

Modi's India in the Global Pecking Order

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Abstract

As it ascends the global pecking order, India collides against other aspirants. This essay evaluates the Narendra Modi government's performance against the promises contained in the election manifesto of the ruling *Bharatiya Janata Party*. It assesses the hurdles before India's ambition and the continuity and change in foreign policy, and argues that success depends more on governance than policy prescriptions.

In foreign affairs, Modi has drawn upon India's counter-narrative to the West-centric view of history, and upon the rich interventions India has offered to the world. The pillars of his foreign policy are 'soft power', economic transformation, and strategic capacity-building. Through energetic diplomacy and a willingness to assume greater international responsibility, India is intent on shifting from the role of a 'balancer' to 'leader'.

Modi demonstrates continuity in foreign policy objectives: ensuring that the neighbourhood remains peaceful, secure and stable; securing inward foreign investment, and increasing India's influence.

Modi has lent urgency to the pursuit of foreign and security policies as 'enablers' in the transformation of India. By getting tied to domestic policy, foreign policy has woven itself into the people's consciousness.

But in an unpredictable international system, can Modi see through his foreign policy initiatives into the end of his term in 2019? The challenge is not merely to augur in 'smart diplomacy', but bring all stakeholders into a governance structure for the transformation of India.

With the consolidation of national strength, India is at the centre of the international security architecture. If India were to become the world power it aspires to be, Modi needs to seize the moment.

Resumo

A Índia na Hierarquia da Ordem Global

À medida que vai ascendendo na hierarquia da ordem internacional, a Índia colide com outros competidores. Este artigo avalia o desempenho do governo de Narendra Modi tendo por base as promessas constantes no manifesto eleitoral do partido do governo, o Bharatiya Janata. Analisam-se as barreiras à ambição da Índia e a continuidade e mudança na sua política externa, defendendo-se que o sucesso depende mais da governação do que de prescrições políticas.

No campo da política externa, Modi socorreu-se de uma contra narrativa à visão ocidental da história e dos relevantes contributos que a Índia tem dado ao mundo. Os pilares da sua política externa são o soft power, a transformação económica e um capacity-building estratégico. Através de uma diplomacia muito ativa e determinada em assumir uma maior responsabilidade internacional, a intenção da Índia é a de deixar de ser um "equilibrador" para passar a ser um "líder".

Modi tem demonstrado uma continuidade quanto à prossecução dos objetivos de política externa, garantindo que a região permanece pacífica, segura e estável e assegurando a captação de investimento externo e incrementando a influência do país.

Modi conferiu um carácter de urgência à consecução de políticas externas e de segurança como "catalisadores" da transformação da Índia. Ao ligar a política externa à política interna, a primeira enlaçou-se na consciência da população.

Mas num sistema internacional imprevisível, poderá Modi alcançar os objetivos de política externa no final do seu mandato em 2019? O desafio não se centra apenas na smart diplomacy, mas em procurar agregar todos os agentes intervenientes numa estrutura governativa em prol da transformação da Índia.

Com a consolidação do seu poder nacional a Índia está no centro da arquitetura de segurança internacional. Se quiser ser uma potência mundial – como aspira – Modi necessita de capitalizar as oportunidades atualmente existentes.

An ascent on the global pecking order is never a smooth ride. It is like a spectacle of climbers taking different routes to the summit and occasionally bumping against each other. With the global power shifting, the field is being crowded out, as many nations knock at the door for membership of the top table at the same time. India is one such nation. Dismissed as a middle-ranking power for decades, India, it is argued, is likely to become a major world power in the foreseeable future.

Is it? Have India's political leaders been able to translate ambition into outcome? Is India finding its true voice as a first-rung world power? What are its strategic priorities and challenges? What are its natural strengths?

As an aspiring world power India is on the path of steady economic growth. With a world-class military, India has launched a charm offensive in recent years through its 'soft power approach' to win friends across the world. Yet India remains an "aspirant" and not a sure-footed world power like China. What ails India? What constrains its drive towards global status? What does India need to do to prove its credentials? Most important, what has the Narendra Modi government done to translate promise into performance?

This essay revisits the election manifesto of the ruling *Bharatiya Janata Party*, critically evaluates the performance of the government against the promises it has made, and assesses the continuity and change in foreign policy. While doing so it provides a primer on the constraints affecting India's ambitions. It provides insights into policies that need revisiting if New Delhi were to galvanize its global ambitions into matching outcomes.

A Muscular Manifesto

During the 2014 election campaign the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) produced a manifesto of lofty intent. It did not pronounce much on foreign affairs, but nevertheless threw important light on the BJP's foreign policy agenda. But while intent can be inspirational it is outcomes that are transformative. This pragmatic realization was built into the manifesto, a document promising action, with unfussy confidence.

The manifesto asked questions of the world order that had fairly failed to accommodate India. This articulated a dominant grain of thinking among the Indian elite, still smarting from historical wrongs against the nation. True to the BJP's ideological moorings, the manifesto drew upon pride in the past, and celebrated idioms that Indians have internalized through centuries. The assertion that India should lead the world, rather than merely balancing leading world players, was true to the BJP's character:

"BJP believes a resurgent India must get its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions. The vision is to fundamentally reboot and reorient the foreign policy goals, content and process, in a manner that locates India's global strate-

gic engagement in a new paradigm and on a wider canvas.” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014, p. 39).

Certainly, the Narendra Modi government has anointed the Indian dream of a better life with ambition and energy. Although many see India as a power in the making the Modi government has put into place a policy framework that radiates India’s diplomatic influence beyond its neighbourhood. To this end it has the effort to show. In 2015 alone, Modi made 28 foreign visits. In a nation where good initiatives dissolve into indecision Modi was redrawing the map.

If India is to be a true great power it will need to shape outcomes of major international negotiations. At the end of the Second World War India was a mere witness to the creation of a new security architecture for the world, as decisions concerning India were made by the British. But India now is prepared to tilt outcomes in its favour, and lead in the negotiation of global covenants. Modi has understood this clearly, and has a vision of transforming India from a “balancer” to a “leader”.

Together with its energetic diplomacy, Modi’s India is willing to shoulder the responsibility of securing the global commons, an exercise full of pain and stumbles. This was demonstrated by humanitarian relief operations in Yemen and Nepal, and in India’s continuing lead in UN peacekeeping operations. India threw itself into the frontlines in keeping the maritime commons safe and secure, and in global negotiations, such as on climate change. In the neighbourhood, India took a lead role in shaping events, such as the resolution of the land boundary dispute with Bangladesh, which had eluded solution since 1971. This was pre-emption, not reaction. For sure, previous governments had set some of these shifts in motion, but Modi has been decisive in taking the new approach forward.

Connecting Diplomacy with Development

Following the violent and debilitating Partition, India had little choice than to pursue an inward-looking foreign policy. But it was clear to the nation’s founding fathers that foreign partners were needed for India’s economic transformation. This has been at the centre of India’s foreign policy ever since independence. India has pursued this objective with particular vigour after the economic reforms of 1991. The process has been further energized under Modi, and indeed is at the core of his diplomatic outreach.

At his election in 2014, Modi announced the goal of 8.5 per cent economic growth. In the year ending March, 2016 the Indian economy grew by 7.3 per cent, and is currently growing at 7.6 per cent. Over the next decade the government hopes to raise the share of manufacturing in the GDP from 17 to 25 per cent. How will Modi achieve these targets?

The agendas of Modi’s foreign visits have carefully been orchestrated to meet economic objectives. From foreign partners he has sought pledges for billions of dol-

lars of investments in manufacturing and infrastructure, notably from the U.K., Germany, France, Japan and the UAE. The government has coupled diplomacy and development in a turn towards quantifiable outcomes. This is understandable in a democracy, because only enlarging manufacturing can provide jobs to India's ever-burgeoning number of youth. Otherwise, India will be in for social turbulence, a point Modi well understands.

Modi's frenetic visits abroad add urgency to an old objective. His diplomatic forays have focussed on the search for technology, resources and best practice. India's diplomats are tasked to shape outcomes, helping the nation's course towards prosperity, and persuade foreign partners to get involved in India's development. This includes visible symbolic actions that have a transformative effect on existing relationships¹.

Culture and Soft Power

The other pole in this multi-pronged approach is culture. Modi has brought the tenets and symbols of India's culture into the centre of India's diplomatic outreach. This is a continuation of India's charm offensive in recent years through its soft power approach to win friends across the world. It is again worth quoting from the BJP's election manifesto:

"India has long failed to duly appreciate the full extent and gamut of its soft power potential. There is a need to integrate our soft power avenues into our external interchange, particularly, harnessing and focusing on the spiritual, cultural and philosophical dimensions of it." (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014, p. 40).

Thus, Modi was out to address a neglected area of diplomacy. There is a clear recognition here that India can gain strategic depth *vis a vis* its peers if it effectively uses its innate soft power position. India has always played a major role in international affairs, offering a range of ideas and interventions in the cultural and political domain. There is a need to integrate New Delhi's natural soft power aspects into its external interface. By harnessing such cultural resources Modi has reached out to the larger world.

But this soft power narration is also an alternate view of the world, which Modi has projected internationally. Indian civilization has had strategic thinkers like Kautilya who, in the 3rd century B.C.E., anticipated the Realist school of statecraft that the West was to take ownership of much later. Modi's India wants to offer a counter-narrative to the West-centric view of history and inter-state relations. With thou-

1 During his visit to the U.K. in November, 2015 Modi visited the Jaguar Land Rover plant at Solihull, owned by India's Tata group. The intended message was that the relationship with the U.K., the former colonial power in India, had transformed. Now an ascendant India had become a player in the U.K.

sands of years of experience of building a civilization that is uniquely Indian, out of diverse creeds and memories, India has something lofty to offer to the world, in the creation of a peaceable society with diverse elements. This is an idea that the Modi government has seized. As the BJP manifesto states:

“We will build a strong, self-reliant and self-confident India, regaining its rightful place in the comity of nations. In this, we will be firstly guided by our centuries old tradition of *Vasundhey Kutumbakam*.” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014, p. 40)².

The best example of India’s harnessing of soft power to achieve diplomatic objectives is the commemoration of the first ever International Day of Yoga. With breathtaking speed the government got 177 of the 193 Member States of the United Nations to co-sponsor a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly in September, 2014 on commemorating the International Day of Yoga on June 21. The other example is the promotion of Nalanda University as an international partnership. In Modi’s India economic diplomacy and soft power objectives have been pursued in parallel to create the sense of the glorious India that is not shy of harking on its past greatness. This is pictured through Indian idioms, with a clear message that India can draw upon its ample soft power resources³. It is not as if indigenous traditions were not put at the disposal of India’s foreign policy mandarins in the past. But what is new is the sustained focus on this.

A New Web of Relationships

If garnering support for India’s development has become a strategic objective of India’s foreign policy, Modi’s India has also put into place a persuasive geopolitical approach. Paragraphs on security cooperation, counter-terrorism and maritime security now feature in most joint statements. India’s diplomatic outreach is being recast. The BJP manifesto referred to the creation of a “web of allies” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014, p. 40), something unthinkable for non-aligned India not so long ago. But can India succeed in gaining strategic depth by creating partnerships at the international level?

To understand India’s strategic objectives we need to revisit the primary goal of promoting the development of India. For prosperity, a peaceful environment is a strategic necessity. This is at the heart of the debate about India’s security. Thus, protecting the territorial integrity of India and resetting relations with the major powers become key goals of India’s foreign policy. One can foresee that this will continue into the next century. Consider that India is still a state in the making.

2 “*Vasundhey Kutumbakam*” can be translated to mean: “the entire world is a family”.

3 During a surprise visit to Pakistan in December, 2015 to greet Prime-Minister Nawaz Sharif on his birthday, Modi touched Sharif’s mother’s feet, a gesture drawn straight from Indian tradition. This was a combination of diplomacy and cultural expression, all at once.

Continuity or Change?

Do Modi's moves to connect diplomacy and development and put soft power in the diplomatic arsenal mark a departure from the foreign policy of the previous United Progressive Alliance government? Within the Indian policy community opinion on Modi's foreign policy is divided. Some argue that there has been a fundamental shift in foreign policy, whereas others argue the opposite, that the changes are cosmetic and not transformative. The truth may lie in between.

Modi's two years in office show a high degree of continuity in foreign policy objectives: ensuring that the neighbourhood remains peaceful, secure and stable; securing inward foreign investment, and increasing India's influence. In clear-headed pragmatism Modi has enhanced the primacy of the neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean, as regional stability is a prerequisite for India's development. This explains the presence of all the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and Mauritius at Modi's swearing in as Prime-Minister in May, 2014.

Another example of continuity is the abandonment of the BJP's stated positions towards the U.S. and Pakistan, bringing them in line with that of the previous Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government. Modi vigorously worked for the implementation of the civil nuclear agreement with the U.S. Despite vowing in the election manifesto not to talk to Pakistan until India had satisfaction on terrorism, Modi has not shied away from dialogue with Pakistan.

Amid continuity a change in India's foreign policy is also discernible. In a new style, Modi's personalized diplomacy has an unconventional touch. Modi has shown a greater willingness than his predecessors to lead on solutions to global problems. He has pursued a more assertive policy towards China and Pakistan, and a vigorous policy towards the Indian Ocean. He has shown a greater willingness to engage the U.S. in a pragmatic give and take relationship. He has pursued a more strategic approach towards Afghanistan, and decoupled India's relationship with Israel from that with the Palestinians. He has put sustained focus on India's 'Act East Policy'.

Relocating Foreign Policy

Modi's personalized interactions with foreign leaders have been marked by welcome hugs for President Barack Obama and President François Hollande, and a selfie with Chinese Prime-Minister Li Keqiang. Modi has won "rock star status" among the Indian diaspora through energetic outreach in public spaces. But the change goes beyond the optics. In shifting towards the role of "leader" rather than "balancer" in foreign affairs, Modi's India has demonstrated a new-found willingness to assume greater regional and international responsibilities.

With two nuclear-armed neighbours in occupation of its territory, India faces the toughest neighbourhood in the world. No other nation on the planet confronts the

security challenges that India does. This is a reality underappreciated if not ignored by the world's foreign policy and strategic communities. To deal with this formidable security challenge, Modi has sharpened India's diplomatic tools.

The Asia-Pacific

In response to China's growing maritime imprint in the Asia-Pacific, Modi has pursued a strong Indian Ocean policy, as well as combating maritime terrorism. In March, 2015, after decades, India unveiled a vision framework for the Indian Ocean. Going beyond the former Manmohan Singh government's policy of being a "net security provider" to Indian Ocean island states, the Indian Navy has released a revised maritime security strategy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*. This expands the areas of India's "maritime interest," speaks of three carrier battle groups, and emphasizes the importance of freedom of navigation and strengthening of international maritime legal regimes, particularly UNCLOS (Directorate of Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, 2015). In the next decade the navy seeks a force of 200 ships.

The United States

In response to Chinese assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific, there is a growing convergence of views between India and the U.S. on the security and diplomatic architecture of the region. A joint statement issued during President Obama's visit to India in January, 2015 states: "We affirm the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flights throughout the region, especially the South China Sea." (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015).

In further signals to China, there were direct references to the South China Sea in the India-U.S. joint statement of September, 2014, and during Modi's visits to Japan in 2014 and South Korea in 2015. The burgeoning relationship with Japan and Australia, India's new strategic partners, and the U.S. "rebalance" in Asia are complementary poles in India's Asia-Pacific strategy. There also seems to have been a breakthrough in the implementation of the civil nuclear agreement of 2008 with the U.S. A second ten-year defence framework agreement, providing for technology transfers and the co-production of arms in India, has been concluded (Framework for the U.S.-India Defence Partnership, 2015).

This clear-headed approach, ending decades of political ambivalence towards the U.S., is a departure from the previous government's policy, when the U.S. characterization of India as a "lynchpin" of its Asia-Pacific strategy was publicly refuted by New Delhi. With the resetting of relations with the U.S., Modi has created more space for manoeuvre in dealing with China.

China

Never in history did India have a great power like China on its borders. In the past India has avoided an assertive posture towards China, relying on a combination of diplomacy and strategic capacity-building to stabilize the relationship. But compared to his predecessors, Modi has demonstrated a greater firmness in dealing with China, while simultaneously seeking stronger business ties.

During the election campaign Modi made an implicit reference to China's "mindset of expansion" (Gottipati, 2014) and, in a policy departure, Tibet's Prime Minister-in-exile was invited to Modi's swearing in. Modi responded robustly to a Chinese border incursion in Chumar during President Xi Jinping's visit to India. He publicly raised the border dispute and brought up Beijing's relationship with India's neighbours with the Chinese leadership. After the Permanent Court of Arbitration pronounced on the dispute between China and the Philippines on the South China Sea, India, while not taking a stand on the dispute, nevertheless issued a statement on the need to uphold UNCLOS, implicitly recognising the court's ruling in favour of the Philippines⁴.

The same confidence was evident during the negotiations on India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group in June, 2016. Modi went ahead with the push for membership without guarantee of success, amid fear that China would stymie the move. That is what happened, and China was forced to take a stand. China was seen as a spoiler, and the setback for India was turned into an opportunity to showcase India's ambition in the face of Chinese opposition⁵.

India and China engage, cooperate and compete simultaneously. Even as China has become India's largest trading partner India is mindful that China will resist the rise of a peer competitor. Boundary negotiations have reached a point where political will on both sides is required for a solution. The chances of a border conflict are low, but skirmishes cannot be ruled out. Modi understands the complexities of the relationship, and has dealt with China with candour and realism.

4 The Ministry of External Affairs statement read: "As a State Party to the UNCLOS, India urges all parties to show utmost respect for the UNCLOS, which establishes the international legal order of the seas and oceans". See "Statement on Award of Arbitral Tribunal on South China Sea under Annexure VII of UNCLOS," July 12th, 2016, Ministry of External Affairs [online], available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/pressreleases.htm?dtl/27019/Statement+on+Award+of+Arbitral+Tribunal+on+South+China+Sea+Under+Annexure+VII+of+UNCLOS>.

5 Vikas Swarup, the spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, stated: "We understand that despite procedural hurdles persistently raised by one country, a three hour long discussion took place last night on the issue of future participation in the NSG. An overwhelming number of those who took the floor supported India's membership and appraised India's application positively". See "Spokesperson's comments on NSG Plenary meeting in Seoul," June 24th, 2016, Ministry of External Affairs [online], available at http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/26950/Spokespersons_comments_on_NSG_Plenary_meeting_in_Seoul.

Pakistan

India's complex relationship with Pakistan has oscillated between dialogue and rupture. The issues bedeviling the relationship are far from solution, amid an on-off dialogue. Because the strategic balance has slowly moved in India's favour, Pakistan has resorted to sub-conventional and asymmetric warfare against India. Since the 1990s Pakistan has adopted terrorism as policy, but this has been the period when India has achieved success in building national strength. Given Pakistan's internal problems India has poor policy options towards Pakistan. Neither dialogue nor suspension of dialogue have worked, so India has had to contain and manage the relationship.

It is in this strategic advance-retreat setting that Modi has hardened India's Pakistan policy, while simultaneously engaging Pakistan. This has been criticized as being contradictory, inconsistent and as absence of policy. But it is a function of the limited options India has on Pakistan.

Following differences on the agenda and programme for the Pakistani National Security Advisor's visit, India cancelled talks between the foreign secretaries in August, 2014, and between the national security advisors in 2015. India's response to firing across the international border and line of control in Jammu and Kashmir became more forceful. Each side accused the other of cross-border terrorism, and India made talks contingent upon an end to terrorism sponsored by Pakistan.

For Modi, terrorism remains the core of the agenda for engagement with Pakistan, which pursues a partisan counter-terrorism policy. Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, the chief of the anti-India *Lashkar e Tayabba*, remains free, with a specious claim to heading a charitable organization. Despite suspected links to the attacks in Pathankot, *Jaish e Mohammed* chief Maulana Masood Azhar is free. Zakiur-Rehman Lakhvi, *Lashkar e Tayabba's* Chief of Operations and the prime accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, was released on bail after spending six years in prison, on the ground of lack of evidence provided by India, something India contests.

Yet, in a departure from the BJP's earlier position that there can be no talks without an end to terrorism, Modi has continued to engage Pakistan. Actually, he has reversed the suspension of official-level talks in January, 2013 by Prime-Minister Manmohan Singh for ceasefire violations across the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir. Modi and Prime-Minister Nawaz Sharif held talks at Modi's inauguration in New Delhi in May, 2014, and on the sidelines of a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Ufa, Russia in July, 2015 (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015a). After another policy reversal it was agreed that "talks on terror" – led by the two National Security Advisors – and talks between the two Foreign Secretaries on all other issues, including Kashmir, would be held back-to-back.

In pursuance of these decisions, official-level talks were held at Bangkok in December, 2015 after three years. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Islam-

abad in December, 2015, when the two sides decided to begin a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue. In the same month Modi visited Lahore to greet Nawaz Sharif on his birthday. After being put on a pause following the Pathankot terror attack, Foreign Secretary talks were held in April, 2016. The two national security advisors have maintained contact, and the chiefs of the two border forces have met to calm border tension.

But all this is about process rather than outcome. The question is whether the centrist Modi government can find the cover of a tough public posture sufficient to deliver a pragmatic give and take, something that eluded the centre-left Congress government.

Modi has also moved the relationship with Afghanistan in a strategic direction. In January, 2016, for the first time, India has supplied offensive weaponry to the Afghan Air Force. The modest supply of three MI-25 ground attack helicopters is not a force multiplier, but marks a significant policy departure, to Pakistan's chargin (Panda, 2016). More transfers of equipment are likely, but India has not sent military instructors or troops.

Modi has also modified the calibrated policy of the previous government towards Israel and Palestine. The government changed the policy of issuing statements of support for the Palestinians over the conflict in Gaza, which resumed in July, 2014, adopting a position of neutrality, and calling for peace talks. Similarly, in a departure from support for the Palestinians in the UN, in May, 2015, India abstained from voting on an application by a Palestinian non-governmental organization for special consultative status in a UN committee (Singh, 2015). India abstained on a UN Human Rights Commission resolution that condemned Israel over a July, 2014 UN report on violence in Gaza.

In September, 2014 Modi and Israeli Prime-Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met on the margins of the UN General Assembly at New York. The first visit of an Israeli defence minister to India took place in February, 2015. While in the past India had avoided high-level visits to Israel, President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel in October, 2015. Modi is expected to make the first ever visit by an Indian prime minister to Israel later in 2016.

A similar change is discernible in Modi's policy towards the Asia Pacific. At independence India leaned on the West for nation-building. Asia took a back seat as the West became the main source of technology and capital. With the end of the Cold War India began to search for new partnerships with a rising East, led by China. The outcome was the 'Look East Policy'. Ironically, the shift from 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy' is India's response to China's actions in India's periphery. Modi has pursued the 'Act East Policy' with vigour, and brought India's maritime past into the equation. As the BJP's manifesto states:

“India was reckoned not only as Vishwaguru but also a vibrant trading society. Our ancestors used to trade with foreign nations through the routes of sea, centuries ago. This was based on the strength of our business acumen and integrity, our products and crafts.” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014, p. 40).

Thus, Modi’s approach towards foreign affairs marks a change both in substance and style. In a world transforming, as India gains a foothold on the top table, Modi’s confident and forthright foreign policy can be reckoned a policy adjustment to India’s growing internal strength.

Conclusion

The simultaneous rise of China and India as major world economies is one of the major geopolitical developments of the age. The fact that China is ahead of India shapes India’s positions towards its northern neighbour. India sometimes has to concede to China on issues it cannot confront head on, in pragmatic side-stepping. For example, the Asia Industrial Investment Bank and the New Development Bank of BRICS are headquartered in Beijing and Shanghai, not in New Delhi or Mumbai, because China is the stronger economy. Similarly, India pursues a less involved policy than the U.S. in the South China Sea. India will not join the U.S. in countering China’s assertiveness in its periphery, but will build limited partnerships to dissuade China from undermining India’s core interests. The fact is that China has more stakes than the U.S. in dominating Asia.

Such a posture looks like a slippery moral path, but diplomacy has to be administered in workable doses. Modi understands the limitations of Indian power, but challenges China when he can, to force it to put its cards on the table. Yet, while China remains a challenge, it is also a partner in the transformation of India.

The fact that India’s foreign and security policies are ‘enablers’ in the transformation of India is now well understood among thinking Indians. In that sense, by getting tied to domestic policy, which receives greater scrutiny among the people, foreign policy has woven itself into the people’s consciousness. But policies can take an unpredictable course, and the question remains whether Modi can see through his foreign policy initiatives into the remaining years of his term which ends in 2019.

The related issue is that of results. India’s foreign policy is leaning towards pragmatism. Its diplomats have the tools and skills of persuasion, but lack the numbers. Even if they had the numbers, governance is far from being a solo flight. Diplomats can be the harbingers of India’s economic transformation but this has to be a collaborative effort between different arms of government. India’s diplomats can bring the horse to the river but cannot make it drink the water. They can create the opportunity but outcomes are determined by a different set of actors. The challenge

before Modi's India is to bring all those in the field in step with international standards of governance, with the requirements of the 21st century.

International support for India's development may in itself be a strategic goal of India's foreign policy, but energizing the conduct of India's foreign relations cannot only be a top down effort. Bringing all stakeholders on board is easier said than done as it involves painful reforms in governance. In this sense there is a disconnection between diplomacy and development. It is better, therefore, to set modest goals and be able to attain them, rather than entertaining grandiose objectives, only to see them unfulfilled. As Modi approaches the middle of his term, the time has come to address this issue.

India is being recast internationally. In the years after independence, following the after effects of Partition, the Indian state was weak. Strategic thinking was thus security-oriented, with a singular avoidance of entanglements, to protect the borders and derive maximum benefit from the superpowers. In the twenty first century India is at the centre of the international security architecture. It is also key to the economic and technological debates of the age. By dint of its economic growth, its innovative spacefaring, and its contributions from medicine to information technology, India has become indispensable to global needs and a shaper of the world economy, not just as a market, but also as an engine of growth and of ideas.

It would not thus be far-fetched to say that the future of the world will be affected by what India does. Take the example of terrorism. With swathes of humanity embittered in nihilistic rage, terrorism is at the centre of international discourse. That is why Modi talks of terrorism as a global problem. Today the world speaks of 9/11 and Mumbai's 26/11 in the same breath, and, as a major victim of terrorism, India becomes a natural partner in fighting this menace. The world cannot go it alone without India. Similarly, on the emission of greenhouse gases and climate change, what India does affects the rest of the world. This, ultimately, is the platform on which Modi has recast India's diplomatic agenda on a more ambitious scale.

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