

***India as an Asia Pacific Power.* By David Brewster. Abington, UK: Routledge, 2012. Hardcover: 219pp.**

India's emergence as a potential global power with a significant security role in East Asia has led to proposals to rethink the "mental map" of Asia. In recognition of India's potential, a new term — the Indo-Pacific region — has been coined in the United States. But India's claim to a strategic role in the Asia Pacific anticipates the future more than it reflects current realities. Thus a rigorous assessment of India's intentions, strengths and limitations is timely and valuable. Brewster's book, *India as an Asia Pacific Power*, makes a major contribution, in large part by sorting out the jumble of information and opinions found elsewhere. It is well-organized and serves as a good foundation for further analysis. Officials and scholars concerned with security issues in Asia, particularly those entranced with the assumption that India will help the US "hedge" against China's rise, should read this book.

In the early 1990s, India faced an economic crisis and, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, strategic isolation. India looked east to the dynamic economies of the Asia Pacific and gradually opened itself up, leading to impressive economic growth rates over the past two decades and then to influence beyond India's borders. Brewster explains how Indian foreign and security policy adjusted and evolved.

New Delhi has not articulated a grand strategy. Brewster argues that Indian strategic thinking is dominated first by fears of Chinese dominance in East Asia and intrusion into South Asia and the Indian Ocean and, second, by India's search for Great Power status. At the heart of the Indian dilemma is how to play a major role in the Asian balance of power in cooperation with others concerned about China's growing power, without compromising a cherished legacy. The legacy that continues to shape the mindset of India's elite is "strategic autonomy", the "holy grail" of Indian foreign policy even today. The dominant power in South Asia, India also inherited an assumption that it was destined to be a Great Power. In the Indian mind, Great Power status is apparently incompatible with lasting commitments to other states. Maintaining India's room for maneuver has often taken precedence over pursuing India's strategic interests.

Thus the enduring appeal of the idea that India can — as it sought to do with non-alignment — sit out assumed Great Power

rivalry, in this case Sino-US rivalry, or manoeuvre between two competitors. Indian pundits have advocated the idea of a strategic triangle among China, India and the United States. However, India's comparative weakness and Beijing's refusal to consider New Delhi a peer competitor, undermine the utility of this concept. The gap between India's self-ascribed status and its actual role has narrowed, but not been closed.

At the same time, a maritime perspective has emerged to challenge old assumptions. India's growing dependence on sea borne trade and imported energy are driving Indian strategic thinking in new directions. Nonetheless, traditionalists have a hard time accepting the argument that India's future lies not on the plains of the Punjab, but at sea. Finally, elites believe India deserves a natural sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean, perhaps extending into Southeast Asia, though thinking about such a sphere of influence remains hazy.

New Delhi has played its weak hand pragmatically, and with some success. It has scratched the itch for status through a "peer" relationship with Japan, though substantial Japanese investment in India has not followed on the heels of Japanese economic assistance. It has sought and received inclusion in ASEAN-centred East Asian regional arrangements, despite India's minimal commitment to ASEAN. India's greatest success has been to convince the US to bet on India, essentially trading current American accommodation of Indian goals for India's presumed assistance in implementing US policies in the future. With Beijing the trick has been to manage increasingly complex rivalry in such a way as to maximize India's status and influence, without allowing the relationship to slip towards overt antagonism. To its potential Asian partners seeking to adjust to China's rise, Indian policy thus often appears hollow, more concerned with status than substance. Nonetheless, most Asian governments, and now Australia, put up with New Delhi's assumptions in hopes that India will make more of a contribution in the future.

Brewster is good at outlining India's limitations and constraints. These include the prominence given to the search for status, India's need to consolidate its position in South Asia and the Indian Ocean before it extends its strategic reach into Southeast and then East Asia, its dependence on Southeast Asian partners to project power because India is not contiguous to the Pacific Ocean, and the traditional view of many East Asians that "Asia" stops at Myanmar, thus excluding India.

There are a few problems with the book. First, the most glaring omission is the absence of analysis of India's relations with Myanmar.

This makes little sense since Myanmar is a member of ASEAN and a theatre for Sino-Indian rivalry. Second, the book fails to capture the disappointment felt in Southeast Asia, including among India's supporters, with India's contribution in the region. Once India joined the East Asian Summit in 2005, New Delhi focused its limited diplomatic resources on China and Japan. Third, the potential importance of a Japanese-Indian partnership may be exaggerated. India will not be a significant player in Northeast Asia for some time to come, and the book betrays little understanding of Japan's ebbing role in Southeast Asia. Finally, the focus on security could be cushioned with additional information on the economic and political background to security relationships. For example, Brewster draws a comparison between India's strategic reach into the Asia Pacific and the expansion of China's interest in the Indian Ocean, but China's penetration of the Indian Ocean is driven primarily by commercial goals and is considerably more impressive than Indian diplomatic gestures in East Asia.

In sum, Indian security policies and expectations of India are increasingly important factors in Asian security. This book provides a very useful overview of India's role in the Asia Pacific.

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