India's Strategic Culture: In Search of a Systemic Element

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Abstract

India is emerging as a global power, but its strategic culture remains largely understudied. Expert literature calls into question the very existence of India's own "systemic" strategic thinking. The article probes into the validity of this viewpoint, postulates that India has its own strategic culture, and highlights its key elements.

With the help of Michel Foucault's genealogical method, the genealogy of the concepts of 'war' and 'power' in Indian political philosophy is examined and, on this basis, the central conceptual elements of India's military-political system are determined.

This approach shows that India's strategic culture is distinguished not only by its own systemic strategic thinking, but also by an original (different from the Western one) way of structuring and coding the conceptual space of 'society,' 'politics,' and 'statehood.' This gives an idea of how war and strategy were understood in Indian culture in the past and how they are seen today. The article offers a cautious forecast of what elements of India's

strategic thinking may persist in the long term, and what geopolitical implications this may have for the future of Russia-India relations.

The rise of new centers of power in the Asian region will entail long-term geopolitical consequences for all actors on the world stage, including Russia. One such center is India. Its strategic culture seldom comes into the limelight and discussions of this set of problems from the standpoint of political philosophy are even rarer.

In the expert community, the very existence of India's "strategic culture" is a subject matter of continued debate, with the divergence of opinions being extremely wide.

In a 1992 pioneering study by RAND Corporation done for the Pentagon, John Tanham concluded that India had a "relative lack of strategic thinking" of its own. According to the author, the ruling elites had no systemic and consistent national security strategy: "there are no writings that would offer a coherent set of articulated beliefs or operating set of principles for Indian strategy" (Tanham, 1992, p. v). Another American study, completed in 2013 with the aim to test the relevance of Tanham's conclusion eighteen years later, acknowledged that there was still a "comparative lack of strategic thinking and paucity of a systematic articulation of Indian security principles, hinting at a lack of evolution and dynamism over those years" (Garretson, 2013).

A Pentagon-requested study of 2006 produced an opposite conclusion: India has an original tradition of strategic thinking, traced back to the ancient treatise on public administration, the *Arthashastra* (Jones, 2006). A number of influential analysts (Guha, 2013; Tellis, 2016; Hall, 2016) also argue that India has its own consistent tradition of strategic thinking.

This article proceeds from the assumption that India possesses its own original strategic culture, rooted in ancient political and philosophical ideas, and that this tradition rests upon a solid and

consistent foundation. One of the factors for its originality and consistency is seen in a special genealogy of concepts related to war, strategy, and power. In examining the distinctions between ancient Indian and Western understandings of power, we proceed from European modernity—a source of most war- and power-associated concepts that are habitually taken for granted.

The subject of this paper is the 'ideational fabric' of India's strategic culture, which defines ways of thinking concerning military strategy and politics. In conformity with Theo Farrell (2005), the ideation texture in this study refers to ways of thinking and configurations of key concepts that form a nation-specific approach to the use of force and its format, attitudes towards legal norms and their content, and ideas about national ambitions and geostrategy. This approach helps identify the "invariant" of the Indian strategic thinking, that is, what systemic ideas about war and strategy are like, and predict how they will transform in this culture when the circumstances change in the future. In addition, this makes it possible to estimate the political prospects of India as a rising center of power in the Asian region.

To define factors determining the specifics of India's strategic thinking, this study uses Michel Foucault's genealogical method. It allows for examining the genealogy of the main concepts of military-strategic thinking, and questions the universality of the premises of epistemology and the corresponding basic narratives in the field of classical political philosophy (usually of Western origin). It also helps identify the specifics of Indian strategic thinking and explain the reasons why external experts consider it "incoherent" and "haphazard."

The first section of this paper describes the genealogy of the main terms associated with the concepts of 'war' and 'power' in ancient India's political philosophy. The second section of the article examines Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance as an original version of strategic thinking and behavior, as well as an example of how the Western basic codes that structure the political space are deconstructed and put at the service of strategy. Finally, the third section reviews and summarizes the main features of modern India's strategic thinking, confirms the conclusion that there is a systemic dimension in India'

strategic culture, and suggests what the identified elements of strategic behavior may look like today.

ANCIENT INDIA'S STRATEGIC PHILOSOPHY

The sources of ancient India's ideas of war, strategy, and politics are the texts of the *Mahabharata* (dated the 5th century BC), the collection *Panchatantra* (the 3rd century BC), and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*—a treatise on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy (the 3rd century BC). Likewise, important for understanding the ontology of war is the classical text *Bhagavad Gita* (a fragment of Book VI of the *Mahabharata*), containing the famous dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and Krishna before the Kurukshetra War.

The coordinate system shaping war and strategic behavior is set by the correlation of the spheres of the "manifest" (Atman) and "unmanifest" (Brahman), contained in a multitude of manifested things in the form of multi-layered "embeddings." The manifest material world is in constant motion. This system is centered around an ontologically immanent war, found behind the entire spectrum of multidirectional manifest forces—interstate, intrastate, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Bhagavad Gita, 1978, Ch. 10, vv. 19-20, 32-40; Ch. 11, vv. 20, 32-34; Ch. 13, vv. 12-31; Chapter 14, vv. 3-4).

In the battle described in *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna makes an attempt to rationally build and strategically "calculate" his behavior. However, the battle takes place both at the level of the manifest and the unmanifest. Krishna shows that, in relation to the latter, the attempts to devise a strategy are futile, and advocates action without an apparent end goal—victory (Bhagavad Gita, 1978; Ch. 3, vv. 18-20, 27-30, 38).

The immanent "play of forces" is outside of the relationship that could be described by the oppositions 'Self/Other,' 'friend/enemy,' 'good/evil,' 'being/non-being' (Guha, 2011, p. 17). The concept of war in the Indian philosophical system is a complex balance of multi-vectored forces acting simultaneously in multifarious dimensions. It may include the traditional understanding of war between states, but in fact it is much broader.

Similarly, power is understood as permanent "mobility" and "circulation," in contrast to its understanding in the Western tradition as

an accumulated "resource" (Guha, 2011). In line with the concept of the unmanifest and transient nature of the manifest Self, power is understood in terms of 'multivectoredness,' 'multichannelness,' and 'multiplicity.'

This understanding is reflected in the *Arthashastra* (from the 6th-5th centuries BC, the period of the collapse of the ancient kingdoms and their active struggle for dominance on the subcontinent). The leitmotifs of this period were "war by all against all," survival and, if possible, successful rule (*artha*) amid constant threats and struggle against adversaries with any means possible.

The political environment outlined in the *Arthashastra* is somewhat akin to the conditions in which Machiavelli's Prince had to act. However, in the Indian system, the genealogy of the basic concepts of political philosophy and the configuration of the channels through which power circulates is fundamentally different.

In Western strategic culture, the basic premises of political and strategic activity are the actor's rationality and the utilitarian and purposeful nature of political action. It is based on the fundamental division into 'internal/external'; in particular, the opposition 'friend/enemy' in line with Carl Schmitt's philosophy and the opposition of 'legal' (contractual, legitimizing, albeit not always observed, such as, for example, *ius in bello*, that is, permissible (for example, the use of violence by the state)) and 'forbidden.' Interactions are supposed to be carried out within the legal space (compare with the 'bracketing of war' concept in Carl Schmitt's philosophy). It is based on the delimitation and possibility of 'law' (usually reserved for members of 'one's own tribe') and 'moral' action (from a 'just war' to international humanitarian law). Hence the rather explicit premises of war: instrumentality (focusing on the 'goal'); agonistic use of force (testing 'Truth' by force); the symmetry of violence by default; war as an instrument of bargaining/pressure, the kinetic and destructive signature of war (Roennfeldt, 2011). Hence the very definition of 'strategy' in the spirit of Carl von Clausewitz.

In the Indian cultural tradition, as the *Arthashastra* illustrates, *the categories and forms of delimitation are blurred*—internal/external, military/peaceful, sanctioned by 'law' (agreements)/impermissible, etc.

One of the reasons for this is that the Indian perception of territoriality is fundamentally different from what has been formed in Western modernity. Political "time" is seen through the lens of eternal mobility, as a series of 'expansion-compression cycles.' Consequently, 'war' (in the broadest sense) is localized "everywhere," accompanying a series of constant "external-internal" changes of the kingdoms' borders and putting the motives of hard "political realism" to the forefront. Power takes on different forms and circulates via its bearers without being accumulated in one or another entity—a ruler, a group of persons or an institution. Raising the question of any moral and legal restrictions that act as a source of the ruler's legitimacy is meaningless.

The actions of political actors and the features of the corresponding political-strategic culture in this context are determined by the following features:

- lack of reference to the divine source of power;
- the idea of time as a series of cycles of 'expansion and compression' ('development-stagnation-decline') (Kautilya, 1992, Book 7), at each point radically open "one way" (hence the impossibility of major narratives, such as "progress");
- hyper-individualism and dependence of public administration problems on the personality of the ruler; "introversion" of military-political thinking and behavior;
- ambiguity of reference to law as an anchoring point; the 'indirect' aspect of social relations is developed far better than the 'direct' one; preference is given to indirect, "asymmetric," fraud and deception related approaches to government, forms of war and strategy (Kautilya, 1992, Books 9-14);
- the blurring of internal and external spheres of action by the authorities across the entire spectrum—from inter- and intra-state to inter- and intrapersonal confrontation; war between states becomes only a special case. A clear, if not dominant, emphasis is placed on 'internal enemies' (in combination with other internal political factors their share is much greater, which leads to the absence of a structuring opposition 'friend (ally)/ enemy'). The ruler is permanently present on the "front line,"

which at any given moment lies everywhere; hence such an extraterritorial geopolitical construction as *rajamandala* (see below). Under such a concept of territoriality, the formula akin to Clausewitz's dictum on war and politics turns groundless;

- assignment of special significance to the situational aspect of decision-making; the prospect of devising a long-term strategic line is rather an exception.

In line with such an ontology, the *Arthashastra* draws a special non-linear topology of political action, war and power where both dividing lines and the center are absent. Its distribution of forces can be presented as multi-layered belts embracing each other, where each point can at any moment be both the "frontline" and the "rear," and provide support for focal confrontations across the entire theater of hostilities.

This topology of war and power is reflected in the Indian sovereign's key geostrategic analysis tool, the *rajamandala* or the "mandala of rulers" (Kautilya, 1992, Book 6). The latter implies that in a hostile environment, political alliances emerge as concentric circles of enemies and allies. Around the ruler, there is a belt of hostile states, encircled by a belt of allies.

Such a mandala can be seen as a (geo)strategic assemblage that most closely matches the *circulatory* and *distributive* nature of power. In a system of concentric circles of friends and enemies, the latter is at the junction of multiple forces in a state of constant motion (Guha, 2011). Generating forces operate through it, passing through the local center ('king-conqueror') and moving centrifugally towards the rim (see, for example, the description of "foreign policy factors" in Kautilya, 1992, Book 7).

The number of combinations within the mandala is large (the resources of the sovereign; combinations of enemies at war with each other, the interaction of the allies' belts through the belts of enemies, etc.), but it is countable (Ibid, Books 6-7). This is a model that looks quite Western, similar to the chess-like positional strategy of grouping alliances and building strategies, which takes into account the players at the board (here the number of combinations is also large, but it is calculable and does not exclude Clausewitz-style "rational" planning) (Guha, 2013). However, the rational level is only one of many other levels and modes of strategy.

In such a system of views, strategic behavior becomes primarily an area of individual responsibility. The concept of synchronized behavior by groups of people and organizational behavior in the conventional sense is missing. The question arises: Is it possible to speak about the forms of strategic behavior proper within the framework of this system? As will be shown below, this is possible, but in light of the described ontology of war/power, strategic thinking gets a very special inflection.

NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE STRATEGY

An example of systemically understood *strategic* behavior that turned out to be effective in political struggle was Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent resistance movement, known as the strategy of "holding firmly to Truth" (*Satyagraha*). It is based on the "asymmetric use of force" and the discovery of a new, *additional* dimension of "asymmetry."

Central to the strategy of "holding firmly to Truth" is the application of an abstract ethical principle with reference to the highest principle of being— *dharma* ('Truth,' 'law')—to the specific tasks of political confrontation. Under such a strategy, Britain, which had broken its promise to grant India self-government after the First World War and issued discriminatory legislation, appears as *a-sat* ('non-Truth,' 'outside-of-law'). As a result, its laws appear to be based on lawlessness, and opposition to them is carried out on the basis of individual "spiritual strength" with reliance on the universal timeless law—dharma.

Gandhi's system rests upon a specifically Indian genealogy of the concepts of war and power. It puts the emphasis on the *distinction* from the Western military-political system. It is operationalized through the prism of 'multiplicity': an ontologically immanent understanding of struggle as interaction by 'multi-vectored' forces is used against the enemy. On this basis, in particular, radical confusion of 'internal' and 'external' spaces of political action is reinterpreted strategically.

There are no explicit references to ancient Indian strategic texts, in particular to the *Arthashastra*, in Gandhi's works; his main emphasis is on moral, ethical and general philosophical issues. The focus is placed on the intrapersonal sphere, with 'Truth' becoming the main object

of reflection. This in itself is a certain political action. The system, which raises the question of resistance to the empire, radiates a political message, and is deeply strategic.

'Non-violence' (*ahimsa*) is seen here as the first step in "mastering oneself," starting from the internal level of waging struggle—an individual, who becomes an arena of a completely practical, multi-vectored and politically loaded confrontation. Various forms of self-restraint become the first forms of "achieving freedom"—"controlling oneself" by an individual and corresponding resistance (Gandhi, 2011, pp. 67-73, 90-99; Gandhi, 1983).

Commitment to a life estranged from the world and accompanying 'violence' (*himsa*) can be seen as an analogue of a (military-)strategic move, including in the context of the Indian philosophical system (*Bhagavad Gita*). What we have before us is rejection of the sphere of the manifest, going beyond the time signature of the world, and preparedness for patient and prolonged struggle—an "open loop" strategy against a momentary, impatient, reflex-reacting adversary.

Furthermore, Gandhi's entire strategy is built as a series of transfers of confrontation from one level to another. Below is a reconstruction of what can be described as a certain form of strategic thinking and its operationalization in the domain of political action. What is important here is not the influence of specific strategic theories on certain actions within the framework of the non-violent resistance strategy, but the very presence inside a system of thinking in which concepts are connected in a special way (for example, war is described in terms of the 'circulation of power' and 'multiplicity,' outside the rational-calculative coordinate system), and conscious emphasis on the distinction between this system and the adversary's system. The very difference between the positions of the opposing sides in relation to 'Truth' is radically "politicized" and "strategized" at different levels, consciously or (quite often) unconsciously.

The 'deconstruction' of the British Empire as a form of 'asymmetric' opposition to it and the broad diversity of forms of such opposition distinguished Gandhi's supporters. (Other participants in the Indian independence movement followed the path of 'symmetrical'—

forceful—counteraction, using quite Western concepts of power, mobilization, resistance, agency of those who offer resistance, etc.)

In such an arena of confrontation, philosophically abstract and emphatically intrapersonal, the resisting side's weapons of choice are *information* and various actions with it. We can see here a unique strategy of resistance to an immeasurably stronger enemy almost exclusively in the information space. Resistance in this information environment is constantly evolving as a permanent "information operation," such as the campaign for the rights of Indians in South Africa (1907-1914); resistance to discriminatory legislation; rights protection lawsuits in courts; publication of a magazine (*Indian Opinion*, 1904); creation of political organizations (Natal Indian Congress, 1894); active use of the "theatrical" dimension in the political struggle, like oaths pronounced in public, hunger strikes and other forms of material self-restraint; and calls for civil disobedience campaigns (Caygill, 2013). During this period Gandhi empirically compiles a "vocabulary" of various forms and formats of resistance and agency of the resistant, based not on traditional violence, but on information, greater legal awareness, the power of personal example, provocation, and non-violence. Essentially, this is modern (and even postmodern) information war.

Simultaneously, the very political backbone of the British Empire's imperial structure is deconstructed informationally—at the level of meanings (content) and codes (expression). The "triple attack" of non-violent resistance is targeted against the key components of the philosophy of political liberalism: 1) the rationality and "calculativeness" of political behavior, which is associated, specifically, with utilitarianism; 2) the methodology of empiricism; and 3) the liberal component of political philosophy. They are primarily associated with British political philosophy but are not confined to it. By deconstructing the axiomatic foundations of these principles, the agent practicing nonviolent resistance challenges them.

In deconstructing the methodology of empiricism, Gandhi's adherents speak out against its basic premise: actions (in particular, social ones) are taken under the influence of "concrete sensations" and empirical data, and not because of an "abstract" principle. The agent

practicing resistance bypasses subgoals to immediately attack axiomatic premises, for example that individuals do not behave "irrationally" in relations with the authorities, because (empirically) "no one does this, because nobody has done this yet." When an "abstract" philosophical principle is made the primary guideline, this undermines the edifice of political philosophy based on the corresponding dogmas.

Gandhi's strategy undermines the imperial system informationally and at the level of its basic codes, too. For example, by refusing to defend oneself in court (the most famous cases being requests for "the most severe punishment" for oneself in courts during the campaigns in South Africa in 1908 and in Ahmedabad in 1922), the defendant eliminates social conventions ("the rules of conduct in court are *like this* by default," "nobody has acted otherwise yet"), that is, the very conditions which make judicial power possible and legitimate (a kind of social contract turned "inside out"). In this way the defendant intercepts the initiative and transfers the standoff into his chosen dimension—"the attainment of Truth."

By declaring the non-violent nature of resistance, Gandhi's supporters also deconstruct the Western system of codifying war and strategic behavior. The provisions on the material, instrumental, "kinetic-destructive" nature of struggle as a means to achieve the goal and, by default, the symmetrical format of war between states (the state's monopoly on violence) fall under attack.

Here we can see again Gandhi deconstruct, in a very "modern" (even "postmodern") way, not only Clausewitz's "state-war" link proposed as the foundation of modern statehood, but also Foucault's logic articulated later (politics/state and its institutions as "the continuation of war with other means"). This questions the deep foundation of the Western state machinery, structurally linked to violence and ways of using violence.

Another system-forming element of the Western model—the division into 'external' and 'internal'—undergoes deconstruction, too. The Western (basically modern) system is configured for confronting a 'symmetrical' player—an outside hostile army or inside armed resistance, which serves as an object of suppression by the state

repressive apparatus. Subject to deconstruction is also the default definition of war in line with Clausewitz's "continuation of politics with other means" formula: the use of 'asymmetric' resources by the Indian side calls into question Clausewitz's "unopposed" classical definition of war and his postulate that the escalation of violence is inevitable.

Gandhi's movement systematically leads the opposition to the enemy and the strategy of achieving one's goals away from kinetic warfare to other spheres: economic (forms of resistance in the economy and economic life); legal (courts as an arena of opposition to power); information and propaganda (raising awareness); philosophical and ethical (dharma); intra-personal; and even "corporal" (practices of self-control). All of them become different "dimensions" of resistance, originally and radically operationalizing the understanding of war (and power) as a multidimensional and, in its own way, total phenomenon and process.

In this construct, the moral (religious, ethical, philosophical) component of Gandhi's strategic philosophy is not the sole one. Nor is it self-sufficient. This is a form of precisely *collective strategic behavior* in a multi-vector struggle of resistance, actively using elements of "information warfare."

CONTEMPORARY INDIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

The Indian state achieved independence through a combination of non-violent resistance and various forms of violent action. Both before independence and afterwards, the army remained the backbone of India's state structure. Independent India fought five major wars, winning four with Pakistan and losing one to China.

India's modern strategic culture is somewhat ambivalent, fragmented and eclectic, for which reason American analysts eagerly speak about its inherent "contradictions." Using the genealogy of the main concepts, this paper aims to prove that whatever its visible "contradictions" and adaptations to changing conditions, India's strategic culture remains basically systemic and coherent.

The modern military doctrine of Cold Start, designed to confront a symmetrical enemy, which replaced the Sundarji Doctrine (1981-2004)],

bears unmistakable traces of Soviet military thought. Both doctrines stem from separate Soviet operational-strategic concepts (which is particularly true of the Sundarji Doctrine developed for possible use in a war with Pakistan). Amid the growing diversity of security threats on the one hand, and the technological evolution of weapon systems on the other, the basic operational-strategic concepts often remain at the level of the 1980s. For example, ground forces' operations (in the Pakistan theater of war) are supposed to involve joint task tactical forces, analogues of Soviet operational maneuver groups (including those within the framework of the Cold Start doctrine). According to one expert assessment, modern forms of the use of force (aerospace and naval operations, precision weapons, etc.) remain insufficiently measured in terms of war theory (Makienko, 2016, pp. 9-10).

Different assessments are possible here, but in terms of India's strategic culture, it looks feasible to highlight some features of the Indian war strategy by analogy with the "American way of war" and its thirteen features highlighted by Colin Gray (Gray, 2006, pp. 29-49).

Gandhi's non-violent resistance can be considered an "invariant" of India's strategic thinking (although it is only one part of the multidimensional strategic system that is not taken today as a guide to practical action and does not belong to mainstream strategic thought).

In the system reconstructed below, the point of interest is the very ability of strategic thinking and its certain *modality*, in other words, how, in accordance with Indian strategic culture, "it might be possible" to think about power, the use of force, struggle, and strategy in the modern conditions and, probably, in the future. The same applies to the special territoriality and 'interna/external' topology of a politically significant space. Although today such operationalization of violence with specific practical implications is unlikely, it is imaginable in this culture in principle and can be considered and, if necessary, actualized.

It should be noted that the military strategy as such reflects only some of these features and often bears opposite traits—symmetrical thinking, limited goals, and non-inclusiveness.

Thus, the reconstructed "invariant" of India's strategic culture might look like this:

- Preference for indirect forms of struggle based on the genealogy of the concept of power that is freely circulating via its bearers through multiple channels, outside of various oppositions that delimit the political space (into legal (permissible)/ impermissible, external/internal (territory of "law") domains, etc.). There is no external or internal space at all; hence the universality and inclusiveness of the strategy (as, for example, Gandhi's strategy that carved out a niche for an "Indian state" that was absent at that time).

- The resulting possibility of action with all permissible means— not "any means, regardless of moral restrictions" (although the *Arthashastra* would allow for it), but precisely the maximum expanded range of means, including those lying beyond the conventional framework. Thus, in foreign and domestic policies, the ruler is recommended to use all kinds of 'asymmetric' actions, for example, the effects of surprise, including through treacherous actions or unexpected attacks: "When thy foe is in thy power, destroy him by every means open or secret. <…> Bear thy foe upon thy shoulders till the time cometh when thou canst throw him down, breaking him into pieces like an earthen pot thrown down with violence upon a stony surface. <…> No pity shouldst thou show him but slay him at once. By the arts of conciliation or the expenditure of money should the foe be slain. By creating disunion amongst his allies, or by the employment of force, indeed by every means in thy power shouldst thou destroy thy foe." (Mahabharata, 1884-1896, Book 1, Section CXLII).

- Anti-pacifism as a default premise. The value of nonviolent resistance is rather universal, supranational, philosophical, and ethical. The applicability of such a strategy remains purely speculative—the ruling and military elites do not think in such terms. Some elements of the pacifist position can be considered, but only as one of the private options in the widest possible range.

- The totality of confrontation (based on the understanding of war as a cosmic "play of forces") with a tendency to stage-by-stage escalation—the ability to involve new dimensions of the

struggle, including informational and other non-material tools, in order to get away from the main code in which the enemy reads war/strategy/statehood.

- Holism and inclusiveness—the spread of the struggle to the civilian population, all social strata, various gender and confessional groups, representatives of other civilizations (radical "supracivilizational" form of ideology); the emphasis on the political dimension of violence along with the kinetic one, which is the Indian equivalent of Liddell Hart's "all the resources of a nation" mobilized to oppose the enemy.
- An "open loop" strategy that includes the dimension of unlimited time and "risk" and sets operational structures where all available resources can last "indefinitely."

Of special interest concerning India's strategic culture is its way of thinking and acting regarding the use of nuclear weapons.

India's historical experience based on pacifism implies that its attitude towards the use of nuclear weapons will be reserved and include the possibility of gradual escalation with a phased build-up of strength (which, in particular, explains the adherence to the Cold Start doctrine). At the final stage of the escalation, the use of nuclear weapons is not ruled out. Moreover, contemporary India's traditional no-first-use policy may be revised, at least at the level of rhetoric. According to expert estimates, such an attack may be targeted not so much against Pakistan as China (Sundaram, 2018; Dalton, 2019; Dalton, 2020; Kristensen, 2020).

Among the current factors of geopolitical nature are India's ambition to play the role of a regional center of power and of a rising global power, as well as the relative security that its geostrategic position provides. What are the decision-making culture and mode of action here?

These questions are part of a broader question of how India fits in with the "big world" through the lens of a world-systems analysis, including India's internal vision of the global environment and an outside vision of India's place in the global system.

To consider perspectives from within India, let us turn to the central philosophical category of the *rajamandala*—the division of the world/

geopolitically significant space into concentric circles depending on the degree of neighborhood and political significance. Within the framework of the *rajamandala*, the "inner circle's" geostrategy is distinguished by fierce defense of the peripheries (usually without gradual escalation of strength). Among the geopolitical priorities of the strategy outside the "inner circle" is the Eastern vector of India's foreign policy (which had gained momentum by the 1990s) within the framework of the Look East Policy launched in 1991 by India's Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao-led government (1991-1996), and the Act East Policy set in motion by Prime Minister Narendra Modi (starting from 2014). Greater involvement in the region's affairs distinguishes both. Since the 1990s, India's foreign policy has been built in accordance with this vector (Bordachev et al., 2018), with allusions to the national historical experience of "soft" (cultural, commercial, and religious) expansion to the East. From the countries of 'immediate neighborhood' (dominance), the vector leads to the countries of the 'extended neighborhood' (advancement of economic interests) and further on to the outer circle of other countries (efforts to achieve recognition as a great power).

The next level of geopolitical priorities comprises the concept of the Indo-Pacific Region, where, along with the United States, Japan and Australia, India seeks to create an alternative to the Asia-Pacific Region and a counterbalance to China. For India, this is a means to gain a firmer foothold outside of the traditional zone of the Indian Ocean. The farthest and last circle embraces the other states, with alternating allied priorities (Russia, Israel and, possibly, France) and relatively constant hostile ones (China).

So, from the 'inside-outside' perspective, the *rajamandala* looks like a projection onto a geopolitically significant space and a tool for its division. However, it can also be interpreted from a reverse, "outside-inside" perspective, and looked at from the inside, because, in fact, it is a construct where military and political power manifests itself as a multidimensional "play of forces," circulating everywhere over multiple channels with multi-layer embeddings.

In line with the 'external-internal' topology, the idea of territoriality manifests itself as multiple gradations, not completely delimited

sections (of the state border, for example). In fact, the concept of a Westphalian state with clearly defined external borders is absent from Indian strategic thinking. Therefore, in the event of a serious clash (for example, with Pakistan), violence is regarded as gradual escalation. Peripheral conflicts, terrorist attacks, and even political protests at home are perceived in a similar way. The public often criticizes the authorities for disproportionate use of force (Sarin, 2016; ICJ, 2019), however, the latter think of their actions in terms of "surgical strikes" (Gokhale, 2017), and, quite remarkably, across the entire spectrum of actions, with "diplomatic strikes" not ruled out (Times Now, 2016).

To an external observer, India's integration into the world system shows signs of ambiguity and 'external-internal' dynamics, akin to the geopolitical mandala and the mandala within itself. In this regard, a number of questions arise. What methodology should be employed for analyzing the political economy of South Asia? Can the changes in the region be explained solely in terms of the region's internal dynamics, or should they be viewed in conjunction with the global processes of capitalism, their source being in Europe? How do South Asia in general and India in particular fit into the modern system of capitalism in the post-colonial period? Essentially, these questions involve the issue of agency in the colonial and, especially, post-colonial context.

Immanuel Wallerstein in his essay *Does India Exist?*, based on an apriori Eurocentric" optics of capitalism, points to India's unquestionable incorporation into the capitalist world system (Wallerstein, 2000, p. 310). In his vision, India is assigned the status of "semi-periphery," which implies an explanation of socio-economic processes in the region as a function of "external" global capitalist forces.

However, there are other approaches that focus primarily on regional socio-economic systems. For one, Anthony D'Costa (1993) argues that without British influence India would have developed its own, South Asian type of capitalism. European capital did not always easily penetrate into South Asia, and the latter did not act as its passive recipient. A greater part of investment into South Asian textile trade during the colonial period was domestic, and not British (Ibid). India contributed to the world system not by drawing capital from the mother countries, but

by providing human resources and then capitalists to other incorporated areas of the world economy (Ibid). The archetypal notion of 'semi-periphery' is two narrow to describe India's hybrid status.

India's "hybridity" arouses questions about the relevance of Wallerstein's ideas about the dynamics and structure of the modern world system. That country is part of the world system, but its position implies a special "external-internal" reference system and a mode of action characteristic of such a topology (a kind of *rajamandala* directed inward).

Furthermore, despite the obvious geopolitical ambitions, the marked South Eastern vector of India's foreign policy bears the features of introvert-extravert orientation. The mandala concept suggests a look at the territories surrounding the subcontinent as multi-layered buffer zones without strict distinctions between the 'internal' and 'external' (at least in the Westphalian understanding of statehood). Such a topology gives an idea of what the position in geopolitics and geostrategy matters may be like in the given culture. This coherent and fully strategic vision stems from an original genealogy of the concepts of war, power, and strategy.

In light of this, what could India's macro-strategic orientation be towards other players on the world stage? Will it change? What policy (geopolitically and geostrategically) will India pursue, given its traditional commitment to non-alignment, the emphasis on equidistance and maneuvering, and the desire to avoid association with any one of the global players? Clarity on these issues may have implications for all key players, including Russia.

The brief answer in accordance with the external-internal topology (mandala, turned outward and inward) is that India's position in the world system is dual and not limited to the role of semi-periphery. The fundamental inability to team up with any one player or ideology in world politics and the economy stems from the genealogy of the concept of power. This also explains the perpetual "non-alignment" (economic, political and geostrategic with any of the players, blocs or alliances) and the tendency to always remain within the framework of its own specific 'internal-external' topology as a geopolitical and strategic resource. Hence the characteristic multi-vectored foreign

policy and the tendency to constantly maneuver between centers of power, while relying on a powerful and extensive domestic resource.

The question if this position may undergo some change is related to the problem identified in the title of this work—the presence or absence of systematicity in Indian strategic thinking. Most likely, the further development of India's military-political system will remain as "evolutionary" and incremental as possible for a long time (see, for example, Fair, 2019).

In the same fashion, one can answer the question whether the geopolitical and geostrategic component of India's strategic thinking will shift from the custom of seeing the environment in mandala terms. A brief answer is likely to be negative, that is, in the foreseeable future and in the long term the elements of such thinking are likely to remain among the constants. But this does not rule out further evolution and the introduction of new variables into the strategy. Foreign policy maneuvering among the great powers is very likely to intensify.

Geopolitical rivalry with China will also remain a constant, including in the format of various dimensions of its containment. The political orientation towards Western partners will remain in place, but over time it may become more situational. This policy may even get stronger at times, but the frequency of oscillations, rapprochements and estrangements in relations with these partners will increase.

Orientation towards Moscow as a strategic partner will remain in force for India, but at the same time new variables, ever more of them, are likely to appear over time. They can be both external, primarily political, or internal (due to the relative decline of state economic players and the emergence of private giants it is advisable to rely on them in considering and establishing partnership schemes with India in the medium and long term). With the emergence of such variables in the system of India's strategic thinking, it will be natural to expect that the existing schemes and formats of interaction, including military-economic cooperation that is important for Russia, will be more complex. With India's growing strategic involvement in regional political context, the "grand-strategy" planning may expand and unfold at all levels, including beyond the geopolitical mandala. A system

configured in this way, with its priorities ranked as described above, is quite consistent.

In conclusion, one can raise the question of how relevant India's strategic experience is today. Perhaps, of the greatest interest is Gandhi's strategy of non-violent resistance. Can it be reproduced outside of its unique historical conditions? Most certainly, yes. Any player set to build a system of asymmetric resistance against an obviously stronger opponent can resort to such a strategy. Such a strategy is characterized by certain "premodern" elements used in (post)postmodern conditions. In the era of "post-Truth," the focus of such a strategy is on 'Truth' (Kavanagh and Rich, 2018), where some postulated and claimed 'Truth' becomes a prerequisite of success and a matter of contestation at the same time, especially in the context of universal and pervasive "informationalization" of combat space. The Gandhi case is an invariant of asymmetric *information war* in the broadest sense (and to some extent of "subconscious" resistance). During the expected "decline of conventional military power" (Betz, 2015), when informational (rather than material-kinetic) counteraction becomes increasingly important, such a war will be especially in demand. Such a strategy of "information resistance" can be used to deconstruct the enemy at the level of the basic codes determining its mode of action. The main difficulty today and the main condition for the possibility of employing a strategy of "information resistance" the Gandhian way is the ability to mobilize significant groups of the population ready to consistently "hold on to Truth," that is, the possibility of synchronized collective action in the public space. How realistic this is in modern conditions remains a big question.

It should be noted that such a strategy will not work against a 'symmetrically' thinking adversary (like Nazi Germany) in an existential conflict. Gandhi's opponent is the one who plays in the 'legal' field, who does not question one's own rightness ('Truth,' legitimacy) and fundamentally is not ready to put everything at stake. Gandhi's fight against the British Empire proved to be a classic example of how a weaker side can win a war against a stronger adversary when they fight "*different* wars" (Arreguin-Toft, 2005); presumably, for one of them, such a war must be existential.

If the problem is looked at more broadly, a strategy that includes some premodern elements in the (post)postmodernity age may prove quite applicable and consonant with the spirit of the times for a number of similar reasons. The premodern features of such a strategy—the 'external-internal' concept of territoriality—may prove to be the currently evolving and "mutating" formats of the use of military and other force that are considered fundamental (and unrivaled) elements of the basic military vocabulary and are firmly associated with (Western, European) modernity (see Biddle, 2006). Such alternative formats of the use force can give an idea of how to overcome and further reform the established canon and look for new forms in which military force can manifest itself.

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