

# State of mind: what kind of power will India become?

RAHUL SAGAR\*

As its economic power, military strength and cultural influence expands, India draws ever closer to becoming a leading player in world politics.<sup>1</sup> Yet relatively little is known about what Indians take to be the nature of international politics, and correspondingly, how their power and influence should be used. The answer to this question is being shaped by four competing visions of India's place in the international system. *Moralists* wish for India to serve as an exemplar of principled action; *Hindu nationalists* want Indians to act as muscular defenders of Hindu civilization; *strategists* advocate cultivating state power by developing strategic capabilities; and *liberals* seek prosperity and peace through increasing trade and interdependence.

These currents in Indian political thought are better described as 'visions' rather than 'schools', because the objectives they commend are often elucidated as images or ideals, rather than as conclusions derived from sustained arguments about the nature of international politics. As a result of their rudimentary presentation, one occasionally finds points of overlap where two thinkers agree on the same policy for different reasons or when one thinker straddles two currents without completely resolving the contradictions between them. Despite this, the divisions listed above provide a reasonable basis for analysis, because one can discern four distinct, typically competing, objectives being commended: moral exceptionalism, martial vigour, state power, and wealth.

The utility of analysing these broad categories in the Indian political imagination may not be immediately apparent, because they may seem no more than 'local' conceptions of general ideas that are already well known. For instance, the views of liberals and strategists can be seen to crudely mirror contemporary theories of neo-liberalism and neo-realism. However, these abstract theoretical presentations are too far removed from the Indian context to be useful in explaining domestic policy choices. It is helpful to study the 'local' conceptions of general

\* I am grateful to Jairam Ramesh and the late J. N. Dixit for encouraging me to write this article. Thanks are also due to Pratap B. Mehta, Devesh Kapur, Siddharth Mohandras, Arunabha Ghosh, Karthik Muralidharan, as well as the editors and anonymous reviewers at *International Affairs* for their valuable advice and criticism. I am solely responsible for any errors that remain.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Stephen P. Cohen, *India: emerging power* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001); Baldev Raj Nayar and T. V. Paul, *India in the world order: searching for major power status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); C. Raja Mohan, 'India and the balance of power', *Foreign Affairs* 85: 4, 2006, pp. 17–31.

ideas, because understanding the particular context in which they are worked out arguably provides a better sense of how they influence policy.

On the whole, it is unlikely that any one of these visions will monopolize the world-view of Indians in the twenty-first century, because they represent ideas about politics that wax and wane with circumstances. What matters therefore is their comparative influence in any given period. On this count, the playing field appears far from level. There is growing consensus in India that the pursuit of moral prestige has proved unrewarding. The demanding vision of the Hindu nationalists enjoys only limited public support, and India's political elite display little willingness to pursue the tough policies advocated by the country's strategic community. Increasingly, it appears India will, if by default, pursue prosperity and peace, a strategy that promises to transform it into a great commercial power. Such a development would have positive implications for India and the international system. It would satisfy India's desire for recognition and create new constituencies for peace and stability in Asia and beyond, founded on the prospect of mutually beneficial trade and investment. However, if this quest is thwarted by external threats it is likely that a contrary dynamic will be set in motion, as calls to enhance India's military power grow louder—and are heeded more closely.

## **Moralists**

The view that India should serve as a moral exemplar in world politics can be traced to the revolutionary character of India's freedom movement, whose protagonists saw themselves as undertaking a doubly moral endeavour: they were not only fighting on behalf of human freedom and dignity, but also using means that were equally profound. When these men and women began to envision what role their country would play on the world stage after independence, their first impulse was to remain true to the ideals that had originally animated them. The most audacious manifestation of this spirit was Mahatma Gandhi's attempt to extend the principle of non-violence to the domain of international politics.<sup>2</sup> Though Gandhi's admission that he had an incomplete sense of how to do this in practice did not inspire confidence,<sup>3</sup> this did not prevent his asking the Indian National Congress (INC) to declare that post-colonial India would depend entirely upon non-violence when dealing with external aggression. Tellingly, the INC declined his request, pleading that it was 'not an institution for organizing world peace'.<sup>4</sup> This modicum of realism aside, the pursuit of exemplary objectives was widely condoned by the generation that founded India. Homage was frequently paid to the idea that it was India's role to serve as a counter-example to the West in international affairs. Correspondingly, emphasis was placed on those aspects of India's religious and cultural heritage that recommend peaceful coexistence and undergird its renowned cosmopolitanism. As the Nobel laureate Rabindranath

<sup>2</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, letter to Chiang Kai-shek, in Shriman Narayan, ed., *The selected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 5 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1968), p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, 17 Nov. 1921, p. 367.

<sup>4</sup> Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *Congress Bulletin*, 7 Sept. 1940, p. 2.

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Tagore summarized in a famous letter to Yone Noguchi, a Japanese interlocutor, 'Asia' intended to contrast its 'great heritages of culture and good neighbourliness' with the 'rapacious imperialism which some of the nations of Europe were cultivating'.<sup>5</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, translated this urge to display exceptionalism into policy. Nehru deeply believed that India ought to set an example to the world, but he rejected the notion that this required adopting the doctrine of non-violence. 'No Government of any country dare allow its country to be unprepared for contingencies', he asserted.<sup>6</sup> Rather, India ought to leave its mark, Nehru argued, by setting the standard for peaceful and cooperative behaviour. To him, this meant that India ought to take minimal recourse to the traditional practices of international politics: the external and internal balancing of power. He based this stance on two beliefs. Since self-determination had been the goal of the freedom movement, Nehru argued that India should not forsake its freedom of action, particularly its capacity to speak truth to power, by entering into alliances which would demand adherence to uniform policies. He recognized that India's autonomy would be severely limited if it could not equal the advances made by the developed world. But this, he argued, was to be accomplished by enacting appropriate domestic policies, rather than by hoping to profit from the rivalries associated with balance of power politics. Therefore Nehru recommended a policy of non-alignment, which sought to maximize India's autonomy by eschewing explicit alliance with either the West or the Soviet bloc. 'Inevitably it means that to some extent we have to plough a lonely furrow,' Nehru said of his policy; 'nonetheless that is the only honourable and right position for us to take.'<sup>7</sup> Nothing 'could be more injurious to us', he asserted, 'than to become camp followers in the hope that some crumbs might fall from their table'.<sup>8</sup>

The unusualness of Nehru's stance was compounded by an unwillingness to rapidly develop India's own military resources. This stance was rooted in Nehru's unhappiness with the notion that peace must be sought through strength. 'It is true that nobody will listen to you if you are weak,' he said, 'but, as you develop your strength to negotiate, unfortunately the other party also goes on developing its strength.'<sup>9</sup> India's peaceful ouster of the British had challenged this exhausting dynamic, Nehru argued, by demonstrating that 'physical force need not necessarily be the arbiter of man's destiny'.<sup>10</sup> The example of the freedom movement

<sup>5</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, letter to Yone Noguchi, 1 Sept. 1938, in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, eds, *Rabindranath Tagore: an anthology* (New York: St Martin's, 1997), p. 192. See also T. A. Keenleyside, 'Diplomatic apprenticeship: pre-independence origins of Indian diplomacy and its relevance for the post-independence foreign policy', in Virender Grover, ed., *International relations and foreign policy of India* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1992), pp. 57–60.

<sup>6</sup> Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Nehru's India: selected speeches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's foreign policy: selected speeches* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1961), pp. 26–7.

<sup>8</sup> Nehru, *India's foreign policy*, pp. 31–2. See also Kanti Bajpai, 'Indian strategic culture' (Stanford, CA: Asia-Pacific Center, Stanford University, 2001), pp. 26–7.

<sup>9</sup> Nehru, *India's foreign policy*, pp. 68, 76. See also Nayar and Paul, *India in the world order*, p. 253. For an account of Nehru's actions (as opposed to his public statements), see K. Subrahmanyam, 'Nehru's concept of Indian defence', in N. S. Sisodia and Surjit Dutta, eds, *India and the world* (New Delhi: Bibliophile, 2005), pp. 41–61.

<sup>10</sup> Hasan, *Nehru's India*, p. 112.

recommended instead the use of reason as a means of resolving political disputes. 'If you approach another country in a friendly way with goodwill and generosity,' Nehru wagered, 'you will be paid back in the same coin and probably the payment will be in even larger measure.'<sup>11</sup> This was especially true in the postwar era, he argued, because decolonization had laid the foundation for an eventual shift of power towards Asia, which was troubled by none of the 'hatreds' that had consumed Europe in the past.<sup>12</sup>

Nehru was at pains to deny that these thoughts emanated from a benevolent temperament. 'In the ultimate analysis,' he argued, 'a government functions for the good of the country it governs and no government dare do anything which in the short or long run is manifestly to the disadvantage of that country.'<sup>13</sup> At other points, however, he took a less stringent view of what was appropriate and argued that his policies identified what was in India's best long-term interests (even if this presumably incurred costs in the short term).<sup>14</sup> As it happened, Nehru felt that 'in the long-distance view' India's self-interest demanded 'a policy of cooperation with other nations, goodwill for other nations'.<sup>15</sup>

If sustained, the desire to act in a principled fashion has three implications for future Indian conduct. First, it implies that India will continue to look sceptically on alliances that threaten its freedom to act and speak as it wishes. Indians will ask with Nehru: 'Is my country so small, so insignificant, so lacking in worth and strength that it cannot say what it wants to say, that it must say ditto to this or that?'<sup>16</sup> A recent example of the diplomatic consequences of this independent streak is provided by the conflict between India and the US over Iran. Even though it shares the American concern about Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and has twice voted with the US at the International Atomic Energy Association to refer Iran to the UN Security Council, India has repeatedly affirmed its desire to pursue an independent policy *vis-à-vis* Iran, including the option of undertaking major energy projects in that country.<sup>17</sup> While maintaining such flexibility responds to genuine national security interests, India's actual engagement with Iran has nevertheless been fairly limited because of its doubts about Iran's reliability as an energy supplier.<sup>18</sup> Yet India's response to US criticism of its relationship with Iran is still sharp, its spokesperson asserting that the country does not need any 'guidance' from the United States on how to manage its relationship with Iran.<sup>19</sup> The need to issue such a statement is revealing: it shows how keen decision-makers remain to assure domestic audiences that India's policies are formulated independently.

<sup>11</sup> Hasan, *Nehru's India*, p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Hasan, *Nehru's India*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Nehru, *India's foreign policy*, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Nehru, *India's foreign policy*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Nehru, *India's foreign policy*, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Nehru, *India's foreign policy*, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Sadanand Dhume, 'India's tough choice on Iran', *Washington Post*, 11 Aug. 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Harsh V. Pant, 'A fine balance: India walks a tightrope between Iran and the United States', *Orbis* 51: 3, 2007, pp. 504, 506–507.

<sup>19</sup> Madhur Singh, 'India and Iran: getting friendly?', *Time*, 24 April 2008; 'India rejects US advice on Iran', BBC News online, 23 April 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7362177.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7362177.stm), accessed 2 Aug. 2008.

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Another implication of the desire to act in a principled fashion will be India's continued leadership of coalitions endeavouring to ensure that international regimes do not undermine the interests of the developing world. India's notable role in the debate over the principles that should govern the distribution of costs and responsibilities for reducing environmental damage provides a good example of what can be expected from it across a range of issues related to human development. In this case, India has argued that measures to address environmental concerns should follow the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', which holds that the developed countries, as historical beneficiaries of environmental exploitation, must shoulder a disproportionate burden of the costs associated with reducing environmental degradation, thereby providing the developing world with 'space to develop'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, India views proposals by developed countries for mandatory universal caps on greenhouse gas emissions as 'green imperialism', which maintains current inequalities in absolute emissions, while simultaneously denying developing countries such as itself the patterns of industrialization and consumption through which developed countries historically modernized.<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that India wishes to have a free hand. Rather, it has indicated that, in the long run, it will abide by only those constraints that are in accordance with the principle of equality and that a convergence over time of per capita emissions can be the only fair objective of international environmental regimes.<sup>22</sup> India has reiterated the same demand with reference to renewable resources, arguing that unless developed countries reduce their absolute consumption levels, the developing world, which lags in per capita consumption, will not be able to increase consumption without causing price rises. The recent global spike in food prices has proven these concerns to be well founded. to afford or to find renewable resources. The recent global spike in food prices has proved this concern to be well founded.<sup>23</sup>

The desire to act in a principled fashion also implies that India will use civil means to challenge what it sees as discriminatory features of the international order. In other words, argumentative diplomacy will remain the leitmotif of Indian conduct. This mode of conduct has its advantages: it ensures that India's disorderliness will be vocal, rather than violent. It also means, however, that when principles and interests prove to be at odds—as will increasingly be the case, given its growing power—India will struggle to do justice to either.<sup>24</sup> It will be increasingly vulnerable to the charge that it deploys the language of morality instrumentally, asserting

<sup>20</sup> An influential statement of the developing world's position is Anil Agarwal, *Climate change: a challenge to India's economy* (New Delhi: Center for Science and Environment, 2000). See also Susanne Jakobsen, 'India's position on climate change from Rio to Kyoto: a policy analysis', Center for Development Research, Copenhagen working paper 98.11, Nov. 1998; Mukund G. Rajan, *Global environmental politics: India and the North–South politics of global environmental issues* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 25–42.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. the comments reported in Peter Foster, 'India snubs West on climate change', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 2007.

<sup>22</sup> R. K. Pachauri, 'Global climate change: Indian perspective revisited and restated', in Michael A. Toman, Ujjayant Chakravorty and Shreekanth Gupta, eds, *India and global climate change: perspectives on economics and policy from a developing country* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 341–84; 'India sticks to its position on climate change, claims support', *Times of India*, 3 July 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Heather Timmons, 'Indians bristle at U.S. criticism on food prices', *International Herald Tribune*, 13 May 2008.

<sup>24</sup> A number of examples can be found in J. N. Dixit, *Across borders: fifty years of India's foreign policy* (New Delhi: Picus, 1998).

the principle of equality when it wants to combat its exclusion, and the principle of proportionality when it wants to maintain its privileges. India's position on nuclear proliferation provides a suitable example of this dilemma. Here, on the one hand, India has repeatedly argued that the prevailing non-proliferation regime constitutes 'nuclear apartheid' and that it will, therefore, continue to develop a nuclear weapons programme outside the purview of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), much to the chagrin of the existing nuclear powers.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, it has made little effort to disguise its concern when countries such as Iran, Syria and North Korea have attempted to contest the discriminatory principles enshrined in the NPT, because it wants to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons in its extended neighbourhood. This apparent 'hypocrisy' has been mistakenly attributed to a desire to curry favour with the US.<sup>26</sup> In fact, it can be traced to India's tendency to justify every action with a high-sounding principle, which inevitably requires it to assert that history and circumstance excuse its actions.

It is increasingly unclear whether India's conduct will in fact continue to be shaped by Nehru's vision. Though his proud defence of Indian autonomy still reverberates in Indian ears, his policies face a growing chorus of criticism from those who wish to see India adopt stances that correspond to its cultural, military and economic potential.<sup>27</sup> These critiques, outlined below, have already begun to influence policy and portend further shifts in the role India conceives for itself in international affairs.

## Hindu nationalists

The oldest and most trenchant critique of the Nehruvian vision is that of the Hindu nationalists, who until the late 1980s were restricted to the margins of Indian politics, but have since come to lead one of the country's two major political coalitions, the National Democratic Alliance. The Hindu nationalists are driven by contradictory impulses of pride and shame: pride in what they consider the self-evident importance of Indian civilization, and shame at its past subjugation by Muslim and British invaders, and at its continuing weak response to security threats. From this potent mix of motives comes a burning desire to resurrect the glory of India and to prevent the recurrence of humiliation. The only way to accomplish this, the Hindu nationalists argue, is to ensure that India becomes one of the poles of a multipolar system.<sup>28</sup> While this objective may appear similar to what the Nehruvian vision proposes, a fundamental difference arises on the question of what *means* ought to be utilized. In contrast to the aloof nature of non-alignment, the Hindu nationalists favour an 'independent' foreign policy

<sup>25</sup> Jaswant Singh, 'Against nuclear apartheid', *Foreign Affairs* 77: 5, 1998, pp. 41–52.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Praful Bidwai, 'India diminishes itself', *News International*, 1 Oct. 2005.

<sup>27</sup> An important survey, which touches on a number of themes discussed here, is Kanti Bajpai, 'Indian conceptions of order and justice: Nehruvian, Gandhian, Hindutva, and neo-liberal', in Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis and Andrew Hurrell, eds, *Order and justice in international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 238.

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. Bharatiya Janata Party, *Foreign policy resolutions and statements 1980–1999*, (New Delhi: BJP, 1999), esp. pp. 2–4, 60–63.

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which involves active engagement with any state that shares India's interests.<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that the Hindu nationalists simply endorse balance-of-power politics. On the contrary, their objective is to make India capable of ultimately transcending balance-of-power politics by creating the conditions to enable it to fend off any rival without needing the help of others.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, this grand ambition implies wholehearted opposition to the Nehruvian emphasis on the peaceful resolution of conflict. True and complete independence, the Hindu nationalists believe, can be attained only by the cultivation of national strength that 'will strike terror into the hearts of aggressive powers and make other nations seek our friendship'.<sup>31</sup> While attaining such strength, the Hindu nationalists concede, requires attention to the material basis of state power, including military and economic development, they argue that its ultimate foundation lies in the unity and muscularity of Indian society, which they therefore wish to promote.<sup>32</sup>

The pre-eminent Hindu ideologue, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, argued in 1923 that unity is essential, because the past revealed that disunity made India prone to subjugation. Therefore, 'the only safeguards in the future', he asserted, could be 'the valour and strength that could only be born of a national self-consciousness'.<sup>33</sup> To this end, he proposed the nationalist ideology of *Hindutva*, which ascribes a common heritage and identity to the historic residents of the Indian subcontinent, excepting those who profess loyalty to 'holy lands' outside India's territorial boundaries. Though Savarkar's definition of India as a Hindu nation remains controversial, Savarkar himself emphasized the instrumental nature of the definition. He saw exclusion as a prerequisite for a vigorous national self-defence, because 'everything that is common in us with our enemies weakens our power of opposing them'. 'The foe that has nothing in common with us', he wrote, 'is the foe likely to be most bitterly resisted by us'.<sup>34</sup>

Savarkar also targeted aspects of India's cultural heritage that, in his view, led to the emasculation of Hindu society. Buddhist ideals were a particular target of his ire, as they had proved 'so disastrous to the national virility and even the national existence of our race'.<sup>35</sup> In particular, he held the 'mealy-mouthed formulas of *ahimsa* and spiritual brotherhood' to have rendered Hindu society vulnerable to the invasions from Central Asia that began around AD 500 and brought the so-called Hindu Golden Age to an end.<sup>36</sup> 'Buddhism has conquests to claim,' Savarkar commented acidly, 'but they belong to a world far removed from this matter-of-fact world where feet of clay do not stand long, and steel could be easily sharpened'.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Balraj Madhok, 'India's foreign policy: the Jana Sangh view', in Grover, *International relations and foreign policy of India*, p. 164.

<sup>30</sup> Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts* (Bangalore: Vikrama Prakashan, 1966), pp. 261–3.

<sup>31</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 262.

<sup>32</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 277.

<sup>33</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva* (New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2003), p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, pp. 20–21.

Savarkar's views are echoed by another leading Hindu ideologue, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the second leader of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Hindu nationalist organization that is the progenitor of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Golwalkar too argued that the verdict of history was clear: 'It was the absence of national consciousness' that had 'eaten into the vitals of our nation. It was not the Muslims or the English who were our enemies, but we ourselves.'<sup>38</sup> Consequently, if India was to receive the respect it deserved, Golwalkar wrote, Indians needed to recognize 'the truth that for real national honour and peace, there is no other way except the building of invincible national strength', because 'the world is not prepared to listen to the philosophy, however sublime, of the weak'.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Indians should pay attention to 'our philosophy [which] tells us that man should be humble only when he is capable of humbling others'.<sup>40</sup>

In order to attain such stature, Golwalkar asserted, Indian society must be reformed in two ways. First, Indians need to recognize that conflict is inherent in international politics, because 'the spirit of world domination' is ineradicable so long as humankind is divided into nations.<sup>41</sup> Indians must, therefore, appreciate that 'whatever the strategy, the basic rule of relations between nations is the law of the jungle—the strong feeding upon the weak and getting stronger'.<sup>42</sup> Second, in order to prepare for this environment, Indians need to strengthen their national character, because a disciplined and cohesive nation can be produced only by instilling a sense of 'heroism, manliness and other noble virtues' in the Indian populace, which Golwalkar proclaimed as the most immediate objective of the Hindu nationalist movement.

Although one should not underestimate the organizational strength and shrewdness of the Hindu nationalists, their world-view has decidedly limited purchase on the Indian mind at present. This is attributable, in part, to the continuing appeal of India's syncretic traditions, and to a deeply ingrained cultural preference for diffusing conflict through accommodation. Significant political obstacles also play an important role. The heterogeneity of Indian society, and the fractious identity politics this generates, as well as the federal nature of India's political system, undercuts the electoral appeal of the Hindu nationalist agenda. The BJP has failed to secure more than a quarter of the national vote thus far, and will, for the foreseeable future at least, be forced to work with a variety of coalition partners that do not share its ideology. Nor does the future bode well for the Hindu nationalist movement. Its leaders recognize that India cannot equal the West materially without embracing liberalization and globalization. However, the materialism and individualism these processes foster challenge the self-sacrificing communitarian ethic espoused by the Hindu nationalists, undermining their efforts to create a 'virtuous' Hindu society. It is not 'westernization', but the pacification induced by prosperity, that makes the soft chauvinism of ordinary Hindus unlikely to harden into martial vigour.

<sup>38</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 213.

<sup>39</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 270.

<sup>40</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 273.

<sup>41</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 257.

<sup>42</sup> Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, p. 270.

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Indeed, it is already possible to discern India's rapidly expanding middle class, long considered the BJP's natural constituency, increasingly displaying nationalist sentiments that are symbolic and transient rather than substantive and sustained: the kind expressed by jingoistic sloganizing rather than genuine self-sacrifice.

Even if the Hindu nationalists are able to improve on their electoral performance and return to power in the years to come, they are still unlikely to succeed in creating a 'muscular India', for two reasons. One of these is internal to the nature of the Hindu nationalist movement. Since its leaders have tended to rally public support on the basis of symbolic rather than material concerns, once in power they have tended—either from habit or from the need to please their constituents—to continue focusing on symbolic objectives instead of displaying the governance required actually to develop national power. Consequently, little progress has been made towards objectives the BJP has declared as vital prerequisites for a muscular foreign policy. For example, after euphorically celebrating the nuclear tests in 1998 as an expression of national power, the BJP did relatively little in practice to ensure the development of India's thermonuclear arsenal or its delivery mechanisms. Not surprisingly, serious doubts remain about the credibility of India's deterrent.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in line with a longstanding promise, the BJP established a National Security Council and National Security Advisory Board to provide decision-makers with strategic inputs. However, in practice these institutions have been widely criticized for being poorly conceived, inadequately staffed and excluded from the decision-making process.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, even if the BJP were to overcome its obsession with the symbolic and commit itself to the hard task of governance, it would still have to face the challenge posed by the steady weakening of the Indian state. The causes of this trend are varied. They include the poor design of public institutions, outdated recruitment policies, the inadequacy of mechanisms of accountability, and the steady fragmentation of political authority which has increased the number of 'veto points' in the system.<sup>45</sup> The most immediate consequence of these developments is that inertia and corruption have become the defining characteristics of state institutions in India.<sup>46</sup> In practice, this means that, even in instances where the political will exists, the implementation of policies on the ground is uneven at best. A ready example is provided by India's continuing inability to prevent illegal immigration from Bangladesh. It is estimated that upwards of 16 million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants now reside in India, primarily in the states of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal. This development has transformed the demography of a number of border towns and metropolitan cities in India, fostering religious and

<sup>43</sup> Apurba Kundu notes that the BJP spent no more on defence, in relative terms, than earlier governments: 'India's national security under the BJP: "strong at home, engaged abroad"', briefing paper 04:02 (Brussels: European Institute for Asian Studies, 2004), p. 26. For a critique of the operational readiness of India's nuclear and missile programmes, see Brahma Chellaney, 'Up, up and frittered away', *Hindustan Times*, 8 May 2008.

<sup>44</sup> 'Our nation's security', election manifesto 1998 (New Delhi: BJP, 1998), ch. 8.

<sup>45</sup> For a survey of the problem, see Pratap B. Mehta and Devesh Kapur, 'Introduction', in Pratap B. Mehta and Devesh Kapur, eds, *Public institutions in India: performance and design* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1–23; Bimal Jalan, 'Crisis of governance', in *The future of India* (New Delhi: Viking, 2005), pp. 92–117.

<sup>46</sup> For a startling analysis, see Arun Shourie, *Governance and the sclerosis that has set in* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2004).

ethnic conflict. More recently, it has become apparent that these migrants include Islamic extremists, who have been implicated in a variety of terrorist attacks across India. Upon coming to power in 1999 the BJP, which had long demanded action on this issue, acted swiftly to complete the construction of a vital, but long-delayed, security fence along the border with Bangladesh.<sup>47</sup> Though complications associated with the terrain have meant that fencing has only reduced, rather than halted, illegal immigration, even this limited accomplishment has been seriously undermined by the venality of local officials and regional politicians, who have exploited the ramshackle condition of the Indian state to provide illegal immigrants with Indian identity papers, thereby making the threat even harder to extirpate.<sup>48</sup>

## Strategists

The second major critique of the Nehruvian ideal of principled action has emerged from the members of India's nascent strategic community. Not unlike the Hindu nationalists, India's strategic analysts view international politics as a domain where power is the ultimate arbiter of national fate. But they take a very different view of what constitutes power. In contrast to Hindu nationalists, who emphasize the contribution of a unified and muscular civil society to national strength, the strategic community focuses primarily on military and economic aspects of state power. Indeed, they usually view Hindu nationalism as an enervating presence in Indian politics, since pogroms organized by its militant element compel the state to address internal rather than external challenges to security and order.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, since Indian strategists appreciate the direct correlation between economic and military capabilities, they favour rapid modernization, unlike the Hindu nationalists, who are suspicious of modernity.

The Indian strategic community displays consensus on two important precepts. First, there is unanimity that India needs to practise what has been described as statecraft 'characterized by unsentimental, quick-thinking and fleet-footed foreign and military policies able to exploit opportunities and to register tangible, not abstract, gains for the country'.<sup>50</sup> This view is a reaction to India's hitherto ambiguous answer to the existential crisis provoked by Nehru's counsel—namely, should it act morally or strategically in the international arena? To the strategists, the answer is clear; but Indians, they complain, fail to recognize that 'between high idealism and the hard stone of a pursuit of national goals what will splinter is always this "moral aspect"'.<sup>51</sup> The strategic community's recognition of force as the ultimate arbiter of international politics also leads it to promote the development of India's economic and military capabilities, especially a credible second-strike nuclear capability and a comprehensive array of conventional military forces,

<sup>47</sup> Jehangir Pocha, 'India erecting a barrier along Bangladesh border', *Boston Globe*, 30 May 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Shourie, *Governance*, pp. 209–229; 'Bangladeshi migrants pose threat to internal security: report', *Rediff*, 18 April 2008, <http://rediff.co.in/news/2008/apr/18bdesh.htm>, accessed 2 Aug. 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Nayar and Paul, *India in the world order*, p. 263.

<sup>50</sup> Bharat Karnad, 'India's weak geopolitics and what to do about it', in Bharat Karnad, ed., *Future imperilled: India's security in the 1990s and beyond* (New Delhi: Viking, 1994), p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (New York: St Martin's, 1999), pp. 42–3.

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including the capacity to project force beyond the subcontinent.<sup>52</sup> There are, to be sure, profound differences over which threats matter more and which responses are most appropriate, but these disagreements do not detract from a consensus about the nature of international politics wherein military power is the best guarantor of peace and security.<sup>53</sup>

The strategic community faces its greatest challenge in propagating this world-view among India's political elite, whose general lack of interest in strategic affairs has been widely noted.<sup>54</sup> One widely cited essay has attributed this lack of interest, at least in part, to the apparently fatalistic nature of the Hindu belief system. 'Rational analysis, so vital to Western societies,' it argues, 'has less influence in Indian society', where a belief in 'the inability to manipulate events impedes preparation for the future in all areas of life, including the strategic'.<sup>55</sup> However, this view is contradicted not only by those aspects of India's heritage that evidence appreciation of the importance of strategy, but also by the existence of an Indian strategic community that utilizes modern strategic concepts and axioms. A more plausible explanation points to specific historical and political factors. Though British colonialism spurred Indian nationalism and also bequeathed it a functioning modern state, the exclusion of Indians from the management of British India's strategic concerns as well as the non-violent nature of the decolonization movement meant there was little inherited experience, or appreciation, of strategic planning in independent India.<sup>56</sup>

If this is so, why has India's political class not moved quickly to develop the relevant capacity? Much of the blame here is placed on Jawaharlal Nehru, who chose to formulate policy either personally or in informal consultation with advisers rather than through institutional channels, thereby setting a precedent that has been readily followed by his successors. One particularly egregious example of this behaviour has been the unwillingness of successive prime ministers to reform India's intelligence community, which has been plagued by political interference, mismanagement in the absence of oversight, and severe coordination problems resulting from 'turf wars' between rival agencies.<sup>57</sup> None of these problems is unique to India; nor is there a shortage of studies clearly outlining the steps that need to be taken.<sup>58</sup> Yet successive premiers have shied away from

<sup>52</sup> A prominent advocate is Bharat Karnad, *Nuclear weapons and Indian security: the realist foundations of strategy* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Amitabh Mattoo, ed., *India's nuclear deterrent: Pokhran II and beyond* (New Delhi: Har Anand, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> K. Subrahmanyam, 'Foreword', in Sanjaya Baru, *The strategic consequences of India's economic performance* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> George Tanham, 'Indian strategic thought: an interpretive essay', in Kanti Bajpai and Amitabh Mattoo, eds, *Securing India: strategic thought and practice* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), p. 43; Singh, *Defending India*, pp. 5–9.

<sup>56</sup> Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction', in Singh, *Defending India*, p. xvii.

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. *From surprise to reckoning: the Kargil Review Committee report* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000), pp. 255–6; D. Shyam Babu, 'National Security Council: yet another ad hoc move?', in P. R. Kumaraswamy, ed., *Security beyond survival: essays for K. Subrahmanyam* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), pp. 83–102; B. Raman, 'National security mechanism', New Delhi: South Asia Analysis Group, 2005, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers13/paper1228.html>, accessed 6 Aug. 2008.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. *Reforming the national security system: recommendations of the group of ministers* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, Government of India, June 2001). But see also Praveen Swami, 'Pointless exercises', *Frontline*, 9 June 2001.

displaying the leadership required to push through reforms, preferring instead to manage intelligence operations personally or via political appointees, or to leave the intelligence community to its own devices. In these circumstances it is not surprising that even when otherwise capable and well-intentioned officers have been appointed to managerial positions in the intelligence community they have not been able to prevent the occurrence of serious intelligence failures.

This is not to suggest that there is no evidence of strategic planning in India; a degree of planning has been undertaken with respect to the development of nuclear and missile technologies in particular.<sup>59</sup> However, there is an undeniable sense in which the operative mentality in general has been that of *jugaad*, a colloquial Indian term that roughly translates as ‘a quick fix’ or ‘a work-around’. This mentality can be traced to India’s uneven encounter with modernity: the forms and institutions have been imported or grafted on, but the spirit of modernity, an innate appreciation of rational thinking, has not taken root.<sup>60</sup> In their more generous moments, Indians attribute the absence of this spirit to the late advent of modernity in India. But the spirit of modernity does not emerge with the passage of time alone; the motivation to act rationally has to be internalized through practice and repetition, which, initially at least, require manipulation or compulsion. Statesmen must use the former or else necessity supplies the latter. Unfortunately for the strategists, India’s factious democracy does not encourage statesmanship, nor does its political elite feel compelled to act rationally, because they believe that India is powerful enough to ward off the worst-case scenario of invasion and conquest for the foreseeable future. Consequently, though they unfailingly express admiration for systems of regulation and planning motivated by a rational concern for long-term consequences, in practice India’s political elites lazily circumvent the norms advocated by the very same systems. In this case, their behaviour is akin to that of ordinary Indians who bemoan the chaos of India’s streets, even as they ignore traffic signals themselves. They do not believe their actions undermine rational planning, since their behaviour is only meant to be a ‘temporary’ exception to the norm, which they otherwise readily praise. Needless to say, once the precedent is established, the exception becomes the norm.

This pattern of irresponsible behaviour is likely to remain undisturbed as the growth of coalition politics encourages the adoption of policies directed at the exigencies of electoral competition. It can arguably only be altered by the experience of mass suffering, which alone can produce a nationwide constituency for strategic planning. Nehru’s observation on the threat of a Japanese attack on British India during the Second World War summarizes the current situation well: ‘Much as I hated war,’ Nehru wrote, ‘I was in a sense attracted to this coming war.’ ‘I wanted a tremendous shakeup,’ he continued, ‘something that would

<sup>59</sup> See the discussion in Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, ‘Of oral traditions and ethnocentric judgements’, in Bajpai and Mattoo, *Securing India*.

<sup>60</sup> This point has been made in other contexts by Dipankar Gupta, ‘India’s unmodern modernity’, in Romila Thapar, ed., *India: another millennium?* (New Delhi: Viking, 2000), pp. 85–107, and Pratap B. Mehta, *Burden of democracy* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2003).

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force [Indians] to face the reality of today and outgrow the past which clung to them so tenaciously.' 'Vast numbers would die' in such a war, he admitted, but this was necessary, for, he concluded, quoting the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, 'only where there are graves are there resurrections.'<sup>61</sup>

## Liberals

The third, and most recent, challenge to the Nehruvian vision of principled action has come from liberals disenchanted with India's circumstances. By the early 1990s, they argue, it had become clear that India was unable to cultivate either the external support or the internal resources required to undertake principled action. The inadequacy of its internal resources derived from its economic policies, which had discouraged trade, stifled private enterprise and channelled state resources into unproductive public enterprises.<sup>62</sup> As a consequence, far from serving as a moral exemplar, by the late 1980s India was experiencing an extended 'crisis of governability' as economic stagnation undermined human development, devastated government finances and fuelled political unrest. Nor could India hope to address these problems in peace and tranquillity, much less receive foreign assistance to do so, since its past emphasis on principled behaviour had precluded the development of diplomatic and economic relations based on common interests. The pursuit of autonomy via non-alignment was held especially responsible for this outcome. It was viewed as having promoted disengagement, since collaborative agreements were frequently seen as potential threats to India's sovereignty. The same post-colonial prickliness could also be seen in India's efforts to promote 'Third World' solidarity, which provided little material benefit and fostered a confrontational attitude *vis-à-vis* the West. In both instances, opportunities for profitable cooperation were lost as a result of policies seen in retrospect as symbols of excessive insecurity.<sup>63</sup>

Liberals argue that two lessons should be learned from this disappointing precedent. The first is that power, rather than moral prestige, ought to be the objective of state action, since it is the 'argument of power', rather than the 'power of the argument', that is truly efficacious in international politics.<sup>64</sup> Nor should the state's focus be on the cultivation of military power. This is not only inappropriate, in the light of India's acute developmental needs, but also unnecessary, since the interdependence fostered by globalization rewards economic power and makes violent conflict unprofitable.<sup>65</sup> The second lesson is that India's policies should be informed by pragmatism, rather than abstract principles. In particular, when ideal circumstances are unavailable, cooperation should proceed on the basis of compromise, because material outcomes are more important than rigid adherence to principles.

<sup>61</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The discovery of India* (London: Meridian, 1956), p. 476.

<sup>62</sup> Jagdish Bhagwati, *India in transition: freeing the economy* (New York: Clarendon, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Jairam Ramesh, *Yankee go home, but take me with you* (New York: Asia Society, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: the shaping of India's new foreign policy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), p. xxii.

<sup>65</sup> Bajpai, 'Indian strategic culture', p. 7.

Liberals would argue that these lessons are already being put into practice. An important example is provided by India's effort to open its rapidly growing economy to trade and investment from other Asian countries. The intention is not only to benefit from the absolute improvements in welfare brought about by trade,<sup>66</sup> but also to create an informal coalition of Asian states sharing an interest in stability and prosperity, thereby balancing China's influence in the region.<sup>67</sup> To this end, India has signed free trade agreements in recent years with Singapore, Thailand and Sri Lanka, and is actively pursuing similar agreements with Japan, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). These initiatives have not always borne fruit. For instance, the South Asian Free Trade Agreement sponsored by SAARC has faltered, as Pakistan has refused to grant India 'most favoured nation' status until the Kashmir issue is resolved.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, by moving ahead rapidly on negotiations with ASEAN and BIMSTEC (which excludes Pakistan), India has signalled that the attractiveness of its markets will increasingly allow it to circumvent Pakistani intransigence, thereby dramatically raising the cost of refusal to normalize commercial and economic relations. As this fact becomes clear to Pakistan, liberals argue, India's increasing economic power will give it the opportunity to transform its relations with its neighbour, moving beyond conflict over territory to cooperation predicated on mutual benefit from growth and development.

Liberals have an even more ambitious agenda with regard to India's relationship with China, which has famously been characterized as one of 'protracted conflict'.<sup>69</sup> This relationship is now increasingly the focus of concerted economic diplomacy, which intends to prevent economic development from being held hostage in the short run to political concerns, and to make interdependence the 'principal vehicle for changing Chinese behavior and calculations in the long run'.<sup>70</sup> In terms of trade, the results have been dramatic. Total trade between the two countries, worth a mere \$1 billion in 1994/5, has grown to \$34 billion in 2007/2008, and is projected to reach well beyond \$40 billion by 2010. This has already made China India's leading trade partner, and India one of China's top ten trading partners (and the fastest growing among them).<sup>71</sup> Sceptics note, however, that as third parties can easily supply the items in India's and China's trade baskets, a 'positive security spillover effect' will actually depend on expanding cross-investment rather than trade.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Baru, *Strategic consequences*, pp. 124–8.

<sup>67</sup> Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. 282.

<sup>68</sup> For sobering analyses see Devesh Kapur and Kavita Iyengar, 'The limits of integration in improving South Asian security', in Ashley Tellis and Michael Wills, eds, *Strategic Asia 2006–07: trade, interdependence and security* (Washington: NBR, 2007), pp. 251–7; Dushni Weerakoon, 'Regional economic cooperation under SAARC: possibilities and constraints', in Anjum Siddiqui, ed., *India and South Asia: economic developments in the age of globalization* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), pp. 234–51.

<sup>69</sup> John W. Garver, *Protracted conflict: Sino-Indian rivalry in the twentieth century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> C. Raja Mohan and Parag Khanna, 'Getting India right', *Policy Review*, Feb.–March 2006, p. 52.

<sup>71</sup> Anil K. Gupta, 'The future of India–China trade', *Economic Times*, 14 Jan. 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Kapur and Iyengar, 'The limits of integration', pp. 257–60.

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Unfortunately, there has been relatively little progress on this front, with cross-investments totalling less than \$500 million between 1996 and 2006.<sup>73</sup> India also continues to send mixed signals about the extent to which it welcomes Chinese investment, especially in the communications and infrastructure sectors.<sup>74</sup> The unease stems from Indian fears about China's ultimate intentions in the light of its belligerent attitude on existing border disputes and its evident desire to 'encircle' India militarily.<sup>75</sup> Given the seriousness of these concerns, it is not surprising that private investors have chosen to wait and watch. Nonetheless, in the liberal view, economic diplomacy may yet succeed. One possibility is that India and China could build trust by cooperatively bidding and investing in projects around the world, as they have recently attempted to do with natural resource projects.<sup>76</sup> Another possibility is that India and China could establish a bilateral or regional free trade area, which, it is argued, would provide not only economic benefits but also a host of strategic benefits, including the creation of an 'Asian' trading bloc that would significantly increase the pressure on the developed world to accede to India's and China's demands at the WTO.<sup>77</sup> It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will succeed.<sup>78</sup>

Should the liberal vision prevail, over the coming decades India stands to become a great commercial power once again—a *bania* superpower (*bania* being the moniker of the Indian community occupied with trade or commerce). Its external policies will, correspondingly, be directed primarily towards ensuring access to resources and markets. India's formative experiences, as well as its steadily deepening social links with the West in particular, will make it unwilling to use force to obtain these objectives, unlike the great commercial powers of the past. Instead, it will strongly favour the development of multilateral regimes to regulate international trade and politics, and provide orderly and fair mechanisms of conflict resolution.<sup>79</sup> The populist character of India's democracy and political culture, as well as its enormous developmental needs, make it likely that trade surpluses will be invested in social, rather than military, programmes.<sup>80</sup> A prosperous India, in this respect, will more likely resemble postwar Europe than either contemporary America or China. It will have little inclination to expand geographically, and its influence will primarily be commercial and cultural.

But will the liberal vision prevail? As a vast majority of Indians share the liberals' deep sense of scorn for India's past economic performance, the implementation of economic reforms has broad, if unorganized, support. This gradual embrace of

<sup>73</sup> 'India and China: the ties that bind', *Business Week*, 8 June 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Kandula Subramaniam, 'Passage to India', *Business World*, 24 July 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Sumit Ganguly, 'India and China: border issues, domestic integration, and international security', in Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding, eds, *The India–China relationship: what the United States needs to know* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 124–7.

<sup>76</sup> Kapur and Iyengar, 'The limits of integration', p. 261.

<sup>77</sup> Arvind Panagariya, 'India and China: trade and foreign investment', paper presented at the Stanford Pan-Asia Conference, Stanford University, CA, 1–3 June 2006, pp. 47–8.

<sup>78</sup> Rupesh Janve and Rituparna Bhuyan, 'Commerce Ministry opposes China FTA', *Business Standard*, 9 Feb. 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Bajpai, 'Indian conceptions of order and justice', p. 256.

<sup>80</sup> Jairam Ramesh, *Kautilya today* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2002), p. 348.

the market economy, which began in 1991, now promises to transform India into one of the three largest economies in the world over the course of the twenty-first century. But fearsome challenges lurk under the surface of India's economic resurgence. Refracted through the prism of identity politics, pent-up needs and desires have begun to produce an impatient and increasingly rapacious democratic politics. The political class emerging from this churn revels in a fiscally lethal form of competitive populism and a constitutionally lethal politicization of public institutions. It is also increasingly criminal in nature, with approximately a quarter of the elected members of the national legislature facing serious criminal charges.<sup>81</sup> The most immediate consequence of these trends has been a steady deterioration in the rule of law, which ultimately threatens economic stability.

Furthermore, while India's rise will primarily be a consequence of internal, rather than external, developments, it would be naive to imagine that the process will not invite the jealousy of current and rising powers. Consequently, much depends on whether the existing great powers—America and China in particular—are willing to countenance that rise. An effort on their part to contain India will have significant intellectual and cultural consequences. The liberal vision lays its faith in the idea that compromise is usually preferable to conflict, a tenet undergirded in this case by India's cultural proclivity for peaceful conflict resolution. But if it becomes apparent to Indians that compromises merely disguise the threat of violence and serve to foster inequalities, a deep disillusionment will set in.<sup>82</sup> This could prove to be the straw that, so to speak, broke the elephant's back. Until now, India has displayed remarkable dignity in addressing the vicissitudes of history.<sup>83</sup> Having succumbed to colonialism, it redeemed itself in 1947, only to fall further behind the West. By equal measures of fortune and foresight, this colossus has once again found a way through the maze of history to a moment where it can repair the tear in its narrative. To deny it now would provoke the kind of self-loathing that will ultimately spur radical fury. It would confirm what the Hindu nationalists and the strategists yearn for Indians to comprehend—that domination, rather than cooperation, must be the ultimate objective of a state seeking greatness. Hence, if the liberal vision is to prevail, the leading powers of today must be prepared to lend a hand in rewriting the usual ending.

<sup>81</sup> Amelia Gentleman, 'A cancerous growth in India's body politic', *International Herald Tribune*, 26 April 2007.

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of the dangers, see David P. Rapkin and William R. Thompson, 'Will economic interdependence encourage China's and India's peaceful ascent?', in Tellis and Wills, *Strategic Asia*, pp. 342–51.

<sup>83</sup> Nehru, *The discovery of India*, pp. 41–4.