India’s traditional strategy of non-alignment has shifted towards “poly-alignment”. As a new regional power, India is increasing its naval, air force and missile capabilities. During this period of rapid development, domestic stability is a key challenge for India. The US supports Indian expansion, with the aim of balancing Chinese influence in Asia.

Summary
In the decades to come, India will continue its rise to great power status aided by the United States, which sees it as helping to keep the global strategic balance in Washington’s favour. Following a strategy of “poly-alignment”, India will subsequently look to project greater power beyond its borders. This will particularly be the case in the Indian Ocean region, viewed by New Delhi as being essential to India’s economic and social stability.

Analysis
Over the last decade there has been an increasing focus on India’s economic and military expansion, and its consequences for South Asia and the world. India is rapidly rising to become a great power, but its ascent depends on maintaining relative domestic stability, and carefully crafting its policies towards the United States and its neighbours, Pakistan and China. All four states are nuclear powers, so the consequences of any conflict between them are potentially dire. India has found the post-Cold War international environment amenable to the expansion of its bilateral ties with all the major powers simultaneously, and has thus pursued a strategy of “poly-alignment” – seeking to be a “bridging power” between the
sometimes competing poles of the United States, Russia, China and the European Union. This inverts India’s traditional non-alignment policy, allowing India to reap the benefits of closer economic and strategic ties while maintaining the same spirit of balanced international relations. To a degree, this arises from uncertainty about the shape of the emerging international order, and India’s own lack of a credible vision of its place in that environment. Nonetheless, its growing wealth and population is now enabling India to build up its military might and, as Harsh V. Pant of King’s College London, has noted, as ‘a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic democracy ... India is being asked to shoulder global responsibilities in consonance with its rising global stature.’¹ As Indian power increases it will inevitably challenge existing political, economic and military patterns but, as Pant argues:

‘India continues to be ambivalent about power, it has failed to develop a strategic agenda commensurate with its growing economic and military capabilities ... throughout history, India has failed to master the creation, deployment and use of its military instruments in support of its national objectives.’²

From independence in 1947, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pursued a strategy of non-alignment that sought to avoid participation in the Cold War, prioritising multilateral institutions and the Non-Aligned Movement. Indian policy was also always opposed to the use of military force in international relations. However, as India begins to assert itself as a regional power, it is today moving to convert its “brown-water” navy into a “blue-water” navy and is expanding the reach of its air force, moving beyond border control and demonstrating greater concern for strategic issues, such as the protection of shipping lanes. While maintaining constructive relations with the United States, India has also been involved in trilateral dialogue with China and Russia, increasingly sharing their vision of a multipolar world based on consensus among the major powers. India has also become a non-voting member of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), through which China and Russia have sought to strategically counterbalance NATO advancement into the Middle East and Central Asia. At the same time, it is China’s conventional and nuclear capabilities that many argue remain the primary military threat to India’s security and the key motivation for India’s nuclear weapons programme, while the United States, under the G.W. Bush Administration, negotiated a substantial deal that would assist India’s own “civilian” nuclear development. India’s other major challenge comes from its unstable neighbour Pakistan, with which full-scale war and nuclear exchange have been avoided, despite clashes in the Kargil region of Kashmir in 1999, and attacks on India by Pakistani-backed terrorists in 2001 and 2008.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War confronted India with an unprecedented financial crisis, as it simultaneously lost access to Eastern European markets, global oil prices spiked, and over 100,000 Indians were repatriated from the Gulf region, thus precluding their remittances. These economic shocks forced a dramatic re-think of Indian economic and foreign policies. Under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, India steered towards greater economic liberalisation and diplomatic diversity. The Rao Government

sought greater engagement with the United States and China, as well as making overtures to Israel and seeking improved relations with South-East Asia through a “Look East” policy. Since then, India’s average gross domestic product growth rate has hovered at around seven per cent, and the Asian Development Bank predicted that, in spite of the global financial crisis, India’s growth would remain around 6.5 per cent for the foreseeable future. Not only has India maintained this remarkable economic growth, but Daniel Twining highlights that, in the next two decades, India’s population ‘will surpass China’s to make it the world’s most populous country, and its rapidly expanding middle class may constitute up to 60 per cent of its 1.3 billion-plus people.’ Internationally, the Indian diaspora now numbers over 20 million, and is relatively affluent, successful, and well-integrated – spreading India’s “soft” cultural influence. The approximately 3.7 million Indian nationals now living in the six states of the Gulf Co-operation Council alone remit around $8 billion annually.

Despite India’s meteoric economic development, it can be said that India has both the best of the First World and the worst of the Third World within its borders, and faces unprecedented human security challenges. India now has 410 million people living below the United Nations’ poverty line – 37.2 per cent of its population and actually 100 million more people than in 2004. Millions of India’s rural poor are faced with food price inflation of up to 17 per cent. Sixty per cent of Indian labour is still agricultural, and the integration of hundreds of millions of peasants into a modern economy may be an extremely painful process.

While Indian infrastructure such as roads, civil aviation, ports, and telecommunications have experienced noticeable improvements in recent years, electricity, railways, and irrigation all still need significant investment. India continues to lag in social infrastructure, such as education and healthcare. These social inequalities have fuelled the widespread “Naxalite” Maoist insurgency affecting vast areas throughout eastern and central India, and whose 20,000 insurgents Prime Minister Manmohan Singh identified as the ‘greatest internal security threat’ facing the nation.

These internal issues pose the first challenge to India’s rise as a great power, as external projection must be based on a firm foundation of domestic stability. The requirements for domestic stability also shape India’s international needs. Pant asserts that, ‘the biggest challenge for India remains that of continuing to achieve the rates of economic growth that it has enjoyed in recent years. Everything else is of secondary importance.… Unless India can sustain this momentum, its larger foreign policy ambitions cannot be realised.’ The process of diversifying and securing access to the international energy sources which fuel economic growth is therefore a vital element in avoiding domestic social and political turbulence.

In this context, Indian oil and gas companies have been encouraged to invest abroad, and have the long-term aim of producing tens of millions of tons of oil a year overseas by 2025.

India has thus been developing strategic relationships with major oil-producing Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, Central Asian states such as Turkmenistan, and increasingly, Iran, as potential sources of energy. Multinational oil and gas pipeline projects have been high on India’s agenda for over a decade, though poor relations with its neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma have prevented such a scheme. The United States has used its significant leverage to insist India chooses between pipeline projects or a US-supported nuclear energy programme.

The United States has been particularly concerned by India’s relations with Iran, which the international community has worked to isolate for some time. In this case, the US is battling the logic of supply and demand, as Iran has the world’s third-largest reserves of oil, is nearby to India, and India is a resource-hungry customer. But India and Iran also have a convergence of other economic and strategic interests. The “Road Map to Strategic Co-operation” signed by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Iranian leader Mohammad Khatami in 2003 also mapped out co-operation for increased bilateral trade, and developments like Iran’s Chahbahar port complex, the Chahbahar-Fahranj-Bam railway link, and a Marine Oil Tanking Terminal. The broader aim of these facilities is a North-South Transport Corridor with Russia that would help to facilitate the flow of goods across Central Asia, taking cargo from Iran’s ports of Bandar Abbas or Chahbahar via rail to the Caspian Sea and on to Russia’s Caspian ports. This route would significantly reduce travel time and transport costs for exporters like India. India and Iran also share concerns about Sunni Islamist power in Afghanistan and Pakistan; there have been reports of a strategic deal allowing Indian access to Iranian military bases and equipment in the event of war with Pakistan. Politically, Iran has recognised Kashmir as a legitimate part of India, while New Delhi is thought to have transferred sensitive nuclear and rocket technology to Tehran, with direct security consequences for Europe and the United States.

With energy pipelines still far from reality, and only a nascent civilian nuclear programme, India remains highly dependent on energy imports and increasingly seeks to secure shipping lanes for the transportation of oil, from Iran and Burma to as far abroad as Sudan and Nigeria. Nearly half of global seaborne trade passes through the Indian Ocean, around 40 per cent of offshore oil production comes from the Indian Ocean, and 65 per cent of the world’s oil and 35 per cent of its gas reserves are found in the littoral states of the Ocean. This makes the region, in general, strategically significant. With India’s ever-growing reliance on imported energy, any disruptions in the Indian Ocean (which are particularly feasible at “choke points” such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca), can lead to serious consequences for the Indian economy. While a key danger is interruption of supply during a time of war, today non-state actors, such as organised criminals, pirates or terrorists, are also an increasing threat. As India increasingly sees itself as a great power, and defines its security in terms of the entire Indian Ocean basin, its strategic frontiers will stretch from the African coast to the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea and, potentially, as far south as Antarctica. Continentally, India already looks to the economic and strategic importance of Central Asia, and has made moves to consolidate its strategic footing, including two airbases in Tajikistan.
The US Government’s recent National Intelligence Council *Global Trends 2025* report projects that, ‘Maritime security concerns are providing a rationale for naval build-ups and modernisation efforts, such as China’s and India’s development of blue-water naval capabilities.’ Indeed, India spent $10.5 billion between 2004 and 2007 on creating the world’s fourth-largest military, and is projected to spend more than $45 billion on arms purchases between 2009 and 2013. These will include long-range aircraft, aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines that are intended to make India a formidable force in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy is planning over the next decade to create a fleet of 130-140 vessels comprising three aircraft carrier battle groups, and has created a Far Eastern Naval Command, headquartered on the Andaman Islands – 190 nautical miles from rumoured Chinese facilities at Burma’s Great Coco Island. Meanwhile, India’s longer-term plans involve constructing a fleet capable of projecting power into the South China Sea. There is also much speculation around India’s production of the new *Surya* ICBM, which may use technology from India’s civilian space programme. India’s *Agni* medium-range ballistic missile programme currently consists of missiles with varying ranges of upwards of 700 kilometres, 2,000 kms, and 3,000 kms. The *Surya* project will result in missiles with ranges of 5,000 kms, which can hit Chinese targets; 8,000-12,000 kms, which can reach the United States and Europe; and 20,000 kms, which will have a global reach. These will have the option of a nuclear payload and, potentially, multiple warheads. The reported 12,000km-range *Surya*-2 in particular is tailor-made to target the United States. This expansion of India’s missile capacity may create increased tensions with China, and may hinder co-operation with Europe and the United States.

Today, the United States remains the key external actor in the Indian Ocean, with its military presence stretching from North and East Africa to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, east to Singapore, and southwards to Diego Garcia. As Donald Berlin concludes, ‘America’s raw power in the region has made it imperative that New Delhi court the United States.’ From the time of Indian independence, some American analysts already saw the potential for India to compete for influence with Communist China but, as India took its non-aligned path, the US found a willing ally in Pakistan, which provided military bases in exchange for economic and military aid. The US relationship with Pakistan led to Islamabad taking financial and political actions against India following the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistani wars, despite Pakistan being the aggressor. Eventually, President Reagan made moves to close the gap with India in an effort to wean New Delhi away from dependence on Moscow, thus the 1982-1991 period witnessed a gradual warming of US-Indian relations. The collapse of superpower competition in 1991 then allowed the United States to move away from its Pakistani ally and engage with India. By March 2000, President Clinton made this new relationship clear while visiting India, stating that, ‘we are convinced that it is time to chart a new and purposeful direction in our relationship.’ This was enacted through the “Next Steps in Strategic Partnership” agreement of January 2004, which announced expanded

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co-operation in civilian nuclear activities and space programmes, as well as missile defence. A senior official made the strategic design of this relationship clear, announcing that the US ‘goal is to help India become a major world power in the twenty-first century .... We understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement.’

As part of this emerging relationship, the United States has subsequently held joint military operations with India, encouraging it to actively patrol the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, and President G.W. Bush sponsored agreements facilitating the development of India’s nuclear programme. President Bush signed the US-India Peaceful Nuclear Co-operation Bill into law in December 2006, which will result in up to $40 billion in trade with India in defence and energy products. Contrary to non-proliferation goals, the deal leaves India free to develop its military nuclear capabilities and increases its ability to access uranium and nuclear technologies. Some supporters of the deal, such as the Carnegie Endowment’s Ashley Tellis, see it as President Bush’s ‘greatest foreign policy achievement. This success, if sustained through wise policies and skilful diplomacy by future administrations, will portend enormous consequences for the future balance of power in Asia and globally to the advantage of the United States.’

Subsequently, under the Obama Administration, the Indian Government signed a $2.1 billion contract with the US for eight long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft, capable of anti-submarine and anti-surface naval warfare.

**Conclusion**

Since independence India has pursued non-alignment or poly-alignment, and has spurned the use of force as a tool of foreign policy. Despite India’s advocacy of a non-polar world, Indian policymakers nonetheless recognise the benefits of American sponsorship. Both nations agree that it serves neither US nor Indian interests for a powerful, authoritarian China to dominate the Asian landmass or for radical Islamic forces to wage wars that threaten the security of both states. Thus, as the United States perceives strategic advantage from assisting India’s rise to great power status, and India is receiving tangible military and economic benefits from this relationship, for the foreseeable future, India’s continued ascendance will be supported by the global hegemon.

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8 Ibid.
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