PART II

India and the world
Introduction

India is fast emerging as a global power. Since the early-1990s, the country has made rapid economic progress, achieving high levels of economic growth, industrial development and a reduction in poverty levels. The middle-class has expanded, leading to a consumerist boom in the country. Industrial output has increased and agricultural production has remained steady. Although the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) did slow things down, India has fared far better when compared to other states. The Indian military is now the fourth largest in the world with a highly mechanised and mobile army, a strategic-strike capable air force and a blue water navy that is rapidly gaining in strength. Internationally, India’s prestige and standing is at an all-time high and experts predict that India, along with China, will be the new entrants to the ‘superpower club’ in the twenty-first century. Politically, the various institutions of Indian democracy continue to function robustly, as attested to by the professional manner in which national elections were conducted in India in 2014 and a smooth transfer of power effected. The presence of a global diaspora and the spread of ‘soft power’ through movies, art, culture, dance, theatre, music and academia further augment India’s global reach and standing.

Problems, however, remain and continue to create roadblocks in the way of further national progress and wellbeing. The Indian state has had to deal with ethnic violence in various forms on a regular basis in different parts of the country. Even rapid economic progress seems to have unleashed violent class warfare in the form of a Maoist insurgency, which has expanded spatially and is now considered by many to be the single biggest internal threat to national security. In foreign relations, the longstanding border dispute with China is nowhere close to being resolved while new tensions have emerged over the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Even though Pakistan returned to civilian rule in 2008, bilateral ties have continued to be vitriolic and fraught with tensions, particularly since the Mumbai terrorist attack and skirmishes along the Line of Control (LOC) in Jammu and Kashmir. Relations with United States and other major powers are also not always free of tensions. In an uncertain global political and strategic landscape, India has adopted a pragmatic and self-help oriented approach to security and foreign policy, which while augmenting India’s military capacity may also open up new lines of conflict.
In this chapter, I aim to do three things. First, I analyse domestic politics in India, focusing on various types of ethnic conflicts that have shaped the politics of the nation in recent times. Second, I discuss the Maoist insurgency, which has emerged as the major internal threat to national security. Finally, I look at the foreign policy posture of India since the early-1990s and analyse how the country is using foreign policy to bolster national security and transform its military into a modern fighting force.

**Politics in India**

India is an immensely diverse and complex nation. Its 1.3 billion (2014) population is divided into several religions: Hindus (80per cent), Muslims (11per cent), and Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Parsis and Jews (7per cent combined). Apart from Hindi (the national language) and English, which are spoken widely, there are at least 18 major languages (belonging to either Dravidian South India or Indo-European North India) that are recognised under the Constitution and over 780 minor languages and dialects (Hardgrave 1993: 54–55).

The majority Hindus are divided into a myriad of religious traditions and castes (*jatis*) that are hierarchically ranked, which vary according to region. The Hindus are also divided into different cultural groups or communities that are regionally concentrated and have their distinct language and cultural traits. The largest minority group, Muslims, are scattered across India although the main concentrations of Muslims are found in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal states. Fairly large numbers of Muslims can also be found in states like Assam, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In only one state, Jammu and Kashmir, and in one Union Territory, Lakshadweep, Muslims constitute a numerical majority of the population. Urdu is a popular language among north Indian Muslims; other Muslim communities may speak Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati, Tamil and Malayalam depending upon their location. While the majority of the Muslims belong to Sunni traditions, other religious traditions such as Shia, Aga Khaan Khoja and Bohra are prominent as well (Khalidi 1995). The Sikhs are traditionally concentrated in the north Indian state of Punjab, although the relative prosperity of the Sikhs has resulted in outmigration and scattering of the community all over India. The Sikhs are particularly well represented in the Indian military and in the areas of business, commerce and agriculture. The Buddhist and Jain communities are very small in numbers. While Buddhist concentrations can be found in the Indian northeast (northern Bengal and Sikkim) and in states like Himachal Pradesh (Dharmasala) and Jammu and Kashmir (Ladakh), as well as concentrations in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (Navayana Buddhists), concentrations of Jains can be found in the western states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Christians are scattered all over India, although concentrations can be found in the north-eastern states such as Mizoram and Nagaland, in south India such as in the state of Kerala and in the state of Goa in western India. Parsis and Jews are mostly concentrated in urban areas, particularly in and around the city of Mumbai.

India’s tribal population (Scheduled Tribes) stands at around 84 million or 8.2per cent of the total population of the country (Census of India 2011). An overwhelming majority of the tribal population lives in rural areas, particularly in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattishgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Karnataka; these states together account for 83.2 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribes population of the country. Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura, Mizoram, Bihar, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu account for another 15.3per cent of the total Scheduled Tribes population (Census of India 2011). The Union Territory
of Lakshadweep has the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes at 94.8 per cent of its total population. India’s ‘Dalit’ or ‘Scheduled Caste’ population is estimated to be around 170 million or 16.6 per cent of the total population (Census of India 2011). Punjab (at 31.9 per cent), followed by Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar, has the largest Scheduled Caste population in India. These four states, along with Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka comprise the group of ‘top ten’ states in terms of large Scheduled Caste population in the country (Census of India 2011).

The framers of the Indian Constitution had realised that only a secular, democratic and federal state would have the capacity to effectively manage India’s immense ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional diversity. Accordingly, the Indian Constitution, promulgated on 26 January 1950, laid down a set of fundamental rights and certain specific provisions to safeguard the interests of ethnic communities, especially the religious minorities. Key fundamental rights include the right to equality; the right to freedom; the right to freedom of religion; cultural and educational rights; the right not to be exploited; and the right to constitutional remedies. Under Article 14, the Constitution guarantees the equality of all persons before the law. Under Article 15, any discrimination between citizens on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth is strictly prohibited. The Constitution further abolished the practice of ‘untouchability’ under Article 17. Under Article 20, all minorities in India are given the right to preserve and promote their language, script and culture. Under Article 25, all persons are entitled to freedom of conscience and to freely practise and propagate their religion. For reasons of social justice and to create socio-economic opportunities, the Constitution also advocates affirmative action policies (through reservations or quotas) for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Article 335) in college and university admission and in government employment. In proportion to their numerical strengths, the Constitution also allots reserved seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the national parliament) and in the state legislative assemblies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Hardgrave 1993: 54–55).

Along with constitutional safeguards, the administrative reorganisation of the Indian state sought to further strengthen ethnic and regional identities by accepting the demand for the creation of provinces based on broad ethno-linguistic criteria. In 1953 the States Reorganisation Commission was set up, which led to the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. Under this Act, 14 states and five Union Territories were initially set up. Subsequent reorganisations and creation of more new states essentially followed the basic principle that major ethno-linguistic groups ought to have their separate states within the Indian Union (Phadke 1974; Brass 1994).

The Indian elites also realised the need to create a secular and federal polity in order to effectively manage India’s ethnic diversity. Constitutional provisions and practices indicate that Indian secularism does not mean a strict separation between church and state; rather Indian secularism allows for state recognition and equal promotion of all religions (Hardgrave 1993: 54–68). The idea of a federal polity also allows the state to accommodate ethnic plurality and encourage cultural distinctiveness without letting any one ethnic group to dominate at the national or federal level. At the same time, however, the Indian Constitution, mindful of the dangers of federalism, denies states and ethnic groups the right to secede from the Federation (Dasgupta 2001: 54).

India’s multi-party system is also a mechanism through which Indian elites have tried to manage ethnic differences and conflict by allowing ethnic communities to form distinct political platforms to voice their grievances and interests. Although after independence the Indian National Congress (INC) was a large ‘umbrella’ organisation that included various
groups, interests and opinions and espoused socialist and welfarist ideology and policies, from the mid-1960s onwards there was a steady growth of regional parties that tapped into ethno-linguistic, religious and regional sentiments (Kothari 1964). These regional parties eventually challenged the Congress party, which under Indira Gandhi’s leadership had increasingly started to resort to undemocratic, illegal and draconian measures to retain its monopoly over political power at the Centre and in the states. The creeping authoritarianism in Indian politics that emerged in the early-1970s eventually criminalised the polity, politicised the bureaucracy and security agencies and rode roughshod over opponents of the Congress party. In 1975 it led to the declaration of Emergency rule and the suspension of democracy. Forced by popular pressure to withdraw the Emergency and hold national elections in 1977, the Congress party was routed by an opposition consisting of a coalition of smaller national and regional parties. Over the next four decades, the phenomenal rise of regional parties and leaders, the gradual weakening of the Congress politically and organisationally, and the emergence and steady growth of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People’s Party) contributed a great deal to the outbreak of ethnic violence and agitational politics across India.

A key form of ethnic conflict that emerged in India centred on the creation of new states. For instance, in 1960, mainly due to the agitations of Marathi and Gujarati speaking populations of the state of Bombay, the Bombay Reorganisation Act was passed and the ethno-linguistic states of Maharashtra and Gujarat were created. Then, in 1962, after the Indian government accepted the Naga tribes’ demand for a separate state, three districts of the state of Assam were detached to create the new state of Nagaland. Thereafter, in 1966, the state of Punjab was divided to create the Hindi-speaking state of Haryana, and in 1971 Himachal Pradesh. In the early-1970s, three further new states – Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura – were created in the northeast. The agitations and demands for new states, however, did not stop there. In the early-2000s, when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was in charge at the Centre, three new states were created by breaking up existing states: Jharkhand by breaking up the state of Bihar; Uttaranchal by breaking up the state of Uttar Pradesh; and Chhattisgarh by breaking up the state of Madhya Pradesh. Most recently, after years of vitriolic agitation and political deal making, on 3 June 2014, India’s twenty-ninth state was born after the state of Andhra Pradesh was divided to create the new state of Telangana. Further agitations for statehood and state break-ups look inevitable in the future. In West Bengal, the Gorkhas of Darjeeling and the Rajbonshis of Cooch Behar have for long agitated for the creation of separate Gorkhaland and Kamtapur states respectively (Ganguly 2005: 467–502). In Assam, the tribal Bodo population has made a similar demand for a separate Bodoland and launched a violent campaign. Movements for a separate Vidarbha, Harit Pradesh and Jammu states have long histories of political agitation.

While the creation of linguistic states went some way to satisfy ethnic aspirations, expanded political participation and allowed people to access state and local governments more effectively, a key drawback of the process was that it encouraged parochialism based on language and religion (Hardgrave 1993: 54–68). In many states outside the Hindi heartland of central and northern India, such parochial sentiments gave rise to militant nativist movements that demanded preferential policies from state governments for the sons of the soil (especially in the areas of education and employment) at the expense of ethnic outsiders. Regional political parties sprang up to take advantage of such parochial sentiments and capture power in the state; once in office, these parties had little option but to promote and protect the interests of the indigenous communities. For instance, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party in Tamil Nadu emerged in the post-independence period ‘as the harbinger of Tamil ethnicity and nationhood’ (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001: 223). A key issue
over which the DMK clashed with the Indian government was the imposition of Hindi as the sole official language. Portraying the Centre’s language policy as cultural imperialism of the North over the rest of the country, the anti-Hindi agitation spearheaded by the DMK ultimately forced the Indian government to back down and allow major regional languages to co-exist with Hindi and English as national languages (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001: 218–232). Similarly, the ideology of the Shiv Sena party in Maharashtra, founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray, is based on the concepts of the ‘Bhumiputra’ (sons of the soil) and ‘Hindutva’ (Hindu nationalism). Taking advantage of the socio-economic grievances and frustrations of the Hindu Maharashtrian community, the Shiv Sena rose into political prominence in Maharashtra under the banner of ‘Maharashtra for Maharashtrians’ and launched ‘verbal and physical attacks at South Indian immigrants and Muslims’ (Hardgrave 1993: 59). In the Indian northeast, too, the steady growth of parochial sentiments went hand in hand with the formation of regional political parties that championed the cause of the sons of the soil. In Assam, for instance, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) steadfastly promoted the interests of the ethnic Assamese and launched attacks against Bengalis, Biharis and other outsiders (Ganguly 2007: 54–55; Ganguly 1997: 110–111). In Mizoram, violence broke out between the majority Mizo community and the minority Bru or Reang tribes after the Mizoram government led by the Mizo National Front (MNF) started adopting policies favouring the Mizo community (Bartwal 1998).

Even though the Indian Constitution denies the right of secession to ethnic groups within the Indian Federation, secessionist demands emerged at regular intervals. The initial challenge came in the form of the Naga and Mizo insurgencies in the Indian northeast, which were eventually neutralised through army action and political accommodation in the form of the creation of the new states of Nagaland and Mizoram (Ganguly 1997: 109–110). However, strong feelings of deprivation, neglect, economic and social marginalisation, and lack of empowerment continued to create resentment among many ethno-tribal groups in this region towards the Indian state. Such resentment often led to violent clashes between competing ethnic groups and between various ethnic groups and the Indian state. Of the various secessionist insurgent groups active in the Indian northeast today, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is by far the most powerful and dangerous. Secessionist violence by Sikhs flared up in the state of Punjab in the early-1980s and eventually led to an invasion of the Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, or more correctly Darbar Sahib which refers to the entire complex of shrines and building around the holiest Sikh religious shrine, by the Indian Army (codenamed Operation Blue Star) in June 1984 to flush out the militants who had taken shelter there (Kapur 1987). The Darbar Sahib complex was severely damaged in the fighting, which inflamed the anger felt by the Sikhs. In an act of retribution, two Sikh bodyguards assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in October 1984, which, in turn, led to anti-Sikh riots allegedly encouraged by some senior leaders of Indira Gandhi’s Congress party in which several thousand Sikhs were killed. In May 1988, Indian security forces were once again forced to enter the Darbar Sahib complex (codenamed Operation Black Thunder) to evict militants who had moved back there and were using it as a shelter and a base of operations (Chadda 1997: 139). In the early-1990s the Punjab police force launched a harsh counter-insurgency operation against Sikh insurgent groups such as the Babbar Khalsa International, the Khalistan Zindabad Force, the Khalistan Commando Force and the Khalistan Liberation Army, which gradually weakened the potency of Sikh militancy in the Punjab. During the 1990s, India’s attention shifted to the Kashmir Valley, where student demonstrations had rapidly escalated into a full-blown secessionist insurgency. Throughout the 1990s the violence in Indian Kashmir continued unabated.
and led to extremely tense relations between India and Pakistan. Although some positive developments have taken place in Indian Kashmir in recent years, Indo-Pakistani bilateral relations continue to be fraught with tensions, thus preventing the dispute from being resolved (Behera 2006). In 2010 there was a resurgence of pro-independence sentiments in the Kashmir Valley mainly due to the high-handed behaviour of the Indian security forces towards the local people, which led to street battles between stone-throwing protesters and the security forces. Over 50 people had been killed by mid-2010 in these violent clashes, and hundreds had been injured. Public support for the state government and the Indian state plummeted, leading to an almost complete paralysis of governance in the state. The Indian Prime Minister tried to quell the popular uprising in the Valley by promising the state a substantial degree of autonomy within the ambit of the Indian Constitution, but his offer received little support.

Communal and religious conflicts have also been a prominent feature of Indian politics after independence. The trauma of partition and the Hindu nationalist constituency’s perception of ‘Muslim appeasement’ by ruling Congress leaders created tense communal relations from the beginning (Ganguly 1993: 102). The exigency of ‘vote bank’ politics further sharpened communal identities and feelings and often resulted in the outbreak and occurrence of communal riots. However, since the early-1990s, communal relations have hit rock bottom as both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist forces have gained ground and Indian politics entered an era of weak central governments (Jaffrelot 1996; Hasan 1988). In December 1992 Hindu fanatics destroyed a sixteenth-century mosque called the Babri Masjid in the city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, disregarding orders against such an action from the Supreme Court and warnings from the Indian government. This incident sparked major communal rioting across the country. Muslim criminal gangs orchestrated a series of bomb blasts in Mumbai, India’s commercial and financial capital, in March 1993 in which around 350 people were killed (Hansen 2001: 125). To avenge the bomb attacks, Hindu mobs in Mumbai, allegedly encouraged by the ruling Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena (Army of Shiv) party and segments of the state security forces, carried out a nine-day massacre of Muslims in the city. In February 2002 further communal carnage took place in Gujarat when several compartments of a train (the Sabarmati Express) carrying Hindu workers and pilgrims returning from Ayodhya caught fire just as it pulled out of Godhra station, killing 58 people. Rumours quickly spread that the train had been attacked by Muslim mobs (Godhra station was located in a predominantly Muslim area of the town), although no conclusive evidence regarding how the fire started and whether the incident was a pre-planned attack has as yet emerged. The Godhra fire led to one of the worst cases of anti-Muslim riots in Indian history in which some members of the BJP-led Gujarat state government and the state’s police forces were alleged to be implicated.

The regular occurrence of various types of ethnic conflict raises serious questions regarding the security and wellbeing of the Indian state and its citizens and the quality and character of Indian secular democracy. Political parties in India have often paid only lip service to secularism and national integrity but actually behaved to politicise ethnic identities thereby sparking violent conflict. This has helped to empower and strengthen militant voices within communities leading to a sharp deterioration in interethnic relations. The politicisation of the democratic institutions of the state, a trend that started prominently in the 1970s, has further weakened the capacity of these institutions to deal effectively and fairly with ethnic political mobilisation and demands thereby causing widespread alienation of large segments of the population from the Indian state. This is particularly applicable in the case of the national and state criminal justice systems’ ability to deliver justice to victims
of ethnic and communal violence and to arrest and punish those guilty of instigating mass murder and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, harsh counter-insurgency operations launched by the Indian state in several parts of the country and the indiscriminate use of draconian legislation (such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act-AFSPA; the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act-TADA; and the Prevention of Terrorism Act-POTA) that gives the security forces a carte blanche have resulted in serious allegations of human rights abuses against the state by leading international human rights bodies and non-governmental organisations.

The Maoist insurgency

While the Maoist insurrection in Nepal officially ended in November 2006 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the Maoist insurgency in India has actually grown spatially and strengthened over the last decade. Termed as the ‘biggest threat to national security’ by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Maoist insurgency is currently spread across nine states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. At least 12 different Maoist groups are known to be active across these nine states. Of these groups, the Peoples’ War Group and Maoist Co-ordination Committee are the best organised and most active. These groups are known to be in possession of large quantities of weapons and ammunition (many of which have been forcibly seized from the police) and conduct periodic military training for their cadres that include jungle warfare and ambush skills. In July 2001, Maoists in India joined forces with the Maoist insurgents in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to form an umbrella organisation entitled the Co-ordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia. The Indian Maoists typically attack ‘class enemies’ such as the rural landed elite, police and security personnel, government officials, bureaucrats, politicians and suspected informers acting on behalf of the state. Maoists have also attacked public buildings, railway property, banks and police stations.

The Maoist insurgency traces its roots back to peasant struggles that have occurred in India historically. For centuries, abysmal levels of poverty, widespread hunger and abject caste and tribal identity-based exploitation and discrimination have been rampant in rural Indian society, feeding and provoking widespread discontent among poor farmers. Following independence, the Indian state’s failure to implement radical agrarian reform – promises on which the hopes of millions of rural families were pinned – led many poor farmers to see the state as controlled by rich landlords, bureaucrats and capitalists (Banerjee 1984). The Indian government’s poverty alleviation and rural development schemes further marginalised the small farmers, the landless peasantry and the tribal populations (Sharma 1999). Feeling betrayed and disillusioned, a number of peasant leaders started drawing inspiration from Mao Zedong’s ideas of guerrilla warfare, protracted armed struggle by peasants and the forcible seizure of state power. A major peasant uprising took place in 1967 in Naxalbari in West Bengal; the aim of the uprising was to capture state power by encircling cities (Banerjee 1984). Although this uprising caused massive political turmoil in West Bengal in the 1960s and 1970s, eventually the state security forces ruthlessly crushed the movement. Still, some Maoist leaders and cadres were able to evade capture and from the early-1980s the movement began to slowly re-emerge and spread spatially especially in the densely forested and backward tribal areas of West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. When Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were broken up to create the predominantly tribal states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, these states became a hotbed of Maoist activities.
In the densely forested and remote tribal areas that have been ‘liberated’ from the state’s control, the Maoists have tried to run a ‘parallel state’. Cases of theft, robbery, rape, prostitution and the exploitation of lower castes by upper castes are decided promptly in people’s courts; punishment can range from maiming to death sentences, with the decision of the ‘kangaroo court’ being final and binding (Mehra 2000). Besides enforcing law and order, the Maoists have been reported to take responsibility for providing basic education, maintaining irrigation reservoirs, running community kitchens and mobile medical units and enforcing a minimum wage for labourers. Furthermore, the Maoists have been reported to play the role of ‘Robin Hood’: collecting money from forest contractors, traders and landlords and distributing it to the poor and needy; halting the extortion of tolls by local goons from poor tribal people; forcing wealthy farmers to raise their employees’ wages; and enforcing social reforms such as bans on alcohol and on extravagant expenditure at weddings, a custom that usually sends poor families deeper into debt (The Economist 1991).

As the Maoist insurgency gained in strength and spread spatially across the heartland of India, the Indian government reacted by allocating larger budgets for the security forces involved in anti-Maoist operations and deployed central forces to fight alongside state forces in affected areas. Very controversially, the Indian government turned a blind eye to the efforts of some states to arm civilians in affected areas and instruct them to fight the Maoists; this practice of creating a vigilante force (called Salwa Judum) was discontinued in 2011 by the order of the Indian Supreme Court after strident criticism from human rights and civil society groups and the media. While unconstitutional and illegal practices have been discontinued, the Indian state has deployed a massive paramilitary and police force in the so-called ‘Red Zone’ (comprising of areas in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal). The main aim of the crackdown on the Maoists seems to be to try and capture or kill the movement’s top leaders and cadres, disrupt their planned activities, encourage defection and spread disarray within the insurgents. However, in spite of the state’s best efforts, which did result in the capture and killing of several top Maoist leaders, the insurgency has remained potent (Chakrabarty 2014). The potency of the Maoists was demonstrated vividly in Chhattisgarh on 25 May 2013, when the insurgents ambushed a convoy of vehicles crammed with politicians from the Congress party who were returning from an election campaign rally. The insurgents overpowered the few security personnel present and rounded up several politicians for immediate execution. Their main target appeared to be a local politician called Mahendra Karma, who was considered to be the brain behind the creation of the now defunct Salwa Judum anti-Maoist vigilante force in 2005. Mr Karma was tortured and then shot dead along with 28 other people. The Chhattisgarh attack was followed by Maoist attacks in Bihar in June 2013 and Jharkhand in July 2013, which left many more security personnel and civilians dead.

The recent attacks on civilian targets by the Maoists perhaps signal a shift in their tactical thinking. In the past, the Maoists had concentrated their attacks on security forces and government officials; in the rare instance of an attack on any civilian, it was usually because they suspected the civilian to be an informant to the police and the government. But the recent indiscriminate attacks on civilians could be an effort to disrupt scheduled national and state elections in a major way. It could also be a signal to the Indian government and to the security agencies of the Maoists’ potency as a fighting force. Some experts also believe that the attacks could reflect a generational change within the insurgency movement. Irrespective of the reasons for the attacks, it seems fairly certain that the attacks would lead to a hardening of stance by the Indian state. Local, state and national level politicians, irrespective of party affiliations, are likely to support extremely tough, perhaps even brutal, forms of response by the security forces (Chakrabarty 2014).
India’s external security and foreign policy

Since the end of the Cold War, India has spent a vast sum of money in modernising its military. In the space of 25 years, the Indian military has become the fourth largest in the world (Global Firepower 2013). It has a million plus volunteer army that is well trained, disciplined and equipped with modern weapons and technology. It has developed a robust air force with modern fighter jets capable of playing both offensive and defensive roles. It has also acquired a blue water capable navy whose strength is rapidly growing with the procurement and induction of aircraft carriers, diesel and nuclear powered submarines and a plethora of other naval assets and bases. In 1998, India broke its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear weapons testing by conducting a series of nuclear weapons tests and thereafter declaring itself to be a nuclear weapons state. Since the 1998 nuclear tests, India has rapidly developed a ‘minimum credible deterrent’ with ground and air-based nuclear weapons and is working towards acquiring the capability to launch nuclear weapons from nuclear powered submarines; once submarine launched ballistic missiles are inducted in the Indian Navy and become fully operational, it will complete India’s strategic triad. Along with the development of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, India has also come up with a nuclear doctrine anchored by the concept and pledge of ‘no first use’.

The transformation of the Indian military into a modern fighting machine over the past 25 years has occurred due to changes occurring at the regional and global levels as well as a reappraisal of India’s external security environment and needs by Indian political, military and bureaucratic elites. To Indian planners, a key development was the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union, which robbed India of a crucial ally that had stood by the country during its times of need. Political turmoil in Russia and the former Soviet space resulted in unreliable defence supplies, which adversely affected India’s military whose weapons were predominantly Soviet-made. Indian leaders therefore understood and emphasised the need for India to build and consolidate its strategic autonomy in the face of a deteriorating international security and political milieu and the preoccupation of the major powers with their domestic problems. India’s economic liberalisation, which unleashed the country’s economic potential and produced growth rates of around 8.5 per cent on average since the early-1990s, made it possible to allocate more resources to the military even though military expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) did not increase significantly.

In the twentieth century, India viewed the Chinese threat as largely coming across a 4,000 km-long land border parts of which were in dispute. This threat became magnified after the Chinese invasion of India in 1962, the construction by China of an all-weather road linking Tibet with Xinjiang and a rail network linking Tibet with north-eastern China, the modernisation of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the establishment and consolidation of strategic ties between China and Pakistan. It was the fear of China that had prompted India to conduct a ‘peaceful nuclear explosion’ in 1974; thereafter, in 1998, India carried out a series of nuclear explosions and proclaimed its status as a nuclear weapons state primarily to establish a ‘minimum credible deterrent’ vis-à-vis China (The Hindu 10 November 2011). By the turn of the century, the PLA Navy’s rapid development and Beijing’s growing power projection capabilities and diplomatic clout in the Indo-Pacific basin began to ring alarm bells within the Indian government and the Indian military establishment. The PLA Navy had begun to invest massive resources on nuclear powered submarines, aircraft carriers, fixed-wing fighter aircrafts for the aircraft carriers and other assorted naval hardware; it had also started conducting training for pilots who were to operate fighter aircrafts from the aircraft carriers.
carriers and upgrading the equipment, training and communication gear of its personnel; furthermore, it had started installing sophisticated electronic and radar equipment, which was designed to improve the targeting capability of its ships, submarines and naval fighter aircrafts. American assessment of the PLA Navy’s growth suggested that although China’s power projection capabilities in the Indo-Pacific were somewhat limited in the immediate term, in the medium to long term Beijing would be capable of deploying substantial military power in far-flung areas well beyond China’s regional waters (The New York Times 1 January 2014; Raja Mohan 2012a, 2012b, 2010; Holmes et al. 2009).

India’s spending on defence and its military transformation was also influenced by the situation prevailing in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the Soviet military withdrawal in 1989 was followed by civil war until 1996 when the Pakistan-backed Taliban took over power. In this civil war, New Delhi supported the Northern Alliance, a largely Uzbek–Tajik–Hazara coalition fighting against the Pashtun warlords and the Pashtun dominated Taliban. During the 1996–2001 Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the group’s hostility towards India became obvious. A large number of Afghan mujahideen, who had once fought against the Soviet occupying forces, were encouraged by the Taliban to infiltrate into Indian Kashmir where a separatist insurgency had started in 1989. In 1999, an Indian Airlines aircraft was hijacked by Islamic militants and flown to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. Negotiations between the Indian authorities and the hijackers were complicated by India’s lack of recognition of the Taliban regime and the Taliban’s decision to surround the hijacked aircraft with its fighters in order to prevent Indian Special Forces from storming the aircraft and rescuing the passengers. The hijacking eventually ended after India released three militants serving time in Indian prisons. The Taliban’s fall in 2001 and the subsequent US military occupation increased India’s involvement in Afghanistan’s development. As the US occupation gradually winds down, a resurgent Taliban could pose a serious threat to India’s interests and assets in Afghanistan.

India’s equation with Pakistan also took a nosedive in the post-Cold War era. In 1998, within a week of India’s second nuclear tests, Pakistan carried out its own nuclear weapons tests, thereby confirming the suspicion that it had nuclear weapons hidden in the basement. Like India, Pakistan, too, proclaimed itself to be a nuclear weapons state but with one major difference: unlike India, which had pledged never to be the first in using nuclear weapons, Pakistan’s nuclear doctrine advocated the first use of nuclear weapons in order to offset its conventional military inferiority against India (Chakma 2009). An accidental nuclear war in the event of a major crisis also could not be ruled out. Pakistan had actively supported the Sikh insurgency in the 1980s and the Kashmiri insurgency since the early-1990s. It had helped create and backed a plethora of Islamic groups, many of which were involved in insurgent activities in Indian Kashmir and other parts of India. In 1999, the Indian military even fought a brief border war with Islamic insurgents backed by Pakistani forces in the Kargil sector in Indian Kashmir, which further vitiated bilateral ties. The attacks on the Indian Parliament and the Akshardham Temple by Pakistan-based and -backed Islamic militants heightened tensions and the two countries came to the brink of war again in November 2008 when suicide terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba, an Islamic militant group based in Pakistan, carried out a daring attack on the Indian port city of Mumbai.

While still Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and then Defence Minister A.K. Antony in 2011 publicly made the case for greater military spending to meet the threats posed by India’s regional security environment. Singh cautioned the country that a serious threat of nuclear weapons proliferation was confronting the Indian subcontinent and that the security of nuclear materials was a matter of grave concern to the Indian government. He also cautioned
that India was faced with multiple threats, including the threat of sub-conventional and cyber warfare. Singh argued that India’s military forces must be equipped with all the necessary and most modern means in order to meet the multitude of threats – conventional, sub-conventional, cyber and nuclear – faced by the nation (The Indian Express 12 October 2011; Bhowmick 2012). Defence Minister A.K. Antony argued that even after the change in leadership in Beijing, China’s stance towards the boundary dispute with India is unlikely to alter in the near future. The Indian military therefore must develop its capabilities to achieve and maintain a minimum credible deterrence against China (The Times of India 9 April 2013; Katoch 2013; Baweja 2013).

To speed up the Indian military’s development and transformation, the Indian government paid attention to expanding defence relations with a large number of countries. According to Brian Hedrick of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) of the US Army War College, this was possible due to India’s decision to move from a policy of ‘non-alignment’ to a policy of ‘poly-alignment’. The ‘poly-alignment’ policy operated in a number of ways. First, the number of countries with which India established defence-specific agreements increased from seven in 2000 to 26 in 2008 as India diversified its defence procurements. Second, bilateral and multilateral military exercises became an enduring feature of India’s defence relationships. Third, India articulated its aspiration to become a regional power across the Indian Ocean Region and actively built ‘strategic partnerships’ with key states and organisations that supported India’s ambition (see chapter by Pardesi in this volume). Fourth, India built strategic partnerships with states that are established or emerging global leaders in order to acquire high international standing and to procure modern weapons systems and the technology and licence to produce these weapons systems eventually in India. Fifth, India forged and consolidated ties with smaller nations globally in order to obtain diplomatic support in international fora on a range of issues and to develop potential markets for India’s own defence industry. Finally, India played an active leadership role in multilateral institutions such as the UN by committing itself strongly to peacekeeping operations and by paying lip service to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Hedrick 2009: 49–50).

One country with which India has dramatically improved its ties, particularly military and defence ties, is the United States. During the Cold War, India was often at loggerheads with the United States, which it blamed for supporting Pakistan and opposing India’s position across a range of international issues (Chaudhuri 2014). The end of the Cold War and the onset of India’s economic liberalisation started the thaw in bilateral relations, which was helped by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs adopting a more realist stance in international relations (Raja Mohan 2003). The United States began to see India as an ‘anchor’ around which stability in the Indian Ocean Region could be built and sustained and over the next two decades the two sides held a number of joint military exercises and strategic dialogues. American defence sales to India started to increase and in the period 2001–2013 US companies sold an estimated US$13 billion worth of military hardware to India (Hardy 2013).

India also actively worked to strengthen its strategic relations with Russia, which continues to be the Indian military’s principal supplier. The Indian Army plans to procure T-90 main battle tanks and the Indian Air Force the Sukhoi-30 MKI fighters from Russia; the Indian Navy has recently acquired the overhauled and refitted aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, and several stealth frigates from Russia; it has also acquired on lease a nuclear powered submarine, INS Chakra, from the Russian Navy. Apart from the US and Russia, India has established strong defence collaboration with Israel, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and several other European states. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Japan
in May 2013. A key outcome of the visit was a strategic convergence between the two countries that they need to work together to ensure the stability of the Asia-Pacific region in the face of a militarily aggressive China. To implement this, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe advocated that India and Japan should institutionalise and increase the frequency of joint naval exercises. Japan also agreed to sell to India the highly advanced amphibious aircraft ShinMaywa US-2, which has both civilian and military application (*The Times of India* 30 May 2013). In June 2013, Defence Minister A.K. Antony met with his Australian counterpart, Stephen Smith, in Perth and Canberra. The two sides acknowledged the need for deepening the India–Australia strategic partnership by stepping up military-to-military exchanges, holding regular bilateral dialogues on maritime security and planning for a joint naval combat exercise in 2015 to build confidence and familiarity between the two navies (*The Times of India* 6 June 2013).

**Concluding remarks**

India is an immensely diverse and unequal society where conflict between groups is to be expected. The framers of the Indian Constitution were mindful of this reality and tried to design a polity that would be able to contain conflicts as and when they emerged. To be sure, ethnic conflict in various forms has dotted the Indian political landscape since independence from British rule in 1947. While many such cases have been handled successfully by the state, in many others containing violence and finding a resolution acceptable to all parties has been a problem. Since the 1980s, the intensity and ferociousness of ethnic violence has increased, putting the life and liberty of thousands at stake. Keeping pace with this development, the state’s willingness and capability to respond to ethnic violence with repressive force has expanded exponentially.

Maintaining internal security and political stability is, therefore, a key national security challenge confronting India in the twenty-first century. It is also equally important for India to remain vigilant about threats to its security from external enemies. Some of India’s external enemies, such as Pakistan and China, have been around for a long time and the Indian military must always remain prepared to deal with such traditional enemies if the need arose. However, key changes that have taken place in the South Asian region and globally since the end of the Cold War have brought with it not only an environment of uncertainty but also new sources of threat to India’s national security from state, non-state and unconventional sources. India must therefore use its foreign policy skilfully to deal effectively with such myriad threats to national security in an uncertain, turbulent and rapidly changing world.

**Note**

1 The term ‘Dalit’ refers to ex-untouchables, people who traditionally were considered as ‘untouchables’ within the Hindu community and who fell outside the traditional four-fold Hindu *varna* system. Due to their untouchability status, Dalits have faced social exclusion, discrimination and violence, which often have prevented them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India.

**References**


Politics, security and foreign policy


