The Natural/Neglected Relationship: Liberalism, Identity and India-Australia Relations

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Abstract:

Recent commentary on India-Australia relations has suggested that two states are ‘natural’ partners while arguing that the relationship is based on ‘shared values’ and ‘shared history’. Unusually, however, another crucial discursive strand in India-Australia relations has been that these two states have historically neglected one another, in ways that defy concepts of both national interest and liberal partnerships. The paradoxical juxtaposition of a natural/neglected partnership is yet to be adequately explained. We consider the historical construction of liberalism in both states as a facet of state identity to argue that far from creating a natural relationship through shared values, differing liberal identities have served to keep these two states apart. This is illustrated through case studies of divergent opinions over global security issues of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Introduction: the ‘natural’/‘neglected’ relationship?

The vision of Australia-India relations as ‘natural’ has become a common facet of political discourse on the relationship. On his recent visit to Australia, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2014a) argued that ‘This is a natural partnership arising from our shared values, interests and strategic maritime location’. Australia’s Prime Minster, Tony Abbott (2014a), remarked also that there was a ‘natural affinity’ between India and Australia when introducing Modi’s speech to the Australian parliament. Similarly, Australia’s Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop (2013) for instance, has argued that ‘Australia and India are natural partners to work together to resolve the issues facing the region’. Former Labor party foreign minister Stephen Smith (2010) argued that India and Australia’ relations would grow, ‘…not just because of India's rise, but because of the strong convergence of interests and values that we share: trade and investment, strategic and security, people to people links. We are natural partners’. This discourse explicitly outlines a confluence of interests and identities in contemporary international politics.

This characterisation of the India-Australia relationship as a ‘natural partnership’ has also been espoused by foreign policy commentators and academics. This goes back some time. P. V.
Rao (Rao, 2003) for instance, has suggested that India and Australia ‘can become natural partners’ in the Asia Pacific while Ramesh Thakur (Thakur, 2013) has argued the two are ‘natural allies’. Likewise, Rory Medcalf (Medcalf, 2010) has argued that the coupling of India and Australia is a ‘natural alliance’ that can lead regional architecture-building in the ‘Indo-Pacific’ region. The ‘natural partnership’ discourse rests on the idea that Australia and India share a common liberal identity with similar concerns with democracy, liberty and the rule of law which gives rise to similar foreign policy interests. At the same time, however, there exists a parallel discourse on the ‘neglected’ nature of this supposedly natural partnership. This narrative of India-Australia relations was confirmed in Tony Abbott’s (2014b) op-ed in *The Hindu*, in which he stated ‘[s]urprisingly, despite the deep ties that bind, we are not as close as we should be.’

For many scholars, Australia’s neglect of India has resulted in the weakness of the Australia-India relationship (Gurry, 1996). Marika Vicziany (2000) for instance, has suggested that Australia’s neglect has led to a ‘diplomatic vacuum’. Peter Mayer and Purnendra Jain (Mayer and Jain, 2010) have dissented from this orthodoxy, arguing that since the 1980s at least, India has neglected Australia far more than Australia neglects India. According to this literature, despite their ‘natural’ affinities, diverging foreign policy interests have long kept India and Australia apart. Hence, for instance, Nihal Kurrupu’s (2004) study of India-Australia relations from 1947 to 1975 explains the Cold War divergence as resulting from India’s non-alignment and the hope for peace through the UN and Australia’s preference for continuing its close association with the US and the UK. Likewise, Raja Mohan and Medcalf (2014: 16) point to a ‘Cold War history of mistrust and mutual indifference’. Meg Gurry (1992) argues that the roles played by Menzies and Nehru in the 1950s and 1960s are central to understanding the weakness of India-Australia relations. She emphasizes the personal disconnect between Menzies and Nehru, arguing that leadership may be crucial in determining bilateral outcomes.

Given however that the personal animosity between Menzies and Nehru dates to the 1950s and the Cold War ended in 1989, these accounts give us few clues as to why the relationship has remained neglected in the last two decades under very different leaderships and international structural contexts. Percival Wood and Leach (2011), for instance, have noted the
regularity with which Australian politicians have called for a ‘redefinition’ and ‘reinvigoration’ of India-Australia ties. Moreover, the end of the Cold War and India’s turn to market-led economic growth strategies since the 1990s has created the context for greater economic and political convergence. Despite this however, two-way trade has been falling and India and Australia continue to take divergent views on major issues in international politics such as for instance, the Transpacific Partnership, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran’s nuclear program and Russian actions in Ukraine.

We argue in this paper that contrary to the discourse of a ‘natural partnership’, Australian and Indian foreign policy interests have diverged because their liberal identities diverge in significant ways. These liberal identities were initially formed through differing experiences of the colonial encounter which has given rise to different liberal agendas with distinct traditions, interests and values. We argue here, that this has led to Australia’s acceptance and defence of a hierarchical order led by ‘the west’ and India’s consistent attempts to challenge this order. To illustrate this argument we adopt a postcolonial critical constructivist framework of analysis, which we lay out in the first part of this paper. Following this, we examine the historical construction of liberal identities in India and Australia, considering Australia’s racialized liberalism and India’s postcolonial liberalism. In the second half of the paper, we take up two case studies on nuclear non-proliferation and Russia’s actions in Ukraine in 2014 to investigate the ways in which the divergence in their foreign policy interests reflects their divergent liberal identities.

Analysing India-Australia Relations: A Postcolonial Critical Constructivist Approach

The puzzle presented by a simultaneously natural and neglected relationship leads us to examine India-Australia relations through a postcolonial critical constructivist approach. This approach emphasizes the historical construction of India and Australia’s liberal identities and their impact on foreign policy and perceptions of security. Constructivist approaches have become an influential in International Relations (IR) because they offer a way to take into account the role of ideas, culture and identity in the analysis of state behaviour. The particular approach adopted here draws on the basic constructivist insight that foreign policy interests are
socially constructed rather than pre-given by material capabilities and a concern with state survival (Wendt, 1999). Constructivist scholars, however, differ in their understanding of how foreign policy interests are constructed. ‘Conventional’ constructivist scholars, like Wendt, argue that states’ identities and therefore their foreign policy interests are created through their interaction with other states in the modern state system (Wendt, 1999). In this account, states have a foundational ‘corporate’ identity consisting of basic behaviours such as power-seeking and egoism that are shaped by the international system (Wendt, 1999: 195-8). This is the product of Wendt’s focus on creating a systemic theory of international politics. Hence he argues that a ‘theory of the states system need no more explain the existence of states than one of society need explain that of people’ (Wendt, 1994: 385). For Wendt (Wendt, 1999: 318-43) states interact with each other in particular ‘cultures of anarchy’ – classed as Hobbesian (based on enmity), Lockean (based on rivalry) and Kantian (based on friendship) - which determine the nature of their relations. This abstract approach does not take us very far in explaining the strength or weakness of particular types of relationships between states (eg. weak friendship, strong rivalry, indifference) and nor does it provide a sufficient explanation as to why states imbibe particular cultures of anarchy in relation to one another in the first place.

‘Critical’ constructivism on the other hand, is an agent-centred approach which argues that foreign policy makers are not blank canvases prior to interstate interaction but, rather, usually have a well-developed understanding of the world and their state’s place in it which is shaped by domestic and international political, historical and cultural contexts (Weldes, 1999: 9). A postcolonial critical constructivist approach is one that couples a ‘constructivist method’, with ‘Postcolonialism’s interpretation of world politics’ (Ling, 2002: 61). By recognising modernity as ‘congenitally’ (Shilliam, 2013: 1133) colonial in its constitution, a postcolonial interpretation of world politics brings to the fore the colonial and imperial contexts in which the modern state system was formed and which continue to shape inter-state relations through a hierarchical ordering of states and societies premised on the basis of ‘Western distinctiveness’ ‘which takes Western agency and ideas as the only serious site of politics’ (Sabaratnam, 2013: 270). Hence, a postcolonial approach recognises the modern international order as consisting of hierarchical, rather than anarchical, systems of sovereign states.
There is now a burgeoning literature which recognises that hierarchy and not just anarchy is an enduring characteristic of the international system (eg. Donnelly, 2006, Goh, 2008, Hobson and Sharman, 2005). In hierarchical systems, unlike anarchical systems, dominant states acquire the ability to command while subordinate states accept a duty to obey through the exercise of legitimate authority (Lake, 2013: 74, Hobson and Sharman, 2005: 69-70). Much of the literature on hierarchy in the contemporary international order is focussed on how hierarchical sub-systems are built and maintained through the construction of legitimate authority through contracts and bargains based on rational utility maximisation (eg. Lake, 2013) and logics of appropriateness based on identities and cultural or normative deference (eg. Sharman, 2012). Less often explored is how and why states resist being incorporated into hierarchical orders. Moreover, the key assumption in much of this literature is that of ‘hierarchy in anarchy’ (Donnelly, 2006). Yet as Hinnebusch (2011: 213) has argued, seen from the global South, rather than there being elements of hierarchy within anarchy, it is ‘more accurate to say that there are elements of anarchy (at the regional level) within a global hierarchy’. Hinnebusch’s (2011: 215-6) conceptualisation of global hierarchy however is a structuralist, core-periphery model based on a hierarchical economic division of labour which is legitimised by concessions and bargains in client-patron style relations. Taking the Middle East as his case study, Hinnebusch (2011: 229-33) conceptualises resistance within this global hierarchy as attempts to build regional autonomy through the articulation of a regional identity and endogenous economic development, but argues that the success of such resistance is usually fleeting because of material structural constraints. The postcolonial critical constructivist approach taken here understands this global hierarchy to be both material and ideational because it is based on a global economic hierarchy as well as a global cultural hierarchy, both of which are underpinned by the notion of Western distinctiveness. Whereas Australia, through its alliance relationship with the United States, has acquiesced in the creation of a regional hierarchical sub-system which maintained an American-led liberal international order, India has challenged this order in various ways, with some success, in both the Cold War and post-Cold War periods and continues to do so (contrary to Goh, 2008: 360). The different approaches taken by Australia and India to the liberal international order reflect their differing experiences with imperialism. As we shall see in the remainder of this paper, these historical processes shape the approach taken by states to their foreign policies, and, indeed, to one another. A postcolonial interpretation allows us to view the
historical construction of liberal identities in India and Australia under colonial-modern rule in both the past and the present.

**Constructing Liberal Identities in India and Australia**

**India, Liberalism and Empire**

Liberal theory, as Pitts (2006: 5) has argued, ‘has been constituted by its engagement with politics’ and the consolidation of empire has been key to this process. The colonial encounter brought not just political and economic subjugation to India but a new liberal language of equality and rights that challenged many existing socio-cultural practices and ideas. An oft-repeated claim is that Indian leaders like Nehru and Gandhi were liberals who turned the liberal values of the British against themselves in their fight against colonial rule. Tony Abbott (2014b) drew on this claim in his speech to the Australian parliament during the visit by Narendra Modi: ‘Australians admired the way India won independence – not by rejecting the values learned from Britain, but by appealing to them…’. However, as Mehta (1999: 10) notes, this is a partial and misleading reading that overlooks the significant reconstitution that liberal theory, both in India and globally, underwent as a result of the encounter with the politics of anticolonialism (Bayly, 2012: 4). Rather than simply rejecting liberalism or accepting it unquestioningly, Indian political leaders engaged ‘with the specific nature of Indian society, its immediate political history and predicament, its cultural past and inheritance’ in order to layer familiar concepts with ‘new meanings and signification’ (Mahajan, 2013: 7-8). They did so by reflecting on and critiquing colonial rule and the liberal ideas that accompanied it, using resources from indigenous and Western traditions, and memories and representations of the past, and in order to reconstruct liberal discourse in an ‘intellectual assault’ against the ‘policies, moral character and culture of their rulers’ (Bayly, 2012: 3). In the Constituent Assembly debates of 1946-50 for instance, the appropriateness of democracy for India was justified in part with references to traditions of democratic assemblies in ancient India (Jaffrelot, 2010: 208-9). Nehru’s (1974: 42) engagement with liberal ideas drew on what he called, a ‘strange medley’ of ‘Buddha, Marx, Gandhi’ and the conceptions of freedom, equality and diversity that he and other Indian leaders developed were centred around the community rather than the individual and the market, which gave rise to
distinctive domestic governance practices in independent India (Chacko, 2011)(Mahajan, 2013: 128). This inflection of Western liberal ideas is broadly termed here, ‘postcolonial liberalism’. Hence, for example, Gandhi argued that

the British system seems to be designed to crush the very life out of the [people]. Even the salt [one] must use to live is so taxed. . . . The drink and drug revenue, too, is derived from the poor. It saps the foundations both of their health and morals. It is defended under the false plea of individual freedom. . . . The inequalities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstratively the most expensive in the world. . . . (Quoted in Chakrabarty, 2006: 50).

Gandhi’s objection here is not to the idea of individual freedom or to the inadequate application of the principle of individual freedom but to a conception of individual freedom that does not see the individual as a part of a larger totality, an interpretation which has resulted in both inequality and imperialism.¹

As Hobson and Sharman (Hobson and Sharman, 2005: 88) have argued, the imperial hierarchy of the 18th and 19th centuries was based on the ideology of liberal imperialism and the idea ‘that Western states were progressive and economically successful because they were liberal, while Eastern states were imagined as but tyrannical regimes that stifled economic progress’. Within this imperial hierarchy, India was positioned as a stagnant, backward civilisation which required paternalistic guidance (Eg. Mill, 1975). In rejecting British renderings of India’s past as irretrievably backward, pointing to the failures of the British colonial regime in providing material betterment for India, and to the connections between liberalism, imperialism, facism and war, Indian leaders challenged the intellectual basis of imperial hierarchy. Moreover, they recognised that the end of formal colonialism and the delegitimisation of imperialism did not mean an end to imperial hierarchy but rather gave rise to ‘informal hierarchies’ in great power alliance systems and international institutions, whereby formal and universal state sovereignty coexists with practices that continue to perpetuate hierarchies premised on Western distinctiveness (Hobson and Sharman, 2005: 93). Post-independence Indian governments have consistently challenged the informal hierarchies that have characterised the post-World War II

¹ Whether or not Gandhi can be labelled ‘liberal’ is a matter of contention. Anthony Parel (1997) for instance, reads Gandhi as a liberal given his focus on rights. Ajay Skaria (2002) argues that Gandhi’s English writings emphasised his convergence with Western liberalism while his Gujarati writings reveal his distance from it and he has recently termed Gandhi’s thought, ‘radical conservatism’. C.A. Bayly prefers the term ‘counter-liberalism’ to describe Gandhi’s thought and its deep inflection of liberalism. Bayly’s interpretation of Gandhi fits the inflected liberalism that we term here postcolonial liberalism.
liberal international order by adopting policies aimed at building counter-hegemonic coalitions, securing India’s autonomy as an international actor and shaping international institutions. In other words, resistance and recognition defined India’s postcolonial liberal identity.

Hence, for instance, Nehru’s foreign policy tenets of Panchsheel (five principles of peaceful coexistence) and nonalignment were developed through readings of ancient Indian history, Marx, Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore and aimed at challenging a Cold War politics of alliance and collective defence pacts which perpetuated informal hierarchies while creating new antagonisms and conflicts (Chacko, 2012: Ch. 3). Moreover, independent India engaged with the newly created institutions of the post-World War Two era in ways that sought to address global material inequality and racism. For instance, India was an active participant at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference where it attempted and, on occasion, succeeded in shaping the Articles of Agreement of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to benefit ‘developing’ countries, taking advantage of the Cold War competition between the US and the Soviet Union to do so (Kirk, 2011: 11). At the United Nations, India was heavily involved in the establishment of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and used the first session of the UN to raise the issue of South Africa’s Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act, a precursor to apartheid (Bhagavan, 2008). Nehru saw the HRC as a first step toward establishing the UN as ‘a world republic in which all States, independent States are represented and to which they may be answerable on occasions’ (Nehru, 1984: 216-7). India also helped to establish the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Group of 77 at UNCTAD’s first session in 1964 and Indian diplomats were active in the drafting documents calling for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974.

As we will show in the next section through case studies on India’s continued resistance to the non-proliferation regime and its approach to Russia, India’s liberal identity continues to be inflected through its anti-colonial/postcolonial politics and its foreign policy remains focussed on contesting the informal hierarchies that persist in the ordering of international politics.

*Australia, Liberalism and Empire*
As with India, Australia’s liberal identity developed in the context of the British empire. It did so, however, in a markedly different manner as Australian society developed through settler-colonial discourses, whereas India’s liberalism took shape through its anti-colonial discourses. This vision of Britain settling an empty, uninhabited continent is still a facet of contemporary political discourse (Abbott, 2014c). Australia’s fears of Asian settlement were visible throughout the 19th century, with the use of non-white, including Indian, labour only allowed when strict regulations were placed on forcing these ‘coolies’ to return to their port of origin (Davis, 2013). Srdjan Vucetic (2013: 119) has shown how in the 1880s Anglo-American liberals consistently argued that Anglo-Saxon supremacy was necessary for the future of world affairs and for ‘the progress of mankind’. This was very much a liberal imperialist vision, which Australia was a part of. Indeed, until the 1940s Australia did not even see itself as a sovereign state, rather as part of a vast imperial system (MacDonald and O’Connor 2013: 185) and occasionally even a ‘Greater Britain’ (Bell, 2007). This liberal narrative of progress, though, was tied up in colonial visions of the ‘White Man’s Burden’ and the period of liberal empire, in which it was thought the US and the UK had to lead the rest of the world (by force if necessary) to liberalism and democracy.

This narrative played out in particular ways in Australia. In the context of World War One, in rebutting arguments that Australia was detached from conflict, Prime Minister Billy Hughes (in Burke, 2003: 51) wondered if ‘those who think Australia remote from the world which hatches dangers and wars ever looked at the map.’ Australia’s isolation from Europe during this period may have been a cause for celebration and security. Hughes (in Burke, 2003, 51), however, was concerned that Australia was ‘but a tiny drop in a colour ocean.’ This fear of Australia’s Asian geography and this racialized vision of liberalism can be seen clearly through White Australia policy. The first bill to pass the newly sovereign parliament was Immigration Restriction Act. Australia’s defence of this policy was often framed as a mere economic imperative: not wishing to take too many poor immigrants so as to protect of Australia’s budding egalitarian society. Menzies (1949) argued in his victorious electoral campaign in 1949:

The strength and history of our race have been founded upon this vital principle. We will continue to maintain Australia’s settled immigration policy, known as ‘The White Australia Policy’; well justified as it is on grounds of national homogeneity and economic standards.
This vision of a prosperous, economically vibrant society was tethered to racialized understandings of who could economically succeed. The economic defence of the White Australia policy was obviously racial however, as wealthy people from Asia could not emigrate, but comparatively poor Europeans were allowed to.

This racialized liberalism was offensive to India. In 1949, Nehru was asked if he saw a place for a ‘White Australia in Asia?’ to which he responded he could understand the desire for slow development of Australia’s population, but not on racial grounds. This was grossly misinterpreted as support by Herbert ‘Doc’ Evatt, and so Nehru (1949) clarified ‘I stated that I could understand an emigration policy based on economic considerations with a view to maintain certain standards and ways of living, but that I thought a racial policy was wrong and to be deprecated.’ Nehru was relatively quiet on this topic, but his resistance was summed up well by Nehru (1954: 315) at Bandung, in which he argued:

The problem of racialism and racial separation may become more dangerous than any other problem that the world has to face… They hurt us. Simply because we cannot do anything effective, and we do not want to cheapen ourselves by mere shouting, we remain quiet. But the thing has gone deep down into our minds and hearts. We feel it strongly.

Even though India was more focused on the very serious issues of racial discrimination in South Africa, the policy led India to look upon Australia as a colonial backwater.

Australia maintained the White Australia policy until the 1970s. With the dismantling of this policy, though the identity debate on Australia’s position between ‘Asia’ and ‘Europe’ continued It now plays out in debate on Australia’s role in the world, and is seen particularly in a discourse of Australia choosing between its ‘history’ and its ‘geography’ (Howard, 2006). Australia’s so-called ‘familial’ connection to the US and the UK was Australia’s region strengthened the intensity with which Australia’s Asian geography was perceived as threatening. By so rigorously defending Australia’s ‘integrity’, a sense of order was maintained. For a counterpoint, we can point to another Anglo-American settler-colonial society, Canada, which was prepared to unwind such immigration policies far earlier, at least partly geographical distance removed the intensity of the threats (Atchison, 2009: 4-32).
The formation of a racialized liberalism has long been central to Australia’s development, and has played out in Australia’s selection of ‘great and powerful friends’ throughout its history. It is telling in this sense that the one major change in Australian foreign policy was from one Anglo-American power (the UK) to another (the US). This historical preference for the Anglo-American powers might have been diluted slightly by the identity project of Paul Keating (1996), claiming Australia as ‘part of Asia’. This narrative of Australian identity placed it at the crossroads of two broader civilizations, with the ability to ‘bridge’ the two of them. Even within this discourse, however, Australia had to be ‘secure it [its] identity’, an implication that the opportunities presented to Australia as part of Asia were tempered by a sense that the ‘rise’ of Asian powers was threatening (Brookes, 2012).

Australia’s racialized liberalism continued to play out in its domestic politics. The bicentenary of Australia’s ‘settlement’ in 1988 was met widespread celebration, in which Australia’s population celebrated its own inclusivity. As Vucetic (2013) points out, however, this celebration was met with protests by the Australian aboriginal community as its minority groups protested at the crippling and obvious inequities in Australia society. Australia (as with the US and the UK) is now frequently defined themselves as ‘post-racial’ or as a colour blind society. John Howard in particularly sought to further align Australia with its Anglo-American partners (Gulmanelli, 2014). Ongoing fears of multiculturalism, though, have been consistently voiced by the Australia’s conservatives (see Johnson, 2007), arguing that this model has failed, and that, as Tony Abbott has put it, minorities (particularly Islamic Australians) need to join ‘Team Australia’ (The Australian, 2014). Australia’s foreign policy has treated the rise of Asia as both allowing economic opportunities (through greater liberalisation of trade policies) but with considerable sense of geopolitical threat. Australia has transactional relationships with Asia (Thakur, 2013b), but regards itself as having familial connections with the US and the UK. In this sense, Australia’s liberalism is still shaped by its racialized construction, despite its contemporary anti-racism. In terms of foreign policy, this identity leads Australia too seek security in the form of the US hegemony over world order, particularly over Australia’s Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific region.

Divergent Liberal Agendas and Foreign Policy
Russia and the Annexation of Crimea

India and Australia’s starkly contrasting reactions to Russia’s actions in Ukraine provides a strong example of the divergent liberal agendas that can be produced by liberal democratic states. In March 2014 Russia annexed the region of Crimea in Ukraine. The annexation followed the Ukraine parliament’s decision vote out of power its pro-Russian President, Viktor Yanukovych, moves by the pro-Russian Crimean parliament to secede from Ukraine and a Russian build-up of unmarked soldiers in Crimea. A variety of motives have been attributed to Russia to explain its actions. For some commentators, Russia’s actions are the result of the expansionist aspirations of a power in decline (Eg. Patrick, 2014), while for others they were a legitimate response to the threat posed to Russia’s core security interests by Western expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Eg. Mearsheimer, 2014).

The former interpretation has been adopted by Western states and allies, including Australia, which condemned both the annexation and the referendum that legitimised Crimea’s secession to Russia as contrary to international law. According to Australia’s Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop: ‘International law does not allow one state to steal the territory of another on the basis of a referendum that cannot be considered free or fair’ (Wroe, 2014). Australia was one of 100 countries to vote in favour of a United Nations General Assembly Resolution which rejected recognition for Russia’s annexation and the referendum. Along with the United States and Europe, it imposed targeted financial sanctions and travel bans against key individuals and companies associated with the Russian regime. Australia also (unsuccessfully) attempted to prevent Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, from attending the Group of 20 summit held in Australia in November, 2014.

India resisted preventing Putin’s attendance at the G20. Indeed, India’s reaction to Russia’s annexation of Crimea surprised some Western commentators (Stravers and Harris, 2014). India was one of 58 countries to abstain on the UN resolution condemning the Crimea annexation and referendum and it has refused to be party to sanctions against Russia. Commenting on the events in Crimea in March 2014, India’s former national security advisor, Shivshankar Menon even stated that, ‘[t]here are legitimate Russian and other interests involved
and we hope they are discussed and resolved’ (‘Russian Interests in Crimea ‘Legitimate’: India,' 2014). India’s new government, elected in May, has maintained this approach to Russia with its new Prime Minister, Narendra Modi describing Russia as ‘India’s closest friend, and the preferred strategic partner’ (Holodny, 2014).

India’s distance from other liberal democratic countries in relation to Russia has been explained as a somewhat inexplicable ‘hangover’ from the Cold War, during which India and Russia developed close ties, or as a reflection of India and Russia’s burgeoning contemporary economic and other links (Stravers and Harris, 2014, 'India's Balancing Act in Crimea Crisis,' 2014). Russia has emerged as a source of energy supplies for India and is also a key source of sensitive defence technologies. However, India’s economic ties with the West and its allies, like Japan, dwarf its economic links with Russia. India’s total trade with Russia in 2013-14 stood at a paltry $US 6 billion while its trade with Australia was double this at $US 12 billion. India’s trade with Japan is also higher at $ US 16 billion. The United States is India’s third largest overall trading partner, with $US 61 billion in overall trade, and it is the biggest destination for India’s exports. Russia still remains a small player in India’s energy market, which is heavily reliant on West Asia but is increasingly diversifying its sources to South America and Africa.\(^2\) In addition, Russia is facing increasing competition from Israel and the United States as India’s largest defence supplier. The Defence Technology and Trade Initiative, which was established in 2012 by the new US Defence Secretary (who was then Deputy Defence Secretary), Ashton Carter, promises to increase trade and technology transfers between the US and India. None of this however, has led India to dilute its relationship with Russia.

Rather, a closer examination of Indian statements suggest that it views Russia as key to its broader, long-term goal of challenging global hierarchy through the creation of what its officials have termed, a ‘polycentric’ world order (Menon, 2012, Mukherjee, 2007). The India-Russia joint statement released during Vladimir Putin’s visit to India in December 2014, committed both countries to building such an order:

Reaffirming their commitment to upholding the principles of international law and promoting the central role of the UN in international relations, India and Russia will work together to

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\(^2\) All of these statistics are taken from the Indian Department of Commerce website: http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/iecntq.asp
promote a polycentric and democratic world order based on shared interests of all countries. The
two countries will work for democratization of global political, economic, financial and social
institutions so that these institutions better represent the aspirations and interests of all segments
of the international community (Government of India and Government of Russia, 2014).

In a manner consistent with a postcolonial liberal tradition in which contemporary political ideas
are legitimised and shaped by locating their precursors in ancient India, Shivshankar Menon
(2012), has argued that a polycentric order is in line with India’s historical ‘tradition and culture
of thought’ and distinct from the hierarchical traditions of other countries:

When we in India call for a plural, inclusive and open security architecture in the Indo-Pacific we
are well within a tradition and culture of thought which was relativistic, idea driven and omni-
directional. Other traditions, which are more hierarchical, claiming universal validity, find
these ideas hard to understand. (And we are shocked when they do not espouse what to
us are our eminently sensible views!) Friends tell me that Chola, Pandyan and Oriya
manuscripts and inscriptions are early examples of what the free flow of goods, ideas and
people could achieve -- the ancient version of the open, inclusive architecture that we speak of
today.

Keeping with this conception of a polycentric world order, the Chairman of India’s National
Security Advisory Board, Shyam Saran (Quoted in Sharma, 2013), has praised Russia’s growing
profile in Central Asia and its heightened global presence, as evidenced by its role in ‘managing’
the Syrian conflict. Saran further encouraged Russia to take a more active role in the ‘emerging
theatre of the Indo-Pacific’ in the interests of creating a more ‘balanced security architecture’.
The 2014 India-Russia joint statement affirmed a joint commitment to:

the evolution of an open, balanced and inclusive security architecture in the Asia Pacific region
based on collective efforts, considering legitimate interests of all states of the region and guided by
respect for norms and principles of international law (Government of India and Government of
Russia, 2014).

Russia’s affirmation of Indian conceptions of regional and international order is reminiscent of
its approach to India in the Cold War. During the Cold War, as Muppidi (1999: 136-7) has
argued, the Soviet Union built a shared anticolonial identity with India by acknowledging
lingering informal international hierarchies in the international system and supporting India’s
attempts to challenge them without seeking changes in Indian domestic and international policies
to bring them in line with those of the Soviet Union. Countries like Australia and the United
States, however, regarded India’s anti-colonialism as misguided and a distraction from the key
issue of the communist threat to a liberal international order and they actively sought policy
changes to force India’s conformity to their economic and political policy precepts (Muppidi, 1999: 141). This was the product of the racialized liberal universalism that underpinned the state identities of Australia and the United States.

In contrast to Indian officials, Australian officials have treated Russia’s actions in Crimea as part of a broader belligerent strategy that once again challenges a US-led liberal international order that Australia remains committed to. In stark contrast to recent Indian statements on Russia, Australia has sought to isolate Russia, presenting it as a threat to regional security and tried to shore up the West-centred liberal order by strengthening existing regional security arrangements based on the US alliance. According to Australia’s ambassador to the UN, Gary Quinlan, for instance,

In pursuing its current course of action Russia has chosen a path towards isolation. In doing so it undermines its own standing, credibility and relations with other states and increasingly poses a threat to security and stability in the region. Inevitably, there are consequences for its unlawful actions (Kukolja, 2014).

While Australia’s attempt to bar Putin from the G20 meet failed, a trilateral was held on the sidelines of the meet, after which the liberal troika of Australia, the United States and Japan issued a statement criticising ‘Russia's purported annexation of Crimea and its actions to destabilize eastern Ukraine’ and announcing expanded military cooperation (Spetalnick and Siegel, 2014). Contrary to Indian visions for regional security architecture, Australia’s conceptions of the Indo-Pacific do not include a role for Russia but instead rest on the traditional pillars of Australian foreign policy, enmeshment with Asia alongside the US alliance. The key countries in Australia’s Indo-Pacific vision are India, Japan, the United States and a China that is to be engaged and integrated into the existing liberal order. As Australia’s Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2014) put it in a speech during a visit to India:

...the shift of economic weight to the Indo-Pacific region is accompanied by strategic change. Here too, on strategic and security matters, Australian and Indian interests are converging as never before. Namely, to protect and promote the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. I pay tribute to India’s leadership in this in the Indian Ocean, and to India’s strengthening ‘Look East’ policy as evident in Prime Minister Modi’s successful visit to Japan. In this endeavour we are not alone. Australia and India have shared interests in continued US engagement in the region.

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3 Australian, Canadian and British diplomats frequently voiced their frustration with India’s perceived ‘obsession’ with colonialism, and urged them to focus on fighting the Cold War with them. See: Crocker, 1961. For an examination of the US relationship, see Rotter, 2000.
just as we both do in a China that makes a positive contribution to stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

As we argue in the next section, distinctive foreign policy interests emerging from India and Australia’s divergent liberal identities can also be discerned in issues of nuclear non-proliferation.

**Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Uranium Sales**

The trade in nuclear materials and global regimes regulating nuclear proliferation (the NPT and CTBT) has been a long-standing difficulty in India-Australia relations. One element of this long-standing difference of opinion has recently been overcome, with Australia agreeing to sell uranium to India. In Australia, this move has been interpreted primarily as an important step-forward for the relationship and the removal of an impediment to closer relations. Indeed, this language appears in the joint statement, which announced the civil nuclear agreement, which noted the deal as ‘a concrete symbol of the bilateral partnership’ (Abbott and Modi, 2014). This has been the case in India as well, and, indeed, this decision marked a significant change in the relationship. In India, however, this deal was also perceived as part of India’s effort to disrupt the global nuclear hierarchy. This comes into clearer focus once we consider India’s long-term resistance to global nuclear regimes and Australia acquiescence to US-led nuclear hegemony.

For much of its history, postcolonial India has denounced the global nuclear order as ‘nuclear apartheid’. As Biswas (2001) has argued, this label clearly defines the nuclear order as discriminatory and colonial. Australia, however, has sought to champion such an order while hoping, albeit with some anxieties, to position themselves under the US ‘nuclear umbrella’ through the rhetoric of ‘extended deterrence’ (Cohen and O’Neil, 2014 and Cohen, 2014: 113). Muppidi (2005: 286) has argued that India’s 1998 decision to test nuclear weapons as an ‘apt manifestation of a postcolonial state’s deep ambivalence towards a colonial order of governance’. India had hoped for an equal world order in which no state had exclusive rights to nuclear weapons. The regimes formed by CTBT and the NPT, however, legitimated the permanent five members of the UNSC to allow for a nuclear order informed by a clear, and in this case formalized, hierarchy. The US, UK, France, Russia and China had special rights to hold nuclear weapons while instituting treaties which prevented further proliferation from other states.
The rhetoric of nuclear apartheid dissipated following Vajpayee government’s decision to test a weaponized nuclear device in 1998. Jaswant Singh (1998) declared that India’s nuclear explosion had ended the discriminatory order. In response to this test, the Australian Government (1998) argued that:

The Government considers that India's actions could have the most damaging consequences for security in South Asia and globally… India must immediately sign the CTBT, join the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and forswear forever the use of nuclear weapons.

Australia’s response has been thought of as far harsher than its western contemporaries (Kaul, 2000: 365). Australia suspended all non-humanitarian aid to India and all ministerial, ended all defence collaboration with India and removed, perhaps forcibly, all Indian defence personnel in Australian colleges (Kremmer, 1998).

Following this nuclear test, though, the perseverance of a nuclear hierarchy can be seen most clearly in the NPT and the regulation of nuclear materials. India is still maligned within global regimes guiding uranium trade and concepts of ‘legitimate’ nuclear powers. By seeking deals with Australia and the US on nuclear trade, India has sought to mitigate its marginalization within the global nuclear hierarchy as well as reshape relations with Australia and the US. For example, when defending his deal with the US, Manmohan Singh (2007) stressed India’s continued independence in the Lok Sabha that:

Our right to use… our independent and indigenously developed nuclear facilities has been fully preserved… India is too large and too important a country to have the independence of its foreign policy taken away by any power… There is independence in our thought and independence in our actions.

Where Singh emphasized India’s independence to his domestic audience, Modi has been relatively silent on the NPT since taking power, there has been no hint of a shift in India’s position. On one occasion, when pressed on the issue in Japan, however, Modi (2014b) argued that India’s ‘commitment to non-violence is total’, and that the ‘DNA of Indian society and this is above any international treaty’. Here, Modi evoked a Gandhian narrative of Indian society in which India is so committed to non-violence it is able to transcend the concept of the NPT.
A more concrete example came in October 2014 following a UN vote on the NPT, after which the Indian government provided an oft-repeated reasoning or India’s (2014) continued refusal to sign the NPT:

India’s position on the NPT is well-known. There is no question of India joining the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. Nuclear weapons are an integral part of India’s national security and will remain so, pending non-discriminatory and global nuclear disarmament.

Almost identical language was used under Manmohan Singh (Government of India, 2009). The President of India’s Atomic Energy Commission R. K. Sinha (2014) showed India’s objections more clearly, when asked about India signing the NPT due to its deal with Australia. He argued that:

We cannot sign the NPT… having been a strong supporter of the non-discriminatory regime. We will be bound by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards in respect of facilities in which these equipment, material or fuel will be used if they are coming through the international cooperation but not beyond that.

On this matter, and on the wording of India’s justification, there has been quite literally no movement. As with the US deal, the India-Australia nuclear deal has been interpreted as both an improvement in bilateral relations and a continuation resistance to the hierarchical/colonial nature of the international system. Despite these nuclear deals, though, India maintains its treatment of the NPT as discriminatory. It is here that a further motivation for India’s US and Australia nuclear deals becomes clear: creating a more equal playing field and levelling the global nuclear hierarchy.

For India, a postcolonial liberal world order demands dismantling the nuclear hierarchy. As Modi (2014a) argued in his address to the Australian parliament, the world needs to create a ‘currency of co-existence and cooperation; in which all nations, small and big, abide by international law and norms’. For Australia, only nuclear weapons states at the top of this hierarchy that embody western exceptionalism are forces for global stability. As the Australian defence department (2013) has argued, short of a world free of nuclear weapons, ‘Australia’s security benefits from extended nuclear deterrence under the US alliance.’ Australia submitted to the US Nuclear Posture Review process in 2009 that ‘in assuring very close allies, like Australia, that they do not need to develop their own nuclear weapons’ (O’Neil, 2013: 113) Australia has applied similar safeguards to both the US and the UK as it does to India, yet it has consistently seen these states’ nuclear weapons as a force for its own security. Australia has viewed a
hierarchical global nuclear with its chosen western-liberal partners in control as a means for security, and sought to be protected by it without having to enter into it. India, however, has viewed this order as discriminatory, colonial, illiberal and consistently sought to undermine and dismantle it.

**Conclusion: Colonial histories and India-Australia relations**

In 2014, Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister since Rajiv Gandhi to come to Australia. He became the first Indian Prime Minister to address both houses of the Australian parliament. Both evoked colonial histories in their addresses as they sought to create a deeper relationship. When introducing Modi, Abbott (2014a) pointed to a number of commonalities between India and Australia, including language, Westminster democracy, an ocean and a national day, but he noted that ‘above all’ Australia and India ‘share a history’. Modi (2014a) similarly argued that India is ‘linked to Australia by the great Indian Ocean; by our connected history and our many shared inheritances - and, even more by our deeply interlinked destinies.’ Yet where Abbott cited various wars in defence of the British empire as evidence of this shared history, Modi referenced the ‘First War of Indian Independence’ and an Australian lawyer’s defence of a leading Indian figure in this war, the Rani of Jhansi:

> More than 150 years ago, an Australian novelist and lawyer John Lang fought the legal battle for a brave Indian freedom fighter, the Queen of Jhansi, Rani Laxmi Bai against the British East India Company in India’s first War of Independence. He also lies buried in the Indian hill town of Mussoorie.

The broader Australian colonies’ response to the Indian Rebellion was, of course, to assist the British in putting down the ‘mutiny’ (Davis, 2011: 72-100). This example is illustrative: even as ties between the two states escalate, when they talk of shared values, liberalism, democracy and colonial histories, they frequently arrive at different endpoints, revealing the ideational ambivalences within the relationship.

Modi (2014a) went on in this speech to note that while India and Australia should both play a role in ensuring peace and security in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region, ‘we do not have to rely on borrowed architecture of the past. Nor do we have the luxury to choose who we work with and who we don't’. As we have shown in this paper, India remains resistant to the
NPT, a regime it has long regarded as enshrining otherwise informal hierarchies in international politics, and it has used the establishment of new or expanded regional institutions that involve countries like Russia and China, like the New Development Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Fund. This has been done in order to bring about a polycentric world order with multiple states forming multiple centres of power. Australia, however, has consistently sought protect the US (and earlier UK) led liberal global order. Since the end of the Cold War, Australia has sought to accommodate India and China within this hegemonic world order so as to prevent its ultimate demise. India, on the other hand, has consistently opposed this structure, seeking a polycentric order by seeking to form selective coalitions that benefit its domestic economic goals while undermining existing hierarchies. Contemporary claims to a shared identity and shared interests are at best murky: India has consistently aimed for a diffuse, polycentric world order with China and India the key players in Asia rather than an external hegemon. This vision of world order has always caused Australia considerable anxiety.

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