



# Managing Indian Defense Policy: The Missing Grand Strategy Connection

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*Abstract: India continues to build its material capabilities but there is rising concern about its ability to direct these toward the service of a grand strategy. India's history highlights that a crucial requirement for developing a grand strategy is an integrative, coordinative state. However, historical and current Indian defense reform efforts implicitly admit this absence of an integrative defense policymaking structure. Recognizing the grand strategy lessons from India's own history will assist defense reform initiatives.*

India is today accruing the material elements of global great-power status. With annual economic growth of at least around five to six percent, it is predicted to be one of the world's four largest economies by 2045.<sup>1</sup> This affords ambitious power-projection plans. It is developing a blue-water navy and ambitions to manage the Indian Ocean; it is fielding a nuclear arsenal with a balance of land, air and sea platforms; and it is assembling a technologically cutting-edge air force, featuring modern Rafale and Sukhoi planes.<sup>2</sup> Demographically, the United Nations estimates

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Finance, *Economic Survey 2014–2015* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2014) p. 22; Government of United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, *Global Strategic Trends—Out to 2045, Fifth Edition* (Shrivenham, UK: Government of United Kingdom, 2014) p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> India has established the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium to promote collaborative management of the Indian Ocean region. See Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, [http://ions.gov.in/?q=about\\_ions](http://ions.gov.in/?q=about_ions). For further background, see Vivek Raghunshi, “French Minister’s Visit to India to Feature Talks on Rafale Sale,” *Defense News*, June 27, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140627/DEFREG03/306270023/French-Minister-s-Visit-India-Feature-Talks-Rafale-Sale>; Vivek Raghunshi, “Russia, India Sign Helicopter, Jet Deal,” *Defense News*, Dec. 24, 2012,

that India will become the most populous country on the globe by 2028, with consequences for human development.<sup>3</sup> The possibility that India is emerging as a major power is very credible.



(Map of India, courtesy of U.S. State Department.)

However, although India is acquiring significant weapons platforms, critics have raised doubts about its ability to harness these resources in service of a long-term strategy. Indeed, the existence of an Indian “grand strategy” that sets out political objectives for Indian power projection—and then ensures military, economic, intelligence and educational development—coordinated toward these objectives, is presently being debated within Indian strategic circles. This debate focuses particularly on the ultimate requirements and specific policy proposals for an Indian grand strategy. However, these debates have focused primarily on current Indian policy problems and recommended solutions based upon Western historical role models. Taking a broader perspective, with a wider range of historical case studies, may help reframe the debate in the Indian context, as well as the general academic discourse on grand strategy.<sup>4</sup>

The article contends that grand strategy ultimately requires two elements: a political leadership able to set the political objectives for securing and advancing the interests of the polity; and a coordinating policy infrastructure that holistically integrates and applies resources in service of those interests. This knowledge can be used to inform the contemporary Indian discourse on defense reforms, which

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<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20121224/DEFREG03/312240001/Russia-India-Sign-Helicopter-Jet-Deal>.

<sup>3</sup> “World Population Projected to Reach 9.6 Billion by 2050 with Most Growth in Developing Regions, Especially Africa,” United Nations Press Release, June 13, 2013, p. 2, [http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012\\_Press\\_Release.pdf](http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012_Press_Release.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> An important start in this direction is Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit and V. Krishnappa, eds., *India's Grand Strategy: History, Theory, Cases* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

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