

China's soft power projection across the oceans

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ABSTRACT

At a time when the focus of most of the academic research on China is on the geopolitical developments in the South China Sea and the panning out of the United States' "next phase of rebalance strategy" in Asia, this paper draws attention to China's charm offensive across the Atlantic. It explores the political undertones of China's soft power push in the developed western world, especially in the context of its evolving relationship with the United States. In the final section, the paper tracks the implication of these developments on India and Indian policymaking.

KEYWORDS

China; soft power; Chinese politics; developed world; U.S.; India

Introduction

Any reference to China's soft power projection immediately leads one to think of Africa,¹ Latin America, Southeast Asia or other remote parts of the "Global South". There was a time when the whole group of developing nations, with only a handful of developed ones like South Korea, Singapore and Australia, were considered the key constituencies for China's "charm offensive"² and the bedrock of its fledgling soft power, supposedly aimed at challenging the liberal democratic world order. However, the trend seems to be changing now as China's soft power focus goes beyond the Afro-Asian developing world, and is fast making its presence felt in the developed North Atlantic belt.

On the other hand, China has already made a grand entry into the world of global governance (a traditional Western stronghold) and has created much credibility for itself as a key provider of international public goods. However, unlike before, China now coordinates and cooperates better with its Western counterparts to deliver these public services, and shares a bigger portion of the resource burden – all to gain more support/ legitimacy for China's rise from this incumbent power block.

While much academic focus in recent years has been put on the geopolitical developments in the South China Sea and the panning out of the United States' "next phase of rebalance strategy" in Asia, this paper aims to draw attention to the Atlantic littorals, where China has quietly mounted a charm offensive across the oceans on some of the US's trusted allies, and has thereby pervaded through the Western alliance that was hitherto conceived "impermeable".

Soft power with Chinese characteristics

Before examining the changing contours of China's soft power projection, it is essential to understand how China defines "soft power". According to Joseph Nye's definition, "soft power" is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. Nye categorically states that soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. When a nation's policies are seen as legitimate and having moral authority in the eyes of others, its soft power is enhanced.³

The discourse of soft power in China, however, involves significant "conceptual twists". While accepting the core concept of Nye's soft power, based on attraction, persuasion, co-optation and emulation, Chinese scholars often argue that culture, ideology and political values do not have to be the only sources of soft power. They point out that these popular sources of soft power do not always produce attraction, whereas, on the other hand, hard power can also produce attraction, appeal and amity in certain circumstances. The traditional sources of hard power, they argue, can also be sources of soft power if they are used in a soft manner – for instance, international peacekeeping activities or humanitarian exercises such as disaster relief.⁴ So they argue that it is through "soft use of hard power" that China has been able to bolster its image in the international community to a great extent.

However, scholars observe that of late China's charm has begun to decline.⁵ They quote several polls showing public opinion about China's influence is predominantly negative in the United States and Europe, as well as in India, Japan and South Korea.⁶ China's high-handed policies at home and abroad, its clash with its neighbours over territories, its unwillingness to accept criticism and its growing nationalism are considered to be some of the biggest roadblocks in China's pursuit of soft power. Given the limited global appeal of the "Beijing Consensus", China's "hesitant, risk-averse, and narrowly self-interested" diplomacy in the international organisations, its somewhat insular cultural discourse "in Chinese, by Chinese, and for Chinese" and, more importantly, given its inability to make its own circle of friends and allies, unlike Washington, some scholars infer that "China possesses little soft power, if any, and is not a model for other nations to emulate and therefore it is far from being a super power, rather it is a partial power".⁷

These scholars further note that although China has been making serious efforts to increase its ability to influence other countries without force or coercion, for all its efforts "China has had a limited return on investment".⁸ This has led to yet another round of academic debate on the Chinese concept of and approach to soft power. Soft power appeal, says David Shambaugh, comes almost entirely and intrinsically from society – not from government as in the case of China. Also, according to him, the Chinese government "approaches soft power and public diplomacy as it constructs high-speed rail or long-distance highways: by investing money and expecting to see development".⁹ Soft power, he says, is not built this way; it needs to be earned.

On the other hand, scholars like Timo Kivimäki feel that Nye and Shambaugh's analyses of China's approach to soft power is "too damning and too biased towards the American world view, often being measured with an American yardstick".¹⁰ Kivimäki argues that China's rise is not taking place in the context of a competition between different political systems, so its soft power success or failure needs to be judged independently of a Cold War mindset. He further adds that China seeks not "hegemonic" soft power (that

is, power to manipulate preferences related to domestic affairs), but “relational” soft power. That is, China’s soft power focus is not directed at attracting other powers to the Chinese way of doing things or to the Chinese system, which is in sharp contrast to the policy followed by the US during the Cold War, when it sought to convince the world of the virtues of liberal democracy and capitalism and the vices of totalitarian communism. The main focus of China’s soft power, he adds, is not to sell the “Chinese way” but to sell “cooperation with China”. He further notes that there is a strong correlation between China’s expanding economic ties or presence in any form and favourable opinion about China. This, he says, proves that the purpose of Chinese soft power in the last decade has been not so much to promote the attractiveness of China’s economic–political formula but to expand the understanding of China in other countries, and develop a good relationship between China and the target country.

China’s soft power practice in the Afro–Asian Region

The first prominent manifestation of Chinese soft power took place in its immediate neighbourhood – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. Scholar Ignatius Wibowo notes that after the Cold War years, most of the ASEAN nations were first fascinated by models of development that came from Western Europe, then those from the Soviet Union and later those from Japan. The bitter lesson from the Asian Financial Crisis and China’s rise thereafter, however, convinced them to turn their eyes on China.¹¹ China’s positive role in the crisis further helped it establish itself as a benign force in global affairs and win the trust of its Southeast Asian neighbours. As observed by Zhiqun Zhu, China’s soft power diplomacy was also successful in strengthening China’s relations with South Korea and Australia. China’s charm success caused both countries to pursue a more balanced approach between China and the United States.¹²

China also made a successful foray into Central Asia through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) format directed at fighting religious extremism and drug trafficking. Subsequently, China encouraged many of its companies to invest in the region. With time, Chinese investors in Central Asia become serious competitors to American and Russian companies. China has now become the largest trade partner of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the second-largest trade partner of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the third-largest trade partner of Tajikistan.¹³

In the following years, China’s soft power began to proliferate beyond its immediate neighbourhood, and through the Indian Ocean; it reached the shores of South Asia, West Asia, Africa and farther on to Latin America. However, nowhere in the world was China’s charm success as prominent as on the African continent. China’s development aid, investment and, particularly, its training programmes for African opinion leaders became its most potent soft power tools in the continent. China dramatically boosted its economic investments and trade with Africa, with the investment often supported by favourable loans from China Ex-Im Bank, and maintained a trade balance in Africa’s favour.

Today, China claims to have completed 1046 projects in Africa, and to have built 2233 km of railways and 3530 km of roads.¹⁴ It is one of the most active players in the key sectors of the African economy such as aviation, highway, railway, telecommunications and power projects. The proposed 1402-km coastal railway in Nigeria (China’s single

largest overseas project), the ongoing Mombasa–Nairobi railway in Kenya and the Addis Ababa–Djibouti rail projects in East Africa are some of the noteworthy Chinese investments in Africa.¹⁵

Under the Xi–Li leadership, this relationship has been further fast-tracked. The Chinese side have initiated “China–Africa relations version 2’’. While aiming to take the China–Africa trade volume to US \$400 billion by 2020 from US \$210 billion in 2013, the Chinese side is now focusing on developing a more holistic relationship with the continent by supplementing traditional assistance programmes with cooperation-based programmes in areas like social welfare, poverty reduction, human development and cultural exchange.

Now, taking the association with the Afro–Asian belt to a new level, and forging newer ties with the countries of the European continent, China, in 2013, proposed its “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) Initiative, which is a part of its grand plan to rejuvenate the Ancient Silk Road or the traditional East–West trading corridor. The concept of “One Belt, One Road” (*yidai yilu*) is actually a combination of two initiatives – the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). SREB is aimed at infrastructure cooperation in the region stretching from Xinjiang (the northwestern part of China) to the Baltic Sea. And, as a part of MSR, China is aiming at port infrastructure development in Southeast Asia, around the Indian Ocean and in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

As Chinese soft power moves beyond the Afro–Asian belt and makes its presence felt, for the first time, across the Atlantic, it is pertinent to trace how China is employing its soft-power conceptual twists like “relational soft power” or “soft use of hard power” to woo new friends and allies in the Western world, apparently driving most of them away from the “US camp”.

“Relational” approach vis-à-vis the Western world

Scholars have already noted that there is a strong correlation between China’s expanding economic ties and a favourable public opinion about China. In other words, the places where China has substantial investment or presence in any form have a better view of China. China is now employing the same strategy in the developed Western world.

Moving away from Asia and Africa, Chinese investment, in the latest wave, is fast making its way into Western Europe, especially to Britain, Germany and France, in their property and real estate sectors.¹⁶ As highlighted by recent reports, the annual investment by Chinese companies in the European Union member states soared from “virtually zero” in the mid-2000s to €14 billion in 2014. For the period 2000 to 2014 over 1000 Chinese green-field projects and acquisitions have taken place in the EU, worth more than €46 billion.¹⁷ The value of EU imports of goods from China has “significantly increased” over the last decade from €129.2 billion in 2004 to €302.5 billion in 2014. Exports more than tripled over the period 2004–2014 to hit €164.7 billion.¹⁸ According to Eurostrat data, EU’s investment in China stands at € 15.5 billion in 2012, while Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the EU amounted to € 7.6 billion in 2012. China–EU now form the second-largest economic cooperation in the world.¹⁹ The UK is by far the biggest recipient of Chinese direct investment, with €12.2 billion. Germany is second with €6.9 billion and France third with €5.9 billion. Economists predict that in the coming years this trend will continue and there will be an increased flow of outbound capital from China, particularly in the developed markets.²⁰

The countries of the developed world (especially in Western Europe, where recovery from the 2008 global financial crisis has been rather sluggish), which have been facing a series of crises in recent years – from global financial crisis to European sovereign debt crisis to the ongoing migrant crisis – resulting in large-scale unemployment, labour unrest and instability, are increasingly welcoming Chinese generosity with open arms. In return, they are willing to compromise on their earlier principled stand vis-à-vis China to usher in an era of unprecedented cooperation with their Chinese colleagues.

Piraeus port: the epitome of Chinese soft power in the west

Just as the Tanzania–Zambia Railway (TAZARA), constructed in the 1970s, became the epitome of China–Africa camaraderie in later years, Piraeus port in Greece is likely to play a similar role in improving China’s image in the Western world. The Piraeus port in Greece plays an important role in the Belt and Road Initiative. The port is expected to serve as the main entry point for Chinese exports into the Southern, Eastern and Central EU, and to be a key hub for seaborne transportation across and around the Mediterranean Sea.

China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO), a Chinese state-owned enterprise, has been developing the Greek port since 2009. Although initially the port courted some controversy, in 2012, Piraeus was rated as the world’s fastest growing container port, and in 2013, Piraeus entered the top 10 of the largest container ports in Europe. Container throughput at the port increased fivefold from 0.7 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) to 3.6 million TEU. With COSCO’s involvement, Piraeus is now expected to become a major trans-shipment hub in the Mediterranean. Piraeus’s growth potential has been furthered by decisions of companies like Hewitt Packard (HP), Huawei, ZTE and Sony to relocate their distribution activities from Rotterdam to Piraeus.²¹

On the other hand, the growth of the Piraeus container port has generated a need for improved railway infrastructure leading from Piraeus to Balkan and Central Europe. There are now plans to construct high-speed railways from Piraeus via Skopje, Belgrade to Budapest and from the Black Sea port of Constanta via Bucharest, Budapest to Vienna, with Chinese help.²²

To summarise, Beijing’s infrastructure-driven soft power strategy has provided an opportunity to redefine and deepen EU–China relations and has helped the Eastern European economies to move away from their peripheral role within the EU. Although knowing that China’s central role in global transport and logistics will take place at the cost of Europe losing much of its centrality of yesteryears, European powers are more than willing to take this risk to benefit from the promise of economic development associated with China’s infrastructure strategy.

It is no wonder that China’s Belt and Road initiative is being warmly welcomed by countries in Europe, while most countries in Asia and Africa have taken a cautious stand vis-à-vis the project, given its ambiguous blueprint and its potential strategic implication. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – the US \$100 billion which was often seen as a symbol of China–US competition, a test case for either side’s global influence – received much support from some of the US’s closest allies and major European economies; the UK, Germany, France, and Italy joined the initiative. The success of AIIB in Western Europe was rather symbolic, where countries joined the Chinese project not just at the cost of Washington’s stark opposition but also without much control over the project.

The “soft use of hard power” approach

Anti-piracy and other humanitarian operations

While People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN’s) posturing in the near seas has drawn Beijing into much contention with its neighbours, its actions in far seas have generated very positive assessments/image for China in the international community, and have helped build China’s soft power.

The most important aspect of the PLA-Navy far sea operation is its counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden under the authority of the United Nations (UN). By maintaining a continuous naval presence in the Gulf of Aden since 2008, China has not just been able to protect its overseas economic interests and secure its trade lifelines, but has also been able to upgrade the PLA Navy’s credibility as a provider of maritime public goods, and has built up its “blue soft power”.²³

Not just engaging in anti-piracy missions, the PLA Navy has carried out escort missions for more than 5800 merchant ships in 798 batches in the Gulf of Aden and in the waters along the Somali coast.²⁴ It also played an active role in important global emergencies such as the evacuation of Chinese personnel in Libya, and providing maritime escort for foreign ships, ships for the World Food Programme and for transportation of Syrian chemical weapons.²⁵ In recent years, the PLA Navy has hardly missed an opportunity to cooperate with the international community on humanitarian issues, from carrying out the successful evacuation operation in war-torn Yemen²⁶ to carrying out relief work at the outbreak of Ebola epidemic in West Africa,²⁷ or providing for the water shortage in Maldives,²⁸ or participating in the search and rescue operation for the missing Malaysian Airlines’ MH370 flight²⁹ and Air Asia flight.³⁰

In terms of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 was a defining moment. China’s financial and in-kind assistance was the largest among the developing nations.³¹ China soon realised that disaster diplomacy is one of the easiest ways to build the trust of other countries. From 2010 to 2012, China actively participated in relief efforts for almost all major natural disasters or humanitarian crises across the world, such as the earthquake in Haiti, floods in Cambodia, earthquake in Myanmar, floods in Pakistan, hurricane in Cuba, the war in Libya and the turmoil in Syria.³² Not merely sending humanitarian relief to distressed countries, China also opened itself up to accept foreign humanitarian assistance during domestic crisis. A case in point is the Sichuan earthquake of May 2008. China’s welcoming response to foreign assistance during the earthquake was in sharp contrast to its handling of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic of 2003.³³

On the 60th founding anniversary of the PLA Navy in 2009, China also introduced its navy hospital ship *Peace Ark* with a 10,000-tonnage capacity.³⁴ With 300 beds for patients and eight operating rooms, the hospital ship has so far taken five “Harmonious Mission” tasks, in 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2015, boosting military diplomacy, medical exchange and cultural communication between China and countries across the globe.

Historically, the turning point in the PLA Navy came when Hu Jintao proposed a new historic mission of safeguarding world peace and stability to Mao’s “fighting force”, also known as the Chinese Armed Forces,³⁵ in 2004. Since then non-traditional military functions, or, in other words, military operations other than war (MOOTW), increasingly became the Chinese Armed Forces’ top agenda. More recently, the 2013 Defence White

Paper³⁶ on China's national defence, titled *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, went a step further and institutionalised the task of safeguarding world peace and regional stability as the Chinese Armed Forces' key responsibility after national defence and contribution to national socioeconomic development. The 2014 defence white paper titled *China's Military Strategy*³⁷ further added that given the growth of national strength, China's armed forces will gradually intensify their participation in international security operations and will do the utmost to shoulder more international responsibilities.

UN peacekeeping

Furthering its image of a major power contributing to international peace and stability, China has intensified and diversified its role in UN peacekeeping operations. From dispatching just five military observers for a UN peacekeeping operation in 1990, it became the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping missions and the sixth largest contributor of funds among the member countries.³⁸ The types of staff sent by China for the UN missions also expanded from engineering, transportation, medical and military observers to whole infantry divisions in the case of South Sudan.

Other than actively participating in the UN peacekeeping operations, China is now backing up its on-the-ground activities with comprehensive investment. On the 70th anniversary of the UN, Chinese president Xi Jinping announced his commitment to forming a US \$1 billion "China-UN Peace and Development Fund" to support the UN's new Global Goals for Sustainable Development, a US \$3.14 billion-worth China South-South Climate Cooperation Fund, and US \$2 billion South-South Assistance Fund for developing countries – all under the UN auspices.³⁹

Upholding the values of women's empowerment, global health and poverty reduction, China has also pledged to donate US \$10 million to UN Women and US \$2 million to the World Health Organization, in addition to training half a million technical personnel, especially women from developing countries. China has also announced that it will be joining the UN capability readiness system, and set up a permanent peacekeeping force of 8000 troops, in addition to providing US \$100 million in aid to the African Union to help build an African standby force and an emergency response/quick-response force.

China's record in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and UN peacekeeping missions and its growing contribution to these international institutions have not just improved its image in the developing world but have earned many accolades from the Western world including the US. In the US-China summit meeting in 2015, President Obama congratulated China on its effort to partner with the US to address global challenges like combating piracy off the Horn of Africa, encouraging development and reconciliation in Afghanistan and helping to end the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.⁴⁰ Similarly, during the October 2015 China-UK summit meeting, Xi and Cameron pledged to work more closely to tackle global poverty and promote economic development in Africa, global health, international disaster relief, and opportunities for women and girls among others.⁴¹

Political implications

Some scholars argue that China's ultimate intention behind engaging with the Western world is to isolate the US, to pressure it to accept the Chinese demands by breaking the

age-old Western alliance.⁴² Others, however, believe that China's real interest is to make a Western *guanxi* (connection) that can serve as one of the links to the US.⁴³

So, be it isolating or reconnecting with the US, the political aspect of China's charm offensive in the developed world therefore boils down to the China–United States relationship. While Chinese scholars often argue that China's post-Cold War policy of *zhongmei guanxi shi zhongzhong zhizhong*⁴⁴ (China to give first priority to its relationship with the US) has long been abandoned and the new policy paradigm under Xi is all about making more friends and improving ties with neighbours, but a careful analysis of the history of Chinese charm strategy under several leaders reveals that such arguments are rather misleading. China's relationship with the US has always been and continues to be the nucleus⁴⁵ of all Chinese diplomacy and its relationship with the rest of the world.

For instance, Mao's China reached out to the third world because it needed a support base when it was busy "fighting with both fists" with the US and the Soviet Union. Deng's China withdrew from the world stage given the US's condemnation of the Tiananmen incident, but welcomed US business with open arms. Again, China under Hu Jintao reached out to the developing world and especially to neighbouring countries due to its friction with the US over democracy and human rights issues. China was relentlessly criticised in those days for being a lonely power, or the head of the "anti-US" camp, with a handful of friends like North Korea, Iran, Myanmar, Sudan, Zimbabwe or Venezuela, all of whom were considered global outcasts in those days. China's befriending the developing world or softening of its stand towards its neighbours was a reaction to this growing criticism and a desperate effort to ward off the "China threat theory" and replace it with the "China's Peaceful Development" theory.

Under Xi Jinping, China has made its priorities clear – that is, to form a new type of great power relations with the United States – which means no conflict or confrontation, mutual respect and win–win cooperation. As has been evident from the recent US–China summits and the joint statements released afterwards,⁴⁶ China is overly enthusiastic to get the US to ratify this new framework of relationship, hoping that the gesture will put China at equal status to, if not higher than, the US on the global platform. However, the US is reluctant to publicly agree to such a power-sharing agreement proposed by China, which will surely degrade its reputation as the sole superpower and impede its relationship with its global allies, without any power competition, contestation or sufficient compensation. Instead, it has reinforced the theory of "responsible power". A quote from President Obama further summarises the American stand on the issue:

We [the US] can't treat China as if it's still a very poor, developing country, as it might have been 50 years ago. It is now a powerhouse ... That's part of the deal of being on the world stage when you're a big country, is you've got more to do.⁴⁷

The idea is to bring home the point that China needs to compensate sufficiently before a Group of Two (G-2)/new type of great power relation arrangement gets operationalised – a technique that many Chinese scholars feel will "bleed China" and seriously hold back its great power ambitions.⁴⁸ However, China, being the strong, confident rising power that it is, and given its massive economic heft, has already taken up the US challenge. No wonder, of late, in most global issues – be they climate change, cybersecurity, global governance, or issues regarding African development or global hotspots like Iran, Afghanistan – China is mostly acting in tandem with the US in order to mount the final charm on the US, to make

the concept of “G-2/new type of great power relations” operative, and thereby to win the war without fighting.

Conclusion

China’s special outreach to the United States by breaking through the Western alliance may appear alarming to the strategic community in India. It is likely to bring back memories of 2009 when the Obama–Hu agreement had already suggested a supervisory role of China in maintaining peace in the South Asia region.⁴⁹

As is known, the US is the existing superpower with a global presence, China is a rising super power and India’s largest neighbour with a contested border, and India is an emerging regional power with great power ambitions. Being the weakest link in the trilateral relationship, India has long been apprehensive of a situation where a powerful China and a domestically constrained US agree to share global leadership or to divide the world into spheres of influence.⁵⁰ Although several high-profile visits between India and the US and India and China have been conducted in the recent past to assuage India’s anxiety, the growing closeness of China and the US and its Western allies is too visible to be missed by New Delhi.

As has been noted by Indian scholars,⁵¹ India desires neither a G2 world system nor a complex cold war between the status-quoist and revisionist powers. As much as India is apprehensive about China’s dominance in Asia, it also does not want to be seen aligning with US against China. However, recent developments in the China–India–US relationship seem to be further adding to India’s scepticism.

It is important to note that the core differences are between China and the US at the present time, such as the South China Sea dispute, human rights issue or cybersecurity challenges; India is either not a direct party to them or does not share those issues as its core concerns. However, the secondary areas where China and the US, in recent years, are exploring and also increasingly finding convergences are the areas where, traditionally, India’s and China’s interests used to converge, a few years ago. In other words, as China moves beyond the scope of a developing country to join the league of a global great power, the window of opportunity for economic and other convergences between China and India seems to be receding fast, while that between China and the US and the other Western powers seems to be picking up.

There are instances galore in this regard. The US–China climate deal of November 2014, which was considered an historic development in China–US ties and was lauded by most of the developed world, actually “surprised” India and put it in a very uncomfortable situation. It was hardly prepared for the amount of pressure and criticism that came its way because of the change in equation between China and the US on the climate issue.

Another case in point is 2013 Bali World Trade Organization (WTO) summit where India’s and China’s positions on the food and agricultural subsidy issue at the WTO negotiations were in total contrast to each other. India invited severe criticism from the international community after blocking the passage of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) at the meeting. However, India was particularly surprised by China’s opposition to India’s stand, because in earlier years China’s stand was much aligned with India’s on issues like

stockpiling of grains and food security, and both are signatories of multilateral forums like the Group of Developing Countries (G-33) and Group of Twenty (G-20).⁵²

Third is the US–China agreement on the expansion of the Information Technology Agreement (ITA). The deal which was agreed upon during November 2014 and concluded on July 2015 is unfavourable to India, which strongly opposed the ITA expansion so as to protect its local Research and Development (R&D) and manufacturing and continue with its “Make in India” initiative.⁵³ Taking note of the trend of developments, Suresh Prabhu, a cabinet minister of India, observed that it was a “tactical mistake” for India to totally align itself with China on issues related to climate and global governance.⁵⁴

It was in 2008–2009 when Shyam Saran, a former Indian bureaucrat and a China expert, observed that “India should not rely on a more limited range of strategic relationships and need[s] to work with other powers who share its objective of a multipolar world and multipolar Asia”.⁵⁵ It is much in line with this thought that India is working to create an independent policy space for itself. So, on one hand, it has linked its “Act East policy” with the US’s “Rebalance to Asia”, and on the other hand, it has been closely collaborating with China in both Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) bank and AIIB. And, finally, adding a third dimension to its balancing strategy, it is collaborating with other like-minded countries to further its other core interests. India’s recent partnering with countries like Brazil, Germany and Japan to push for its candidature as a permanent member in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is just one example of how India is breaking away from its earlier nonaligned stand and demonstrating its ability to forge partnerships with multiple powers, and even with the rival ones, to promote its own national interest.

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Notes on contributor

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