, I do see many similarities between India's foreign policy challenges and an outlook. For example, in both our countries' an alliance system is not an option. For Indonesia, it's a constitutional issue, it's also a historical imperative. So, anybody that propose an alliance would definitely be voted out. Yeah.

Secondly, the emphasis on strategic autonomy, there is something sacred about it somehow in Indonesian foreign policy, I think also in Indian foreign policy. But for us, it's a bit different than what Justin said. It's about our fear that other countries strategic priorities and interests and entanglements will become ours. And as a result, our strategic policy options become much less. So, we always feel that it's a luxury to have this strategic autonomy, and no matter what the doctrine is, different governments have different doctrines, strategic autonomy tend to be most valued in Indonesia, and I think as much as in India. And also, our relations with the United States, both of us have changed significantly. In Indonesia, there used to be a time when you know you can't talk about close relationship with the US; this was in the 60s and so on, yeah. But now we've outgrown that, and I do see that India somehow is closer to the United States and Indonesia is right [inaudible] I think for us there is some political issues that are relating to the Islamic constituents at home. It's quite a complicated issue that the President of Indonesia, President Jokowi, was trying to keep the United States at a distance due to his attempt to win second re-election bid in Indonesia.

How do we see India? We see India as a very different power now. I remember when I joined the foreign ministry in 1987, that's like 30 years ago, India was really nowhere in the map of how we saw the world. We saw the world as mainly, we need to be on good terms with the West, with the United States, and Europe, with Japan. And then, we saw the world as North and East, which is to China, to Korea, to Japan. We didn't see India to the west of Indonesia. So, I think the most important geopolitical adjustment for us in recent decade was to see India as a very important part of that geo-strategic chess game that Indonesia is in. And we value India, especially because we see India as a leader, not the leader but a leader in the non-western world. Indonesians still see the world in terms of developed countries and developing countries, and India is there as a pioneer, a country that we count on, we discuss with. Although, sometimes I must admit that India can be very easy to deal with but on the negotiating table, can be very difficult to deal with. I think you know what I'm talking about. But India we see now as an economic powerhouse, something that wasn't seen 30 years ago, as a regional power. You wrote about a sense of deference towards India

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in the region. When we see South Asia, we see you guys as the regional power that we have to talk to. And then not just that, you are a power with global influence.

The one big question that I can't get a straight answer from an Indian is, do you consider yourself a great power or a middle power? Every time I ask an Indian, I get different answers and they try to evade that question. I think Indians consider themselves a middle power but they have entitlement to be a great power and they want to be called great power, but they're too shy to call themselves a great power, but maybe I'm wrong on that. But we also see India as a balancer vis a vis China. I think like every country in the world, China is the newest factor in our regional outlook in how we see the world and how we see the future.

And if you ask us in Indonesia, what is the one country now that matters most for Indonesia's future? Actually, we did an actual polling on this, in the last 10 years, the answer had always been the United States. But we did a polling two years ago, and for the first time, the answer was China. The country that is most consequential and matter most to our future in the region. But at the same time, the surprise of getting close to China. We want to spread the bet and this is why we see, not just United States, not just Japan but also India as a balancer, and that is how the relationship is actually new now, assumes a new dimension.

And this brings us to the Indo-Pacific as well. India is a strong voice for a free and open Indo-Pacific. Indonesia also, although we tend to be careful about it. You mentioned about the Quad and expanding the Quad. To be honest, Indonesia was asked to join the Quad, but we were quite careful about it because we don't want to step out of ASEAN. We want to make sure that when we have a position on Indo-Pacific, it will be an ASEAN position. We want to bring ASEAN along. And that's why, I think our viewpoint on Indo-Pacific is slightly different than India, because for us, it's very important- your term is "free and open", right? We use that too but "inclusive" is that key word for us. What does 'inclusive' mean? 'Inclusive' means 'let's get China on board'. Because Indo-Pacific will not be a force for stability, a comprehensive structure, unless one of the biggest players, which is China, is on board and fully supported. So, I think that's a slight difference in how we embrace and promote the Indo-Pacific.

And another thing that is maybe different, I don't know, you can tell me later. For Indonesia, we have now a new approach to foreign policy in terms of strategic autonomy. Usually, we talk of strategic autonomy in terms of maintaining equidistance between Indonesia and the great powers, which mean between Indonesia and Beijing and Washington and Moscow. But now, that is set aside. Now, we define strategic autonomy in terms of being as close as possible to Beijing, and as close as possible to Washington. This new approach in our view is because the closer we are to these countries, the more we are able to influence them. And I would hope that – and maybe that's a question that you can answer – is that also possible for India? Yes, you are closer now to Washington than Beijing, but what if you're closer to both in a way that you can affect them both; that you can shape and minimize the gap between the two?

And last two or three points I would love to understand, the question of leadership is important. All of us, given the size of India, you have to play some leadership role. China is playing some leadership role someplace. Japan is. Even Indonesia is. I would love for you to elaborate, what is it that India wants to lead on? Is it democracy as Alyssa said earlier? Or Human rights? Globalization? Whatever and whatever, but I would love to get a sense of that. And along with that, the issue of principles. I mean, foreign policy runs on principles, no matter how big you are.

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But what are the principles that matter most to you, to India, apart from the need to transform India as you said in your paper?

And finally, in your book, you rightly stated that the foreign policy ambition of India must expand because the landscape is different now and so on and so on. The country is much bigger, much more geopolitically powerful. But how do you make sure that there is no gap between your foreign policy ambition and the domestic perception? In Indonesia, for example, I am an isolated person Amb. Menon, because I talk about fancy foreign policy ideas in fancy languages, and it's hard to capture public imagination. And there's always a gap between sophisticated foreign policy concepts and the ability of the grassroots, which is the majority of Indonesians, 90 percent or more, to understand or even care about these concepts. So, I think I know your diplomat is facing this.

And finally, your last paragraph mentioned about India becoming a great power with a difference. Totally agree because you have that capability. But what I have a slight problem is when you quote, "that ambition must fulfil Mahatma Gandhi's dream of having an India that wipes every tear from every Indian". It's beautiful and very sentimental, but it doesn't give much practical foreign policy guidance. So, what does that mean really, in practical terms? And I don't think it's a vision that can ever be achieved, to wipe the tear off every Indian. But I understand what you're trying to say and India has always been at the forefront of justice, along with Indonesia. India has always wanted to be, not a status quo power, you've always been progressive and reformist by your power, just like Indonesia and I think the world expects a lot more from India, and I know India can fulfil those hopes much better than ever before. So, maybe I'll stop there and we'll discuss later.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Djalal. Let's move on to Canberra. Professor Medcalf, you've been patiently waiting over there, so if you could share with us your thoughts about how India is seen from Australia and your perspectives on this paper.

Rory Medcalf: Thank you very much. Thanks very much, Constantino, and it's a real pleasure to be with this group because it's such distinguished company and so much of sort of what needs to be said has already been said. So, what I'm going to do is, I'll just make three brief observations, really. One is connecting the really important grand sweep of Ambassador Menon's paper with my own recent writing, and you mentioned my book on the Indo-Pacific that I'll come to in a moment. And I think it's really important to position India's realistic ambitions in that sweep of history, in Indian history, and also the pitfalls that other major powers have met over the years. And I particularly like the way in which, I guess- there are also some warnings against hubris in Indian ambition. I wove it into the paper but also in the references to what may be facing China. And so, what I'll do is talk a little bit about India in the Indo-Pacific, then I'll talk a little bit about the domestic, further to what Justin and Alyssa said as well, and indeed Dino, the domestic dimensions of policy that are really important as foundations for a realistic ambition. And then I'll say a few words at the end of that. I guess what I hope to see Australia do with India is to support this agenda.

Well, as a thing I mentioned, my own book recently on the Indo-Pacific, and I've got the Australian edition, *'Contest for The Indo-Pacific'*. But interestingly, going to the warnings about imperial overreach, the international edition is called *'Indo-Pacific Empire'*, and it's up to the reader to guess whether I'm talking about China or somebody else. But then, the serious point that I try to make in my book, which I think complements this paper, and maybe I differ in a few areas that I'll illuminate, is that India is returning to play in this much larger Indo-Pacific space. I actually see as quite a natural progression that India will need to engage across the two-ocean system, which in

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fact, has been, as I argue in my book, more of the norm throughout history, and I think meant more of a standard throughout history that many of us often assume.

I like to hear the reference to Indonesia rediscovering its western flank, if you like. But I think likewise, as the book argues, if you go back to the immediate independence of India, you go back to the ambitions and the vision of Nehru and Gandhi, and my book has a section on the Asian relations conference in 1947, where in fact, the participation, the membership very closely tracks the membership of the East Asia Summit today. Not precisely, but India was at that point trying to position itself as a leader and inspiration for a much broader vision, Asia-centric vision of this part of the world, whether we call it the Indo-Pacific or not.

So, I do think that any evolution of Indian foreign policy has to include that Indo-Pacific dimension. I would differ with any assessment that suggests this is just about the Quad, and I know that's not precisely what you were saying. But I would also note that the Quad is really just one piece of an architecture that is going to be much more complex, much more many-layered and will, I think if it is executed effectively, have the advantage of beginning to enmesh and embed China and frankly, slow down, and hopefully, moderate China's overreach. And also, I would say help us to manage American dysfunction, at least under this administration. So, I would hold out quite a lot of hope for India as a driving force in many of these other places of regional security architecture. The Quad, we'd heard the experiments we're trying with Australia, India and France. I think India and Japan is important and there's really interesting tri-laterals that in Australia, India and Japan, or the US, India and Japan are doing that I think need to be developed.

Also, I think India has an effective power and a good neighbour in the Indian Ocean. I think where I perhaps would, again, interrogate the analysis in the paper is the point that's made that we need to differentiate between the different sub regions of the Indo-Pacific and craft, in a sense, different policies for those sub regions; Indian Ocean, the Pacific, the waters close to China, and so on. I'm not entirely persuaded of that because particularly, when we look at it from Australia's perspective, and we look at the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean, a lot of the challenges there are going to be very similar. That is, how do we help vulnerable small island states cope with everything from environmental resource pressures, through to the influence campaign that particularly, China's money and China's ambition bring. And I think in fact, we can learn a lot of lessons, transpose a lot of lessons on countries like India, Australia, France and others, from one of those sub-regions to another. So, I'll just encourage, I guess, a sense that the Indo-Pacific is more than the Quad and is certainly more than a containment or even a balancing strategy. I think it is a context in which Indian power, influence and interest will be engaged.

I'd also make the point that India has an opportunity, which I don't necessarily say it's fully seizing at the moment, and which it's been undermining in certainly some of the self-harm that we've seen in regards to liberal democratic values in India in the recent past. But India actually has an opportunity to demonstrate some steadiness over the years ahead. There's going to be a lot of difficulty and pressure that comes from, particularly, the economic and societal impacts of coronavirus. But there is a very anti-fragile resilience in Indian society, and I would even go so far as to say that India has more potential over time to be stable than does China, which may go against what we assume when we see a one-party state. And so, this new Indian policy, if you like, or this new Indian foreign policy, the foreign strategy that the paper speaks of, I'm not sure that it needs to be something that's done in a hurry. In many ways, I would say that if India can manifest

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a lot of its advantages, really, over the span of a generation and hold the line and be steady, then I think it opens the space for many other partners to work with India.

I'll go to my final two points, if I may. One is really to echo a few of the sentiments that we'd already heard about the domestic factor in foreign policy, and I think the papers called it a foreign strategy, which I think is right. Because of course, these days, with respect to all of the diplomats in the room, foreign policy is too important for diplomats alone, and is very much about economics, it's about technology, it's about business, it's about society. And I think that's going to be more and more the case with India.

I think one of the great disappointments that some friends of India have is that, I think India still falls so far short of harnessing a lot of its non-bureaucratic and non-government expertise and talent in building much more influential power on the world stage. There's also, I guess, the question about whether India can, quickly in the coronavirus response, mobilize civil society, business, the centre and the states together in such a way that India begins really to be as great as the sum of its parts. And that I think is in many ways the lesson that some smaller countries like Australia are beginning to teach ourselves as we go along that journey.

I look, finally, at the Australian dimension there. All I was going to say is that it's fascinating in the news today, in one of the main Australian newspapers, one of the chief stories was a supposed exclusive about the fact that our Prime Minister is due to hold, essentially, a virtual summit with Mr. Modi shortly, which is of course, the postponed bilateral summit we were due to hold back in January of this year. And I think because it's no secret that Australia is having an interesting time with China at the moment, there is a view increasingly in the Australian policy community that the more trouble we have with China, the more importantly India is in our constellation. I think that we're beginning to learn though, of course, the much more rounded sophistication of engaging with India.

This is a long game for us, a 25-year game. And like a lot of India's other partners, we're also going to have to learn to moderate our own expectations and ambitions. To be honest, I think none of us particularly want India to, or expect India to be any kind of formal ally. But I do think that one of the wisest observations I've heard over the years, and I'll close on this point, is that India simply being India is going to make a big difference for a multipolar future in our region, and that's really the India that we want to enable. So, thank you.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Rory. Thanks all for having really interesting comments and perspectives from across your different countries and geographies in many ways. We had 700 to 800 registrations. We have hundreds of people watching us and you can imagine the questions are flooding in, we're having very specific questions. So, we can do this either way. Amb. Menon, would you like to highlight anything in response to this, or should we start, we have another half an hour solely into a rapid fire of shorter more specific questions?

Shivshankar Menon: Well, I'll do two quick responses because I think Justin raised a fundamental issue about the tension between strategic autonomy and multilateralism in an anarchic world. My simple answer is please read my book when it comes because it's a plea for Indian engagement with the world. But the question is not should India engage? You make a very good case for engagement but that doesn't translate into multilateralism. My answer to the problem today, when both the greatest powers in the world are revisionist powers and seem to have turned their back on at least traditional multilateralism as we know it, my answer is, issue-based coalitions of the

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willing. Pick an issue that matters, find those who agree with you and work on it. And this can include anybody who wants to deal with it. When it's maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, for instance, there's an obvious set of actors. You look at cybersecurity, you get a different set of actors, who have the capability and the will to do something.

For me, that is really the way to deal with issues in a fragmented world, where you're between orders, where there's really no assurance of what you're going to be dealing with in two years, three years, by way of leadership or governments or attitudes. So, in that situation, that's my short answer to your question, but I am with you on the engagement. In fact, India cannot do without engaging, cannot do without the global public goods that we mentioned. India is not going to be a wholesale provider of those goods, not in this condition, not today. But we will work with partners where we find them. And so, strategic autonomy in that sense is not autarky, is not isolation, is not cutting ourselves off. And I want to stress that because I think there's some confusion there, in maybe the way this paper came out. Because the paper contains many of the ideas which are fleshed out in much more detail in the book.

The other thing, frankly, for most of what everybody else has said, I'd say me too. In fact, what particularly struck me was when Dino said, I feel isolated at home when I talk foreign policy and I try and persuade people. It's a hard row to hoe, especially today when domestic politics is so all-consuming and frankly, the crisis has made that worse in each of our countries. It's very hard to get people to think about these issues and yet, this is where our future is going to be decided, not just at home but also abroad. But I'll stop here because there are so many questions, I'll leave it to-

Constantino Xavier: But let me actually follow up on this Amb. Menon, I mean all speakers really mentioned the importance of either principles, values, democracy, as spelled out-

Shivshankar Menon: All those are important, very important.

Constantino Xavier: and in the way you portrayed it in many ways, you mentioned the coalition of the willing, reminds me of the current External Affairs ministers remarks that comfort is the new commitment. So, my question would be, is there a particular comfort you would think India has with fellow democracies based on those values of common systems of governance?

Shivshankar Menon: Well, when Dino asked, for instance, what kind of world do you want? What are your principles? Frankly, they're exactly the principles of democracy, of a plural, open, equitable world which functions in a democratic way. That's the kind of order we would actually work for. So, yes, we are much more comfortable with other countries who share those ideas, who work for those principles. And this is why I say I basically agree with what most of you have said but there's only so much a paper can cover.

Constantino Xavier: Good. One more question which came in actually from Sri Lanka, from Asanga Abeyagoonasekera. He asked, to what extent do you see the Quad+ mechanism evolving now as affecting India's options in the region and beyond? I mean, is this again limiting India or is it enhancing India's autonomy?

Shivshankar Menon: I think it's as exactly as Rory said, that's one element in a very complex architecture that is in the process of being constructed. And some of it is happening through evolution, some of it is happening by individual decisions, by states, by non-state actors as well. And so, what we're seeing is actually the evolution of a security architecture, which is much more

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complex than anything that we've known before. The reason I stress the difference between the Indian Ocean per se, the western Pacific, and the seas near China, is because I'm not sure that we'll end up with the same kind of architecture right across the Indo-Pacific, because the problems are slightly different in each of these areas. I don't see the kinds of threats to freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean that we see in the seas near China, for instance. So, I think that we will adapt to different circumstances but the Quad is only one small part of the response.

Constantino Xavier: So, then if I may just stay with you for two quick more questions, Amb. Menon, one is on China. In the news these days, as you know, new skirmishes or at least escalation of tensions along the Himalayas, and let me go back to 2007, when you give a speech at the Observer Research Foundation, let me quote from that, I think it's a year after President Hu Jintao's visit to India: "there have been some concerns expressed about the peaceful rise of China but..." you go on to mention, "...it is our belief that there is enough space for both of us to grow. We remain hopeful in India about the steady progress in our relations with China". Would you share this assessment again, or are trust levels lower than they were in 2007?

Shivshankar Menon: I think they're much lower than they were then. And I think if you look at what's happened not just to the balance of power in the region, in Asia, or you look at behaviour by the various powers, and you look at what's actually happened with the various flash points, and you look at South China Sea, Taiwan, you look at what's happened in Hong Kong, I think these are things which naturally lead you to slightly different conclusions. The Chinese themselves have stopped talking of their peaceful rise. The PLA and various people within the Chinese system didn't think this was a good idea. So, naturally today, I think you'd need to reassess it. This is part of my argument, that we're in a different situation, change your assessment, change what you do.

Constantino Xavier: So, you would be less inclined to invest in the relationship with China?

Shivshankar Menon: No, I didn't mean that, I didn't say that. In fact, it actually becomes even more important that you manage that relationship well. Every country, every one of us, all of us here certainly, have an important relationship with China, which includes both competition and cooperation. And where we use various forms to try and promote, encourage the kind of Chinese behaviour that we would like to see – not always successfully. And that's something that I think we need to do, and we're doing more and more of it together as well in practice. If you look at the kind of cooperation that we are carrying out among ourselves, a lot of it is because of this new assessment of where China is and what she is trying to do. So, I often say to my Indian friends, that we owe many of our friends to the Chinese.

Constantino Xavier: Last before we go to the speakers and take this rapid-fire to them, I can't resist asking you a nuclear ballistic question, coming from Gaurav Sen here in India. He asked that you may have seen the debate on India's nuclear doctrines flared up again about a possible change in India's non-first use policy, often referring to the comments you made about flexibility. From China we've seen, I think recently another comment by the Global Times editor, about a possible change in their own nuclear strategy. Do you have any comments or takes on that? And surely, you shall be quoted for the next 30 years in whatever you're going to say now.

Shivshankar Menon: I think it's something that needs to be looked at regularly. I'm not privy to the intelligence on what's actually happening anymore, all I see is what's said in the press and that's signalling. So, I wouldn't make policy on the basis of what other people want me to believe or try and tell me. So, I'd be very careful in commenting about whether we need to change our policy or

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not, but I think we need to look at it regularly because three or four things have changed. Surveillance technology today is much better than it ever was before, which always brings into question survivability of all nuclear forces, and especially if you're relying on second strike or no first use, then that becomes a big issue. But those are not issues which I'm qualified at this stage to comment on, so I'm not going to.

Constantino Xavier: Good. Thank you, Amb. Menon. We have another 15 maybe 20 minutes, if you'll be generous with your time, for all speakers not for- if you agree, a sort of rapid-fire series of questions of which are coming in. Alyssa may I come to you first? And the first question which really comes in from Debanshu Agarwal is, are we witnessing a new abnormal in US-India relations under President Trump? If Joe Biden wins later this year, would this be all back to the old normal in India-US relations?

Alyssa Ayres: Well, I don't know what the normal means. We have been in a process over the past 15 years of trying to broaden and deepen this important relationship. As I offered earlier in this conversation, I do think that there is perhaps an abnormal aspect to the way the Trump administration has approached many of the trade and economic issues. But we are also seeing across the world, as Ambassador Menon noted, a much more of an inward-looking approach to economics, and I think that will likely continue as a result of the economic pain everybody is facing, resulting from the pandemic. So, I don't know to what extent we will see a return to a more expansive idea of free trade. The WTO is under duress. I do think that a change in government in the United States would see a return to the idea of the importance of institutions of global governance – this is something that the Trump administration has not been at all interested in. And that would provide a strong platform for US-India cooperation on those sorts of broader issues, of the way we approach global governance and the way the world functions.

Since we only have a few minutes, can I just offer one other thought? I just didn't know how our conversation was going to evolve. But one of the things I also wanted to say on the values front is that India's soft power, so much of India's enormous soft power stems from the fact that this just enormous, huge, often very chaotic place, is a democracy and provides that voice to people, regardless of literacy, regardless of income, and that is an inspirational thing. And it's what sets India apart from China. And the fact that India has been able to slowly but surely deliver increased prosperity, better quality of life to more and more of its citizens without adopting an authoritarian framework has been something that really sets India apart from the approach that China has taken, and the way that China presents its expertise, shall we say, in delivering to its citizens. So, to the extent that the economic problems worsen and deepen, and to the extent that some of the problems of discrimination that are becoming worse in India become more and more noticed on the world stage, that really dampens that appeal. And so, I just wanted to throw that out there. I think it is an important issue and something that we need to factor in.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Dr. Alyssa Ayres. Justin, if we come quickly to Paris, and let's try to keep it short so we can bring in the most number of questions here. But for you in particular, I remember we met in 2017 when you were having this India-Australia-France trilateral, you were head of the Policy Planning Unit at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It seems so easy, this France-India relationship, and I'd say that France today is the privileged partner here in Delhi – that's the sense people get from France's commitment of what has happened over the last few years; your new documents on the Indo-Pacific, your very forward policy. But it sounds very easy, but if you could tell us about the challenges you've faced. I mean, did you sacrifice something?

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Were the Chinese upset? And are there lessons for other countries that often I think are hedging, but maybe France can tell us a bit about how you managed to reach out to India and, at the same time, maybe or maybe not keep your relationship with China.

Justin Vaisse: Yes. Thank you, Constantino. Very briefly, I just want to sort of add my approval to what Alyssa said about soft power, I think it's really important and soft power exists and it's what China has seen evaporate in the last few weeks and months here in Europe, at least same for the U.S. It's really important and India can make a difference, and it does matter even in real terms.

Quickly to your point now, Constantino. Yes, there's been this turn towards the Indo-Pacific because France is present both in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean. And it has seen that with its allies or partners, let's say, Australia and India, it was necessary to sort of reassert that it needed to be an area of cooperation, an area of the rule of law and an area that was already, I would say formatted, if you'd like. So, it's not a sort of bending together against China and having any sort of a style intent. It's more about reasserting what the three countries, and you could add many others to the lot, have in common, in terms of rule of law, in terms of exploiting the resources that the Indian Ocean has in an open and sustainable way, in terms of respecting the neighbour, in terms of helping and coming to the help of the [inaudible] states that are around. It's all of these things that I don't think add up to any kind of hostility towards China. So, to answer your question more rapidly, no, I don't think there was much of a price to be paid, even though we clearly stated what we thought about the South China Sea and the freedom of circulation, for example. And so, I think it's not a zero-sum game in a sense. It's really about reasserting what we believe in along with our partners, and the price to pay for that is not very high.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. I wish more European countries would hear you. I think that's a very pragmatic approach, and there have been questions raised here in Delhi about the reliability of the EU but also, several other countries in Europe, which I mean I have to say are less aggressive or less progressive than Paris has been in the last years.

Dr. Djalal, if we can come to you in Jakarta. Yeah, I think one of the real big puzzles I've had now in the last four years I've been in Delhi is, why has the India-Indonesia relationship underperformed? Do you agree with this? And in many ways you mentioned ASEAN. I mean, India's Indo-Pacific approach and vision spelled out by Prime Minister Modi three years ago at the Shangri-La dialogue actually mentions inclusiveness too as a principle and ASEAN. But then you look at the ASEAN document on the Indo-Pacific and in Delhi, many people were disappointed they found it too shallow or too simple. So, if you could share with us in Indonesia, why has this relationship not performed better with India?

Dino Patti Djalal: well, first, I totally agree because I was in the Indian-Indonesian Eminent Person Group and that is exactly one of the questions we asked. The complementarity is there but the relationship is still struggling to elevate to a higher level in a very meaningful way. The trade is low, the investment is also low. We see more Indian tourists coming to Indonesia and to Bali, we like that. But obviously, it takes a lot more to elevate the relationship. The Indian soft power is great in Indonesia; I think every Indonesian singer or entertainment is influenced by Indian songs and cinemas and so on.

But again, in terms of diplomatic cooperation and so on, I think we are really punching below the weight. And I think the real challenge also, aside from economic, is the geopolitical alignment, not alliance but alignment. Because Indonesia and India have a common interest in the Indian Ocean,

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for example and so on, and Indonesia wants to see a more active Indian engagement in ASEAN and so on. But again, for some reason, the security and strategic cooperation has not been to a level where it should be. There's more attention now on cooperation in the Andaman Islands because that's the area whereby our areas overlap. But again, it's a modest cooperation and I think that the largest potential is really Navy-to-Navy cooperation between Indonesia and India, there's a lot of scope there.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. Rory, coming to you. Following up on this issue, your incoming High Commissioner from Australia here in Delhi has mentioned, a week or two ago, the importance of a possible India-Indonesia-Australia trilateral dialogue. What's your view on that, and to what extent is there fatigue of trilateral dialogues as the system is collapsing? Or is it actually even more important than ever?

Rory Medcalf: Well, I think, look, we should always be careful of dialogue fatigue and I know how overstretched many of our foreign ministries are. But I think a lot of these ideas are not necessarily for dialogues that are heavily institutionalized, but it's really about experimenting with which constellations actually work. And I think we're beginning to discover, and this is partly because of the uncertainties about the US and its commitment or its stability in the region, but also very much to do with China's assertiveness. We're beginning to discover one another, or rediscover one another in the region. And so, for example, Australia-India-Japan, Australia-India-France, Australia-India-Indonesia, these can all be very powerful potential issue-based coalitions, as Ambassador Menon has mentioned but dialogue partners to prepare ourselves if and when we need to operationalize in that way. And I think that contiguous maritime geography, shared challenges to do with resources and maritime surveillance and yes, of course, sharing assessments on the China challenge, I think all of those factors make Australia-India-Indonesia a pretty compelling combination just as with France.

Two other points I might just add, if you don't mind, to wrap up on my side. One is that, in fact, I think from an Australian perspective, there was no great disappointment with the principles of the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific. And I think if you look at Prime Minister Modi's speech in Singapore, if you look at the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific, if you look at many of the statements that many of their governments have made, the French, the Japanese and so forth, in fact, there's a common thread there. It's about sovereignty. It's about rules. It's about the equal rights of nations. It's about non-coercion. So, in fact, I think we do have the thread of a kind of shared Indo-Pacific vision to work with, and I would suggest that a new, if you like, Indian foreign strategy has an opportunity there or might later be.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. We have another seven minutes. So, quickly in reverse order. Rory, can I come to you? To what extent can we talk about the Indo-Pacific with security, politics, that's all happening but without the strong economic pillar; is there any hope in Canberra still about the RCEP and an India that is engaged economically in a variety of trade and investment arrangements?

Rory Medcalf: So, look, I think it's fair to say that certainly the trade pillar of the Indo-Pacific is weaker than the other pillars. Although, bear in mind that we wouldn't have any Indo-Pacific if it wasn't for China's own, I guess, expanding interests and presence across the Indian Ocean over the past 20 to 30 years. So, I think we're beginning to see some of the elements of a regional economic, I guess, architecture come in to play. And in fact, the big question now will be, as our economies and societies adjust to the shock of COVID, and the shock to our supply chains, and

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I guess this new push for self-reliance among many countries, will there be more diversification that builds a genuine Indo-Pacific set of trade relationships that can become arrangements later? I don't know. I would say that from an Australian point of view, there's no rush, there's no desperate expectation that India's going to be part of RCEP soon, but the door is certainly being kept open for more auspicious times.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. Dr. Djalal, coming to you. You mentioned the importance of the domestic image in Indonesia about India. To what extent do you see the recent developments in India in the last two or three years, with changes in the constitution and an ideological tilt on many policies in India? Have they affected Indonesia's interest in India? Has this reduced India's manoeuvring ground and its image in Indonesia?

Dino Patti Djalal: Can I speak honestly?

Constantino Xavier: Please do.

Dino Patti Djalal: Okay. Well, two things. One is, there's more attention on the issue of Islam in India, in the media and in the public. And I know what India is all about; India and Indonesia, the same freedom of religion and so on, but because of the news reports, that has come to the fore and that has coloured the public perceptions towards India to some extent. So, I think that part is important to recognize. And there's also attention being paid on Hindu nationalism. For some reason, it's a term that I hear a lot among the Indonesian political elite, and what they say is they hope that Hindu nationalism continues to progress but in a way that is calm and moderate and open and reinforce India's identity as ethnically diverse and a pluralistic society. Again, you may hear different. I know you have different narratives and there are a lot of explanations for it, but I think you need to be sensitive to these opinions that I hear more and more among Indonesian political elite.

Constantino Xavier: Justin, coming over to the European Union, the relationship between India and the European Union has actually gone into positive developments over the last three or four years now. It was in a bit of a suspense mode until 2014-15. But often, people here in Delhi ask, why is the EU so split on China? Why is it not able to develop a coherent policy? Why is it not able to engage India as an alternative? How do you see Europe being able to have a consensual, coherent policy to resist the temptations and the problems of China, and at the same time, also engage India?

Justin Vaisse: I think 2020 is quite a turning point for the perception of China in the EU. Not that China has become some kind of adversary, or some kind of enemy, it's not the case. And we do a lot of trade with China, we exchange lots of things, etc. However, something has been broken and I think the High Representative for Foreign Policy, Mr. Josep Borrell, has expressed it very well, stating that China is a partner in terms of trade. It's an actor in the world stage with which we can engage on a number of things, including climate, for example, but that it's a competitor in terms of the model it puts forward and the geopolitical influence that it wants to acquire, including very close from home. And I think that's a reflection of the overall mood in Europe, honestly, which has soured markedly because of the COVID-19 crises, and I would say the clumsy way in which China handled its public diplomacy vis-a-vis that crisis. And which I think will lead to a slightly more firm attitude and also, a more united attitude.

Remember that we Europeans do everything well but just a bit too late. And so, you just have to wait and then in the end, we'll correct things. Look at, for example, the response to the COVID-

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19 crisis in economic terms, it really came first in April and then two days ago, when Chancellor Merkel and President Macron banded together to open the way for a common borrowing of money to get out of that crisis. So, ultimately, you will have to count with the EU, and the EU I think would be an increasingly important partner for India.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Justin. Alyssa, if I may come to you. Two very brief quick questions. One is, in 2006 you wrote an article calling India a sort of America's France in Asia. You mentioned "the US may be better off viewing India as an ally like France, one which shares many values with Americans but pursues its own course." Would you say that again today? Is that the type of India you see?

Alyssa Ayres: I've always thought this. I mean, we followed a kind of similar recommendation in the independent task force that the Council on Foreign Relations convened in 2015. Our recommendation, that was a much larger, it wasn't just my work, but our recommendation was that in thinking about the future of US-India relations, we cannot think of India as a country with which we are somehow on a trajectory towards a traditional alliance relationship but not quite there. I mean, I just don't think New Delhi has any interest in playing that kind of role in the way that allies of the United States have played over decades. It has its own ideas about what it wants out of partnerships and I think that reality is something that Americans need to better adjust to. In the arenas in the United States, people that are deeply invested in the security partnership oftentimes feel a sense of disappointment, that India is not willing to do more faster, or deeper with the United States. And the focus of all of my US-India writing has been to try to shift the view of that as an end goal because we will perennially be disappointed if that's the kind of ambition we have. I just don't think that's where we're headed. So, yes, India as the France of Asia, yes.

Constantino Xavier: And relating to this Quad+ development, we saw an expanded format now focusing more on non-traditional security issues, the responses to COVID in particular, these seven countries discussing that. You've been arguing persistently that there's a danger to over-militarizing the Quad. Do you think this is a good development now that we talk more about different issues?

Alyssa Ayres: I do absolutely. And I think that the coronavirus pandemic is going to reaffirm the idea that we have very significant security issues that are non-military in nature, that have to do with the openness of our economies and how we can deliver prosperity. How do we protect the health of our populations? How do we deliver quality of life? These are issues we have to part. The climate issues; the Trump administration has not been focused on climate change but this is enormously important and it requires thinking of partnerships, multilateralism, or plurilateralism, or whatever word you want to use, in a manner that is very different from thinking of military coordination and issues. It's not to discount the importance of militaries, but it is to say that we have a range of security issues that need to draw on other aspects of society, a kind of expertise that exists in civilian institutions. So, I continue to believe that's true, if not more true than ever before.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. Amb. Menon, we'll come to you last. Two questions and I will end on the neighbourhood, an issue that is close to me. But before that, Nayanima Basu from The Print asks whether this current COVID crisis allows for India, or may lead India to revisit its One China policy? We received a similar question from someone asking, India and Taiwan, Shubham Sharma asks if China is hanging out with Pakistan, doesn't it make sense that India also has a stronger relationship with Taiwan?

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Shivshankar Menon: Well, I'd be surprised if our declaratory One China policy changed. But in practice, what we've done with Taiwan over time has changed. I mean, what we're doing with Taiwan today in terms of trade, flights, travel, etc. – pre-COVID – all that is quite different from what we were doing 30 years ago, 20 years ago. Yes, we adjust realistically to the situation and Taiwan is an important trading partner for us. It's also an important source of technology. We do work together. But I think I'd be surprised if declaratory policy changed on our One China policy or if that changed in any way as a result of COVID. No.

Constantino Xavier: Second, we talked a lot of capacity today. We talked about objectives. Your paper lays out instruments and tools and I can't resist but asking you, and some of these questions came in that direction, how do you explain that India still represents the interests of 1.3 billion people with less than 1,000 diplomats? Does India have sufficient institutional capacity, the civil-military dialogue, the military modernization capacity? We saw the new Chief of Defence Staff being announced with the Department of Military Affairs. But on the institutional capacity, do you see enough to run India towards these, or to take India towards these objectives?

Shivshankar Menon: For something like 80 years, the US was accused of not stepping up to the plate, not performing her responsibilities until the end of the Second World War actually. Europe kept saying, why isn't the US doing what she should be doing? China's gone through the same process. I think this happens to rising powers, that they spend their time concentrating on developing themselves and everybody else says, "you're being irresponsible. You're not doing what you should. You are not applying your weight better". I don't think our instruments are sufficient. In fact, I've been arguing for a much stronger diplomatic presence, for various changes, military reforms, etc. for a long time. But I think the fundamental question here is, your means and your tools have to be adapted to the job that you want to do. So, first you need clarity on the job that you want to do and that's why the strategy part is very important. But I am not prepared to accept this kind of accusation, that India is not a responsible power, is not pulling her weight, is not doing her fair share. This I think we'll have to live with for a long time, for reasons that I think I've tried to spell out in other places. That I think is our lot.

Everybody wants you to do what they want, and as long as you're not doing what they want, they will accuse you of being irresponsible. That's the way the world is. But you should do what's in your interest just as they do what's in their interest, and work together where your interests overlap. You're lucky that your interests actually overlap with most of our friends and with several countries around the world. So, you're not isolated. You have a much easier situation than several other big countries. I won't call them great powers, but big countries. And I think you have the opportunity actually to go out and do your bit in the world, but you will always face this accusation. And the tools will follow, the tools are not the problem.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you. Because I think there's a lot of feedback often that India has a tremendous ambition, has showed up with tremendous ideas and often, the capacity to perform on that has led to some disappointments. The last question of this discussion, Amb. Menon, to you, very closely to the neighbourhood from Bangladesh. Two similar questions from Mohammed Mohsin, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, and from Tariq Karim, former High Commissioner here to India. They ask, what is India's future in promoting, strengthening mutual cooperation here in South Asia? How committed is India? Will it mimic the 'I, me first, and myself only', or will it really focus on neighbourhood first? And this comes in the context also of many

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questions, as you can imagine, on the India-Nepal border dispute, which is flaring up again over the last few days, and has led to an escalation between Kathmandu and Delhi.

Shivshankar Menon: I don't see how we can argue that there's an Indian interest which is somehow separate from regional economic integration, from a peaceful periphery, from working with our neighbours in the subcontinent. There is no way that I can see India developing, realizing her ambitions alone. And surrounded by a sea of instability, or by countries which are completely cut off from India, there's no way that that's going to work. So, for me, this is not a question. I, at least personally, I'm convinced that our future lies with our neighbourhood, it cannot be separated from them. And I think if you look at the experience of Europe, if you look at the experience of ASEAN, you look at China also, her best years were when she was working most closely with her neighbours, when she'd put her political differences aside and concentrated on economic integration. And so, for me, this is very important, and it's a false choice. We don't have the choice of trying to just develop India or do as you just said, India first, me alone. That choice doesn't exist for us. Not our geography, not our history, nothing permits that, not logic.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you, Ambassador Menon, for really bringing us here together, because your paper made that happen. Thank you to all the four panelists who joined us from across the world and four different countries. Some of them early morning, some of them late evening, some of them breaking their fast, some of them having lunch. So, thank you all for making your time to share your thoughts and really, I think help animate a larger debate here in Delhi about the future of the country, about the resources, the objectives of where we want to see India in a few years from now.

So, thank you all and hope to see you again soon. And thanks all for joining us also, the many participants and hope you will join us again soon for the next Brookings India webinar. Thank you. Good afternoon.